an introduction to a christian worldview

OPEN CHRISTIAN COLLEGE is a Christian educational service. It is founded on the belief that the Christian faith is basic to everything, including academic pursuits. It offers a new type of educational resource for Christians who want to develop an integrated Christian approach to their studies. Gradually OCC aims to provide an increasing range of courses in various subject areas based on a coherent biblical worldview. Contributors to this new type of educational resource come from a variety of Christian backgrounds within and outside Britain. "Introduction to a Christian Worldview" is the first course offered by OCC. OCC courses operate on the "distance-learning" model, so they can be taken alongside any other period of study and employment or activity.

The course team which prepared this manual included Adrienne Chaplin, Jon Chaplin (editor), John Peck, Steve Shaw, Alan Storkey. Elaine Storkey prepared the accompanying tapes.

"Introduction to a Christian Worldview"

NOTE: THIS MANUAL IS ONLY INTENDED FOR USE WITH COURSE TEXTBOOKS AND OTHER COURSE MATERIALS, WITHOUT WHICH IT CANNOT PROPERLY BE UNDERSTOOD. IT IS NOT A COMPLETE COURSE IN ITSELF.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Grateful acknowledgment is made to InterVarsity Press (U.K) for permission to quote from several of their copyright books.

Quotations taken from **The Transforming Vision** by Brian J. Walsh and J. Richard Middleton are copyright C 1984 by Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship of the USA and used by permission of InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Ill. 60515. Quotations taken from **The Universe Next Door** by James W. Sire are copyright C 1976 by Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship of the USA and used by permission of InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Ill. 60515.

Quotations in this manual from **Creation Regained**, by Al Wolters, have been taken from the American edition published by W. B. Eerdmans. Students using the British edition published by I.V.P. may notice occasional slight differences between parallel quotations in the two editions. Page numbers are the same.

The cartoons on pages 100,149 and 175 of our manual are reproduced by kind permission of Third Way.

Third Way seeks to provide a biblical perspective on political issues, social ethics and cultural affairs in the contemporary world.

Subscription rates are available on request. Third Way, 37, Elm Road, New Malden, Surrey KT3 3HB (England).

Special thanks must go to the production team which included Paul Edwards, Ruth Edwards, Ann Holt, Steve Shaw, Mary Mansfield and Wendy Shutt.

CONTENTS

UNIT ONE

The Nature of a Worldview

UNIT ONE: THE NATURE OF A WORLDVIEW

Textbook Readings: Walsh and Middleton Chapters 1-2
Wolters Chapter 1

1. INTRODUCTION: WORLDVIEWS AT WORK

The best way to acquire an understanding of the nature of worldviews is simply to see them in action. Worldviews are most clearly identified by their effects in people's lives. Walsh and Middleton open their book with some extended examples of worldviews at work. They focus on the ones dominant in three cultures, the Canadian (or North American), the Japanese and the Dene Indian. Before beginning to analyse worldviews in more general terms, it will be helpful to explore some further examples. The first is from the culture of an African native tribe called the Azande; the second is from nineteenth-century England.

EXAMPLE ONE: THE AZANDE WORLDVIEW

In his book The 'Soul' of the Primitive (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1965), the famous anthropologist Lucien Levy Bruhl records this story about two Azande natives, told by a European explorer:

> 'Two neighbours, Schakipera and Kimbiri, go to the wood to gather honey. Possibly Schakipera was the more adroit, or it may have been mere luck, but at any rate he found four big trees full of honey whilst Kimbiri could only find one. When he reached home again, Kimbiri was bewailing the fact that he had had such bad luck, while his neighbour had been so fortunate. Meanwhile Schakipera had returned to the wood at once with his relatives in order to bring away the honey he had found. In the evening he was attacked and torn in pieces by a lion. His companions hastily climbed trees and thus saved themselves.
>
> His affrighted relatives at once go to the kimbanda (soothsayer) to discover who was really responsible for his death. The kimbanda consults the oracle several times and finally declares that Kimbiri, jealous of his neighbour's rich harvest of honey, assumed the form of a lion in order to avenge

> himself.... The soothsayer's judgement was reported to the ruler of Kiakka, and he, in the face of the accused's strenuous denial, ordered the matter to be settled by the ordeal of poison.... The ordeal was unfavourable to the accused, he confesses, and succumbs to torture. (p.44)

The story focuses on the administration of justice. Perhaps the thing that strikes us most forcibly is the fact that Kimbiri finally confesses to having turned into a lion and having committed the foul deed. How can this be? The answer becomes clear when we consider Kimbiri's worldview - a worldview which he also shares with everyone else in his tribe. There are three major beliefs which go to make up Kimbiri's worldview. These are the belief in witchcraft, the belief in oracular power, and the more fundamental belief that all forms of matter, be they stones, trees, animals or humans, are simply outward manifestations of mana, a primary, mystic power which pervades the whole universe.

This belief gives rise to a way of life that appears totally outrageous to us. Rocks, plants, animals and humans, as well as being able to change their outward form at will, are also capable of bipresence. Thus the same person may be seen in two places miles apart at the same time; or, by an act of wizardry, a person may perform an act of metamorphosis. The facts of the case then are interpreted through these three beliefs which act as a kind of filter or lens through which they are perceived.

Now such an interpretive framework also excludes the notion of accidental death by natural causes, a notion which is so ingrained in our own scientific culture that it seems ludicrous to doubt it. Yet, similarly, it would be ludicrous for Kimbiri to doubt that if someone is devoured by a lion, there must be some effective reason behind it, such as the jealousy of a rival. Kimbiri then is a prime suspect. This is confirmed by the oracle which he and his community have always trusted and so he finally confesses to having turned into a lion.

EXAMPLE TWO: THE "CENTURY OF PROGRESS"

The Azande worldview is striking because it is totally different from our own. But now let us come closer to home. Here is an extract from Queen Victoria's diary on the occasion of the opening of the Crystal Palace Exhibition in Hyde Park on May 1st 1851:

> The glimpse of the transept through the iron gates,the waving palms, flowers, statues, myriads of people filling the galleries and seats around,

with the flourish of trumpets as we entered, gave us a sensation which I can never forget and I felt much moved.... The sight as we came to the middle where the steps and a chair (which I did not sit on) were placed, with the beautiful crystal fountain just in front of it, was magical - so vast, so glorious, so touching. One felt - as so many did whom I have since spoken to - filled with devotion, more so than by any service I have ever heard. The tremendous cheers, the joy expressed in every face, the immensity of the building, the mixture of palms, flowers, trees, statues, fountains, the organ (with 200 instruments and 600 voices, which sounded like nothing), and my beloved husband, the author of this "peace festival", which united the industry of all nations of the earth - all this was moving indeed, and it was and is a day to live for ever. (Charles Harvard Gibbs-Smith, The Great Exhibition of 1851, London: HM Stationery Office, 1950.)

The Times described the proceedings in an awe-stricken tone:

There was yesterday witnessed a sight the like of which has never happened before and which in the nature of things can never be repeated. They who were so fortunate as to see it hardly knew what most to admire, or in what form to clothe the sense of wonder and even of mystery which struggled within them. The edifice, the treasures of art collected therein, the assemblage and the solemnity of the occasion, all conspired to suggest something even more than sense could scan, or imagination attain. There were many there who were familiar with magnificent spectacles .... but they had not seen anything to compare with this.... Around them, amidst them, and over their heads was displayed all that is useful or beautiful in nature or in art. Above them rose a glittering arch far more lofty and spacious than the vaults of even our noblest cathedrals....It was felt to be more than what was seen, or what had been intended. Some saw in it the second and more glorious inauguration of their Sovereign; some a solemn dedication of art and its stores; some were most reminded of that day when all ages and climes shall be gathered round that Throne of their Maker; there was so much that

> seemed accidental, and yet had a meaning, that no-one could be content with simply what he saw. (Times, May 2nd 1851).

Notice the devotional language used here, and compare it with Prince Albert's public speech given on the opening day:

> Nobody who has paid any attention to the peculiar features of our present era will doubt for a moment that we are living at a period of most wonderful transition, which tends rapidly to accomplish that great end to which indeed all history points - the realisation of the unity of mankind.

We see here a profound conviction that industrial progress - which is what the exhibition was intended to celebrate - will bring salvation, peace and prosperity to a troubled world. Although the idea of progress had existed for a long time in western thought, in the nineteenth century it had taken particular hold on people's imagination. Indeed, as one writer put it: "Progress had become an article of faith".

Charles Darwin gave expression to this belief in progress in his book The Origin of Species:

> ...we may feel certain that the ordinary succession by generation has never once been broken, and that no cataclysm has desolated the whole world. Hence we may look with some confidence to a secure future of equally inappreciable length. And as natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress toward perfection. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1968, p.459) (our emphasis)

The philosopher Immanuel Kant extended this belief in progress to the moral condition of mankind. Although accepting that such moral progress would be interrupted, he believed it could never entirely be stopped. The belief in inevitable progress became an essential, unquestioned tenet in the minds of many of the leading opinion-formers in nineteeth-century England. And, although rarely expressed today in such devotional language as that of Queen Victoria's diary, it is an important aspect of the dominant contemporary worldview, as we shall see in Unit Five.

****

SHORT ASSIGNMENT

In 1984, over 2000 people were killed and many more injured when lethal gas escaped from a chemical factory in Bhopal, India. The factory was sited close to populous residential areas. It was owned by a large American company, Union Carbide, and has since closed down. Legal proceedings over compensation for the victims are still continuing.

How might adherents of the Azande, the Dene, the Japanese, and the North American worldviews each describe such an event?

****

2. DEFINITIONS OF WORLDVIEW

These examples of worldviews at work represent different cultures and historical periods. Their adherents share the same actual world, yet they express their vision of it in radically different ways. Our next task is to try and understand exactly what worldviews are and how they operate. Different terms have been used for describing worldviews. Some of these are: way of life, view of the world, way of understanding, interpretive framework, view of reality, ethos, cultural assumptions, philosophy, set of values, and value-system. In general we shall use the two terms "worldview" or "vision of life". (They mean the same thing.)

Wolters defines a worldview succinctly as "the comprehensive framework of one's basic beliefs about things". (Creation Regained, Leicester: I.V.P., 1986, p.2. Subsequent references in the text to Wolters refer to this book.) (our emphasis). He explains carefully each of the main terms in this definition on pp. 2-3, which you should re-read at this point. It will help your overall understanding of worldviews to compare Wolters' definition with some others:

a) James Sire, in his book The Universe Next Door, (Downers Grove, Ill.: I.V.P., 1977), defines a worldview as:

> ... a set of presuppositions (or assumptions) which we hold (consciously or unconsciously) about the basic make-up of our world. (17)

> A worldview is composed of a number of basic presuppositions, more or less self-consistent, generally unquestioned by each person, rarely, if ever, mentioned by his friends, and only brought to mind when challenged by a foreigner from another ideological universe. (18)

b) Charles Kraft, in Christianity in Culture, (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis, 1979), brings out the relationship between worldview and cultural life:

> Cultures pattern perceptions of reality into conceptualizations of what reality can or should be, what is to be regarded as actual, probable, possible and impossible.... The worldview is the central systematization of conceptions of reality to which the members of a culture assent (largely unconsciously) and from which stems their value system. The worldview lies at the heart of the culture, touching, interfacing with, and strongly influencing every aspect of culture. (53)

c) Warren Wager, in his book Worldviews: A Study in Comparative History (Hinsdale, Illinois: Dryden Press, 1977), defines a worldview as:

> ...a picture of the world that reveals the meaning of life and the ends for which life should be lived;... a conception of the nature of cosmic and human reality that discloses the meaning of life.... Worldviews furnish answers to the largest questions that human beings can ask about their condition.... The ingredients in a worldview may have cognitive significance to the thinker; he may find them true. But a worldview is pre-eminently a structure of values, a credo responding to man's need for anchorage in life. Its ultimate source lies not in any formal system of religion, philosophy or science, but in our ancient psychic struggle to establish a relationship to the world that binds heart and will. It functions in both the conscious and the unconscious mind. It is a surrogate for the instinctual world bond of animal life. (7)

These various definitions all point to the same basic features of a worldview, which we need to note carefully. First, however, let us notice what worldviews are not.

3. WORLDVIEWS ARE NOT THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

A common misunderstanding of worldviews is that they are purely intellectual or theoretical frameworks. People often think that worldviews refer to systems of thought devised by philosophers. We will see in Unit Six that theoretical frameworks and philosophies are certainly influenced by worldviews. But they are not the same thing as worldviews. If a worldview were simply a theory or a philosophy, then it would only matter to scholars. But it is crucial at the outset of this course to realise that worldviews are not the special property of scholars. Worldviews do not only influence academic studies - they shape the entirety of our lives. No area of life can evade their directing effect.

As both Wolters, and Walsh and Middleton emphasise, worldviews originate at a much deeper level than the intellect. Wolters points out that the word "worldview" derives from the German Weltanschauung, which refers, not to a theoretical framework, but to a fundamental outlook on the whole of life, a "life perspective" or a "confessional vision" (2). Worldviews are rooted in the living, pulsating core of a human person. This "core" is not a particular faculty of part of a human being like their "will" or their "reason". Rather it refers to the whole person before God. This is really what the Bible means when it speaks of a person's "heart". In Scripture, the "heart" is the focal point of a person's relationship to God, their religious "centre of gravity". Worldviews, far from being mere theoretical frameworks, are the product of the deepest direction of a person's "heart".

A further point arises in this connection. As both texts make clear, not everyone is able to articulate their worldview. To be able to do this requires both a degree of self-awareness and a certain level of education. For most practical purposes, it is not necessary to articulate a worldview. Indeed, one of the important points about a worldview is that it acts as a guide to life without having to be clearly and consciously articulated. But nevertheless, everyone has a worldview of some kind, whether this is implicit or explicit. This is not something about which we ought to feel embarrassed. Needing a worldview is not a symptom of human weakness, but, as Wolters says: "having a worldview is simply part of being an adult human being" (4).

****

SHORT ASSIGNMENT

Examine these biblical references to "heart" What common features do you find?

Genesis	6: 5
Deuteronomy	4: 9
Deuteronomy	8: 11-17
Deuteronomy	11: 18-21
Psalms	51: 6,10,17
Psalms	119: 2-3
Proverbs	4: 23
Jeremiah	17: 9,10
Matthew	6: 21
Matthew	15: 7,18-20
Acts	5: 3-4

****

4. WORLDVIEWS ARE GUIDES TO LIFE

The above passages suggest that what grips a person's "heart" gives direction to their life. The vision of life proceeding from the heart of a person thus comes to expression in a whole way of life: the vision of life thus functions as a guide to life.

The examples given at the beginning of this unit are illustrations of distinctive ways of life. In common usage, this term sometimes means little more than "cultural mores". But as we shall use it, "way of life" includes all human experience and activity. A worldview is primarily a way of believing; a way of life is a way of seeing, feeling, eating, carrying out justice, doing art, practising science and so on.

Such an approach is in keeping with the biblical use of the term "way" of life. The Bible uses the notion of a "way", or "walk" of life extensively. Such phrases are used mostly to emphasise the contrast between life and death, obedience and disobedience, blessing and curse (cf. 2 Peter 2:2, Psalms 32:8). The comprehensiveness of the term can be readily seen when we consider what is involved in the statement, "You shall walk in all the way which the Lord your God has commanded you..." (Deuteronomy 5:33). From Deuteronomy 16:4 and chapters 22 ff, we can see that the "way" includes social, economic, moral, legal, political, medical, hygienic, liturgical, celebrative and other aspects of life.

The manner in which a worldview operates as a guide to a person's way of life is complex. But we can summarize what Walsh and Middleton, and Wolters, write on this under three headings:

a) **PERCEPTION:**

> worldviews function like pairs of spectacles, each tinted with a different colour, allowing us to perceive certain things in the world (e.g. "high-rise flats are efficient uses of residential land"), but filtering out other aspects of reality (e.g. 'high-rise flats erode community spirit").

b) **INTERPRETATION:**

> worldviews act as interpretive grids, through which we place each element of what we perceive (including ourselves) into an assumed framework of overall meaning (e.g. "efficient" uses of land contribute to prosperity and increase human welfare; high-rise flats are thus meaningful in terms of human life as a whole).

c) **ORIENTATION:**

> worldviews operate like maps, indicating the basic direction which we should take in life; and they embody normative implications for what we ought to do and not do (e.g. "we should support "slum" clearance schemes by voting for politician X").

Walsh and Middleton summarize these three points by saying that a worldview "produces a model of the world [perception and interpretation] which guides its adherents in the world [orientation].

It stipulates how the world ought to be, and it thus advises how its adherents ought to conduct themselves in the world" (The Transforming Vision : Shaping a Christian Worldview, Downers Grove, Ill.: I.V.P. 1984, p.32. Subsequent references in the text to Walsh and Middleton refer to this book.)

5. WORLDVIEWS ARE COMMUNALLY HELD

A worldview is rarely, if ever, the possession of a single individual. If this were the case, every human being would have a unique worldview. Rather, people hold worldviews in common. The way people normally acquire a certain worldview is by adapting to the common way of life of a community. Only individual persons can be adherents of a worldview. But the process of acquiring and expressing a worldview is inevitably a communal affair. Worldviews come to expression in a shared way of life. This is true whatever their content might be. As we see in the next unit, God has created human beings to live in fellowship and community with one another; so whatever they do has a communal dimension.

Worldviews are not to be found apart from a community in which they are expressed and sustained. But viewed from the other way round, we can also say that communities are not found without a worldview. If worldviews are inevitably communal, then communities are inevitably "worldviewish". Worldviews are essential to the identity and stability of human communities. As Walsh and Middleton put it: "true community is possible only when people are bound together by a common way of life rooted in a shared vision of life" (32).

Thus a person's worldview cannot be dismissed simply as his or her "personal opinions". All of us do hold a variety of individual, idiosyncratic notions and preferences about various things in life, but such notions and preferences are not what we mean by worldviews. A worldview is: the collectively-held vision of life which guides and sustains a human community.

It is necessary to define more precisely what we mean by a "community". The word is used in ordinary language to refer to a wide variety of different kinds and levels of human relationships. We speak of the "neighbourhood community", "the scientific community", the "educational community", the "black community", and so on. But when we speak of a community sharing the same worldview, we are using the term more widely to include all those who share a common culture. Whatever differences there may be among members of a common culture, the majority will all share a wide and distinctive set of common

assumptions, practices, norms, and behaviour patterns. A shared religious vision of life, a common worldview, will find expression in a shared way of life. Walsh and Middleton show how distinctive cultural patterns emerge when a whole society is dominated by a particular worldview. Their diagram on p. 33 of The Transforming Vision portrays how a worldview shapes all the various areas of cultural life. These areas include such things as education, business, politics, family life, the arts, health and medicine, science and technology, architecture, urban planning, and transport.

Walsh and Middleton describe the worldviews of three distinct cultural communities, the Canadian, the Japanese, and the Dene. But common cultures are not necessarily the same as national cultures. English people sometimes speak of the "English way of life". They then sometimes refer to certain distinctive national characteristics such as, for example, toleration, moderation, and perseverance under pressure. (Non-English people may come up with different, less flattering characteristics.) It is certainly true that national groupings do exhibit these kinds of distinctive traits. We might refer to the "spirit of enterprise" as distinctively American, or the spontaneity and "love of life" of Mediterranean culture. However, all these things are relatively unimportant compared to the deep differences resulting from conflicting worldviews. Thus Canada, America, Britain and Italy are, in spite of many differences, all dominated by the "Western" worldview, which Walsh and Middleton describe as the "modern secular worldview".

6. CONFLICTS BETWEEN WORLDVIEWS

Walsh and Middleton present a case study of the conflicts which can arise when a minority community, the Dene Indians, seeks to protect its distinctive way of life in a country dominated by a very different worldview. The dominant worldview in a society frequently strives to become the exclusive worldview in that society. This puts enormous pressure on dissenting minorities to abandon their distinctiveness and conform to the cultural norms required by the dominant community. Modern patterns of migration and international communication mean that there will usually be worldview minorities in most countries. In the United States there is a vast "melting pot" of different immigrant cultures. In Britain there are sizeable minorities of Commonwealth immigrants and their descendents. So almost all of us today come into contact with people holding different worldviews. We are all therefore put in the position of having our own worldview challenged.

Several dissenting minorities now exist within most western societies. Some of these still share some of the assumptions of the dominant worldview, while breaking with it at certain crucial points. Marxism would be one example of such a dissenting worldview. Marxists share many of the typically western commitments to science, technology and economic growth, but differ radically over how the socio-economic system is to be arranged. Other dissenting minorities adhere to a totally different worldview. Consider, for example, the proliferating religious cults springing up in western countries, many of which have an "eastern" worldview.

Minority communities face a difficult choice, however. Such communities will either strive to live out a whole way of life which is fully consistent with their distinctive worldview, or they will accomodate themselves to the dominant culture in the major "public" areas of cultural life (e.g. business practices, consumption patterns and career structures), while retaining their distinctiveness only in relatively minor areas (e.g. personal belief and ethics, dress and style of worship.) In the first case the community attempts to be a "counter-culture" within the dominant culture; in the second it is reduced to a mere "sub-culture". A major question to be raised in Unit Four will be whether the Christian community - now a minority in western societies - will seek to act as a genuine counter-culture, challenging the dominant worldview with a clear alternative at every point, or succumb to a position of relative cultural irrelevance by remaining a sub-culture.

****

SHORT ASSIGNMENT

What conflicts would you expect a Muslim and a Marxist living in British culture, to experience? Are any of them similar to those that a Christian might experience?

****

7. CULTURE AFFECTS WORLDVIEW

The diagram on page 33 of Walsh and Middleton's book shows how a worldview shapes a culture. But note that the arrows connecting the worldview to the various areas of cultural life point in both directions. The diagram thus shows how culture itself also shapes the worldview of a community. Cultural patterns have a "feedback effect" on the worldview which gave rise to them. As Walsh and Middleton state: "If a culture's vision leads to certain child-rearing, educational and economic practices, then those practices will themselves socialize the children to live in terms of that vision" (32).

The influence of cultural patterns on the formation of worldviews is emphasised in Os Guinness' book The Gravedigger File, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1983). Attacking merely intellectual Christian analyses of contemporary culture, he writes (through the person of the "Deputy Director" of the "Central Security Council", which is seeking to subvert the western Church):

> Where [Christian] analysis comes badly unstuck is in areas where people's thinking is as much influenced by their ordinary experience as by theoretical ideas. Relying solely on the history of ideas in those areas is a self-imposed handicap. For instance, how might a Christian explain what has influenced the modern concept of time?
>
> "Aha!" he might rush to reply, as if brandishing his potted history of Western thought. "The modern view of time is linear and progressive and is a result of the biblical view of time as it has been interpreted by Augustine and reinterpreted by contemporary thinkers such as Einstein."
>
> He'd be right, of course, up to a point. Yet what he would miss would be the far more basic and down-to-earth influences, those for instance of clocks, watches, timetables, schedules, diaries, and calendars. He'd overlook these because he'd think they're so obvious they're hardly worth attention. But there he's wrong. Much closer to the mark would be the old Filipino description of Westerners as "people with gods on their wrists". On your next advance trip, try out some local L.A. [Los Angeles] churches and observe how the Sunday sermon

> comes to a hasty close as a chorus of digital alarms goes off at noon. It's not just ideas that form their view of time nor just the Bible that makes them tick....
>
> These are tiny examples, but layer upon layer, their effect in moulding lives is radical. Thus the slow, subtle but all-powerful shaping of culture has all the advantages of a complete philosophical revolution with none of the disadvantages of intellectual sweat. (39-40)

John Francis Kavanaugh makes a similar point in more technical language. In Following Christ in a Consumer Culture, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1978), he writes:

> A culture is a cult. It is a revelational system. It is the entire range of corporate ritual, of symbolic forms, human expressions and productive systems. It quietly converts, elicits commitments, transforms, provides heroics, suggests human fulfillments. The culture, then, is a gospel - a book of revelation - mediating beliefs, revealing us to ourselves.
>
> A culture is a cultivation. Humans tend and till themselves through nature into culture. When culture has an independant reality of its own it reciprocates and tends and tills us. We become cultured. Thus although culture is made by humans, it, in a special manner, makes us - to some extent in its own image...(56)

A key question arises here: into what image is our culture making us? Christians are part of culture and are subject to its shaping influence. But Christians can also contribute to the shaping of their culture. This clearly has important implications for whether Christians will exist as a sub-culture or a counter-culture in modern society. For if the dominant worldview of a culture is false and dehumanising, it will not be enough for a dissenting minority simply to proclaim verbally an alternative vision of life. The cultural patterns of a dominant community can survive purely verbal or intellectual assaults on its basic premises. Unless the minority community begins to develop and exhibit alternative cultural patterns, the dominant culture will be able to sustain its own vision of life without serious threat. Thus Jesus charges his followers that it is when unbelievers "see your good works" that they will be led to "give

glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

8. THE PROBLEM OF COMMUNICATING ACROSS WORLDVIEWS

We have already noted that the worldviews held by various communities can come into sharp conflict. The modern western world, although still dominated by a single worldview, is no longer the exclusive territory of a single vision of life. We are confronted today with a diversity of competing worldviews. This pluralism of worldviews makes communication difficult. As Walsh and Middleton put it: "Another person's worldview is like a different world or universe... "(34). Consider the example of the student from Singapore cited by Walsh and Middleton at the beginning of their book. His plight was quite fundamental. He was torn between two conflicting ways of looking at life: two distinct understandings of the nature of love, marriage, family, social relationships, right and wrong, personal identity, even of life itself. He stood between two conflicting worldviews.

This kind of problem is increasing in our society. We probably expect it to arise between members of different ethnic groups, especially those from widely different cultures. But we may be surprised when it arises between members of our own culture. For example, it is a common phenomenon in the "generation gap". Certainly many cases of inter-generational conflict are simple battles of wills and ambitions, and each side roughly understands what the other thinks. Sometimes, however, there is simply no communication at all, but a sheer inability of each party to enter into the other's point of view.

The conflict between worldviews also appears increasingly in public life, as the assumed consensus over the nature and basic goals of society begins to break up. Many people have remarked on the television confrontations between the protagonists of the 1984 miners' strike, that the spokesmen on both sides were having no impression whatever on each other's thinking; there was no actual communication. They were reasoning within two different worlds, or rather two radically different ways of perceiving and interpreting the world.

****

SHORT ASSIGNMENT

Describe how the Eastern bloc and the Western bloc countries each understand the Cold War? How might a small, Islamic Third World country understand it?

****

9. THE BASIS OF WORLDVIEWS: FAITH

We now need to probe further into the crucial role played by faith in the creation and maintenance of worldviews. Walsh and Middleton state that "worldviews are founded on ultimate faith commitments... our ultimate faith commitment sets the contours of our worldview. It shapes our vision for a way of life" (35). In recent decades many people have found themselves going through periods of radical questioning about the meaning and purpose of life. The philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre spoke for some when he said that "every existing thing is born without reason, prolongs itself out of weakness, and dies by chance". But this is an intensely difficult position to live with, because human beings appear to have an irrepressible drive to find meaning and security. Human beings are by nature inclined to search until they find some particular aspect of their experience which seems to be especially significant, something which promises to reveal the meaning of their life. This aspect is often employed as the key to explaining the remaining aspects of experience. Just as a magnet, when placed under a paper covered in iron filings, produces an order, so a particular aspect or dimension of life establishes coherence in a person's life - and in the life of a culture.

When a particular aspect of reality is taken to be the focal point or source of meaning in human life, it has become an object of faith . Many things may be pressing concerns in daily life, but faith is concerned with what is of final importance, of ultimate significance. Thus Wolters writes: "worldviews have to do with basic beliefs about things. They have to do with the ultimate questions we are confronted with; they involve matters of general principle" (3). Walsh and Middleton list four such ultimate questions on p. 35:

1. "Who am I?" - what is the nature and significance of human beings?

2. "Where am I?" - what is the origin and nature of the reality in which humans find themselves?

3. "What's wrong?" - how can we account for the distortion and brokenness in this reality?

4. "What's the remedy?" - how can we alleviate this brokenness, if at all?

Compare these with the list of basic worldview questions proposed by James Sire on p. 18 of The Universe Next Door:

1. What is prime reality - the really real? To this we might answer God, or the gods, or the material cosmos.

2. Who is man? To this we might answer a highly complicated electro-chemical machine whose complexity we do not understand, or a personal being created by God in his own image, or a sleeping god, and so forth.

3. What happens to man at death? Here we might reply that man experiences personal extinction, or transformation to a higher state, or departure to a shadowy existence on "the other side".

4. What is the basis of morality? The character of God, the affirmation of men, the impetus toward cultural or physical survival, we might say, among other things.

5. What is the meaning of human history? To this we might answer to realize the purposes of God or the gods, to make a paradise on earth, to prepare for a life in community with a loving and holy God, and so forth.

These, then, are the ultimate questions we face in life. They are questions of faith, and the answers we give are our ultimate commitments in life - things we would (perhaps literally) stake our lives upon.

Faith, says theologian Paul Tillich, "...is the state of being ultimately concerned." He goes on:

> Man, like every living being, is concerned about many things, above all about those which condition his every existence, such as food and shelter. But man, in contrast to other beings, has spiritual concerns - cognitive, aesthetic, social, political. Some of them are urgent, often extremely urgent, and each of them as well as the vital concerns can claim ultimacy for a human life or the life of a social group. It claims ultimacy, it demands the total surrender of him who accepts this claim, and it promises total fulfillment even if all other claims have to be subjected to it or rejected in its name. (Dynamics of Faith, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1957, p.1.)

An aspect of life which "claims ultimacy" is one which appears to be worthy of worship and unquestioning trust. Tillich claims that the chosen object of faith is seen as demanding "total surrender" from the person asking the ultimate questions. He illustrates this surrender with the example of nationalism:

> If a national group makes the life and growth of the nation its ultimate concern, it demands that all other concerns, economic well-being, health and life, family, aesthetic and cognitive truth, justice and humanity, be sacrificed. The extreme nationalisms of our century are laboratories for the study of what ultimate concern means in all aspects of human existence, including the smallest concern of one's daily life. Everything is centered in the only god, the nation - a god who certainly proves to be a demon, but who shows clearly the unconditional character of an ultimate concern. (Dynamics of Faith, p.1-2)

Tillich refers to an aspect of our experience which claims ultimacy as a god. Such language should not be taken as a mere metaphor. As Walsh and Middleton put it: "Humans are confessing, believing and trusting creatures" (35). We have an inbuilt inclination to seek out a god, to bow before it in surrender, whether we are conscious of doing so or not. Gods demand surrender. In return they promise certainty - though they do not necessarily give it. The nineteenth-century surrender to "Progress" exercised enormous cultural power, demanding great sacrifices of its worshippers and promising immense

blessing. The power that gods can wield over submissive human beings can be seen dramatically when we consider how the worship of the Aryan race, when combined with a belief in progress, led to such horrors as Auschwitz and Belsen. We shall examine further some of the "gods of our age" further in Unit Four. The main point we are making here is summarised in Walsh and Middleton's words: "where we place our faith determines the worldview which we will adopt" (35).

Faith is also articulated and stated in clear propositions. These we call beliefs. A set of such beliefs would constitute a creed. Wolters explains how beliefs are quite different from both feelings and opinions in that they make a "cognitive claim", a claim to knowledge. They are committed beliefs, convictions, assertions of truth (2-3).

But while belief is not simply emotional inclination, neither is it detached intellectual assent. Paul answers the desperate question of the Philippian jailer, "what must I do to be saved?", with the exhortation, "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved" (Acts 16:30). He is calling for much more than mere assent to certain historical facts. He is calling for the jailer to surrender his life to Christ as Lord. Clearly, unless the jailer actually did believe in the existence and claims of Jesus, he could not make such an act of surrender. The historical, factual side is essential, as Paul elsewhere makes quite clear when he says, "If Christ has not been raised, then our faith is in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:17). But real belief, committed belief, is more than factual, and this "more" is what we have described as surrender, it involves wholehearted allegiance, complete trust. Belief is sometimes wrongly spoken of as if it were simply an assent to certain revealed propositions, such as those formulated in creeds. But as we all know, it is quite possible to give intellectual assent to such creeds, without having actually surrendered in faith to the God to which they bear witness.

10. EVALUATING A WORLDVIEW

So far we have tried to clarify some of the common features that all worldviews share, whatever their particular content. It is now time to see how we might scrutinise the content of a worldview. We need to ask the crucial question about any worldview: is it true? Many people today, influenced by relativist ways of thinking, would claim that this is an illegitimate question. They would suggest that all we can do with different worldviews is to identify their content and describe how they function in human and cultural life. They would deny that there are any criteria by which we can evaluate their truth. Indeed,

many deny that the idea of "truth" is any longer valid in our pluralistic culture.

This hesitation about evaluating the truth of a worldview has itself developed from the humanist worldview. While some humanists believe that the idea of truth applies in the area of science, most deny that it can be used outside that narrow area. In the field of "moral values", "metaphysics", or "theology", they claim, there is no final measure of truth: there are only personally chosen truths, "truths for me". At this point a Christian view departs radically from such relativist standpoints. For Christians believe that the Scriptures are the final touchstone of all claims to truth. The Word of God in Scripture stands above all human authority and knowledge. It is thus by this final standard that worldviews must be evaluated for their truth-value. In Wolters words: "...our worldview must be shaped and tested by scripture. It can legitimately guide our lives only if it is scriptural."(6). Our worldview is not to be seen as something which we develop in isolation from or in addition to what Scripture teaches. Rather, it ought to be the fruit of our submission to God in Scripture. Scripture should generate, sustain and critically reform our worldview.

The main burden of Wolters' discussion on pages 6-7 is that the Scriptures have decisive authority over the totality of our lives. Their relevance cannot be restricted to only certain areas of life, such as personal salvation, ethics, or church government. The Bible speaks authoritatively to all areas of life, including the so-called "secular" areas of society and culture. Walsh and Middleton also emphasise that our worldview must be tested against Scripture: "If we seek a worldview that leads to life and not death, then we must go to the Scriptures for instruction. And as our worldview is informed, corrected and shaped by the Scriptures under the guidance of the Spirit, we will receive direction for our way of life" (39).

A further important point needs to be introduced at this stage. Some of you may have asked the following question: If our worldview is the way we see everything in life, doesn't that mean that we will also read the Bible itself through our worldview? If our worldview is, as we said before, like a pair of tinted spectacles, then won't what we find in the Bible also appear "tinted" with the same colour? The answer to this question is: yes, but we must allow Scripture to impose its own tint on our spectacles. Distortion is avoidable if we are prepared to submit to the clear teaching of Scripture and willing to remain open to the Spirit as Interpreter. So the recognition that we see everything, including the Bible, through our worldview, does not lead to relativism. Scripture breaks through the relativity of our limited views of reality and God. As Hebrews says: "the word of God

is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (4:12-13).

Tragically, however, Christians have often not allowed the Scriptures to speak fully and have misread them through the spectacles of a distorted worldview. Walsh and Middleton give an example of this on pp. 103-105, which you should now read again.

Another example is the "biblical" justification of slavery proposed by some Christians in eighteenth-century Britain and America. And today, some Christian businessmen interpret the biblical teaching on property and wealth as a justification for the existing structure of capitalism and free enterprise. Not all Christians have misread the Bible in these ways however. Indeed, many of those Christians who were truly open to the Scriptures actively campaigned to abolish slavery and to oppose the injustices of capitalism. But these examples do serve to warn us that we may also be misreading Scripture today because of defective worldview assumptions.

One of the things the Scriptures teach, as we shall explore further in the next unit, is that God has created the world and human beings in such a way that if they obey his laws, they will experience blessing, life, peace, wholeness. So the first criterion by which we can test any worldview is what Walsh and Middleton call the "reality" criterion: "A worldview that does not integrate and elucidate God's creation as it really is cannot lead to an integral and whole way of life. The question is really whether our worldview is consistent with reality. If it is not, then reality will fight against our misconstrued vision, urging us to change our perspective and our way of life" (37).

So we can ask of any worldview: Does this worldview give an adequate account of God's creation? Does it lead us to live in ways that conform to this creation order? Does it therefore bring life, health, joy, peace, justice, love, or does it distort this order of creation, and lead towards pain, evil, brokenness, and despair? Does it exaggerate and distort certain areas of life while neglecting others? Does it open us up to the whole of God's rich creation, or does it restrict our experience of the world?

It is important to add here that people who adhere to a false worldview may not actually recognise that it leads to distortion in their lives. They may interpret these distortions in various ways. Some may deny that they are really damaging. Others will rationalise

them or "explain them away". But the Christian, looking at human experience in the light of Scripture, will seek to identify these painful effects truthfully, recognising them for what they are. So the "reality criterion" depends on having a biblical view of what reality is and how it works.

Nevertheless, even if a person denies that they are experiencing the pain of disobedience, they will in fact be feeling it in some way or other, and a compassionate Christian response will be to bring these facts home to a person holding this worldview, and then try to show how a Christian worldview can contribute to their relief because it more truthfully addresses it.

We said earlier that communication across worldviews is often very difficult. But it is by no means impossible. If that were so, then conversions from one worldview to another would never occur and evangelism would be impossible. All human beings inhabit the same reality, the same creation order established and sustained by God. Because of this shared experience of God's creation order, human beings encounter the same obstacles when they violate his requirements; they share many similar kinds of experience, even though they interpret them differently. It is in fact the shared context of God's creation order that is at the basis of all human communication.

The second criterion proposed is closely related to the first. Walsh and Middleton refer to it as the criterion of "internal coherence" (38). If a worldview leads to contradictory ways of living, we can suspect that it will be false in important ways. They cite the current crisis in the Japanese worldview, where the belief in the superiority of the Japanese people has led to unrestrained industrialisation, which now conflicts with the traditional Shinto respect for the natural world.

We might note here, incidentally, that the unrestrained industrialisation of Northern Europe in the nineteenth century has often been blamed on the influence of the Christian worldview. If Christianity were to blame, then it would itself harbour a fatal incoherence, and its adequacy would be called into question. We shall see in Unit Five that this drive for the domination of nature came not from authentic Christanity, but from a Christianity which had been deeply compromised by secular humanism.

The third criterion suggested by Walsh and Middleton, the criterion of openness, is also highly important. They write: "In any respect that another worldview brings life, we should all learn from it and allow it to correct our worldview.... A 'good" worldview ...recognises its own finitude and limitation" (38). The point they are making here is

not that we should try to form some kind of synthesis of the Christian faith with some other faith, as if each contributed some partial element of a larger, more embracing "truth". Rather, the point is that Christians (and others) should acknowledge that their individual human understanding and formulation of the Christian faith is necessarily limited and provisional, and all too often mistaken. Because of this, an attitude of humility towards other people's worldviews is essential. There should be a receptive and critical openness to the insights into God's creation order that other worldviews have struck upon. And Christians have to admit that often it is adherents of other worldviews who point Christians back to neglected or misconceived aspects of God's world.

We said earlier that Scipture must determine the "tint" of the worldview through which we read it, and all of life. This will involve being continually open to the challenge and rebuke of God through the Scriptures. Even as we read the Bible we must expect God to point out previously neglected or misunderstood aspects. We must be prepared to be caught off guard, to have our false assumptions exposed. Often, experiences in life can be used by God to drive us back to the Scriptures and read them in a new way. If we are not regularly experiencing the challenge of Scripture our reading may have become complacent. But we can be encouraged to remember that we are not alone in the task of interpreting the Bible. We are members of the Body of Christ. The task of receiving and interpreting the Word of God is a task given to the whole of the Church, guided by the Spirit.

****

SHORT ASSIGNMENT

Read 2 Chronicles 34 and Acts 10:1 - 11:18. Here are two examples of God challenging people's deeply-held assumptions. What are these assumptions in each case? Where do you think the Church today may be misreading Scripture and what false assumptions may be responsible?

****

ADDITIONAL READINGS

1. Bob Goudzwaard, **World Crises and their Common Roots** (Third Way article). This article shows how contemporary global problems reveal the powerful influence of people's faith commitments and argues that unless these commitments change, the problems cannot be resolved.

SHORT ASSIGNMENT:

What are the main "articles of faith" which are responsible for creating today's global crises?

****

2. James Olthuis, **Visions of Life and Ways of life: the Nature of Religion.** This paper develops further the analysis of how worldviews seek to integrate our experience around an ultimate faith commitment. Parts of it are difficult; you can pass over pages 16-18 for example.

SHORT ASSIGNMENT:

What standards does Olthuis suggest for evaluating the truth of a worldview?

****

UNIT ONE: MAJOR ASSIGNMENT OPTIONS

Intermediate

1. Lesslie Newbigin, **The Other Side of 1984** (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1984) (75pp)

This short book is a profound statement of the challenges facing the Church as it seeks to communicate the Christian faith in an age which thinks faith has been superceded. It has been written for a major World Council of Churches Conference, and contains a critical response. Recommended for students in all subjects.

Essay question: What are the main differences between the Enlightment worldview and the Christian worldview? Why do people today regard faith as something which is dispensable?

2. Os Guinness, **Doubt: Faith in Two Minds** (Tring, Herts: Lion, 1976) Chapters 1-4, 6-8, 16 (100pp)

In this book Guinness reveals a great deal about how faith operates, by examining the problem of doubt. Recommended especially for students in physchology, counselling, theology and religious studies. Also an option for Unit Six.

Essay Question: What do these chapters tell us about a) the nature of faith; b) the relation between faith, doubt, knowledge and reason?

3. James W. Sire, **The Universe Next Door** (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1977) Chapters 1-5,9 (95pp)

This is a Christian critique of six secular worldviews still highly important today. Very clearly written, it takes the reader carefully through the key items of belief in each worldview. Recommended for students in all subjects. Also an option for Unit Five.

Essay Question: Why does Sire think that deism, naturalism, and nihilism fail to satisfy the conditions for an adequate worldview?

Advanced

4. Leslie Stevenson, **Seven Theories of Human Nature** (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974) (125pp)

Like **The Universe Next Door**, this book is a critical survey of different worldviews, focusing especially on the theories of human nature which they generate. It deals with Plato, Christianity, Marx, Freud, Satre, Skinner, Lorenz. Not written from an explicitly Christian standpoint. Relevant for students in all subjects.

Essay question: Identify the main contrasts between the Christian view of human nature and three of the secular views described in the book.

Further Reading:

O.R. Barclay, **Developing a Christian Mind** (Leicester: IVP, 1984) (Intermediate)

Charles Kraft, **Christianity in Culture** (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1979) (Advanced)

John Francis Kavanaugh, **Following Christ in a Consumer Society** (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis) (Advanced)

UNIT TWO

The Biblical Worldview: God's Creation

UNIT TWO: THE BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW - GOD'S CREATION

Textbook readings: Walsh and Middleton chapter 3
Wolters chapter 2

1. THE BASIC STRUCTURE OF THE BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW

In Unit One we examined the fundamental role that worldviews play in human life and culture. We saw that worldviews or visions of life, whether held consciously or not, achieve concrete expression in distinct ways of life. They generate overall directions of living which order all our various activities. And we saw that because they are communally held, they shape particular cultural patterns in society as a whole.

In your assignment for Unit One, some of you will have encountered a variety of the main worldviews which have arisen in the history of western culture. Some of these remain highly influential today and new versions are emerging all the time. In Unit Five we shall examine the worldview that has been dominant in western culture over the last two centuries. But before we are in a position to understand this worldview critically, we need to explore in detail the contours of a distinctively Christian worldview, one rooted in biblical revelation.

In the next two units we shall concentrate our attention on the overall pattern of the biblical worldview, and its fundamental structure. Surveying the broad landscape of Scripture, we shall focus on its outstanding features, those overarching themes that integrate all the diversity of teachings into a coherent perspective.

The fundamental structure of the biblical message is built upon the central themes of the creation of the universe by God, the fall of humankind into sin, and God's response in the redemption of creation. No particular aspect of the Scriptures can be fully understood apart from these primary themes. Of course, this is not the only way of understanding the Scriptures, but we believe it allows the main biblical themes to be opened up faithfully. The main aim of Units Two and Three will be to equip you to interpret the world from the perspective of creation, fall and redemption.

We focus on these three main themes because they constitute the biblical answer to the four basic questions which, as we saw in Unit One, are addressed by every worldview. We summarised these questions as:

1. What is the nature and significance of human beings? ("Who am I?").

2. What is the origin and the meaning of the reality in which humans find themselves? ("Where am I?")

3. How can we account for the brokenness and distortion in this reality? ("What is wrong with the world?").

4. How can we alleviate this brokenness, if at all? ("What's the remedy?")

The first two questions are answered biblically in terms of creation:

1. Human beings are creatures of God, made in his image.

2. Human beings live in an ordered, meaningful and good universe created by the same God.

The third question is answered in terms of the tragic reality of the fall:

3. The creation has been radically ruptured by the sin and disobedience of rebellious human beings, who are tempted and assaulted by the Devil who seeks to destroy God's good creation.

And the fourth question is met by the proclamation of God's redemption:

4. The remedy for the sin of humankind and the resulting brokenness of creation is found in redemption through Jesus Christ, who reclaims the fallen world and transforms it into the Kingdom of God, now provisionally, but finally in its fullness.

It is of crucial importance to grasp the true significance and scope of these three comprehensive biblical themes, and to perceive their proper relationship to each other. These should be your aims in Units Two and Three. The Bible is not an ad hoc collection of assorted doctrines, some of which apply to one particular problem, some to others. It is a profoundly coherent whole. Through the rich diversity of authors, styles, and emphases, a deeply unified message can be discerned. This involves more than merely seeing particular passages in their immediate context. For the widest context, creation-fall-redemption provides our understanding of each testament, each genre, each book, and ultimately each individual passage. Just as we are likely to misinterpret a play if we fail to distinguish the

"main plot" from the various "sub-plots" which may be woven around it, so we shall fail to grasp the deepest meaning of the "biblical drama" if we do not see the various "sub-plots" against the background of "main-plot" (creation, fall and redemption). By biblical "sub-plots" we mean such themes as the Flood, the Covenant with Abraham, the Exodus, the Law, the Incarnation, Pentecost, the Second Coming, and so on. We are certainly not suggesting that these themes are in any sense less important than the themes of creation, fall, and redemption, still less that they are dispensable. They are simply less comprehensive: the "sub-plots" cannot be accurately "placed" without knowing the "main plot". Let us now see how creation, the first "act" in the main plot, relates to the others.

In personal evangelism, Christians often begin their presentations of the Gospel by pointing to Christ's death and resurrection, and calling on the person to commit themselves to him. You may already have begun to suspect that perhaps this may not be always the best place to begin. To see why, note the distinction introduced by Walsh and Middleton between the "focus" of Scripture (43), and its "underlying foundation" (44). By "focus" they mean the events and teachings which take up the bulk of the text of the Bible, the action which takes place "centre stage" in the biblical drama. This focus is clearly the saving action of God the Redeemer. Its dramatic climax is Jesus' death and resurrection, where the grace and love of God are most magnificently displayed and realised. By "underlying foundation", they mean the reality from which everything else develops and which is the basis of meaning for the whole subsequent drama. This founding assumption is the majestic theme of God as Creator of the entire universe. This point has implications not only for personal evangelism, but for the whole biblical worldview. As Francis Schaeffer puts it:

> Christianity as a system [i.e. a worldview] does not begin with Christ as Saviour, but with the infinite-personal God who created the world in the beginning and who made man significant in the flow of history. (Genesis in Space and Time, p.97, quoted by Walsh and Middleton, p.188, n.1)

As Walsh and Middleton also point out, both the Bible and the Apostle's Creed open with clear affirmations of the doctrine of creation. Yet, they claim, Christians often only pay lip-service to it, appealing to it only to rebut the biological theory of evolution (43). And Wolters writes:

> Usually when we speak of creation we have in mind the realities investigated by the natural sciences

> - the structure of the atom, the movements of the solar system, the life cycle of a plant, the building instinct of a beaver. That is the sort of thing that comes to mind when we speak of the "wonders of creation". Alternatively, we may think of a majestic snow-capped mountain or the vast expanses of the starry sky. Our understanding of creation is usually restricted to the physical realm (21-2).

He then cites the title given to the "Creation Research Society", which in fact only addresses matters arising in the realm of nature. Note too, the common phrase "the creation-evolution debate". There is nothing necessarily wrong with such terminology, so long as we remember that there is far more to the biblical doctrine of creation than these terms normally suggest. (The issue of evolution is an important one and will be addressed in a future course on biology. A helpful introduction to the debate is the book Creation and Evolution (I.V.P. 1985), edited by David Burke).

To summarise: We have seen how the primary themes of creation, fall and redemption constitute the core of a biblical worldview; they answer the four basic "worldview questions". We have suggested that problems arise if they are not seen in their proper relationships. And we have noted especially the crucial distinction between the redemptive "focus" of the Bible and its creational "foundation". While redemption is the focus of Scripture, the doctrine of creation is its indispensable foundation.

2. GOD THE CREATOR: GOD IS THE ORIGIN OF ALL REALITY

The chapters dealing with creation in the two basic texts are quite comprehensive. When you have mastered them you should have acquired a good understanding of key aspects of the biblical theme of creation. While the basic perspective outlined in the two books is the same, some of the categories and terms employed are different. We shall highlight the key notions introduced and also help you to relate the various concepts and terms to each other. We shall also supplement the material in the books with some additional points. For purposes of explanation, we have grouped the key notions under three main headings:

- those that refer primarily to what God does as Creator (sections 2-4)

- those that refer primarily to the nature of the Creation order (sections 5-6)

- those that deal with the place and task of humankind within the creation order (sections 7-10)

The fundamental point of departure for the doctrine of creation is that all of reality finds its origin in the creative activity of the Sovereign God. This affirmation occurs repeatedly throughout the Bible. Just as Genesis opens with the words "In the beginning God created...", so the last book in the Bible confesses God as both "Alpha and Omega, beginning and end" (Revelation 21:6; cf. Isaiah 44:6). God is the source of all existence, the only final answer to what the existentialist philosopher Heidegger posed as the basic question in life: " why there is something, rather than nothing".

This biblical confession has many profound implications, several of which are discussed or assumed in both textbooks; but some need more explanation. First, God is One; he has no rivals as Creator; the entire universe owes its origin to him alone. The assertion in the Old Testament that there is only one God, is often coupled with the affirmation of God as Creator of the whole of reality. Ezra's appeal for God's aid in deliverance from slavery is typical: "Thou art the Lord, thou alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and thou preservest all of them; and the host of heaven worship thee" (Nehemiah 9:6). Clearly, if God has created the whole universe, all other supposed deities are mere pretenders to the throne of heaven.

To appreciate the full significance of the Genesis account of creation, note that it is in one sense a polemic directed against rival ancient near-Eastern accounts. Such rival accounts presupposed a polytheistic theology. But Hebrew religion is based on "radical monotheism"; the complete exclusion of any gods other than Yahweh. One aspect of this polytheism was that the various gods were seen as holding merely local sovereignty.

John Stott writes of the biblical account:

> It establishes from the outset that the God who later chose to reveal himself to Israel was not the God of Israel alone. Israel must not regard Yahweh as the Moabites regarded Chemosh and Mascot. For he was no petty godling or tribal deity whose domain and interests were limited to the tribe and its territory, but the God of creation, the Lord of

> all the whole earth. (Understanding the Bible Revised edition, London: Scripture Union, 1984, p.47)

Another feature of polytheism was that the beings worshipped as gods were in fact merely aspects of the creation itself. Arthur Holmes writes:

> The living God of creation is constantly contrasted with other deities. Other religions saw the gods as part of creation, akin to natural phenomena or nature's inhabitants. Mesopotamian gods were identified with celestial bodies, the moon-god and sun-god, especially, or with the behaviour of the birds of the sky or even with the deep waters supposedly "under the earth". Yet the Genesis creation story, for all its parallels with the Babylonian accounts, declares the heavenly bodies and the waters and fowls of the air and every living thing to be created by God, and in no sense divine. Other religions might worship them, but the biblical religion knows only one God and can serve none other. (Contours of a Worldview, Leicester: I.V.P., 1983, p.59. Subsequent references to Holmes refer to this book.)

Thus the plagues visited on Egypt were targeted at those creatures to which divine status had been ascribed (Holmes: 59-60). We shall explore some further implications of the biblical rejection of false gods when we encounter the theme of idolatry in Unit Three.

The second implication of the fact that God is the origin of all reality is this: God is utterly different from everything he creates. This is already implied in the above quotation from Arthur Holmes. When God created the universe, he did not transfer something of himself into his works. If he had, then creation itself would be worthy of the worship which the Scriptures declare to be solely his due. To regard a creature as an object worthy of worship is declared by Paul to be idolatry (Romans 1:25). There is an absolute distinction between God the Creator and that which he has created.

A third implication is that God creates with complete freedom. God was entirely free to create or not to create: nothing compelled him to bring the universe into existence. Arthur Holmes writes:

> ...[God] is entirely unconstrained, for apart from himself, nothing else could even be. Nor does he

> have any inner compulsion necessitating creation for he is quite self-sufficient, has no needs, and requires none other for his own satisfaction. He therefore freely chooses whether to create or not, as well as what to create. (63)

A fourth implication is addressed by Wolters (18-21). God creates "out of nothing" (ex nihilo) (Hebrews 11:3). The essential point here, as Wolters suggests (18), is a negative one: God did not require any pre-existing raw material out of which to create, unlike the potter who needs clay. God created the clay itself, as well as shaping and moulding it. This is important not only to show how the early church combated a particular heresy (derived from Plato), but also because some modern theologians have also argued that the "nothing" out of which God is said to have created was actually a reality in itself, an original negative principle (a "chaos") which God first had to conquer in order to create the world (the "cosmos"). This view seriously compromises the idea of God as the originator of all reality. It suggests that something could exist prior to God's creating activity. Note Wolters' comment:

> ...the expression "formless and empty" in verse 2 (Genesis 1) does not describe a chaos - that is, the antithesis of cosmos (the currently prevalent interpretation, which draws upon Babylonian parallels); rather it describes the first step toward the order of the earthly cosmos, something like the preliminary rough sketch of the artist, which is later filled in with colour and detail, or like the bare frame of a house before it is finished and furnished. The point is that there is no distortion of God's good creation before man's sin: formless means "unformed", not "deformed". (19-20)

Note too his comment that the term creatio ex nihilo can, strictly speaking, be applied only to the initial creation (creatio prima) of the earth as "unformed empty and dark", and not to God's subsequent creative fiats (creatio secunda) by which he imparts form and order to that earth. The same distinction is also implied, though not explicitly drawn, by Walsh and Middleton (44-5). As we move on to the next major theme, the "Word of God", we are therefore dealing with creatio secunda.

****

SHORT ASSIGNMENT

Read 1 Chronicles 29:10-18. List as many things as possible that could come under the "all things"(RSV) referred to here. What kind of things do not come under that heading?

****

3. THE WORD OF GOD IN CREATION

You may have found the discussions in the textbooks of the "Word of God" and its relation to God's "Law" somewhat complex. This is because of some terminological differences between the two books. We deal with these later, but first we highlight the main themes in the biblical account of God's creative Word.

The first theme is the centrality of Christ in Creation. Wolters discusses this on pp. 20-21. The principal biblical passage here is John 1:1-3. The apostle John begins his gospel with what is really an exegesis of Genesis 1. He declares that all things were made through the Word of God and that this selfsame Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Jesus, then, is the Word of God made flesh, the one through whom all was created and in whom everything holds together (Colossians 1:15-17), and who sustains the universe by his Word of power (Hebrews 1:2; 2:10). The Word of God by which creation was ordered is not an impersonal "principle of Order": it is Jesus Christ himself.

Acknowledging Christ as the one through whom God created the whole world has profound implications: the Jesus whom we worship and follow, and whose death secured the daily mercy on which we all depend, this Jesus is the person through whom God holds the entire universe together by his power. Christ is therefore intimately related to all that we are as creatures of God. Anything or any aspect of life that can be attributed to God's work in creation (i.e. everything) is thoroughly related to Jesus Christ, through whom they were created. In exploring, enjoying and stewarding creation, Christians do not move into a realm where Christ is absent or about which he is indifferent. Rather, precisely in plunging wholeheartedly into God's creation, we discover even more profoundly the love, majesty and richness of Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit is equally involved in the work of creation (Walsh and Middleton:45). Even Genesis itself speaks of the Spirit's creative work. As the creative power of God is poised to break forth, "the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters" (1:2). In Scripture, while God's Word is often associated especially with his authority and order, God's Spirit is frequently identified as the source of life and power. Thus in the account of the creation of human beings, we read: "then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostril the breath of life; and man became a living being" (2:7). God's breath, his spirit, brings life.

Second, the language of God creating "by his Word" underlines the fact that God created solely by his own sovereign power and will; he is dependent on nothing as he creates. The repeated refrain in Genesis 1 "Let there be... and there was..." demonstrates that whatever God commands, takes place. Walsh and Middleton say of creation" by the Word":

> The impact of this image makes us aware of the power and sovereignty of the Creator. His authority is such that he needs only to speak and creation obeys. By his sovereign decree, he gives order and structure to the world. (45)

Third, God's Word brings order and structure in creation. Wolters writes: "By his word of command, God "works up" the unformed earth into a masterpiece of the craftsman's art" (20). The creative Word of God, his authoritative command, establishes an intricately designed order through all of reality. Creation exists as an order because God speaks. God's Word in creation is the ultimate basis of our experience of order and meaning in reality.

Fourth, God creates by his wisdom. As you will have noted, Walsh and Middleton show that creation-by-word and creation-by-wisdom passages together speak of the purposeful design imposed by God upon his creation. Wolters notes that the term "wisdom" is used in the Bible to refer both to God's wisdom and to human wisdom (26). (Wolters also introduces the terms "law-side" and "subject-side" in this context. We will return to them in due course.) In ordering the universe, God "consults" his own wisdom alone. He does not need to refer to some prior master-plan which would indicate to him how a "good creation" ought to be constructed, His own wisdom is the criterion of what a "good creation" looks like. Creation is good, precisely because it is modelled according to the wisdom of God. Recall God's reply to Job:

> Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
> Tell me, if you have understanding.
> Who determined its measurements - surely you know!
> Or who stretched the line upon it?
> On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone,
> When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? (Job 38:4-7)

The final point relating to God's Word in creation concerns the term "law". You will have observed that Wolters uses law as the central theme in his discussion of creation. By contrast Walsh and Middleton employ the theme of God's Word. The difference here is largely terminological, but it needs some clarification. Wolters notes that there are a variety of words used in the Bible to capture what he calls "God's acts of sovereignty by which he constitutes and upholds the totality of reality": power, breath, word, rule, hand, plan, will, call, decree, ordinances, statutes and so on (13). You will find that every verse of Psalm 119 contains one of these terms, or a synonym. For purposes of clear communication Wolters opts for one term to convey the shared meaning of all of them, and he chooses "law". (Obviously, there is no suggestion that the other terms should be laid aside. They are part of the rich texture of the Scriptures and should be as used as freely any other biblical words).

Wolters chooses "law" for two reasons:

a) the term "law" points to God as sovereign. We might add here that the term "sovereignty" originated as a legal term in connection with discussion of (human) legal authority.

b) the term "Word of God" is most frequently used in Scripture to refer to God's redemptive activity, rather than his creative work.

As we saw, Wolters does recognise that the term "Word of God" is also used in the Bible to refer to creation. But he believes that, to avoid confusion, the term "Word" should normally be reserved for God's redemptive work, and that we should refer to God's creative activity by the term "law" (20). In fact, the two terms "word" and "law" are very closely related; they exhibit a "family resemblance" to each other. What God speaks in his Word, he also commands as law. As Wolters puts it: "The word of the sovereign is law". And Arthur Holmes writes: "The 'word' of God that commanded things into existence...becomes God's law to his creatures" (60). In the rest of this course (and other courses) you will find that the terms (and possibly still others) are used interchangeably to refer to what

Wolters summarises as: "the totality of God's ordaining acts towards the cosmos" (13).

****

SHORT ASSIGNMENT

Read Job 38-41, another key "wisdom" passage. How does God's wisdom differ from human wisdom? And in what ways should human wisdom seek to reflect the wisdom of God?

Consult also James 1:5 and 1 Corinthians 1:18-25.

****

4. GOD HAS ENTERED INTO A COVENANT WITH HIS CREATION

The third main theme concerning what God does as Creator is this: God has bound himself to a covenant relationship with his creation. (Wolters deals with a similar theme but in different terms.)

The fundamental idea here is that God's creative activity did not cease when his original world was completed on the sixth day. God constantly holds the creation in existence; he constantly maintains its order. The Word which was active at the beginning of creation continues to be active today. What God began in Genesis 1, he enduringly sustains. Thus Wolters writes:

> God's commanding omnipotence, by which he makes all things to be what they are, is the same in the beginning of creation and in every moment of the history of creation.... From day to day every detail of our creaturely existence (the very hairs of our head) continues to be constituted by the "Let there be's" of the sovereign will of the Creator. (12-13)

Walsh and Middleton also cite various biblical passages which express this conviction of the sustaining activity of God the Creator (49-51). Note also Psalm 75:3, which says: "When the earth totters, and all its inhabitants, it is I who keep steady its pillars:" and the crucial text in 2 Peter 3 dealt with by Wolters. The terms in these and other similar passages speak of God's faithfulness to his creatures. Such faithfulness undergirds our very existence; and it points to the

"radically dependant nature of creation", as Walsh and Middleton put it (49). They continue: "In ourselves we have no structure or existence. We are but flesh and dust, here today , gone tomorrow." Isaiah 40:6-8 compares us to grass or flowers. "The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands for ever" (v.8). Creatures are, by definition, totally dependant(49). Bruce Milne expresses the point graphically thus:

> ...God has called the universe into being out of nothing, and hence at every moment it 'hangs' suspended, as it were, over the abyss of non-existence. If God were to withdraw his upholding Word, then all being... would instantly tumble back into nothing and cease to exist. The continuation of the universe from one moment to the next is therefore as great a miracle and as fully the work of God as is its coming into being at the beginning. In this profound sense we all live "every instant only by the grace of God". (Know the Truth, Leicester: I.V.P., 1984, p.74)

As Wolters points out, this biblical truth is the basis for the rejection of deism, the belief that God created the world, wound it up like a clock and retreated, allowing it to run by itself by means of its own autonomous mechanistic laws. Walsh and Middleton summarise deism thus: "Deism postulated a God, but a God not particularly involved in the universe - an absentee Creator who set the world in motion but then retired from view" (189, n.12). Deism denies the total dependance of created reality upon the continuing dynamic power issuing forth from God's Word. It also denies that God intervenes providentially in particular ways in history and human experience. (You may need to review here Wolters' distinction between God's "general" laws of creation, and his "particular" commands, found on pp.17-18)

Once again we want to draw attention to the practical implications of this rejection of deism. The fact is that Christians who confess God as Creator and Sustainer of the universe sometimes find it difficult to make this confession a living dimension of their daily experience. Although they might be "theoretical theists", they tend to act as "practical deists". This difficulty, which no doubt affects all Christians to some degree, may show itself in a hesitation to pray for God's real intervention in their own lives, in the church, or in world events. Or it may simply result in an inability to take some aspect of our created humanity, such as the arts, business, or politics, as seriously as they take evangelism. But by acknowledging God's enduring, life-giving work in creation we are able to view all aspects

of life as related to his will and purpose and as realms in which he is already present. As Paul declared to the Athenian pagans, God is a God in whom "we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). God's Word is not alien to our humanness; it is what constitutes our humanness. In aligning ourselves to God's law, we enter into our true humanity.

This then is the fundamental point behind God's covenant with creation. What about the term "covenant" itself? Walsh and Middleton note that we usually think of the word in connection with God's special promises of faithfulness to Abraham, Israel, David and the Church (50). (They discuss these further in chapter five on "redemption" which we look at in Unit Three.) The term is usually associated with the historical covenants initiated by God as part of his redemptive purposes. This is certainly the main biblical usage. But they also show that behind these covenants lies a prior and more comprehensive covenant which God makes with creation as such. This is what we have been referring to as God's "faithfulness" to his creation, his sure promise always to uphold his world. A passage which parallels those cited by Walsh and Middleton (49-51) is Psalm 89:34-37:

> I will not violate my covenant or alter the word that went forth from my lips. Once for all have I sworn by my holiness; I will not lie to David. His line shall endure for ever, his throne as long as the sun before me. Like the moon it shall be established for ever; it shall stand firm while the skies endure.

Here the psalmist draws a parallel between the covenant with the house of David and God's faithfulness in upholding the physical universe. The declaration is that God's faithfulness to David will be as sure as his dependability in upholding the universe.

This profound notion of God covenantally upholding his creation is expressed by Wolters in his rather more abstract definition of "creation" at the beginning of chapter two: "the correlation of the sovereign activity of the Creator and the created order" (13) (our emphasis). Tying the two approaches together, we can say that the "correlation" which Wolters refers to is a "covenantal" correlation. You will have observed that Wolters himself avoids the term "covenant" in this context. This may be because, as with the term "Word", its biblical use is predominantly in the context of redemption. But the underlying truth is fundamental to both accounts: God has pledged himself steadfastly to uphold the works of his hands. He will not allow that which he has created out of his love ultimately to come to

ruin. Perhaps you can begin to sense already how God's faithfulness in creation is profoundly related to his faithfulness in redemption. This point will be pursued much further in Unit Three.

5. THE CREATION ORDER: CREATION RESPONDS TO GOD'S WORD

In sections 2-4 we concentrated our attention on the creating activity of God. In this section we shift our focus towards the creation order itself, the fruits of his creative activity.

In section 4 we observed that God has entered into a covenantal commitment to maintain his creation order. It is because of God's covenant that creation exists at all. But there are two parties to a covenant. So far we have focused on God as the initiator of the covenant with creation. What about the role of creation itself in this covenant?

First note that in all covenants made by God, the relationship is not one of parity: the parties to the covenant are radically unequal. God initiates his covenants, defines their terms and acts as judge concerning how far they have been kept. But the subjects of covenants instituted by God are not inactive: they are involved because they are called to fulfil the requirements of the covenant laid down by God. And creation itself is called to respond to God's covenant; its role is, simply, to be what God calls it to be. It is this straightforward idea that Walsh and Middleton are conveying when they write that "creation is a covenantal response to God's Word" (50); or, more technically: "creation is essentially constituted as a response to the laws of God" (49-50).

It may be obvious that human beings can respond to God's covenant requirements. But it may not be so obvious in what sense the non-human creation can be said to "respond" to God's Word. Clearly the non-human creation is not endowed with the capacity to obey or disobey as are humans. Wolters makes this point by drawing the distinction between God's immediate rule over the non-human realms through "laws of nature" and his rule mediated by human beings through "norms" which humans must choose, consciously and responsibly, to obey (14-15).

Wolters' basic point is that the non-human creation, although it responds to God's law, is not responsible for its operations in the way that humans are. God does not call it to account for its responses. But the Bible does indeed speak of the non-human creation responding to God's covenant requirements. This reminds us that there are not two kinds of reality which have totally different

relationships to God. All creation responds to God's Word. All creation depends on God. Thus the psalmist can write of "...fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling his command" (Psalm 148:8). The natural, non-human world is not independent of God, running according to its own laws. It has its own identity and relationship to God. The biblical view sees all of creation together praising God. It ought to inspire in us a deep sense of belonging, of "at-homeness", in the natural creation. In Unit Five we look at why the modern western world has lost this sense.

6. CREATION IS THOROUGHLY GOOD

Both textbooks express clearly the radically important truth that God is pleased with his accomplishments in creation: he declares each of them to be, simply, "good". As Wolters says, "God does not make junk, and we dishonour the Creator if we take a negative view of the work of his hands when he himself takes such a positive view" (42).

Creation is good because it reflects the nature of its Maker. Nothing in creation can therefore be regarded as inherently evil or inferior, or "mundane", or of peripheral importance. Created things may be used for evil, but that is abuse; and the cure for that is not neglect or rejection, but a reversion to proper use. But having said that everything in creation is thoroughly good, we should not think that anything is good in itself. Nothing in the world is good irrespective of whether there is a God, and irrespective of what humans do with it. It is "good" only in so far as it functions as God meant it to function. It is therefore misleading to speak of God's good gifts in creation as somehow "neutral". In a universe "charged with the grandeur of God", to use Gerard Manley Hopkins' words, there can be no neutrality.

Wolters further writes that the confession that creation is good is "the biblical antidote to all worldviews, religions and philosophies that single out some feature or features of the created order as the cause of the human predicament" (42); he then supplies a list of possible "scapegoats". This is a point of great significance and is further addressed in Unit Three.

Creation is also pronounced good in its variety and particularity, as Walsh and Middleton note (45). The biblical view of creation knows nothing of a Platonic or Hegelian elevation of the principle of unity above the reality of diversity. Creation is good because it manifests the multifaceted wisdom of God. Note that the results of each of the six days of creation are declared to be "good". Also note that God

creates each member of the vegetable and animal kingdoms "according to its kind" (Genesis 1:11,12,21,24-5). "Creational kinds" are good in their distinctiveness and variety. In many of the passages we have already dealt with, the Creator is praised precisely because of the rich diversity of his creatures,

At the same time, creation is an ordered, coherent diversity. Each of the many aspects, kinds, things, possibilities in creation is closely interrelated with the others. Nothing was created out of step, ill-fitting, in short supply or in excess, or inappropriately designed. An important biblical theme which captures something of this sense of well-balanced integration and rounded health is "peace", "shalom". Christopher J. H. Wright explains its basic thrust in this way:

> Coming from a root which means "to be complete", this has a deeper sense than absence of strife. It includes wholeness, total welfare, that state of soundness and harmony that God desires. It is thus closely related to the tsedeq concept of "properness": things and people as they ought to be. (Living as the People of God, Leicester: I.V.P., 1983, p.135).

God's world, while brimming with dynamic diversity, was at the same time created as a universe of peace, order and coherence. God's Word for creation establishes a multiplicity within a unity, and this multiplicity is "good". Bernard Zylstra summarises the biblical picture thus:

> God is one. His Word is one. The creation's response must be one. But this unity does not eliminate diversity. The creation is a symphony where we find a variety of creatures each singing the praises of the Maker in accordance with its unique character, different from creatures of another "make". The lion is to serve the Lord like a lion, the dandelion like a dandelion. The difference in service depends on the difference in the Word addressed to them. The response of the creation to the one all-embracing Word - serve Me! - is thus a symphony of voices in which each type of creature performs its unique function in the indispensable setting of the whole. ("Thy Word Our Life", in Will All the King's Men, Toronto: Wedge 1972, p.157)

7. THE PLACE OF HUMANKIND IN CREATION: IMAGE-BEARERS OF GOD

Human beings occupy a unique place within the creation order. Distinct from all the various species or "kinds" found in the natural realms is "humankind", a creational species in its own right. Only when human beings are created on the sixth day does God pronounce creation to be "very good" (Genesis 1:31). Humankind is the crowning achievement of God's creational enterprise. Answering the question "What is man that thou art mindful of him?", the psalmist replies, "yet thou has made him little less than God, and dost crown him with glory and honour" (Psalm 8:4-5). At the centre of the biblical account of the uniqueness of humankind and its difference from the non-human creation is the profound idea that human beings are created in the image of God.

In the first place, we should remember that the word "image" speaks of our relativity in contrast to God. As Henri Blocher says in his book In the Beginning "An image is only an image. It exists only by derivation. It is not the original, nor is it anything without the original. Mankind's being as image stresses the radical nature of his dependence", (Leicester: I.V.P., 1984, p82. Subsequent references to Blocher refer to this book.) And further: "Selem [image] generally refers to a concrete image, a statue, often an idol. It would be difficult for it to be used for the model, the form of the original; it is rather the image made according to the original" (84-5). Earlier we saw that Scripture counters the claim that human beings are totally different from the non-human creation. Humans share with the rest of creation the status of dependent creaturehood. We are truly "earthlings". The Genesis account of the creation of humankind underscores this continuity with the non-human creation by pointing out that we were formed "out of dust of the ground" (2:7). Blocher writes:

> Mankind remains infinitely lower than his Creator; he is mere creature and nothing more. From its very first page the Bible excludes the pagan theme of the divinization of man and all the dreams of hidden divinity and its self-creation. It does not follow Babylonian mythology with its humanity moulded with divine blood. The spirit conferred on mankind does not emanate as if it were a portion of the Spirit of God. Zechariah 12:1 uses for the creation of the spirit of man within him the same verb "to form" as Genesis 2 uses for the body, the verb that describes the work of the potter. From this point of view Scripture places mankind firmly

alongside the world, before the Lord.

> The two 'tablets' of the beginning each teach in their own way the solidarity of mankind with the animals. Mankind arrives on the sixth day, as do all the various animals, and God appoints their food to all at the same time. In the paradise narrative, God models or fashions from the ground both the man and the animals that will pass by before him (2:7,19). Without going so far as St Francis of Assisi in calling the beasts our brothers, the Bible informs mankind of his links with the animal kingdom. The first chapter of Genesis does not mention the clay, the material from which the human being is made. But by calling him Adam (Adam) it indicates his connection with the earth: dama. Adam is the 'earthling' and his name is fitting because God gave it to him (Genesis 5:2). (82-3)

Secondly, the idea of image also speaks of our special relationship to God and to the non-human creation. Blocher writes:

> If man is the image, the emphasis falls on his situation. The metaphor of the selem does not speak firstly of the nature of the human creature (although a secondary interest in it cannot be excluded). It defines our constitutive relationships. Mankind belongs to the visible world, as befits an image. But in particular we are defined in relationship to God. Mankind is to be the created representative of his Creator, and here on earth, as it were, the image of the divine Glory (1 Corinthians 11:7; 2 Corinthians 3:18), that Glory which mankind both reflects and beholds. (85)

What then does it mean to be God's representative or image? Both our textbooks place primary emphasis on the central idea of dominion, ruling over the earth. The notion of image in Genesis 1 is immediately followed by the commission to subdue the earth (5:2 ff). The ideas are so closely related in the meaning of the biblical text that one wonders how they ever became separated, and "image" identified with something else: "Let us make man in our image...and let them rule". The second phrase informs us what imaging actually consists of. Image is immediately associated with a task, a charge, a mandate. Walsh and Middleton see "an intended analogy between the

limited authority over the earth that human beings enjoy and the ultimate sovereignty of Yahweh. The former is portrayed as a reflection or likeness of the latter" (54).

The parallel idea in Wolters' discussion (35-37) is expressed in the new term he introduces: creatio tertia (36). God himself displays his own authority in bringing the world into existence (creatio prima) and ordering it (creatio secunda). Now he delegates authority to mankind commissioning them to exercise dominion over the rest of creation on his behalf. In exercising that delegated dominion, we "image", or reflect God's sovereign dominion. This dominion or ruling consists of the dual tasks of cultivation (or developing or unfolding), and stewardship (or preserving). The key biblical words here are respectively, "tilling" and "keeping" (2:15). These themes we explore further in section 9.

Note also that the commission to subdue the earth is not given to Adam alone, but is only issued after Eve has been created. Two most important implications follow from this. First, the task of cultural formation is in no sense a specifically male responsibility. Elaine Storkey brings out this point:

> Woman is one half of mankind, and is created by God. She is made as a being distinct from the animals, but together with man stands at the pinnacle of God's creation. More than this, man and woman together make up the image of God.... Not only are man and woman together created in the image of God, they are also given joint responsiblities over the rest of creation. Together they are told to have dominion over everything else, and to exercise stewardship. (What's Right with Feminism, London: SPCK/Third Way Books, 1985, p153)

Adam cannot begin the task of exercising dominion until Eve has been given as his "helper". As Storkey points out, however, there is no suggestion of inferiority in this word: "...ezer ("help", "helper": Genesis 2:18) is never used in the Old Testament of someone who is an inferior or less able being. Mostly the word is used with reference to God himself" (154).

The second implication is that the task of cultural formation is given to the whole of humanity. Although Adam is definitely a historical person, he nevertheless also represents the whole human race. The word Adam in Hebrew also means "humankind". And in Romans 5 Paul refers to Adam as a representative of the whole of humanity. The

implication therefore is that human beings corporately bear the image of God. Walsh and Middleton write:

> ...our human culture-forming is intrinsically a communal or social phenomenon. Its social character is suggested by the mention in Genesis 1:28 of both man and woman as the image of God. It is also indicated quite clearly by the precise command God gave them. Their task was to subdue or rule the earth. But because Adam and Eve are only two, God tells them to be fruitful and multiply. How could they otherwise subdue it? The cultural development of the pristine, undeveloped creation is thus not conceived as a task for an individual. Culture is based solidly on society. Our humanity, in the image of God, is essentially a cohumanity. We are sociocultural beings, called by God to work together in developing and cultivating the creation. (55)

8. HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY IN GOD'S COVENANT

At this point we need to trace further the central theme of covenant. We saw earlier that the entire creation stands in a covenantal relation to the Creator. Humankind, as the crown of creation, is at the centre of this covenant. While all of creation responds to God's Word, human beings respond in a unique way: they are held responsible. Humankind is a conscious, accountable party to God's covenant. The specific features of this original covenant with humankind can be found in the Genesis account. But first a word of introduction. Biblical scholars have been able to show that the particular historical covenant God made with the people of Israel, initiated in Exodus 9:3-6, reveals parallels with certain "suzerainty treaties" found in the ancient Near East. Such treaties were imposed by a powerful king, a suzerain, upon a subjugated vassal state. They followed a common formula and the main elements of this formula, the particular benefits promised, conditions to be fulfilled, and sanctions, can be identified in the biblical narrative. In the covenant with Israel, God appears as the "suzerain" laying down his treaty requirements on his vassal Israel - obedience to his Law - and promising both protection against enemies and prosperity following obedience. (The differences between the Exodus account and other suzerainty treaties are also very significant. A thorough study of this question can be found in Meredith Kline's The Structure of Biblical Authority (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids: 1972)).

The significant point here is that a parallel formula can be detected in the account in Genesis 2 of the creation of humankind, as Blocher carefully demonstrates (chapter 6). The covenant blessings granted to the first human beings are summed up in "Eden", the name of the garden (2:8-9). It means "delight"; it suggests "a pleasure, the very environment of happiness". "The Lord immediately proves his generosity by installing his vassal in a paradise" (Blocher:113).

What covenant requirements does God then lay upon his vassal? In the first place man is to "till and keep" the garden (2:15). This is his mission from God, and we explore its implications presently. Blocher comments: "It is an order for the man to benefit from the life God gives to him, to explore the magnificent park and taste its fruits. By refusing to be content with a stunted existence, the man will show his gratitude and glorify his Lord" (121). But the chief provisions of the covenant agreement, as Blocher points out, are found in the following verse: "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat for in the day that you eat of it you shall die" (2:17). The essence of this second covenant provision is summarised by Blocher thus:

> ...the knowledge of good and evil corresponds to the ability to decide. It is the prerogative of the king who judges his subjects and of the father who brings up his son. What analysis could be more suitable for Genesis? It shows the man as the vassal of the Lord by virtue of his covenant of grace. It makes him as it were a son of the Creator God. The Lord reserves for himself the royal prerogative to decide, the Creator God alone knows good and evil, he alone is autonomous. Relative to God, mankind must, in order to be happy, constantly approve his dependence as a vassal and renounce all conspiracy against his suzerain; relative to God, mankind must rejoice in his final dependence and reject the mirage of a truant autonomy like that of the prodigal son. (132-3)

9. THE HUMAN TASK: "TILLING AND KEEPING"

We noted earlier that the core meaning of imaging God is found in the mandate to subdue the earth and exercise dominion over it. The covenant provision to "eat of every tree" carries with it the mandate

to "till" and "keep" the garden. This mandate was not simply an agricultural instruction. In fact, the garden represents the whole of the creation, and the mandate to "till and keep" encapsulates the central task of humankind in creation.

Walsh and Middleton point out the connection between the terms "cultivation" and "culture". Human culture is in essence the outcome of human obedience (or disobedience) to the original creational mandate to "till and keep". We are commissioned by God to develop and unfold the creation, unlocking and releasing its rich possibilities in service to God. Culture, in all its variety, is the arena of human obedience to God. As Walsh and Middleton put it: "To be a cultural being is, quite simply, to be human" (55). The word "subdue" in Genesis 1:20 (kahbash) is a strong word; it is used elsewhere to mean the treading of grapes in the wine press for the making of wine. Humans are to take the raw materials of creation (including themselves) and work and develop them. They are to be culture-formers.

You may have wondered about the significance of man's "naming" of the animals in 2:19. At this point, we need simply note that the primary connotation involved in the activity of "naming" is also dominion. In naming the animals, man "indicates the right that he has over them, as the pharoah will show his suzerainty over his vassal by changing his name from Eliakim to Jehoiakim (2 Kings 23:34) and Nebuchadnezzar will show his over Mattaniah whose name was changed to Zedekiah (2 Kings 24:17)" (Blocher:91).

But coupled with cultivation is stewardship, the mandate to "keep" the garden. Developing and preserving go hand in hand. Walsh and Middleton emphasize that the notion of "conquest of nature" is entirely foreign to the Scriptures. We may press the grapes into wine, but not pollute the vineyards. We may develop sophisticated technology, but not at the expense of rewarding human work. We are free to eat of every tree in the garden, but not to spray them with destructive chemicals merely to increase short-term gain. While we must reject any idea of worshipping nature, a proper attitude is captured in the word Wolters uses, hallowing. To hallow the creation is to receive it as a gift entrusted to us by God; to honour the integrity of the diverse created things; to respect the limits associated with each thing; and to repair any breaches in the balanced cycles of nature. In Unit Five we shall examine some of the reasons why this vision has been so pervasively discarded in western culture. In essence, stewarding is to be rooted in gratitude, motivating us to mirror the faithfulness of God. As Walsh and Middleton put it: "Our culture-forming is not to be done selfishly but with real care for the creation. To be faithful to the image of God, our cultural

development of the earth is to be good, wise and loving - like Yahweh's covenant rule" (58-59).

The Old Testament especially contains many examples of laws showing how God's creational mandate is to be applied in many areas of human society and culture. Such laws were given within a particular historical context. They are not to be literally implemented in our own very different context, but they do express God's purposes in creation in an authoritative way. There are norms for economic life (e.g. Exodus 22:25); judicial life (e.g. Exodus 23:1-3); family life (e.g. Deuteronomy 21:16); political life (e.g. Deuteronomy 17:16-17); even hygiene (Deuteronomy 23:13-14).

Further, the "cultural mandate" is what gives true meaning to human history. The problem of the "meaning of history" has been discussed endlessly throughout the centuries. Is history meaningful at all? If so, is the meaning to be found in the recurrence of determinate cycles or in the movement towards a single climax? And of what significance is distinctly human action in this purpose? There are a number of distinct philosophies of history which have sought answers to these and other questions. (We shall not discuss them here. If you wish to explore them, David Bebbington's Patterns in History (I.V.P., 1979) would be an excellent place to start). But the "meaning of history" is not primarily an abstract philosophical question. It concerns the significance of any ordinary human action; it has existential urgency.

Many Christians, sadly, fail to appreciate the tremendous significance of the biblical view of history for their daily activities of work, play, raising families, engaging in politics, the arts and so on. The central point is that all these activities are aspects of living as image-bearers of God. They are part of the human cultural project commissioned by God from the beginning of creation and to be fulfilled and purified at the conclusion of this age. In all these things we extend and develop God's own work of creation. As Wolters puts it: "We are called to participate in the ongoing creational work of God, to be God's helper in executing to the end the blueprint for his masterpiece. The meaning of history, therefore, must be sought against the background of the human management of God's work" (38). Or, in Kavanaugh's phrase: "culture is the tilling of history by humane self-expression" (Following Christ in a Consumer Culture, p.57).

This positive affirmation of the meaning of human history means that Christians need not feel uneasy with historical change. Sometimes Christians fall into the trap of trying to transplant God's written norms for ancient Israel immediately into contemporary society. Others

wish to return to a more primitive, preindustrial civilization, supposing that it is a closer approximation to God's design. Behind these and other similar views may lie a vague suspicion of human historicity. Although history and culture have, since the fall, developed in radically distorted ways, the fact of development and change in itself is part of God's original intention. Creatio tertia is a process which implies that humans can and must transform the world entrusted to them by the God of history.

****

SHORT ASSIGNMENT

Think of three aspects or potentials of God's creation which human beings have discovered this century. To what extent have they been used obediently?

****

10. RECOGNISING CULTURAL NORMS

The biblical view of creation assumes that we can actually discover God's will to guide us in our creational tasks. It presupposes that cultural norms are knowable. Without such knowledge, the idea that cultural norms are built into the creation order would be useless speculation. Wolters explains an important passage in Isaiah 28 as declaring that "The Lord teaches the farmer his business" (28). The principle applies right across the expanse of creation including all aspects of cultural life.

Wolters recognises that many people, Christians included, do question whether these supposed creational norms can in fact be known in such areas as aesthetic life, schooling, business and so on (29). In chapter 5 he explores further the problems involved in discerning such norms; we shall return to his discussion of these in Unit Six. In chapter two, however, he approaches the question in terms of the respective roles of "spiritual discernment" (29-31) and of Scripture (31-35) in detecting creational normativity. Let us begin by discussing the place of Scripture. Wolters poses the issue succinctly: "How does God's speech in creation relate to his speech in Scripture?"

Let us first explore further how we can receive creational revelation. First, note that such revelation comes to us in both a positive and a

negative way. We may for instance recognise a great act of compassion as a revelation of God's gift of the human capacity to love. Such recognition may move us to go and do likewise, in which case we have received this revelation properly. In other words, revelation here is mediated through a person's obedient response to the Word of God (even though that person may not know Christ). However, we might also witness a great act of injustice and be moved to anger and rectifying action. In this sense our very recognition of injustice constitutes revelation from God. (We may, however, see "compassion" where there is in fact only sentimentality, or "injustice" where there is only discipline. We come to this problem very soon).

Second, if revelation can come to us in such ways, then clearly it will be confronting us constantly, in every experience of life and in every field of experience. That means that we are continually faced with religious choices. We must respond obediently or disobediently to the constant challenge of creational revelation.

Third, creational revelation can come to us through historical inquiry. God's norms for cultural life can be discerned both in their manifestation in our contemporary experience, and in human responses to them throughout history. Taking a historical overview, we need to look for evidence of constant creational features in various fields of culture, social institutions and relationships, child-rearing, use of technology and so on. Clearly the major problem here is the danger of confusing factual regularities arising from the persistence of human sin, with genuine creational constants. But, though precarious, it is a necessary enterprise.

What then is the place of Scripture in this process of discerning creational revelation as it applies to human culture? Clearly it is indispensable: we have already noted two possible pitfalls resulting from relying on ordinary observation alone. In the first place, the Scriptures instruct us to seek for such norms, as Wolters points out (32). This is one dimension of "spiritual discernment". So we are not bypassing, but obeying, Scripture in searching for such creational norms in creation itself. Second, we are to read creation in the light of Scripture, through the eyes of a biblically-attuned worldview. This is suggested by Wolters' two images of the glasses and the miner's lamp. Note that the emphasis in the lamp image directs us to focus our attention on the rockface (creation) rather than the lamp (Scripture). This analogy, however, is limited by the fact that, while we would be blinded by looking at the miners lamp, we are illuminated by looking at Scripture itself. The Scriptures provide written instructions on how we may find our way around in the dark. Thus, third, as Wolters writes, "Scripture spells out in clear human language what God's law is" (33). We would remain in the dark

without verbal clarification, for, as we saw earlier, rebellious human beings suppress the truth revealed in God's creation. The Scriptures have a simple straightforwardness ("perspicuity") that creational revelation, because of our distorted vision, lacks.

But there is a highly important point to be added here. If we have genuinely turned to Christ and received the Spirit, we will be less and less inclined to "suppress" the truth of God displayed in creation. This means that Christians with renewed minds led by Scripture should feel freer than ever before to seek for God's revelation in creation itself. As we grow to maturity in Christ, as our faculties of spiritual discernment sharpen up, our attunement to creational revelation should increase correspondingly.

Wolters' explanation of the place of Mosaic law (34-5) is of great importance. Recently there has been an encouraging renewal of appreciation of Old Testament ethics. He defines the law of Moses as "the divinely accredited implementation of creational law for ancient Israel" (34), and states the kernel of the interpretive task thus: "...insofar as the Mosaic law is addressed to a particular phase of the history of God's people it has lost its validity, but insofar as it points to the enduring normativity of God's creation order it retains its validity" (35). Another way to express this is to say that the Old Testament laws embody instructive precedents of obedient behaviour. The Old Testament contains two main sections of law: Exodus 20 - 23, and Deuteronomy 14 - 26. Each opens by declaring its basic principles (the Ten Commandments, and, more generally the nature and purpose of the covenant with God's people), and goes on to provide samples of how that law is applied in various areas of life. They were not comprehensive even in their own day, but they nevertheless disclose the enduring norms by which God governed his people. A demanding task of discernment is to detect that 'enduring normativity" within the specifics of Old Testament legislation.

****

SHORT ASSIGNMENT

Referring to Exodus chapters 20-23 and Deuteronomy chapters 14-26, find examples of laws addressing one of the following areas of life: economic, judicial, family, political, use of nature and animals. Try to detect the "enduring norms" in this area of life. What practical implications might these norms have for today?

****

ADDITIONAL READINGS:

1. Al Wolters, **The Foundational Command: "Subdue the Earth"**. This paper explains how the structure of the book of Genesis conveys a profound message about human culture and history, developing a point raised in Walsh and Middleton (56-58).

SHORT ASSIGNMENT

How does this paper shed new light on the significance of the genealogy of Jesus in Luke 3: 23-38?

****

2. **Unemployment : Working it Out** (Third Way/Shaftesbury Project Study Guide). Although designed for group use, parts of this study guide can be completed individually.

SHORT ASSIGNMENT:

Read the whole study guide; answer the question in the "Bible study" section either of part 1 or of part 2.

****

UNIT TWO: MAJOR ASSIGNMENT OPTIONS

Intermediate

1. Derek Kidner, **Wisdom to Live By** (Leicester: IVP, 1985) Chapters 1,2,4,6,8, (80pp).

This book presents a lucid account of the theme of wisdom as it appears in Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes, providing biblical evidence relevant to the discussion of wisdom in the textbooks. (Chapters 3,5, and 7 are more detailed theological studies to which you may, but need not, refer.) Relevant for students in all subjects.

Essay Question: What is "wisdom" in the biblical view, and how is it broader than what today is usually called "scientific knowledge"?

2. James Houston, **I Believe in the Creator** (London: Hodder, 1979) Chapters 1-5 (120pp)

This is a comprehensive statement of the biblical teaching on creation and of its contrasts with pagan and modern secular views. Relevant for students in all subjects. Also an option for Unit Six.

Essay Question: Identify the main points at which the Christian doctrine of creation departs from pagan and secular views.

Advanced

3. Henri Blocher, **In The Beginning** (Leicester: IVP, 1984) Chapters 1-6 (115pp)

This is a brilliant study of the opening chapters of Genesis, shedding further light on themes already covered in this unit. (It also includes an appendix on scientific issues not dealt with in the unit). Relevant for students in all subjects. Also an option for Unit Two.

Essay Question: Humanists have held that Christian belief in the absolute sovereignty of God denies human dignity. How would you respond to such a position?

4. Arthur Holmes, **Contours of a Worldview** (Leicester, IVP, 1983) Chapters 4-7, 10-11 (100pp)

This is an advanced presentation of various themes found within a Christian worldview, giving particular attention to its possible theological and philosophical outworkings, and also contrasting the Christian worldview with a variety of ancient and contemporary perspectives. Also an option for Unit Six.

Essay Question: What are the implications of a Christian worldview for our understanding of:

a) the creation order?
b) humanness?
c) human relationships?

Further Reading:

Francis Schaeffer, **Genesis in Space and Time** (London: Hodder) (Intermediate)

Loren Wilkinson (ed), **Earthkeeping: Christian Stewardship of Natural Resources** (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) (Advanced)

UNIT THREE

The Biblical Worldview: Fall and Redemption

UNIT THREE: THE BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW - FALL AND REDEMPTION

Textbook readings: Walsh and Middleton chapters 4 & 5
Wolters chapters 3 & 4

1. THE FALL: SIN IS COVENANT-BREAKING

The biblical account of the fall, humankind's sinful rebellion against the Creator, furnishes an answer to the third of the "worldview questions" described earlier: "how can we account for the brokenness and distortion we experience in reality?" We examine this theme under four main headings: sin as covenant-breaking; sin as idolatry; the scope of the fall; the relation of sin to the creation order. Then we shall explore further a highly important distinction, that between "structure" and "direction". In this section we see how sin involved the breaking of God's covenant with humankind.

Merely to acknowledge the reality of brokenness and distortion in the world does not, in itself, cost human beings very much. Every worldview in some way acknowledges the presence of "sin", though each has a different account of it. The real obstacle comes in assigning responsibility for its origin. Scripture places this responsibility squarely on the shoulders of human beings themselves.

As we saw, human beings, uniquely among creatures, are held responsible for their actions. At its deepest level, this responsibility is religious in character: human beings are placed in the position of having to respond to God in some way. We cannot not respond to God. For religious responsibilty constitutes the inescapable creaturely condition of human beings. As Walsh and Middleton put it:

> Human beings are inherently religious creatures. We cannot live without a god, even if it is one of our own making. We need a centre, an ultimate focus, a point of orientation for our lives. We have in fact two alternatives. Either we serve the Lord and obey his will, or we practise idolatry in disobedience. These are the spiritual antitheses, the either/or of life which the Bible repeatedly addresses. In all our doings, in all our ordinary human and cultural activities, we constantly face these two covenantal ways. (61)

The Bible characterises the religious responsiblity of human beings as covenantal in nature. As we have seen, our activities as human beings take place in response to the covenant requirements that God has laid down from the beginning of creation. In Unit Two, we saw something of the content of these requirements as set out in Genesis.

The Genesis account continues by narrating how humankind violates these covenant requirements. We can describe sin, therefore, as a breaking of the covenant relationship established by the Creator. Man and woman tasted of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, explicitly transgressing a covenant provision. Recall that this prohibition was no act of meanness on God's part. In essence, as we saw in Unit Two, it was God's way of reminding humankind of their status as creatures who are wholly dependent on their Creator. God, as the origin of creaturely existence, retains sovereign rights to determine its conditions. Thus the "fall" into sin can be expressed most simply by describing it as humankind's revolt against the covenant rights of the Creator. Sin is covenant disobedience.

We should note, at this point, a further profoundly important fact. The Genesis account engages in no complex analysis of multiple causes (though there is a place for this), and appears quite uninterested in "mitigating circumstances" (though these too can be real and important). It simply narrates a series of events in which human beings deliberately violate an explicit prohibition from God. They are held accountable for this violation. There was no compulsion to succumb to the temptation of the serpent, subtle though it was. No "explanation" is given, no account of any prior causative factors. Blocher helps us again:

> ...the temptation was the occasion of the fall; it was not its <u>cause</u>. 'Weak' as the woman was, she had no reason to let herself be persuaded. There was no tendency in her nature that drove her on to the fatal slope. Neither did anything direct the man to his foolish acquiescence. There was no fault in his will - before sin entered. Why did he yield? The enigma remains total, and the evil rebellion inexcusable. (145-6)

Nevertheless, the text does suggest a deeper <u>characterisation</u> of sin. You can trace in the text the progression from <u>doubt</u>, sown by the serpent, to <u>desire</u>, aroused for the tree's fruit, to <u>disobedience</u>, the act of eating (3:1-6). Once the man and woman doubted that the Word of God to them was given for their highest good, once they began to question the all-wise intentions of the Creator, the deed was as good

as done. For in doubting the adequacy of God's requirements they took upon themselves the sole prerogative of the Creator to determine the nature of good and evil. Sin, therefore, involves an abandonment of creaturely trust in the Word of God. And it is inexcusable. God's Word was sufficient, as Deuteronomy 8:3 makes plain: "And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know; that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but that man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord". Blocher sums up the meaning of the Genesis account of sin as teaching:

> ...that at the heart of sin lies the claim to autonomy, that sin is rooted deep in our hearts by doubt and covetousness, that it overthrows the created order, that it is both weakness and arrogance, and that it brings alienation to the human race, to the advantage of that spirit of false wisdom which corrupts the religion of men. (154-5)

2. SIN IS ROOTED IN IDOLATRY

If human beings are inescapably religious, driven always to seek an object of worship, then the fall cannot be characterised solely as revolt against the rightful Lord: it must be described further as the exchange of religious allegiance. This is stated quite explicitly by Paul in Romans 1:23-5, as Walsh and Middleton observe (62). The rebellious vassal, breaking away from the tutelage of the Creator-King, cannot simply declare himself henceforth independent. He necessarily seeks another protector, a surrogate suzerain, whose authority he will from now on accept. In other words, separated from the true God, humankind is driven to idolatry.

The theme of idolatry is central to the Scriptures, but its full significance is not always recognised. Increasingly, Christians concerned with social justice are discovering in the Old Testament frequent denunciations of economic oppression and exploitation of the poor. It is tempting, in reading such passages, to regard the equally strident denunciations of idolatry (with which they are almost invariably associated) as something more relevant to an ancient or primitive culture than to our own. But this is a selective use of the biblical text. Consider another fact. Protestant Christians have often applied the biblical condemnation of idolatry primarily to questions of liturgical symbolism, concluding that "images" of Mary or Christ found in Catholic or Orthodox churches are illegitimate as

objects of devotional attention. Whether or not this is a valid application, we might question whether the main point of the biblical attacks on idolatry has not thereby been overlooked. For in the Scriptures, idolatry is not merely a narrowly defined "cultic" practice. Rather, as Walsh and Middleton emphasise:

> Idolatry is essentially a declaration of autonomy and independence from our Creator, our rejection of his rightful kingship...idolatry is portrayed in the Bible not as merely one sin among many, but as the epitome of sin. It is the central act of disobedience which disrupts Yahweh's rule over human life. (63)

Walsh and Middleton make three further important observations regarding idolatry. First, idolatry leads to the abandonment of our human task as image-bearers of God. Not only does idolatry "usurp God's place", it also "usurps our place". This point is seldom recognised in discussions of idolatry, but it clearly follows from the acknowledgement that the essential task of human beings is to "image" God in the creation. The honour of God in creation is proclaimed primarily in the obedient and worshipful response of his unique representatives on earth, humankind. If they fail in their task, this witness is diminished. Thus the two sides of idolatry are integrally related: if human beings worship idolatrous images of the true God, the honour of both God and man are violated, so closely has God bound himself to his image-bearers. This point is developed in detail in Harry Fernhout's paper set for this unit, so we will not examine it further here. When you reach the discussion of contemporary idolatry in Unit Five, observe especially how such idolatry is inevitably de-humanising, how it strips humankind of its true calling and responsiblities.

Second, idolatry is misplaced faith. Imagine that someone has written down a series of words, representing all the various aspects of life and experience, onto a large sheet of rubber which is stretched over a horizontal board. Now consider what would happen if someone took hold of one small area of the rubber and pulled it up vertically away from the board. All the remaining places on which we have written down the various aspects of life would be distorted by the stretching of the rubber. This model may help to clarify the meaning of Paul's words in Romans: "Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for evermore. Amen".(1:24-25).

When Paul talks of "worshipping and serving the creature rather than the Creator" he is describing idolatry. Worship is an act of faith. As we saw in Unit One, it consists of ascribing ultimate worth to something. On our model, whatever we have chosen to pull up vertically (to give ultimate worth to) represents our idol. Recalling our opening examples of worldviews at work, we can say that the animist culture of the Azande Indians has "pulled up" mana, or energy or power, while in nineteenth-century England, "progress" or organic growth was grasped.

Idolatry consists therefore of taking an aspect of our creaturely experience and raising it to a position of ultimacy. God is usurped from the place which is rightfully his. Paul Tillich writes: "In true faith the ultimate concern is a concern about the truly ultimate, while in idolatrous faith preliminary finite realities are elevated to the rank of ultimacy" (Dynamics of Faith, p.12).

Note especially that idols are necessarily constructed out of something within the creation order. Hence in Romans 1:23-5, Paul describes idolatry as serving created things rather than the Creator. As Walsh and Middleton point out, there are only two possible objects of worship: the Creator or something he has created. Nothing else exists. The pseudo-deities worshipped in the ancient Near East were "no gods": they were merely some aspect of creation - sun , moon, fertility, animals, birds elevated to the status of divinity in the minds of worshippers. The same applies to all false gods. And Reinhold Niebuhr writes:

> If some vitality of existence or even some subordinate principle of coherence is used as the principle of meaning, man is involved in idolatry. He lifts some finite and contingent element of existence into the eminence of the divine. He uses something which itself requires explanation as the ultimate principle of coherence and meaning. (The Nature and Destiny of Man, vol.I, London: Nisbet, 1941 p.176)

Third, idolatry always leads to distortion and death. God's Word is the way to life, blessing, prosperity, peace, wholeness: breaking that Word necessarily produces death, cursing, poverty, war, brokenness. Exploitation, violence, sexual immorality: all these sins follow from exchanging the Word of God for the "word" of a false god or gods which care little for human life, for the poor, for sexual integrity and so on. Walsh and Middleton point out that the covenant established by God has sanctions attached, as did ancient Near Eastern treaties. They point to one of the clearest statements of the alternatives

placed before the people of Israel, in Deuteronomy 30. Similar statements can be found periodically through the Old Testament, e,g, Joshua 23-4, Judges 2:11-23, Nehemiah 1, Psalm 78, Hosea 4. In these and other passages, the two covenantal options are set out strightforwardly: either we give our unqualified allegiance to Yahweh and obey his direction for blessing and prosperity, or we forsake his instructions and invoke upon ourselves the covenant sanctions. Note the important point that Walsh and Middleton make: 'The consequences are inevitable. For disobedience goes against the very grain of creation itself. Sin is rebellious against both the structure and the Structurer of reality. Such rebellion is inevitably self-defeating and self-destroying' (67). We should remember, however, that there is nothing mechanistic or impersonal about God's judgement on our covenant-breaking, as there would be for a deist's god. God is continually, personally, upholding the creaturely conditions which make such consequences inevitable. He is fully and intimately present in his Word, whether it comes to us as the way to life, or as his judgement.

In the analogy we introduced earlier, the stretching rubber illustrates the distortion and warping of life that takes place as a result of idolatry. Ezekiel writes: "...and you shall earn the penalty for your sinful idolatry" (23:49). Examples abound of such distortion: the distortion of justice in the Azande tribe; the appalling conditions of workers in nineteenth-century England resulting from the blind commitment to industrial progress; the destruction of nature following from the unrestrained pursuit of economic growth in Japan.

****

SHORT ASSIGNMENT

Consider ways in which idolatry of 1) the nation, 2) woman, 3) the market, takes place in our society. Can you identify evils which follow from each of these?

****

3. SIN AFFECTS ALL OF CREATION

We have said that sin can be described both a) as the breaking of God's covenant demands and b) as idolatry, the transferring of our ultimate religious allegiance from God to something within creation.

Earlier we said that a religious allegiance is an allegiance from the heart, from which springs all the "issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23). All our specific activities are determined by the direction of our hearts, the religious centre of our total being. If heart-obedience to Yahweh issues forth in a life of total obedience, then heart allegiance to an idol will also be expressed in all areas of life. The scope of sin's effects will extend throughout the whole of life. Like King Midas, with his golden touch, fallen human beings will taint and corrupt everything to which they put their hands.

No human being is free from sin's corrupting effects. For, as Paul says, sin spread from one man, Adam, to all men everywhere (Romans 5:12). Deuteronomy 5:9-10 warns that the effects of sin are so powerfully transmitted from parents to children that even those of the third and fourth generation will feel it. Recent psychological studies have shown clearly how emotional and spiritual distortion can indeed get passed from parents to children and even to grandchildren. At a wider level, sins of a corporate and social kind will also be embedded in a society's institutions and practices, thus corrupting its new members.
Wolters gives examples of some of the far-reaching effects of sin in human life and society on p.45. One further area where sin brings distortion is in human understanding - indeed, this is at the heart of all sin. By understanding we do not here mean theoretical thinking, although this is included. Sin corrupts our basic vision of life, our worldview. It radically distorts the spectacles through which we see the world, ourselves and God. As Paul says, sin darkens our understanding of God's revelation:

> ...although they knew God they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools...they exchanged the truth about God for a lie. (Romans 1:21-23)

The Bible frequently speaks of sin as bringing a corruption of the mind, a blindness to the truth, a readiness to believe lies (e.g. Titus 1:15; 1 John 2:11; Romans 28:26-27). People whose minds are thus darkened cannot see reality as it is. They may see one part of it, and exaggerate this part out of all proportion - this is idolatry. And there will be as many false visions of life as there are idolatries. Note the Bible's repeated description of the Devil as "liar". The first recorded temptation of the Devil (through the serpent in the garden of Eden) was the denial of the truth of God's Word (Genesis 3:1 "Did God say...?"). His strategy is to insinuate falsehoods, tempting humans to believe them (Matthew 4:3-11; John

8:44; 2 Corinthians 11:3; 13-14; 1 Timothy 4:1-3; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10; Revelation 12:9-10).

But the Scriptures go further than this. The scope of the fall is not limited to humanity itself. It reaches into the non-human creation as well, as Walsh and Middleton note (70). Wolters writes:

> ...Adam and Eve's fall into sin was not just an isolated act of disobedience but an event of catastrophic significance for creation as a whole. Not only the whole human race but the whole non-human world too was caught up in the train of Adam's failure to heed God's explicit commandment and warnings. (44)

Scripture does not explain exactly what this being "caught up" consists of; but it does give an important clue. If humans have been entrusted with responsibility for the whole earth, then we might expect their sin to wreak havoc in every area of creation. As Walsh and Middleton note: "Our sin has enslaved the earth. Because God had given us a unique authority over creation, our disobedience brought the entire creation under a curse" (70). Read the covenant curses pronounced by God after the fall (not, it should be noted, on the man and woman themselves): To Adam he says: "...cursed is the ground because of you" (Genesis 3:17); here the "ground" can be taken to represent the whole natural order. The important passage in Romans 8 sheds further light on creation being "caught up" in the sin of human beings. (Walsh and Middleton: 70-71; Wolters: 46-47)

4. SIN IS ALIEN TO CREATION

We have seen that the scope of creation is universal and that the scope of the fall is universal. Some people interpret the universality of the fall to mean that the positive power of God over the creation order has actually been eliminated. God's providence is thus seen in primarily negative terms. But, as Wolters points out, sin does not abolish the creation order (47). Sin cannot abolish the creation order because this order is upheld by the Word of God. However traumatic and devastating the visible effects of sin are in the world, God never suspends his sustaining Word for creation.

Indeed it is because this Word is continually active that sin's effects are traumatic and devastating. Sin brings painful consequences because it is an attempt to break the laws for healthy human living, laws which God graciously upholds. The very presence of

pain, distortion and brokenness actually testifies to this upholding work of God in creation. Such consequences are nothing other than God's Word coming as judgement, as warning, calling us away from disobedience and back to his ways. This is what Wolters means when he writes:

> Curbing sin and the evils that sin spawn, [the law of creation] prevents the complete disintegration of the earthly realm that is our home. The law, in other words, impinges upon its creaturely subjects. The law is "valid" in the sense that it holds, it is in force, it has come into effect. Ignoring the law of creation is impossible. (52)

Thus the negative, restraining function of God's law is based upon God's positive sustaining of this law.

This helps to explain what Wolters means by saying that sin and evil are parasitic on the creation order; or that they are caricatures of the good creation (45). They exist only as negatives, living off the goodness of the creation order by seeking to distort it. Thus, "..evil exists only as distortion of the good, it is never reducible to the good" (48).

But Wolters also points out that sin never becomes identified with creation: sin exists only as the negation of creation, as the violation of God's Word for creation. Sin is a radically alien intrusion into God's good creation. This places in wider perspective the point we stressed earlier, that Adam and Eve's sin is inexplicable. There was nothing in their created nature that predisposed them, in any sense, to disobey God's law. Their sin was a fundamental violation of what they were made to be. Nothing in the creation order in itself tempts anyone to violate God's requirements. There are no "vulnerable" areas, no weak links in the chain which could give humans any excuse for falling into sin. There are important implications of this point that now need to be developed further.

5. DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN "STRUCTURE" AND "DIRECTION"

Sin and evil are fundamentally distinct from the creation order. This point is explained further by Wolters who introduces Calvin's distinction between the "order of creation" and the "order of sin and redemption"(48). These "orders" are like the two main "acts" in the "biblical drama", to use the analogy we introduced earlier. They also

correspond, respectively, to the "foundation" and "focus" of Scripture. Wolter writes that they "relate to each other as health relates to sickness-and-healing" (48). Recall here Wolters' analogy of the growth of a child who had suffered a traumatic disease in his early years (39). There he pointed out the necessity of distinguishing between the three processes simultaneously at work: the normal process of maturation and growth, the progress of disease, and the process of healing. The first process corresponds to the "order of creation", and the second and third to the "order of sin and redemption".

Wolters then introduces two key terms to designate these two orders: "structure", referring to the order of creation, and "direction," referring to the order of sin and redemption. The structure of a thing is determined by the law of creation pertaining to it. We can therefore speak of its "creational structure". The direction of a thing is determined by the ultimate faith commitment of the human being who is responsible for it. We can thus speak of its "faith direction" or "spiritual direction". Walsh and Middleton's image of the electrical cord with current running through it helps clarify this distinction (88-9). The direction of the current represents the spiritual direction of human life; either towards or away from God. This direction affects everything a person is or does. But, whatever the direction, God still maintains intact the stucture of the electrical cord. As Wolters puts it : "The structure of all the creational givens persists despite their directional perversion" (50).

We shall investigate further in Unit Five the wide significance of this distinction for our cultural and scholarly activities. At this point we want to draw attention to Wolters' warning against reducing direction to structure. He writes: "The great danger is always to single out some aspect or phenomenon of God's good creation and identify it, rather than an alien intrusion of human apostasy, as the villain in the drama of human life" (50). You may recall here Wolters' discussion of the "goodness of creation" in which he states that the biblical view of the complete goodness of creation is "the biblical antidote to all worldviews, religions and philosophies that single out some feature or features of the created order as the cause of the human predicament"(42). One such view was the early church heresy known as "Gnosticism". (Wolters explains this on page 42 and then further on pages 50-1; we shall discuss it in more detail in the next unit). The "gnostic" tendency to declare something in creation to be evil, to "scapegoat", has been pervasive in human history.

Note also that the gnostic tendency to depreciate one aspect of creation is frequently associated with a corresponding tendency to elevate or divinise another aspect; that is, to view it as the means

of access to God. A depreciated aspect of creation is identified with sin, while a divinised aspect is regarded as the means of redemption. To clarify this, recall our discussion of idolatry as misplaced faith. We said that idolatry consists of vesting one's ultimate faith in an aspect of the creation order itself. Such an aspect is elevated to the level of a god; it is "idolised" or "divinised". Idolatry produces both the divinisation of an aspect of creation and a corresponding depreciation of another. For, if one aspect is chosen as god, then others have to be rejected, and they inevitably become rivals.

In a polytheistic worldview such rivalries are normal, and myths abound of wars among the gods. But where a worldview attempts a unified view of life such as is typical of monotheism, the adoption of a particular idol always splits creation into two parts: that which corresponds with the idol, and that which rivals it. The world is seen as a dualism, an arena of two contending principles. If the Mind is seen as the ultimate focus of reality, then the Body will be in opposition. If Reason is the focus, then Nature is the opposition. If the scientific notion of necessary Cause-and-effect is the focus, then Freedom is the opponent. If Conscience is the key, then Instinct is the opposition.

Further, when God's nature is seen as being characterised especially by one of these idolised aspects, then Christian discipleship tends to be seen in terms of cultivating these aspects and denying or restraining their opposites. Thus, for example, physical activity comes to be viewed as less important then intellectual activity; manual labour as less spiritual than theology; rock music (being strongly physical) as less Christian than Baroque (being more intellectual); and so on. The quest for an idol therefore also leads to a <u>denial of the coherence of the creation order.</u>

****

SHORT ASSIGNMENT

Wolters suggests that certain false worldviews attempt to place the blame for evil on one or another aspect of creation. He lists the following "scapegoats": the body, temporality, finitude, emotionality, authority, rationality, individuality, technology (42-3). One worldview which blames authority as the source of evil is anarchism. A worldview which scapegoats temporality is Platonism (which we discuss further in Unit Four). Think of a worldview which blames one of the other scapegoats in Wolters' list and suggest what practical consequences it might have in human life.

****

6. REDEMPTION IS CREATION REGAINED

There is a much greater abundance of Christian literature available on the biblical doctrine of redemption than on the doctrines of either the creation or the fall. In one sense, this is only to be expected, since, as we said earlier, redemption is indeed the "focus" of Scripture. But there are two indispensable biblical truths which sometimes seem to be passed over all too quickly, (or even implicitly denied), in some discussions of redemption. Wolters states them at the beginning of chapter 4 (p.57), and we shall concentrate on them in the next two sections:

1. Redemption is the restoration of creation; it is "creation regained".

2. Redemption is comprehensive in scope; it reaches to all aspects of creation.

The radical implications of the fact that redemption is comprehensive need re-emphasis today because of two contrasting tendencies in Christian reflection. The first is the view that redemption means leaving creation behind, discarding it in favour of a wholly new order of things. In this view, redemption involves the abolition of the fallen creation order and its replacement with an entirely different one. Sometimes texts such as 2 Peter 3:10 are cited (wrongly, as we shall see), in support of this view. (This view follows naturally if one believes that the fall has so completely obliterated the structure of creation that creation is now beyond possiblility of salvage; that it is, literally irredeemable).

The second tendency sees God's work in redemption as conferring upon humans a new structural level of being (using the term "structural" in the precise sense defined earlier), which they originally lacked, a "spiritual nature", for instance. Wolters refers to this view on p.59. Such views are still deeply ingrained in our Christian consciousness, and they influence both the way we read the Bible and the way we engage in evangelism. Both views make the mistake of thinking that redemption effects some kind of change in the structure of creation. But redemption, biblically conceived, is a matter of direction. It does not modify our created structure by adding to it or taking away from it. Rather, it reorientates the whole of our created nature back to God. Again it is most important not to confuse structure with direction.

This is the main point Wolters makes in the first part of his section headed "Salvation as Restoration". There he shows that all the "salvation words" in Scripture imply "a return to an originally good state or situation" (57). Apart from those biblical words he lists, the same applies to terms like "atonement", "justification", and "propitiation": all suggest the idea of rectification, of putting right something that had gone wrong. None of them suggest that any new structural element in human life has been introduced. They all signify a restoration of human beings to their created relationship with God.

If salvation consists of the restoration of the good creation, important implications follow for our understanding of redemptive history, the "focus" of Scripture. We need to keep in the forefront of our minds the ultimate purpose of the long process of redemptive history. At all points we need to remind ourselves why God is calling this individual, rescuing Israel from that particular enemy, teaching this particular message. The basic answer is always the same: he is in the process of gathering a people from his fallen human creatures and restoring them to his original intended purpose of serving and glorifying him as stewards of his world.

As Walsh and Middleton show, the biblical account of redemption is organised around a series of covenants. These are redemptive covenants and they should be distinguished from (though never pitted against), the original creational covenant we discussed in Unit One. In the covenant with creation we see God's institution of the creation order; in the redemptive covenants we see God's restitution of the fallen creation. Whatever differences there may be between the successive redemptive covenants - and these differences are important - beneath them all lies a single overriding purpose: God's regaining of dominion over his creation.

We want to draw attention to three points made in the texts. First, the covenant with creation is not superseded by the redemptive covenant. In the covenant with Noah, God reaffirms his commitment to sustaining the creation order (Genesis 8:21-22) in spite of the persistent sin of man. He also reaffirms the covenantal requirement laid on the human race to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (9:1-7). The mandate to develop creation through human culture is thus underlined, not withdrawn, (though clearly new elements are introduced on account of sin, as Walsh and Middleton point out, pp.75-76). The redemptive covenants presuppose the continuation of the covenant with creation, and also point to its ultimate fulfilment in a renewed creation.

Second, the restoration or restitution of creation does not mean its "repristination" (Wolters 63-4). Repristination would involve a return to a prior state of affairs, a reversion to the Garden of Eden. If that were the meaning of redemption, it would suggest that God would wipe out the entire history of human cultural development. Such a drastic remedy would have been necessary only if everything done by humans since the fall had been wholly evil; and this is not so. As we observed earlier, the results of cultural development are indeed ambiguous: good and evil are closely intertwined. But redemption will involve the purification of human culture from its evil component and the continuation of that which has been done in accordance with God's creational laws. Redemption is thus indeed "creation regained"; but it is not the original condition of creation regained.

The idea of purification leads to the third point we wish to emphasise; redemption is necessarily coupled with judgement. The purification of creation from evil is achieved through God's judgement on that evil. This judgement will take place at the end of this current period of redemptive history, determined according to God's plan. Scripture is quite clear that at the appointed time, Jesus Christ will return to earth not only as Saviour , but as Judge. Through him , God will initiate a cataclysmic purging of the whole creation (2 Peter 3:10; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 Acts 17:31; 1 Corinthians 2:13-17). Everything evil will be "burned up" but everything good retained and incorporated into the "new heavens and earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:26). The idea of redemption as the restoration of the whole of creation should not therefore be taken to mean that every individual person or thing will be saved, (the view which is often referred to as the "doctrine of universal salvation" or "universalism"). Judgement will mean vindication for those found to be in Christ, but tragically, final exclusion from God's presence for those who hold out in

rebellion against God.

7. REDEMPTION TOUCHES ALL OF LIFE

Although redemption does not mean the restoration of every individual creature, its scope nevertheless extends into every area of creation. Let us begin with the implications for the human race of this comprehensive redemptive intention. Even in the redemptive covenant with Israel, the elect people of God, a broader intention can be perceived. The election of Israel, originating with the covenant with Abraham and repeatedly affirmed throughout Scriptue (e.g. Deuteronomy 4:32-40), was only a temporary focusing of God's redemptive attention (Walsh and Middleton: 76-7). It did not indicate that God had turned away from the rest of his human creatures, but rather that he was preparing for the extension of his redemptive grace to all peoples. There are a number of "flashes" of this universal intention in the Old Testament, growing brighter and more frequent as the Scriptures move on. See especially the following: Genesis 12:3; Deuteronomy 4:6-8; Isaiah 42:6-7; 49:6; Daniel 4:1-3; Micah 4:1-4; Zechariah 9:9-10. The climax arrives with the coming of Jesus (cf Luke 2:29-32; 3:4-6), who bursts open the doors of the covenant to people of every race and nation, breaking down the barrier between Jew and Gentile (Ephesians 2:11-16) and creating an international People of God.

Redemption for human beings also means a renewal of their calling to be image-bearers of God (Walsh and Middleton: pp. 83-88). God has created human beings to be his image-bearers on the earth; and he redeems them so that they can fulfill this calling once again, fully and obediently. This important theme is developed further in the paper by Harry Fernhout set for this unit, so we will not pursue it further here.

But it is not only human beings who participate in the drama of redemption. As Wolters notes, Paul speaks of God reconciling all things to himself through Christ (59), and of God's plan to "unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth" (Ephesians 1:10). In Revelation, John records that the One who sat upon the throne declares, "Behold, I make all things new" (21-5). The entire scope of creation is embraced within the ultimate redemptive horizon of God. As Wolters writes:

> The scope of redemption is as great as that of the fall; it embraces creation as a whole. The root cause of all evil on earth - namely the sin of the human race - is atoned for and overcome in Christ's

> death and resurrection, and therefore in principle his redemption also removes all of sin's effects. Wherever there is disruption of the good creation - and that disruption, as we saw, is unrestricted in its scope - there Christ provides the possibility of restoration. If the whole creation is affected by the fall, the whole creation is reclaimed in Christ. (59-60)

****

SHORT ASSIGNMENT

If redemption brings restoration to all of life, then it includes our understanding. In what ways has Christ's redemption led you to:

1. a renewed understanding of yourself in relation to God?

2. an ability to distinguish truth from error?

3. an understanding of the goodness of some aspect of your created humanity?

4. an understanding of the root causes of a social problem?

****

8. REDEMPTION RESTORES THE RULE OF GOD

Redemption enables God's law and rule to be restored in human life. The main way that the Gospels describe this restoration of God's rule is "the Kingdom of God". The Kingdom of God is the central theme in the preaching and actions of Jesus. Christians have long recognised that Jesus came to preach the "gospel" or the "good news". But we have sometimes overlooked the fact that the content of the gospel is determined by the meaning of the Kingdom of God. We simply cannot understand what the gospel means unless we grasp what Jesus meant by the Kingdom of God. Andrew Kirk points out that Jesus frequently refers to his preaching as the gospel of the Kingdom (cf. Matthew 4:23; 9:35; 10:7; Mark 1:15; Luke 4:43; 8:1; 16:16). He writes:

> Everything he said and did was directly related to the coming of the kingdom. He reversed all the consequences of evil in the world: disease,

> possession by inhuman spirits, guilt, ritualistic and empty religion, a caste system of purity and impurity, scarcity of food, a hostile nature, commercial exploitation and death. In these activities Jesus showed that he believed that the goal of God's kingly rule is the complete remaking of the universe. Mark, in particular, sees Jesus as the second Adam. Leaving behind the desert and a struggle with wild animals (both express the opposite of the original creation with its fertile garden and tame creatures), and beginning with the defeat of the tempter (Mark 1:12-13), Jesus reverses all the effects of the first Adam's disobedience. (A New World Coming, Basingstoke, Hants: Marshall, 1983, p.54. Subsequent references in the text to Kirk refer to this book.)

Although the themes of forgiveness, justification, atonement, new covenant, are essential to the New Testament explanation of the Gospel, they are not the most inclusive themes. Herman Ridderbos explains this further:

> ...neither the idea of covenant, nor that of justification - to mention only these two prominent conceptions - can represent the entire thought of the kingdom of God... The idea of the kingdom of God is more comprehensive exactly because it is not only oriented to the redemption of God's people, but to the self-assertion of God in all his works. Not only does it place Israel, but also the heathen nations, the world, and even the whole creation, in the wide perspective of the realization of all God's rights and promises. (The Coming of the Kingdom, St. Catharines, Ontario: Paideia, 1978, p.23. Subsequent references to Ridderbos refer to this book.)

This quotation from Ridderbos leads us into the second main point we wish to emphasise: the Kingdom of God consists of nothing less than the dynamic reassertion of God's rightful kingly rule over the whole of his creation. Note the importance of the word "whole". In the words of Ridderbos again:

> ...the idea of the kingdom of heaven implies the participation of all created life in the coming of the kingdom, to which especially resurrection and re-creation belong...the coming of the kingdom, as

> the re-assertion of God's right and glory, also consists in the redemption and the restoration of life, in a material as well as in a spiritual sense. Because God is God, i.e. the God of the revelation, the creator of heaven and earth, the Holy One who has committed himself to Israel in his promise and covenant, the "proportions" of the kingdom are universal. (46)

Note also the word "dynamic". Ridderbos once again:

> ...the great future announced by Jesus is ... not a question of a general timeless statement concerning God's power and reign, but especially of its redemptive-historical effectuation which will one day be witnessed. That is why the idea of the kingdom of God is pre-eminently the idea of the kingly self-assertion of God, of his coming to the world in order to reveal his royal majesty, power and right...(19)

> The coming of the kingdom is first of all the display of the divine glory, the re-assertion and maintenance of God's right on earth in their full sense. (20-1)

Ridderbos points out that there are many other detailed nuances of the Kingdom of God found in the Gospels. The Kingdom is described, for example, as a "state of peace and happiness" (Matthew 8:11; Luke 14:15), as an "order of things" (Matthew 5:19; 11:11), as a "spiritual atmosphere" fitting for one person but repellent for another (Luke 9:62; Mark 12:34), as a "gift" (Luke 12:32),(p.26). It is also described as something which a person must enter (John 3:5), and as something which is first hidden and then revealed (Matthew 13:33). Each of these aspects of New Testament teaching adds to our understanding of the Kingdom. But the central meaning concerns the King and his kingly activity: it speaks of the Creator-Redeemer reclaiming his occupied territory and re-establishing his royal rule throughout.

This is indeed the Old Testament meaning of the Kingdom, and it is the meaning taken over by Jesus. You may recall that Walsh and Middleton, in their chapter on creation, referred briefly to the Old Testament use of the Kingdom, showing how it is closely linked to the theme of the covenant with creation :

> "This covenantal bond between God and creation, this model of God's sovereign and loving relationship to the world, corresponds to the biblical theme of the kingdom of God. God is the great King over creation, and he rules his subjects by sovereign decree. He gives his law, and creation responds in obedience. He governs the world by his word" (50).

Stephen C. Mott makes a similar point:

> The demand posed by Jesus in his proclamation of the Reign was not totally new, but summed up the values associated with the centuries old Hebrew expectation. The Reign was a renewal of God's creative intention. Jesus' ethics therefore, are a call to live according to the way things were created. ("The Use of the Bible in Social Ethics II", Transformation July/September 1984, p.23)

****

SHORT ASSIGNMENT

Several prophecies in the Old Testament anticipate the coming of the Messiah who will usher in God's Kingdom. Some of these are: Isaiah 9:6-7; 42:1-9; 60-61; 65: 17-25; Daniel 7:13-14,27. Read these passages and consider the ways in which they have been or will be fulfilled through the coming of Jesus. (Refer to Walsh and Middleton pp. 77-83, and Wolters pp. 61-3 for suggestions.)

****

9. REDEMPTION IS WON THROUGH THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

We have seen that the Scriptures present redemption as restorative in character and comprehensive in scope, and we have seen that the theme of the Kingdom of God is the dominant way in which these two features of redemption are expressed in Jesus' teaching. Earlier we also noted that while other themes such as justification and forgiveness are essential, they are not as inclusive as the Kingdom. What then is their place? How exactly are the Cross and Resurrection related to

the Kingdom of God? The first point we can make here is that the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus occupy the central position in the Gospel narratives and they are the dominant themes in the preaching of the early church. If the most comprehensive thing God is doing in Christ is the inauguration of his Kingdom, then the central means by which he inaugurates it is the death and resurrection of his Son. Thus the Cross and Resurrection are indeed the heart of the Gospel: without them there could be no Kingdom of God.

The New Testament describes the achievement of the Cross and Resurrection in a variety of ways, all of which overlap and interlock with each other. It uses words like atonement, sacrifice, passover, victory, reconciliation, justification, propitiation as well as the terms we have already examined like redemption and covenant. (A helpful new study of these themes is Leon Morris' The Atonement: Its Meaning and Significance, I.V.P., 1983). Each of these suggests further dimensions of meaning involved in the work of Christ and all have important Old Testament roots. We shall mention just two of these key themes here: Jesus as sacrificial Lamb, and Jesus as Victor over the Enemy.

Both Walsh and Middleton (81) and Wolters (61) draw attention to the fact that Jesus' casting out of demons indicates his victory over Satan. But, as Walsh and Middleton stress: "The victory of God's kingdom, however, required the death of Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God, who suffered the covenant curse for our sins" (81). Recall that the covenant with the people of God in the Old Testament had sanctions attached: disobedience would lead to God's judgement. The Old Testament sacrificial system, based on the shedding of blood of an animal substitute, was instituted to remind the people of Israel that God's continued faithfulness to them depended on his grace and his forgiveness of their repeated covenant violation. But this system was only a prefiguring of what was to come in Christ, whose sacrifice would be "full, perfect and sufficient" to cover the sins of the whole world, once and for all. The point of sacrifice was to show that when God's creatures violate his covenant demands, utterly serious consequences follow. God is the sovereign of the universe and his Word can never be violated lightly. His Word must be upheld and therefore sin has to be punished and atoned for. Through Jesus, this atonement is realised. Kirk writes:

> Jesus suffered as a sacrificial lamb. His suffering was not just the endurance of pain, nor just voluntary submission to violence, nor just solidarity with fellow human beings. Through suffering Jesus liberated people from the burden of guilt, shame and oppression that sin brings. In

> the moment of crucifixion, the totality of evil became concentrated upon this one human being. He 'carried our sins in his body to the cross' (1 Peter 2:24). Sin and its consequences were dealt with once for all, totally and finally. So, 'he himself took our sickness and carried away our diseases' (Matthew 8:17). (134)

Jesus' sacrificial death is inseparable from the coming of the Kingdom. According to Ridderbos: "...the motif of suffering is one of the most constitutive factors determining the sense of Jesus' preaching of the kingdom. The Son of Man had been invested by God with all power and authority for the revelation of his dominion and was at the same time the one who "had to" suffer and die. He had come to give himself as a ransom for many" (169). Indeed the sacrificial death of Christ actually <u>is</u> a revelation of the Kingdom of God, as Ridderbos goes on to say:

> The world of God's redemption was not only revealed in Jesus' power over the Evil One, in his miracles and in his authoritative preaching of salvation. It was no less revealed and present in the perfect obedience of the Servant of the Lord to the will of the Father, in his taking upon himself the infirmities of his people, in his substitutionary self-sacrifice as a ransom for many. This is the thought of the mediator who fulfills the law, offers the sacrifice, expiates the guilt; and representing the people in this, thus redeems them. This, too is the kingdom of heaven. Here the theocentric motif of the kingdom comes to the fore in an incomparable way. In Christ God maintains his royal rights and accomplishes his royal redemption. But this happens not only in Christ as the Son of Man invested with all authority, but also in Christ as the obedient Servant, and Christ who suffers and dies for the many. The judgement and the redemption of the kingdom of heaven are not only brought about <u>through</u> him, but also <u>by</u> him and <u>in</u> him. (171)

It is by virtue of his death as sacrificial Lamb that Jesus secures the victory over the Enemy. This tremendous theme is marvellously proclaimed in Revelation, where the themes of "Christ the Lamb" and "Christ the Victor" are both prominent. Here are two of the key passages:

> "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and honour and glory and blessing." And I heard every creature in heaven and earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all therein, saying, "To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might for ever and ever!" And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshipped. (5:12-14)
>
> Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they were defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world - he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. Rejoice then, O heaven and you that dwell therein. (12:7-12)

The same themes are found together in Paul's words from Colossians: "He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (1:13-14). Paul also specifically associates Christ's resurrection with his elevation to the position of supreme authority in the universe. Paul speaks of:

> The working of his great might which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and he has put all things under his feet and has made him head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all. (Ephesians 1:20-23)

10. THE CHURCH AS THE REDEEMED COMMUNITY

In the passage just quoted from Ephesians, Paul refers to the central place that the Church holds in God's redemptive purposes. The Church is to be the visible presence of Christ on earth after his Ascension. Hence Paul describes the Church as the Body of Christ (v. 23; 4:4-16). Paul also uses other similar expressions in Ephesians. Many of these also make clear that the Church is a community of people, not a mere association of saved individuals (e.g. "household of God" (2:13), "temple of the Lord" (2:22).) In his commentary on Ephesians, John Stott writes:

> The gospel which some of us proclaim is much too individualistic....The good news of the unsearchable riches of Christ which Paul preached is that he died and rose not only to save sinners like me (though he did), but also to create a single new humanity; not only to redeem us from sin but also to adopt us into God's family; not only to reconcile us to God but also to reconcile us to one another. Thus the church is an integral part of the gospel. The gospel is good news of a new society as well as of a new life. (God's New Society, Leicester: I.V.P., 1979, pp.128-9)

The same emphasis is found in Paul's other epistles and elsewhere in the New Testament (e.g.Acts 2:42-7; Romans 12:4-5; I Peter 2:4-5, 9-10). These passages build upon the Old Testament theme of Israel as the "people of God" (Genesis 17:1-9; Exodus 19:4-6; Deuteronomy 4:20; Hosea 1:10-11; Matthew 2:5-6; Luke 1:68-79). Walsh and Middleton bring out further aspects of this. They show how the renewal of our status as image-bearers of God also includes its communal aspect (86-88). We saw in Unit Two that our original imaging task given at creation is clearly a communal one. In redemption God renews our image-bearing role through Christ. Thus, Walsh and Middlton write:

> Paul always describes our individuality in terms of our unique contribution to the body (1 Cor.12:7-31). And when he tells us to be renewed in the image of Christ, he is never speaking merely to individuals but always to communities of believers (Eph.4:7-16, 22-24; 5:1-12; Col. 3:5-17). Our task of understanding God's laws and imaging him by our obedient lifestyle is a communal task. We must struggle together in discerning how to respond as authentic Christians to the secular culture in

> which we live - this culture with its deeply ingrained, often distorting effects on human life (86), (our emphasis).

11. LIVING "BETWEEN THE TIMES"

Today the cultural and social aspects of the Church's witness are far below the potential that they could reach. That is why we will be placing special emphasis on them. Some of you, however, may begin to wonder whether the vision of Christian cultural action developed here sounds rather too optimistic, too grandiose, even utopian. Can we really expect Christians to achieve any meaningful, substantial changes in a culture which is at the point of collapse? Are not the forces of the Enemy gathering increasing momentum, rendering the "transforming vision" at best an idealistic hope, and at worst a dangerous illusion? And doesn't the Bible teach clearly that towards the end of time evil will only grow greater ? What can we realistically expect to achieve as Christians today?

The answers to these questions really depend upon a proper biblical understanding of Christian living "between the times". Christians are living between two crucial historical turning points: the resurrection of Christ and his final return as Judge. Although the Kingdom will only come in its fullness when Christ returns, nevertheless it has already entered human history. In Christ the Kingdom of God became a visible reality on the earth. Through His people, He is continually extending His Kingdom on earth now. But Scripture gives no answer to the question of <u>how far</u> the Kingdom of God will become visible "between the times". It simply exhorts us to remain faithful witnesses to God's Kingdom, whatever historical circumstances we find ourselves in. In many countries today, the kind of organised Christian action we will discuss in Unit Six is virtually impossible, due to the constraints of the state; or where it is attempted, it evokes violent suppression and even persecution. In such situations, very different goals and tactics will have to be worked out. But in either case, Christians are called to remain faithful, not becoming anxious over how "successful" or "influential" they may be within their own society. This biblical vision of patient, faithful service is very well expressed by Lesslie Newbigin. He writes:

> If the churches are to escape from their long (and rather comfortable) domestication in the private sector and to reclaim the public sector for the Gospel without falling into the "Constantinian trap", what is required is a return to the biblical

vision of the last things which must govern all our secular obedience. Those parts of the New Testament which are usually called "apocalyptic" have naturally seemed strange and uncouth to privatized churches, but they point us to the essential issues. They offer no basis for a doctrine of earthly progress. They do not encourage us to look for the establishment of justice and peace on earth as the result of our effort. They point rather to more and more terrible conflict. But beyond that they promise justice and peace as the gift of God. And they therefore call for a patience and endurance which can remain faithful to the end. They are - in fact - the projection on to the screen of future history of that pattern which Christians have learned from the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

The message of Jesus was of the presence of the reign of God in the midst of history as the reality with which every human being must take account. The message was addressed to the nation. It concerned God's government of all nations and all creation. When it was rejected, Jesus did not follow the Zealots in seeking to establish God's reign by force. That road was to end in the tragedy of Masada where the last remnants of the freedom fighters took their own lives. Nor did he withdraw from public life and follow the Essenes into the desert to wait and pray for the kingdom. That road ends in the crumbling ruins of Qumran. What he did was to challenge the public life of the nation, at the place and time of its most passionate sensitivity, with a claim to kingship which was at the same time quite uncompromising and completely vulnerable. The claim was rejected and he was destroyed. But God raised him from the dead (an event in public history which our privatized religion has naturally converted into a purely psychological experience of the disciples) as the sign and pledge of the fact that the claim stands even though it is rejected by the world.

Christian discipleship is a following of Jesus in the power of his risen life on the way which he went. That way is neither the way of purely interior spiritual pilgrimage, nor is it the way of

> realpolitik for the creation of a new social order. It goes the way that Jesus went, right into the heart of the world's business and politics, with a claim which is both uncompromising and vulnerable. It looks for a world of justice and peace, not as the product of its own action but as the gift of God who raises the dead and "calls into existence the things that do not exist" (Rom.4:17). It looks for the holy city not as the product of its policies but as the gift of God. Yet it knows that to seek escape from politics into a private spirituality would be to turn one's back on the true city. It looks for that city "whose builder and maker is God", but it knows that the road to the city goes down out of sight, the way Jesus went, into that dark valley where both our selves and all our works must disappear and be buried under tha rubble of history. It therefore does not invest in any political programme (whether conceived in the style of a restored 'Christendom" or in the style of a classless society where all coercive government will have withered away) the hopes and expectations which belong properly only to the city which God has promised. There can be no repetitions of Constantine, neither on the left or on the right. What is required is a faithful discipleship, following Jesus on the road he went, and living by the hope of which his resurrection is the outward pledge and the gift of the Spirit the inward foretaste. Such discipleship will be concerned equally in the private and in the public spheres to make visible that understanding and ordering of life which takes as its "fiduciary framework" the revelation of himself which God has given in Jesus. It will provide occasions for the creation of visible signs of the invisible kingship of God. (The Other Side of 1984 : Questions to the Churches, Risk Book Series No.18, Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches, 1984, pp.36-7).

If Christians are to be able to sustain such a vision of patient, faithful discipleship "between the times", we will need to constantly be nourished by worship and prayer. Much of our attention in this course is on the importance of Christian cultural action in a secular age. But such action will always degenerate into an ultimately powerless activism if it does not arise out of vivid personal and

corporate experiences of prayer and worship. "Activism" sees humanly-initiated action as the important condition of success. It can be just as serious a problem as Christian "quietism", the withdrawal from the world of culture into a life of detachment. Christian activism is in fact an example of Christian compromise with secularism. It is an accommodation of the Church to the modern secular belief in human progress, and assumes that the world will gradually move towards perfection through human effort alone. Everything in Scripture denies this kind of humanistic pride.

However, the rejection of activism does not simply mean taking time out to "do nothing". The way to avoid activism is to engage regularly in another distinctive form of Christian action: prayer. In his book Until Justice and Peace Embrace (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), which is a passionate appeal for Christian social action, Nicholas Wolterstorff includes a chapter with the significant title, "Justice and Worship: the Tragedy of Liturgy in Protestantism". He calls for a rediscovery among the Protestant churches of "inwardness":

> It is my conviction that the church, and humanity at large, neglects inwardness at its own peril. And when I speak of inwardness I do not just mean motivation for social action along with the beliefs that undergird it. I mean contemplation. I mean the cultivation of what in some traditions is called spirituality, and in others, piety. It seems to me that amidst its intense activism, the Western world is starved for contemplation. Likewise it seems to me that the unmistakable witness of the Scriptures is that where genuine piety or spirituality is missing, there life as a whole is deeply wounded. Contemplation, spirituality, piety - these in my judgement themselves belong to authentic shalom, with influence radiating throughout the whole of our existence. (146)

Richard Foster opens his book Celebration of Discipline (London: Hodder,1980), with a similar challenge: "Superficiality is the curse of our age. The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primary spiritual problem. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people" (1).

SUMMARY OF UNITS TWO AND THREE

We are now in a position to see how all the great themes of the biblical drama come together. We began by exploring the theme of creation in terms of God's covenantal bond with his creaturely subjects. We saw how through the fall of man God's creation suffers invasion by the opposing force of the Enemy who seeks to destroy God's creational achievement. And we saw how God the Creator-Redeemer acts to re-assert his kingly authority over the whole creation, winning the decisive victory over the Enemy in the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus, and creating a renewed community as his visible presence on earth. Walsh and Middleton sum up all these themes in the following way: "Through Jesus' death-resurrection victory he inaugurated the kingdom of God. He began to restore the obedience of God's once-rebellious subjects. The Messianic kingdom that Jesus brought is thus the reversal of evil, the renewal of God's good creation." (81)

****

SHORT ASSIGNMENT

Read Matthew 11:1-6, 14:1-12, 13:24-30 and 13:36-43. How would you have answered a disillusioned follower of John the Baptist who said that John's death meant the Kingdom was doomed to fail?

****

ADDITIONAL READINGS

1. Harry Fernhout, **Man: the Image and Glory of God**, (ICS paper). This paper traces the theme of man as image of God through the Bible, showing particularly how our human status as image-bearers of God is renewed through Christ and the Spirit. It develops in greater detail New Testament themes discussed in Walsh and Middleton pp.83-6.

SHORT ASSIGNMENT

What does this paper suggest about the nature of genuine "spiritual renewal"? To what extent do you see signs of such renewal occurring in the churches today?

****

2. Chris Sugden, **The Kingdom and the kingdoms** (Third Way articles).

SHORT ASSIGNMENT

Summarise the various ways in which the Kingdom of God has been misunderstood by Christians. Have you shared such misunderstandings?

****

UNIT THREE: MAJOR ASSIGNMENT OPTIONS

Intermediate

1. Andrew Kirk, **A New World Coming: A Fresh Look at the Gospel for Today** (Basingstoke, Hants: Marshalls, 1983) (134pp)

This is a very readable book which contrasts a fully biblical view of the Gospel and the Kingdom of God with other sub-Christian views. It shows how these central themes speak clearly to contemporary social and global problems, and contains an up-to-date assessment of current evangelical debates concerning evangelism and social action.

Essay Question: How would you answer a Christian who argued as follows: "Evangelism and social action are quite separate aspects of the Church's task, and social action is only a secondary concern"?

2. C.J.H. Wright, **Living as the People of God** (Leicester: IVP, 1983) Chapters 1-4 (90pp)

This book is a wide-ranging study of key ethical themes in the Old Testament, showing how they all find their place within the biblical drama of creation, fall and redemption. It also points to the relevance of O.T. ethics for a Christian view of culture and society. Clear and readable. Also an option for Unit Six.

Essay Question: What is the significance of the themes of "people" and "land" in the biblical drama of creation, fall and redemption?

3. Richard Mouw, **When the Kings Come Marching In** (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/Exeter: Paternoster, 1983) (85pp)

In this original book, Mouw shows how the inspiring prophecy of the New Jerusalem in Isaiah 60 expands our understanding of the Kingdom of God. All aspects of human culture will be purged of sin and transformed when the Kingdom of God comes in its fullness.
Essay Question: Describe how you think three of the following aspects of contemporary society might look after the return of Christ:

a) political authority
b) family relationship
c) technology
d) art and music

e) race relations
f) human use of nature

What implications might your answer have for present-day Christian action?

4. Robert Webber, **The Secular Saint: A Case for Evangelical Social Responsibility** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan/ Exeter: Paternoster,1979) Chapters 1-4 (60pp)

This is a very helpful account of various Christian views of the relationship between Christianity and culture. After a statement of central biblical themes, it distinguishes between "separational", "indentificational", and "transformational" models of this relationship. Also an option for Unit Four.

Essay Question: Either a) Webber points out the cultural consequences of the disobedience of Cain and the obedience of Seth. Can you discern the lines of Cain and Seth in the world today? Should you be able to?

Or b) How is the biblical theme of Christ's death as a victory over satan central to the issues of the Christian's relationship with the world?

Advanced

5. Henri Blocher, **In The Beginning** Chapters 7-9 (80pp) **Essay Question**: What do these chapters add to the view developed in this unit that "sin is alien to creation"? What are the "wages of sin"?

Further Reading

R.E. Cassidy, **Jesus, Politics and Society: A Study of Luke's Gospel** (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1978) (Advanced)

G.E. Ladd, **The Gospel of the Kingdom** (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957) (Advanced)

Leon Morris, **The Atonement: Its Meaning and Significance** (Leicester: IVP, 1983) (Advanced)

Chris Sugden, **Radical Discipleship** (Basingstoke, Hants: Marshalls, 1981) (Intermediate)

UNIT FOUR

The Problem of Dualism: A Christian Failure

[illegible]

UNIT 4: THE PROBLEM OF DUALISM: A CHRISTIAN FAILURE

Textbook readings: Walsh and Middleton chapter 6
Wolters chapter 7

1. ACKNOWLEDGING DUALISM

In his book The Call to Conversion, Jim Wallis relates an incident from his school years that sharply reveals the tensions created by "dualism". Describing how his girlfriend's father had strongly opposed him taking her to see a film, ("The Sound of Music"), he writes:

> I didn't understand the intensity of his convictions, so later I asked him why he felt so strongly. He replied, "If we start going to movies and dances and start drinking and smoking, there will be absolutely nothing that makes us different from the world." I knew he was right. He knew in his soul that to be Christian was to be different from the world's values. It wasn't just his opposition to "The Sound of Music" that made him emotionally distraught that night. What was at stake for him was the meaning of his faith in the world. He felt in danger of losing his identity as a Christian, so he clung to what he felt was the last straw. The surrounding culture had kept encroaching, so finally he was forced to resist over a Julie Andrews movie.
>
> Evangelicals in this century have a history of going along with culture on the big issues and taking their stands on the smaller issues. (Tring, Herts: Lion, 1981, pp. 24-5)

Few Christians would defend such an attitude today, of course. This example of a tragically narrow view of Christian discipleship is an easy target. But there is much evidence that many Christians today are still "going along with the culture on the big issues" rather than demonstrating Christian alternatives. Walsh and Middleton raise the question: "If the biblical worldview is unique, and if it is radically different from the dominant worldview in our secularized culture, then why do Christians fit so well into our culture?" (94) (our emphasis). Nicholas Wolterstorff, in his "Foreword" to The

Transforming Vision observes that, in spite of the presence of large numbers of Christians, "Christianity is ineffective in shaping our public life. What effectively shapes our public life and our society generally is our adulation of science and technology and economic growth. Christianity for the most part stands in the wings and watches" (9). Martin Luther King posed a similar challenge in these words:

> We are not makers of history; we are made by history. Longfellow said, "In this world a man must either be anvil or hammer," meaning that he is either a moulder of society or is moulded by society. Who doubts that most men are anvils and are shaped by the patterns of the majority? Or to change the figure, most people, and Christians in particular, are thermometers that record or register the temperature of majority opinion, not thermostats that transform and regulate the temperature of society. (From a sermon entitled "Transformed Nonconformist", in Strength to Love", London: Fontana, 1969, p 19)

Nonchristians have also been asking why Christians appear to have been indistinguishable from the surrounding secularized culture. Theodore Roszak's comments on the impact of Christians on society at large are scathing:

> I am not close enough to the churches to say how far beyond the level of Sunday school platitudes the clergy and their flocks press the discussion of Christian eschatology. But if that discussion goes more than skin-deep, it is abundantly clear from the character of social and cultural life throughout the west that it has been well quarantined within the congregations. Where public affairs begin, the churchgoing millions are at one with the atheist existentialist few: in body, mind, and deed they live the conviction that salvation will be found nowhere but in the collective, historical process - in making, doing, and improving. That is where their effort and attention go. Time and matter have trapped their vital energy; secular enterprise consumes it totally. Christian faith - the willful belief of the unbelievable - was never better than a poor substitute for sacramental experience; but even dutiful belief in a transcendent dimension of life

> has long since degenerated into mere opinion, socially irrelevant, even if privately engaging. (Where the Wasteland Ends, N.Y.: Anchor, 1973, p.412)

Roszak's critique amounts to an accusation that the Church has accommodated itself in all essentials to the process of secularization, betraying its true identity and calling. This accommodation to secular cultural patterns has also taken place among sections of the Church which proclaim a high view of biblical authority. Sadly, orthodoxy in this area has not guaranteed faithfulness to the Gospel in other areas of life. Insofar as evangelical Christians have failed to live out the biblical worldview in areas other than personal lifestyle and evangelism, they have been at one with those who question the authority of Scripture. Neither type of Christian has a basis for a truly Christian perspective on culture and society. Affirming the authority of Scripture is of limited consequence if we do not let it speak authoritatively to all areas of life.

This tendency to limit the scope of the biblical worldview is referred to by Walsh and Middleton as the problem of "split vision". An illustration may make this term clearer. Suppose that a normal-sighted person were required to wear bi-focal glasses designed for someone who was long-sighted. Looking through the upper part of the lenses he could see quite clearly, but looking through the lower part would produce blurred vision. Someone wearing such glasses would naturally tend to focus on distant objects as much as possible and would experience discomfort when required to look at objects close by through the lower part of the lenses. Shifting attention from higher to lower vision would involve a difficult, perhaps even painful act of refocusing, while shifting from lower to higher would be experienced as a relief. Such a person would be experiencing something analagous to "split vision". Looking at the world through dualistic "worldview glasses" produces "split vision". Some aspects appear clearer, more "real" than others, and come to be seen as more worthy of attention.

Christians can experience their lives in this way. Let us look briefly at one main area where this tension is often felt, Christian attitudes to work. Walsh and Middleton point to some of the results of split vision for work on pages 97-8. They show how the routine engagement in a "secular" job can sometimes be viewed as a necessary, though implicitly inferior task. Work is seen only as a means of life, affording opportunities for personal evangelism, and allowing us to pursue "Christian" activities in leisure time. It is not seen as a Christian activity in itself.

The following letter published in the Church of England Newspaper (October 25, 1985) brings home how church attitudes can perpetuate this view of work. It was written by Christine M Woodward from Bradford, West Yorkshire, and entitled, "Called to secular work":

> In your comment of October 4 the writer asks, "How can we (presumably the clergy) get the message across ... that for most people their ministry in the world is more important than their ministry in the structures and internal life of the Church?"
>
> As one of "them", may I point out that you've got it the wrong way round. I don't need to be told that my so-called secular occupation is the work to which I'm called by God. It is largely the clergy who, even if they know this, do not acknowledge it.
>
> At the beginning of September those holding various positions in my particular church were called on to rededicate themselves, and the congregation to pray for them, in my case to God's work of running the church bookstall and singing in the choir. I found this service very encouraging and I hope we do it again.
>
> On the Monday of the following week I 'rededicated' myself to God's work of teaching in a large multi-racial inner-city college - but without any church support. I am sure many Christians from many different churches find themselves in the same situation.
>
> Every member ministry, as we all know, means giving everybody a job to do in their church. It does not mean that every member's job, full-time or part-time, is being considered part of the Church's ministry to the world. I wish it did.

****

SHORT ASSIGNMENT

Evaluate your own attitudes to work and that of your local church or Christian group in the light of this letter. Can you detect any signs of "split vision"?

****

2. A CHRISTIAN ANALYSIS OF DUALISM

Let us now probe futher into the nature of "split vision", or "dualism" as we shall now refer to it. The illustration of the bi-focal glasses indicated that, in a dualistic worldview, a sharp contrast is made between two apparently distinct areas of life, one area being viewed as better or of higher value, and the other as inferior or of lower value. This contrast is the central feature of dualism. A dualistic worldview is characterised by a mistaken division of created reality into two opposing realms. Such realms are often described in terms of contrasting pairs like: holy/profane, sacred/secular, spiritual/material, eternal/temporal, heavenly/earthly, supernatural/natural and so on. The contrast between "church" and "world" is then seen as corresponding to that between "sacred" and "secular", and the contrast beween "soul" and "body" as corresponding to that between "spiritual" and "material". Similarly the academic disciplines of theology and philosophy are seen as belonging to the two contrasting realms, "sacred" and "secular". Wolters writes this on the church/world distinction:

> ... Christians of virtually every persuasion have tended to understand "World" to refer to a delimited area of the created order, an area that is usually called "worldly" or "secular"... journalism, sports, business, and so on. In fact, to this way of thinking, the "world" includes everything outside the realm of the "sacred", which consists basically of the church, personal piety, and "sacred theology". Creation is therefore divided up neatly (...) into two realms: the secular and the sacred. (53-4)

He makes a similar point in his discussion of various views of the Kingdom of God (64-69): "An almost ineradicable tendency exists among Christians to restrict the scope of the kingdom - a tendency that parallels the persistent inclination to divide the world into sacred

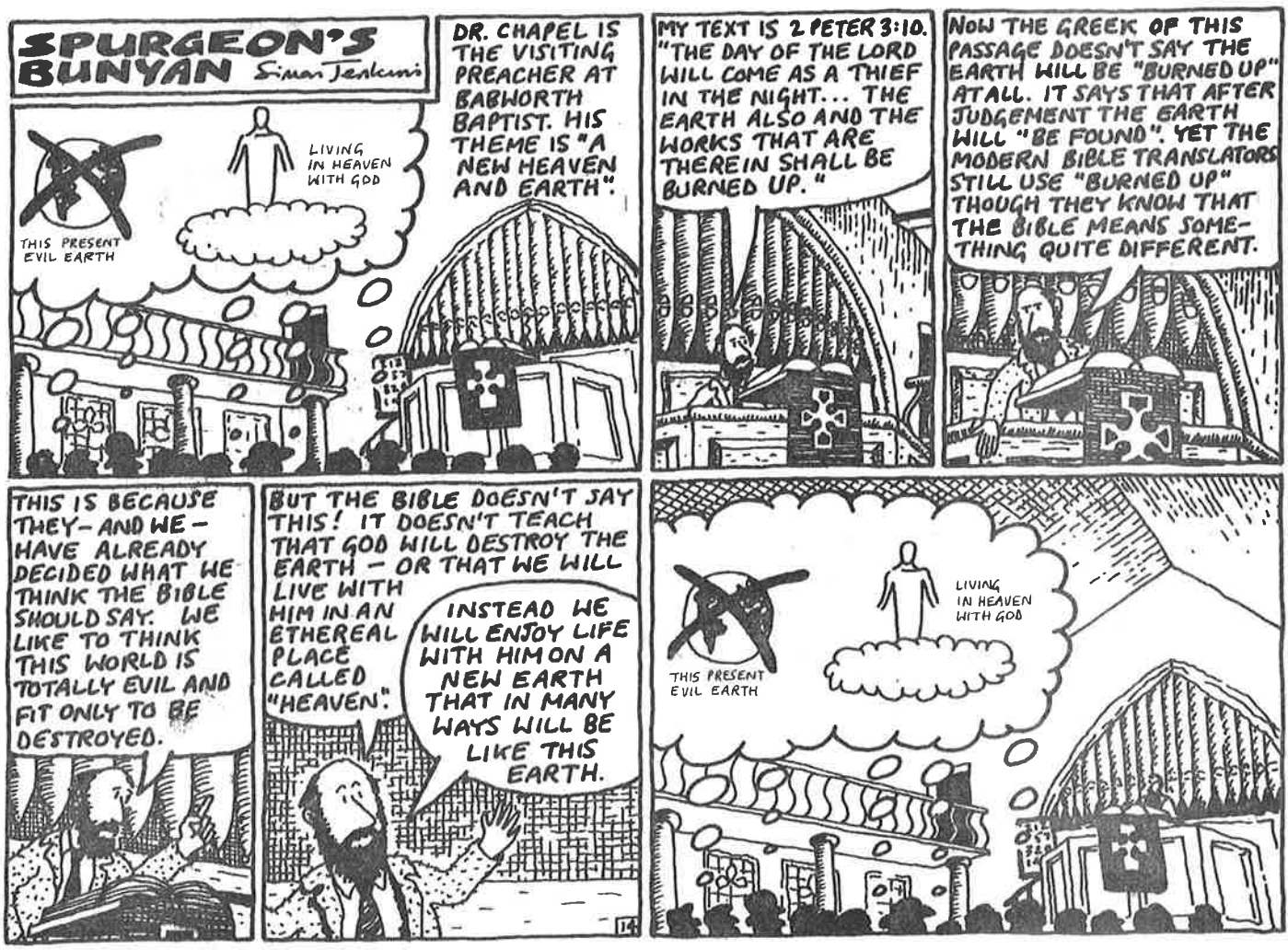
and profane realms" (65). Wolters' diagrams on pages 66 and 68 illustrate the problem clearly. Instead of the line which divides the Kingdom of God from the world being drawn vertically through all the various areas of creational life, the line is drawn horizontally through creation itself. Wolters describes such a view as a "two-realm theory". Such a theory "supposes that there is a line dividing creation into two realms, and it typically identifies that line with one of the creationally-given "seams" separating different kinds of creaturely activity" (67). Thus the church is seen as the realm of life dealing with spiritual, heavenly, or eternal matters. All other activities of life are placed in a lower, secular, realm.

Wolters notes that the line separating "world" from "kingdom of God" may be drawn in different places. Apart from those areas he mentions, we might note that areas such as the arts, or intellectual life have also been placed on the sacred side of the line in Figure B. Some Christians have held that artistic creativity gives access to heavenly or spiritual realities in a way that other human activities do not. Music or painting is then seen as a special means of revelation. And, as we shall see in the next section, many Christians throughout western history have believed that it is the mind or intellect that is the spiritual aspect of man's nature, in contrast to the body, which belongs to the lower material realm. But wherever the line is actually drawn, the problem of "two-realm" or "dualistic" approaches is fundamentally the same. Walsh and Middleton express it thus:

> Dualism blurs the valid duality between obedience and disobedience because dualism identifies obedience, redemption and the kingdom of God with only one area of life. It sees the rest of life as either unrelated to redemption (or the sacred), or worse - under the power of disobedience, sin and the kingdom of darkness. (95)

Let us now state the problem of dualism in terms of the distinction between "structure" and "direction". Referring again to Wolters' Figure A on page 66, we can say that the horizontal lines distinguishing the various areas of creational life represent the "structure" of creation. The question of "direction" concerns the human response to the structural norms laid down by God for creation. Each of the various creational areas can be directed in one of two ways: in obedience or disobedience to God. These two opposing directions are represented in Figure C on page 68. The left of the diagram represents creation insofar as it is obediently directed towards God; the right side represents creation in rebellion, i.e. the "world".

Imagine rotating the jagged vertical line in Figure C around 90 degrees. Now it cuts through creation horizontally rather than vertically: this confusion is the heart of the problem of dualism. As Walsh and Middleton put it, dualism "has superimposed on the structure of creation the "directional" question of obedience and disobedience. The dualist understands the good-evil distinction (which is really a question of obedience and disobedience) as a distinction within the structure of creation" (96). Or, to use Wolters' terms, the dualist misinterprets the struggle between two regimes, both contending for the whole of creation, as an opposition between two realms within that creation (67). The strong antipathy of the biblical worldview to dualism is one of its most important features.



This cartoon appeared in the January 1985 issue of Third Way, and is reproduced by kind permission.

3. THE INFLUENCE OF GREEK THOUGHT

In the previous section we examined some of the ways in which dualism has distorted Christians' understanding of the biblical worldview. But we also need to trace the deeper roots of dualism and see how it has come to exercise such influence on Christian understanding.

Briefly, the problem of dualism arose initially because of the uncritical acceptance by Christians of concepts drawn from pagan Greek thought. We shall examine some of these Greek concepts and see how they have been transmitted through various influential Christian thinkers into contemporary Christian thought and action. Walsh and Middleton summarize the main elements in the thought of Plato, Augustine and Aquinas. We shall add some further comments on each of these and then show how dualism was to some extent also present in one of the leading Protestant Reformers, Martin Luther. In this section we look at Plato.

Plato's thought did not arise in a vacuum. Like us, he lived in a culture characterised by a dominant worldview. The main beliefs which moulded the dominant worldview of the Greeks were expressed in the form of myths concerning the origins of the world and the human race. Many of the central themes of these myths were taken up by the sixth-century Orphic sect, whose thought had a profound influence on Plato. One of these, the myth of Dionysius, is especially important here. According to this myth, Dionysius, the son of Zeus, was killed and devoured by the wicked Titans, the enemies of Zeus. The Titans were held to have an earthly nature. Zeus is said to have hurled a thunderbolt which burned up the Titans. Out of the soot rose the human race, partly good and divine (Dionysius) and partly evil and earthly (the Titans). The implication drawn was that in order to realise our divinity, we must cultivate the good and higher component of our nature and suppress or purge away the Titanic or earthly element bound up with it.

This view of man as made up of two opposing elements clearly comes to expresssion in Plato's distinction between "Body" and "Soul". It is clearly evident in the following dialogue between Socrates and Simmius, in the Phaedo (66b) Socrates speaks first:

> 'And is not purification really to separate as far as possible the soul from the body, and accustom it to collect itself together out of the body in every part, and to dwell alone by itself as far as it can, both at this present and in the future, being freed from the body as if from a prison?'

'By all means', said he.

'Then is not this called death - a freeing and separation of soul from body?'

'Not a doubt of that', said he.

As Walsh and Middleton put it: "Following Platonic logic, we must deny our creaturely life in the world and strive for the heavenly life of permanence, stability and bliss" (108).

A very important point is that, in Plato's conception, striving for the heavenly life involves intellectual contemplation of the unchanging "Forms" of reality. Divinity is thus associated with the activity of the mind or "soul", which is contrasted with the mortal body within which it is imprisoned. This distinction became fundamental to the dominant Greek worldview. Walsh and Middleton describe how this mind/body dualism in Greek thought led to a depreciation of necessary labour and an elevation of the life of intellectual contemplation over other activities (98-99).

This dualistic opposition between body and soul was expressed in extreme form in the early church heresy called Gnosticism, which we encountered in Unit Three. Gnosticism represented the first main example of the penetration of the Christian community by pagan Greek concepts. Although it was officially declared a heresy, ideas which resemble gnosticism have remained pervasive in Christian thinking. It is therefore worth examining this heresy a little further.

There were many different gnostic sects, and gnosticism was not articulated into a single creed. But it rests on some shared basic beliefs which can be summarised briefly. The world is seen as inherently evil, having been created by an inferior and ignorant demi-god. Some humans, however, have a spark of the divine trapped or imprisoned in their bodies, and feel totally alienated from this unhappy and imperfect world. But salvation is available to those with the divine spark, and comes in the form of a messenger from God who reminds them that they do in fact possess such a spark of divinity. This 'reminding' is in the form of secret teachings and imparted knowledge which releases the gnostic from the poison of the material world. Once released the gnostic begins a journey through several layers of reality. The passage from one to the other was through knowing the appropriate "password".

Paradoxically, gnosticism could lead to radically opposing lifestyles: either extreme asceticism, (a total withdrawal from the world and its pleasures), or excessive indulgence and immorality. Both kinds of lifestyle can result from denying the spiritual importance of creaturely life. It is clear that Paul had to combat both extremes of gnostic behaviour in some of his letters (cf 1 Timothy 4:1-5; 1 Corinthians 5:12-19).

Belief in the incarnation becomes extremely difficult for gnosticism. Because gnostics regarded matter as either evil or illusory, it was inconceivable to them that God himself should take on the material form of a human being. This would amount to divine approval of the realm of matter. In an attempt to accommodate the idea of incarnation into the gnostic worldview, the "Docetists" argued that God only appeared to take on human flesh. But this heresy was rebutted and the biblical position expressed in the Nicean creed, with its emphatic assertion that God was "made flesh". Note too John's clear affirmation that Jesus was truly human, lived among us,and that his disciples saw and touched him (c.f John 1:14; 1 John 1:1-3).

As we said, gnosticism itself was clearly rejected as a heresy. But, as Walsh and Middleton point out, there was no unaminous response in the early church to the Platonic worldview behind gnosticism: "The predominant pattern, however, was cautious acceptance... The early church fathers...tended to accommodate themselves to the Greek worldview, and they began to read Scriptures using dualistic world view glasses" (109). What was missing was a radical critique of the fundamental assumptions of pagan Greek thought in the light of the biblical worldview. What was being borrowed from pagan thought might easily turn out not to be an aid to the formation of a biblical worldview, but rather a Trojan horse, destined to undermine this worldview from within.

Platonic thought in particular, and Greek thought in general, has been highly influential in Christian thought in the West as a result of the attitude of "cautious acceptance" adopted by leading church fathers. To a considerable degree, this influence came through the first great Christian philosopher, St. Augustine. In spite of his attack on pagan learning, Augustine reveals the profound influence of a Greek vision of life.

4. AUGUSTINE: ETERNAL VERSUS TEMPORAL

Augustine's influence changed the history of the western world. In many ways his thought led to a reorientation of the dominant worldview towards a Christian direction. It is essential to recognise the genuinely Christian distinctiveness of Augustine's thought in its contrast to Greek conceptions. (This is not brought out adequately in Walsh and Middleton's account (110-111).)

There is an important anti-dualistic strand in Augustine's writings. The following hymn of exultation over the goodness of God's creation flies in the face of a gnostic repugnance for the material world:

> Thou, O God, sawest everything that thou hadst made, and behold, it was very good. Yea we also see the same,and behold, all things are very good... seven times have I counted it to be written, that thou sawest that that which thou madest was good; and this is the eighth, that thou sawest everything that thou hadst made, and behold, it was not only good, but also very good, as being now altogether. For severally, they were only good; but altogether both good and very good... let Thy works praise Thee that we may love Thee, and let us love Thee that Thy works may praise thee. (Quoted in R.H. Niebuhr, Christ and Culture, N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1957, p.210)

Furthermore, Augustine held that the source of evil lay not in creaturely reality itself, but rather in the religious response of the human being to God. He writes: "When the will abandons what is above itself, or turns to what is lower, it becomes evil - not because that is evil to which it turns but because the turning itself is wicked" (City of God, XII, 6).

Finally, Augustine also believed that Christ makes possible a redirection of the fallen will back to God, healing the wounds resulting from sin. As R H Niebuhr writes, for Augustine: "Christ restores what has been corrupted, and redirects what has been perverted" (Christ and Culture, p.214). Niebuhr goes on to show how for Augustine the scope of redemption is potentially comprehensive:

> There is room within the Augustinian theory for the thought that mathematics, logic and natural science, the fine arts and technology, may all become both the beneficiaries of the conversion of

> man's love and the instruments of that new love of God that rejoices in His whole creation and serves all his creatures....Everything, and not least the political life, is subject to the great conversion that ensues when God makes a new beginning for man by causing man to begin with God. (215)

However, this is only one strand in Augustine's thought, and it remained undeveloped. More prominent in his thought was the dualistic emphasis reflecting the influence of Plato. This influence was transmitted to Augustine through the neo-platonic philosopher Plotinus.

Augustine's distinction between the eternal and temporal realms of life reveals this influence. Although created by God and therefore good, the temporal realm is an inferior, transitory and corrupted realm of reality, destined to pass away at the end of time. Such "Augustinian" sentiments are evident in the following prayer taken from the 1662 Anglican Book of Common Prayer (Collect for fourth Sunday after Trinity):

> O God, the protector of all that trust in thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy: Increase and multiply upon us thy mercy; that, thou being our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal: Grant this, O heavenly Father, for Jesus Christ's sake our Lord, Amen.

This distinction between eternal and temporal (which is not to be found in this form in the Bible) is seen as corresponding with the distinction between body and soul. The soul is intended for eternal life, while the material body is subject to mortality. "Augustine sees the soul as 'inhabiting' the body," as Walsh and Middleton note (110). He also holds that the soul, which gives access to the higher eternal realm, is supposed to rule the body, which is bound to the temporal realm. However, sin has so disturbed the human constitution that the mind is unable to rule the body and keep its passions in check. If it is to function properly and produce a life of true virtue, the mind must be enlightened by the grace of God through faith and brought back into obedience to God.

Augustine was not hopeful that all would seek knowledge of God. Rather he believed that two "cities", or communities of people would continue to exist side by side on earth, the one comprising the saved - the "City of God" - and the other comprising the unsaved - the "city of man". The radical distinction between these two cities had decisive

implications for the way Augustine regarded that culture which was produced by the city of man. Pagan learning, for instance, had a very limited value. For Augustine, such learning only had real value if it contributed directly to the knowledge of God. "We ought not to give up music," he wrote"... if we can derive anything from it that is of use for the understanding of Holy Scripture" (On Christian Doctrine, Bk 2, chapter 18). He issued this general caution about pagan learning :

> I think, however, there is nothing useful in the other branches of learning that are found among the heathen, except information about objects, either past or present, that relate to the bodily senses, in which are included also the experiments and conclusions of the useful mechanical arts, except also the sciences of reasoning and of number. And in regard to all these we must hold by the same maxim, 'Not too much of anything;' especially in the case of those which, pertaining as they do to the senses, are subject to the relations of time and space....(On Christian Doctrine, Bk.2 Chapter 39)

That which was subject to the relations of time and space - the "temporal" - was of only passing value compared with that which was "eternal".

The temporal/eternal dualism also gave rise to Augustine's preference for the "contemplative life" over the "active life". The former was concerned with eternal and spiritual things, while the latter was preoccupied with the transitory things of this passing age. Both sacred and secular occupations were acceptable, but the former was to be preferred if possible (cf. Walsh and Middleton: 99).

Walsh and Middleton describe Augustine as the "father of the middle ages". They point to the fact that the middle ages were characterised by an "ecclesiastical" culture (111). Note that this is not an incidental by-product of Augustinian dualism. The tendency for the institutional church to dominate all areas of society is, they write, "inevitable when the realm of grace is limited to one's spiritual life and the church seen as its custodian. If the Gospel is not seen as a reforming and redeeming power in all of life, then the church as custodian of that power will extend its influence, often at the expense of the rest of life" (111).

A. P. D'Entreves makes a parallel point:

> ...the teaching of St. Augustine had offered an interpretation of life which admirably fitted the other-worldliness of the medieval mind. With his eyes fixed in rapture on the splendours of the Heavenly City, the Christian could only conceive of the world as a world of corruption. History, indeed, was nothing else than a tale of two cities: the tale of the failures of man and of the triumph of faith, of sin and redemption. The earthly city must be recast as a godly theocracy. ('Introduction' to Aquinas: Selected Political Writings, Oxford: Blackwell, 1959, p. x)

5. AQUINAS: NATURE AND GRACE

Walsh and Middleton supply some of the background to the thought of Thomas Aquinas (112). Whereas Augustine was primarily influenced by the philosophy of Plato, Aquinas' main intellectual debt was to Aristotle. The marked differences between Plato and Aristotle account in large part for the divergence between the thought of Augustine and Aquinas. But at the same time, both medieval thinkers reflect the continuing power of an essentially Greek dualistic worldview. Let us look briefly at both the differences and the similarities between Augustine and Aquinas.

Aristotle's philosophy was distinctive in the Greek world for its focus on concrete empirical reality. Recall Francis Schaeffer's comment on Raphael's painting, "The School of Athens" cited by Walsh and Middleton: "Aristotle is spreading his hands downwards while Plato is pointing upwards" (108). With the revival of Aristotelian philosophy in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries came a renewed interest in studying the natural world for its own sake. Aquinas fully shared this interest in "nature", breaking with centuries of medieval "other-worldliness". Although he quotes Augustine frequently as one of his most revered authorities, he differed notably from Augustine in this consistently positive evaluation of the world. "While Augustine stressed the fallenness of humanity and nature, Aquinas stressed their created goodness" (Walsh and Middleton:112). Thus although we find dualism in Aquinas, it is a "softer" dualism than that of Augustine: the contrast between the spiritual and the material realms is less pronounced. The two realms of grace and nature are not seen as sharply opposed to each other; nature is merely the lower level of goodness. We can represent the progression from the acute dualism of

the gnostics, through Augustine, to the softer dualism of Aquinas, thus:

GNOSTICS:	SPIRIT	: (good)
	MATTER	: (intrinsically evil or illusory)
AUGUSTINE:	SPIRIT	: ETERNAL REALM (good)
	MATTER	: TEMPORAL REALM (good, but radically corrupted and now of little value)
AQUINAS:	SPIRIT	: SUPERNATURAL REALM OF GRACE (good)
	MATTER	: REALM OF NATURE (good, but inferior; not an end in itself)

Aquinas' appreciation of created reality, or "nature" as he refers to it, contrasts with the depreciation of earthly concerns in Augustine. But Aquinas still retains the basic pattern of dualism. His division of reality into hierarchically-related realms of being, the natural and the supernatural, reflects the continuing influence of neo-platonic Christianity, which conceived of creation as an ascending scale of levels of being culminating in God himself. Walsh and Middleton describe how Aquinas sees the operation of grace in relation to (natural) human life. His understanding of the fall is of key importance (112-113). The fall is understood more as the loss of a (supernatural) capacity than as an act of religious rebellion proceeding from deep within the heart of man. Consequently, redemption is understood as the recovery of the lost capacity, rather than the religious redirection of the whole person back to God.

But we need to forestall a possible misunderstanding at this point. For some Protestants speak as if Aquinas sees the two realms of nature and grace as parallel lines which do not meet. But Aquinas certainly does believe that grace deeply affects the realm of nature. Indeed, apart from grace, nature and the natural capacities of man are fatally weakened and constantly subject to failure. Nature needs grace if it is truly to be nature. Grace is thus not simply superimposed on nature, as if it were merely the "icing on the cake". Rather, the effects of grace permeate through the natural realm, elevating and renewing it. As Etienne Gilson has written:"grace, by healing nature, actually makes nature capable of having virtues.... Thomism does not ask us to choose between nature and grace, but to perfect nature through grace". (The Christian Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, London: Victor Gollancz, 1957, p.343)

In this sense, Walsh and Middleton (quoting Herman Dooyeweerd), are incorrect to suggest that Aquinas restricts the fall and redemption to the supernatural (113). Aquinas certainly sees the nature of the fall

and redemption in "supernatural" terms: the fall is the loss of a supernatural capacity and redemption is its recovery. But the scope of fall and redemption includes the realm of nature.

Having made this qualification however, it remains true that for Aquinas, the realms of nature and grace stand in a hierarchical relationship: nature exists to serve grace. The realm of nature is not seen as part of the object of redemption, but as the means towards redemption. The intrinsic value of the full range of created reality is thus not adequately acknowledged. While nature is affected by redemption, this effect is seen as preparing nature to be a fit channel for something else: grace. Nature is thus only the "stepping stone" or the "prelude" to grace. As Wolters has pointed out, however, in the biblical view the purpose of grace is to restore nature (10-11).

Corresponding to the two realms of nature and grace, Aquinas identifies two kinds of happiness that man may obtain. He follows Aristotle in asserting that the goal of humanity is to find happiness, and that the highest form of happiness is the contemplation of the highest truth. For Aquinas, however, this truth is God. Happiness in this life, possessions, friends and so on, is to be rendered subservient to man's final end which is to attain ultimate happiness in the contemplation of God. He writes: "Happiness is twofold; the one is imperfect and is had in this life; the other is perfect, consisting in the vision of God" (Summa Theologica, I. II, q4, art 5.) Consequently, he affirms the superior value of the "contemplative" life over the "active" life (Walsh and Middleton: 99).

Thus we see that Aquinas, in spite of his modification of Augustine, retains a dualistic framework of thought, rooted in the basic distinction between nature and grace. The realm of grace is superior to the realm of nature; the latter must gain its value from being directed to the ends of the former. We can represent his framework as follows:

	ULTIMATE HAPPINESS		
GRACE	THROUGH CONTEMPLATION	SUPERNATURAL VIRTUES	REVELATION
NATURE	EARTHLY HAPPINESS	NATURAL VIRTUES	NATURAL REASON

Bernard Zylstra outlines the practical consequences of the nature/grace vision for the life of the ordinary Christian:

> His life is divided between the realm of nature and the realm of grace. In the realm of nature, he builds his marriage and family, makes a living, goes to school, and engages in sports. The Christian is quite willing, even highly interested, to take his share of social, cultural, and political tasks because, after all, he is a human being with responsibilities. He executes these tasks in cooperation with non-Christians on the basis of a common ethics founded on natural revelation, natural law, and the common light of reason.
>
> Beyond the realm of nature the Christian also lives in the realm of grace. This is the higher realm and ultimately much more important since here we encounter the love of God in Jesus Christ, Who restores the image of God in us through His incarnation, death and resurrection. Here we encounter the Holy Spirit, Who makes us a member of the Body of Christ, the communion of the faithful, on our way to our final heavenly destination. In this realm of grace we are face to face with the divine mysteries which far transcend our natural life. ("Preface to Runner", in H.Evan Runner, The Relation of the Bible to Learning, St Catherines, Ontario: Paideia, 1982, pp. 24-5)

****

SHORT ASSIGNMENT

Go through a hymn or song book you normally use, looking for expressions of the temporal/eternal or nature/grace views of life in the words. Look at both traditional and contemporary hymns and songs. What pictures do you think go through people's minds when they sing such words?

****

6. LUTHER: GOSPEL AND LAW

Dualism is not only found in medieval and Catholic thought. It has also penetrated deeply into Protestantism. In spite of the many doctrinal differences between Catholicism and Protestantism, they have both revealed the influence of dualistic ways of thinking. While the Reformers succeeded in removing some consequences of medieval dualism, others remained. Some of these consequences can be seen in the thought of Martin Luther, whose thought has exercised a major influence over evangelical Protestantism.

Luther consciously rejected large parts of medieval Christianity. He rarely mentions Plato or Aristotle, the philosophers who had shaped so much of medieval thought, and sought instead to make the Scriptures his sole authority. He saw himself as returning to the line of Augustine, which he believed to be more biblical than the "scholastic" thought of the late middle ages. He also rejected the medieval view that the radical commandments of the Gospel applied only to Christians who chose a monastic and contemplative way of life. For Luther, all the commandments of Christ were binding on all Christians everywhere. The Bible addressed itself to ordinary people whatever their field of work.

> If you are a manual labourer you find that the Bible has been put into your workshop, into your hand, into your heart. It teaches and preaches how you should treat your neighbour. Just look at your tools - at your needle or thimble, your beer barrel, your goods, your scales, your yardstick or measure - and you will read this statement inscribed on them. Everywhere you look, it stares at you. Nothing that you handle every day is so tiny that it does not continually tell you this, if you will only listen. Indeed, there is no shortage of preaching. You have as many preachers as you have transactions, goods, tools, and other equipment in your house and home. All this is continually crying out to you: 'Friend, use me in your relations with your neighbour just as you would want your neighbour to use his property in his relations with you.' (Luther's Works 21, Saint Louis: Concordia, 1956, p 237).

But nevertheless, dualistic elements remained in Luther's writings. To see why, we need to look at his doctrine of the "two kingdoms". This doctrine was a development of Augustine's distinction between the

two "cities", the City of God and the city of man. Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms is complex and sometimes inconsistent, but we can summarise it briefly as follows:

The human race is divided into those who are members of the Kingdom of God and those who are members of the kingdom of the world. These two kingdoms are opposed to each other in principle; the one represents good, the other evil. Furthermore, each kingdom has its own kind of government, employing very different means of ruling. The Kingdom of God is governed by God through the spiritual means of the Word, operating in the inner person. No law is necessary in this Kingdom, for its subjects - Christians - willingly submit to the will of God. Not law, but the Gospel ethic of loving one's enemies reigns in this Kingdom.

The kingdom of the world, however, is governed by human rulers. Although these are appointed by God and subject to his will, such rulers rule not by means of the Gospel ethic, but by means of law. Such law must be coercive because of the propensity of human beings to sin. The Gospel ethic as such cannot be applied to political rule: it would undermine such rule. Government in the Kingdom of God is therefore based on principles which are quite different from political government.

Nevertheless, Christians (at least some) are required to participate in both kinds of government. The issue of participation in government was a lively one in Luther's time. The Anabaptists accepted Luther's distinction between the two kingdoms, but they concluded that participation in the coercive aspects of the government of the kingdom of the world represented a compromise of Christian discipleship. They adopted a pacifist position as a result. Luther, however, affirmed that, if political government was indeed ordained by God as taught in the Scriptures, Christians were bound to uphold it and, if called to the office, to take part in it. This would certainly involve them in physical coercion, something which was unacceptable in the Kingdom of God. Such coercion was necessary if justice was to be done; and Christians, out of concern for their neighbour, were bound to seek justice. But justice which had to be enforced by coercive law could not be an expression of the Gospel. Rather than viewing the practice of justice in society as an outworking of the norms of the Kingdom of God, Luther regarded it as an alternative to the Kingdom of God, necessary in a fallen world.

Luther was concerned about the growing problem of church-state relationships. Since the twelfth century the church had been seeking to increase its political power over European rulers. And the state, too, had been overstepping its authority by punishing heresy, which

Luther saw as a spiritual matter and therefore beyond the competence of the state. Luther's doctrine of two kingdoms and two governments was an attempt to disentangle this confusion of two areas of authority. But its implication was that the effects of redemption could not be realised within political institutions, but only in the personal attitudes of the ruler or judge.

Luther was right to limit the influence of the institutional church over the state and society; this had been one of the main problems of medieval dualism. But the way he drew this limit meant that the realm of the state was largely separated from the Gospel. The Gospel was to be applied within the church and in the personal life of Christians. But in wider society and the state, coercive law, not the Gospel, was the order of the day. The Christian therefore found himself living in two contrasting ethical dimensions, one for personal and church life, and one for social and political life.

****

SHORT ASSIGNMENT

"You can't apply Christian principles to a nonchristian society": in what sense is this statement true and in what sense is it false?

****

7. THE JOURNEY FROM DUALISM TO SECULARISM

We have concluded our survey of some of the main Christian thinkers who have contributed to or been influenced by a dualistic perspective. One highly important consequence of dualism needs further consideration, and is described by Walsh and Middleton: they argue that the dualism which has bedevilled the Christian community has also contributed to the secularization of the modern world (113-116). This is a serious allegation. It suggests that the Church's misinterpretation of the Gospel has had consequences far beyond itself. It is not difficult to see why. Since the Church was so dominant in shaping western culture during the middle ages, it is not surprising that its errors of understanding should have had consequences for the wider world. Let us inquire further into how dualism has prepared the way for secularization.

As Walsh and Middleton point out, the essential problem of dualism is its confusion of structure with direction (113-114). The distinction between good and evil (a matter of direction) was seen in terms of two different (structural) realms within the creation, the realm of grace being placed over the realm of nature. Whether the dualism is of the sharp, Augustinian variety, or the softer, Thomistic variety, the result is that the redeeming power of the Gospel has no direct, integral relation to many areas of human life. In Walsh and Middleton's words: "the Christian faith affects creation and created life only tangentially. The radical, life-transforming power of the gospel is short-circuited" (114).

It was this shortcircuiting of the Gospel that paved the way for the transition from dualism to secularism. For, as Walsh and Middleton put it: "If the gospel speaks no normative word for culture, then we will listen to some other word, for we are inescapably cultural beings. By leaving most of life unaffected by the claims of Christ, medieval dualism led Christians to find other ultimate authorities for the "nature" side of their lives" (114).

In the late middle ages, around the time of Aquinas, this "other ultimate authority" for natural life was increasingly being seen as reason. We noted earlier that the nature/grace dualism assumed a "common reason" which gave a basis for discovering norms for natural life, norms which were referred to as "natural law". There was in fact a broad (though temporary) consensus about the basic content of natural law, lasting until around the time of the Reformation. However, this consensus owed much to the common acceptance of the Scriptures and Church tradition; the conclusions of "natural reason" were often simply justifications for biblical or church teaching. When these teachings were questioned, the consensus broke up. Subsequently, when reason was still seen as the ultimate authority for natural life, it generated widely different conclusions when no longer directed by revelation. After the Renaissance, natural life was increasingly seen as independent of supernatural revelation. As Walsh and Middleton observe:

> While scholastic theologians granted a limited degree of autonomy to the realm of our natural life (and natural reason), the Renaissance humanists so greatly expanded the autonomy of nature that there was no longer any need for the realm of grace. If God and Christianity were already basically irrelevant to most of life, why not make their irrelevance complete? (115)

A similar conclusion is implicit in the following assessment of modern thought by a leading Catholic philosopher, Frederick Copleston, S.J. He describes how philosophy, which was regarded in the middle ages as a "natural" branch of learning, gradually acquired independence from theology, which was seen as the study of "supernatural" revelation. He observed that, among thinkers who were not theologians:

> ...the charter granted to philosophy tended to become a declaration of independence... the acceptance of a great system of philosophy [i.e. Aristotle's] known to have been thought out without the aid of revelation was almost certain sooner or later to lead to philosophy going her own way independently of theology. In this sense (...) the synthesis achieved by St Thomas was intrinsically precarious. (A History of Philosophy, vol.2, Medieval Philosophy New York: Image Books, 1962 p. 151) (our emphasis)

This proved to be true not only for philosophy and theology, but for cultural life in general. As Walsh and Middleton put it: "..it was precisely the realm of history, the temporal realm of everyday affairs, from which God was more and more excluded. As the saeculum was increasingly absolutized, God began to figure less and less prominently as an integral part of the modern world view" (115-6). In the next unit, we examine the cultural consequences of this gradual abandonment of God and revelation as the modern world began to take shape. But first we need to examine how modern Christian thinking and action have continued to be dualistic. We begin with some background on the historical development of Christianity since the Reformation.

Sometimes people try to present the Reformation as the "religious" parallel to the "secular" Renaissance, because both gave renewed attention to man's individual responsibility in opposition to the authority of the medieval church. Although there are certain outward similarities, the spirit of these two movements was in fact in basic conflict. The Reformers' reasons for reacting so strongly against the position of the church in the middle ages were quite different from those of Renaissance secular humanists. While the latter criticised the church for restricting man's freedom and the development of his autonomous personality, the Reformation opposed the church because it placed too much emphasis on human efforts rather than on God's grace and sovereignty. The church, as an institution, had come between God and the individual believer. In this situation both Luther and Calvin proclaimed the central principles of the Reformation: sola fide, sola gratia, and sola scriptura (by faith alone, by grace alone, and by Scripture alone). Neither by the church or its sacraments, nor by

independent reason, could man obtain salvation.

Initially, the cultural influence of the Reformation was far wider than that of the Renaissance. Whole populations were converted to Protestantism, and important changes followed in both church and political life. The Renaissance began as an elitist movement predominantly operating among the aristocracy and merchant classes. But in the eighteenth century the Renaissance spirit succeeded in penetrating deeply into European culture. It was then that secularism gathered pace as a widespread cultural force. Although reformed churches continued to exist and grow in influence, the Reformers' (and especially Calvin's) vision for the reformation of the whole of life stagnated. H. Evan Runner described the overall process thus:

> Since the Renaissance, the faith of humanism has occupied the commanding position in western life and thought. In its peculiar modern form it rose quickly to this position of leadership, conquering one area of modern life after another in its limitless self-assurance.
>
> It has never been the sole driving force in the modern world. Roman Catholicism and, since its appearance, the Reformation movement, have never been eliminated as constitutive root-forces in the historical development of the West. On the contrary, these movements remained indestructibly at work, partly in antithesis with the newly emerging view of life and the world, but in many quarters in apparent synthesis with, or accommodation to, the skein of ideas and problems of the new humanistic faith.... As distinct from humanism, however, these movements were not in a position to set their stamp on western civilization. In the historical struggle for control of the spirit of culture, they were increasingly put on the defensive as the drama of the modern centuries unfolded. The controlling role passed to humanism.
>
> In this way humanism became the dominant culture-forming belief of the modern centuries.... [It was] only slightly affected, and less and less as time went on, by the forces of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. Christian thinkers and movements, to the extent that they set themselves in antithesis to the movements of humanism were forced out to the

periphery..."Christianity and Humanism", Toronto: I.C.S., 1968 p.4)

Runner goes on to note that the revivalist movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such as the Wesleyan revival in Britain, the Great Awakenings in America, and their European Continental parallels, temporarily put up resistance to the spirit of humanism. But the scope of their cultural impact was much more limited than that of the Reformation.

Many of us will be aware of the upsurge of social concerns which followed these revivals, exemplified especially by the antislavery campaigns led by figures such as Wilberforce and Finney. Similar consequences followed in Continental countries. The revival of Calvinism led by Abraham Kuyper in nineteenth-century Holland was particularly distinctive in the breadth of its cultural vision. The Europe-wide contribution emerging from a revived and socially conscious Catholicism towards the end of the nineteenth century was also of great importance. All these movements have certainly exerted an impact on modern western society and their heritage still inspires efforts at transformation.

But having said this, Runner is correct in saying that the overwhelmingly dominant position in the shaping of modernity has been taken by secular humanism. In spite of the genuinely Christian contributions of the movements mentioned above, the majority of Christians were unable to sustain a truly Christian cultural witness. (Evert van der Poll's article shows why this was the case in Evangelicalism.) Partly because of the tremendous force of secularism, and partly because of an inner weakness of vision, many Christians began to accommodate themselves to secular patterns of thought and action. This gave rise to a number of distinctly modern forms of Christian dualism, shaped not by Greek but by humanist thought. We now turn our attention to two of these.

8. MODERN CHRISTIAN DUALISMS: FAITH VERSUS UNDERSTANDING

If dualism in Christian attitudes paved the way for secularism, we now face a situation, and have done for two hundred years or more, where secular conclusions have imposed themselves on Christians' understanding of their own faith. Since we are often still trapped in those approaches, it is important to examine them. The first is a very powerful one. Understanding, it says, is achieved by science, common sense, reason and education. Faith is a leap in the dark, or is essentially irrational or mysterious, or relates to the areas of

life where understanding finishes. A pattern was frequently repeated. One form of secular understanding assumed absolute authority and declared that Christian understanding was no longer valid. So that we appreciate the weight of this process we shall look at several examples.

The first one is the case of miracles. Now the very point of the New Testament miracles is that they were extraordinary actions of God within his creation. That is why they were recorded. If we turn to David Hume's attack on miracles written in 1748, we find the following argument

> A wise man, therefore, proportions his belief to the evidence. In such conclusions as are founded on an infallible experience, he expects the event with the last degree of assurance, and regards his past experience as a full proof of the future existence of that event. In other cases, he proceeds with more caution: he weighs the opposite experiments: he considers which side is supported by the greater number of experiments: to that side he inclines, with doubt and hesitation; and when at last he fixes his judgement, the evidence exceeds not what we properly call probability. (R Wollheim, Hume on Religion, London: Collins/Fontana 1963, pp. 206-7)

Christians accept that miracles are "improbable". That is precisely why they are marvellous. But Hume, on the basis of the absolute authority of human experience, reaches the following cynical conclusion about faith:

> Mere reason is sufficient to convince us of its [the Christian religion's] veracity: And whoever is moved by Faith to assent to it, is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience. (Wollheim p. 226)

In other words, Christian faith may only be retained at the expense of understanding. This sceptical attitude to faith assumed a leading position among thinkers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Unfortunately, the predominate Christian response was not to challenge this definition of faith, but rather to accept it and then insist that, nevertheless, both faith and understanding have their place, At

the same time a secular definition of the nature of faith was accepted. This definition was bound eventually to undermine the orthodox content of faith; and this is what happened in much nineteenth and early twentieth-century theology.

A later attempt to separate faith from understanding emerged from the widespread nineteenth-century movement of thought known as Historicism. According to the historicist view, truth about things was found in the direction of their historical development. To get at this truth involved detailed empirical research, in order to trace the historical patterns by which something had evolved. The implication was that the only really authoritative way of seeing something was the "historical" way - seeing something wholly in terms of its historical context. The movement affected several disciplines including economics and biology. It provided the context which made Darwin's Origin of the Species (1859) assume such importance.

This approach was then also applied to biblical studies. It was evidenced in "The Search for the Historical Jesus" and the "Historical Criticism" associated with D.F. Strauss (1808-74) and Ernest Renon (1823-1892). This approach required, in varying degrees, that only the parts of the Bible which could be shown to be valid according to independent historical criteria be accepted as significant. That is, it was not just advocating thorough historical research into the biblical text, but imposing "historical interpretation" as the authoritative way of handling the text. This approach, it was claimed, excluded faith and presuppositions and merely examined the evidence. If Christians wanted to approach the Bible privately in an attitude of faith, they could, but faith was not the appropriate way of responding to the Bible.

A third, twentieth-century example is that of positivism. This movement stated that the only meaningful knowledge is that which we can verify with our senses. Anything else was strictly non-sense and we could not talk about it. This included all talk about God. Christians therefore could believe in God, but they could not meaningfully talk about God. On this view, propounded by the logical positivists like L.Wittgenstein, A.J. Ayer and others, Christians should actually be silent about their beliefs.

Each of these positions has involved pushing faith into a narrower conception. Faith is what is left after understanding; it is irrational, private and inarticulate. Despite the fact that each of these positions and the authority they have claimed have turned out to be spurious, Christians have often accepted them as giving the meaning of their faith.

9. MODERN CHRISTIAN DUALISMS: MORALITY VERSUS REALITY

There is another dualism which the Church has also readily accepted. On the one hand there is the way the world really is, which we understand in terms of science, observation, and objective analysis. But on the other hand there is the question of what ought to be the case, of morality. Traditionally the Church has majored on the ought, the moral. Thus it is accepted that although the Christian faith may speak about morals, it has little to say about anything else.

This view has its most famous modern expression in the work of Immanuel Kant. He distinguished between the phenomenal ordering of the world by the mind, and the inner noumenal insight as to what should be the case. Later there was a distinction between the determinist understanding of how the world operated and the inner awareness of free will and morality. Later still in the twentieth century there has been an emphasis on the distinction between what is the case, the "facts", and what ought to be the case, the "values". It is argued that one cannot get from facts to values, or vice versa.

This dualism departs from the biblical understanding of creation as made good and therefore valuable, and as the theatre for human responsibility. Nevertheless Christians have often been prepared to leave the task of understanding what this world is like to non christians, only being wheeled out when a moral judgement is required.

There are other dualisms which have been important in terms of the way in which Christians have interpreted their faith. One of them is the objective - subjective distinction. Sciences and knowledge are seen as objective, testable and publicly established, while the Christian faith is subjective and without public reality.

However, all of these views have the same underlying pattern. They involve a compromise of the doctrine of creation and the comprehensive authority of biblical revelation, and they lead to a retreat into a ghetto of Christian experiences or activities. Thus the secularization of thought, to which earlier Christian thinking contributed, has now pushed Christians into a compromised and defective faith. Sadly, there are many Christians who do not even realize that this has happened, and who lose out on their birthright as children of God in all areas of their lives.

****

SHORT ASSIGNMENT

Can you find evidence of the continuing influence of any of these modern forms of Christian dualism in recent public statements of leading clergymen, or in those of politicians who have criticised them? Look for examples both from doctrinal and political statements.

****

ADDITIONAL READINGS

1. Michael LeRoy, **A Voice Still Unheard: Liverpool and the riots: the view from three years on**; and **Liverpool 8 update** (Third Way articles). These articles describe the serious riots that took place in Liverpool in the summer of 1981, and critically assess various Christian responses to them.

SHORT ASSIGNMENT

How do these events illustrate the effects of dualism in some of the Liverpool churches?

****

2. Evert van der Poll, **"All We Like Sheep...: Straying from the Vision of Social Revival** (Third Way article). In this article, Evert van der Poll analyses the retreat of Evangelicals from their earlier commitment to social and cultural witness. It helps to explain why evangelicals today have found such difficulty in coming to terms with the need for such a witness.

SHORT ASSIGNMENT

What views of creation, fall and redemption can you find behind the loss of social concern among evangelicals?

****

UNIT FOUR: MAJOR ASSIGNMENT OPTIONS

Intermediate

1. Jim Wallis, **The Call to Conversion** (Tring, Herts: Lion, 1981) (170pp)

This is a compelling statement of the challenge of true "conversion" for Christians in a secular and idolatrous culture. It powerfully critiques all attempts to restrict the scope of the Gospel to private concerns. Full of lively contemporary examples.

Essay Question: Conversion has been defined as "a change of lords". Why have Christians so often attempted to serve two lords, and what have been the consequences of this double allegiance?

2. R. Macaulay and J. Barrs, **Christianity with a Human Face** (Leicester: IVP, 1979) (188pp)

This very readable book shows how Christ's renewal of the image of God in human beings has implications for all of life, especially the self, family life, thinking and guidance. It shows why Christians should reject a "platonic" view of human nature.

Essay Question: How has a dualistic view of humanness limited and distorted Christians' experience and understanding of Christ and the creation?

3. Robert Webber, **The Secular Saint** Chapters 5-8 (125pp)

Essay Question: How would Christians holding each of Webber's three models approach:

a) criticising government?
b) personal wealth?
c) involvement in a multinational corporation?

Advanced

4. Edward Norman, **Christianity and The World Order** (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979) (85pp)

This book is the text of the 1978 BBC Reith Lectures. It is a critique of what Norman sees as the increasing "politicization" of western Christianity. Norman is disenchanted with much of the social and political action of Christians in recent decades, especially that associated with the World Council of Churches.

Essay Question: In what ways would it be correct to describe Norman as a "dualist"? How far do you agree with his critique of recent Christian social involvement?

5. Alan Storkey, **A Christian Social Perspective** (Leicester: IVP, 1979) Chapters 4,15,16 and one of: 7,8,9,10 (appx. 70pp)

This is a comprehensive statement of a Christian perspective on society and develops in more detail many of the themes introduced in this course. Of interest especially to students in the social sciences. It also helpfully tackles several issues of much wider interest. Also an option for Units Five and Six.

Essay Question: How has dualism led to a defective view of the church? (cf. Chapters 4,15,16). Can you find evidence of dualism in the ways Christians have approached one of the following:

a) community and class (ch.7)?
b) marriage (ch.8)?
c) the family (ch.9)?
d) the media (ch.10)?

Further Reading

R.H. Neibuhr, **Christ and Culture** (London: Harper and Row, 1975) (Advanced)

Os Guinness, **The Gravedigger File** (London: Hodder, 1983) (Intermediate)

Gustavo Gutierrez, **A Theology of Liberation** (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1973) (Advanced)

UNIT FIVE

The Modern Secular Worldview

UNIT FIVE; THE MODERN SECULAR WORLDVIEW

Textbook readings: Walsh and Middleton chapters 8 and 9

1. INTRODUCTION: UNDERSTANDING "THE MODERN WORLD"

Developing a coherent biblical worldview is of little use unless it can be put to work in the context of our contemporary world. One of the results of the dualism which has crippled the church so badly in the past is that, while Christians may be well-equipped to explain the biblical message to each other, they may be largely ignorant of the worldview of those outside the Church who most need to hear it. This is a major reason why Christians find it so difficult to witness today to the mass of indifferent people with no "felt need" of the Gospel. To use James Sire's phraseology, the people living next door are inhabiting a "different universe". This is one primary reason for seeking to come to grips with the worldview which dominates our modern world.

Another consequence of the dualism of the church is that Christians who are unfamiliar with the landscape of modern culture will not know how to chart alternative Christian ways of life within it. If we are to be obedient today to the law of God for all of culture, we must know the shape of the modern way of life and learn to recognise its spiritual direction. If we plunge into culture and society without this spiritual discernment, our attempts at Christian transformation may be limited in effectiveness, or, worse, actually reinforce the secularising trends in society. Our goal in this unit is, therefore, to lay some basic foundations for this process of cultural discernment.

The modern world is certainly highly complex and varied. Ours is a pluralistic culture - that is, one in which more than one worldview co-exists and competes for adherents. A main reason for this is that the humanist worldview which has dominated our culture for so long is now rapidly breaking up and people are engaged in quests for all kinds of alternatives. A whole course devoted to only the dominant modern worldview would be just a small beginning. This complexity creates a special problem for modern people seeking to understand their times. Often we can feel so overwhelmed by the confusing barrage of facts, opinions, beliefs and choices constantly being presented to us, that we are tempted to give up on trying to grasp the larger picture. It is already demanding enough to master the information we need just to pursue our daily lives and jobs. While some seem also to be able to

handle the extra data required for involvement in specific issues such as environmental concern, poverty, business ethics, contemporary music or feminism, going beyond this seems too daunting a task. Doesn't the idea of "understanding the modern world" sound altogether too ambitious a project?

Three responses need to be made to this understandable question. The first is that it is possible to get to the heart of "the modern worldview" without necessarily getting bogged down in detail. We should not be intimidated by those specialists who say that modern issues are so complex that professional expertise is required before anything can be said. Indeed, people who always stress the complexity of things may do so because they are unwilling to face some deeper truth which is really very simple. In this unit we will, therefore, be approaching "the modern worldview" with a view to grasping its essential spirit. Inevitably, if you were to probe further into detailed aspects of this account, qualifications might be necessary. But it is necessary to start with some overall orientation.

The second response is more important: it is to emphasise that unless we see the whole, we will never fully understand the parts. What Francis Schaeffer has said about Christian social action in America also applies much more widely:

> The basic problem of the Christians in this country in the last eighty years or so, in regard to society and in regard to government, is that they have seen things in bits and pieces instead of totals.
>
> They have very gradually become disturbed over permissiveness, pornography, ...schools, the breakdown of the family, and finally abortion. But they have not seen this as a totality - each thing being a part, a symptom, of a much larger problem. They have failed to see that all of this has come about due to a shift in worldview - that is, through a fundamental change in the overall way people think and view the world and life as a whole. (The Christian Manifesto, Basingstoke, Hants: Pickering, 1982, p.17)

As we saw in Unit One , all the various aspects of a culture are integrated within a common vision of life. This vision gives (relative) cohesion to a culture. It generates distinctive "cultural patterns" which shape every area of the culture's life. Without recognising such larger patterns in our own society, we are likely to

fall into limited or distorted views of the details of our daily life and work. We may see and respond to the surface phenomena but never get under the skin of our situation. Christian economist Bob Goudzwaard opens his book Capitalism and Progress: A Diagnosis of Western Society by pointing to the necessity of probing behind the multiple specific social and economic crises of our time, and of penetrating to the heart of our predicament:

> Western culture is indeed challenged today. It is challenged in the accumulation of problems, but also in the ineffectiveness of the classical solutions. Will we be able to find the correct answers in time? That is the unavoidable question confronting us. Because the continued existence of western society is at stake, the search for solutions has become a matter of life and death, especially since impotence can readily nourish despair. Fortunately, the public gradually realizes that the situation in which the West finds itself is cause for deep concern. This however, increases the risk of a wrong reaction. The danger exists in particular that in a panic we will try to find a separate answer to each of the problems confronting us, in the manner to which we are accustomed. This reaction is especially dangerous because it can prevent the necessary in-depth reflection on the causes of the present predicament....the typically western manner of solving problems might aggravate the underlying causes. For example, a patient's condition worsens when he or she is given stimulants to counteract the lethargy resulting from pain relievers. In the West we run a similar risk of being satisfied with superficial remedies which only aggravate the disease. Perhaps we are afraid of a genuine reflection into causes because that would lead to a confrontation with ourselves. Does western culture dare to behold itself in a mirror? (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979, pp. xv - xvi. Subsequent references inthe text to Goudswaard refer to this book.)

This challenge applies as much to Christians as to non-Christians for we ourselves have been accomplices in the development of modern secularism.

A final response to the question posed earlier is to re-emphasise that we are not concerned here primarily with the analysis of modern philosophical systems as such, but with detecting the spiritual direction or worldview of modern culture. As we saw in Unit One, the spiritual direction of a culture is expressed and sustained in its actual practices. Thus Walsh and Middleton point out that their first concern is not with secular humanism as an intellectual system of beliefs. Beliefs expressed in secularist creeds such as " The Humanist Manifesto" have only ever been explicitly held by a minority of intellectuals. Such creeds in themselves have exercised limited influence: they are articulations of much deeper religious commitments which have driven the whole of modern western civilisation. Thus Walsh and Middleton define secularism as "that pre-theoretical, committed vision which has shaped the dominant institutions of the modern Western world since the Renaissance"(118). (our emphasis) (You may find it helpful here to review section 3 in Unit One entitled "worldviews are not theoretical frameworks".)

Here is an outline of what to expect in this unit. In the previous unit, understanding the historical origins and development of dualism helped us learn to recognise its contemporary expression. The same approach is helpful in this unit. In order to understand the worldview which has been so dominant in western culture, we also need to go back to its historical roots. We shall look first at the influence of the Renaissance, a great cultural movement of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, on the development of the modern secular worldview. Then, second, we examine the next major contributor to the rise of the modern worldview, the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century. After this we move on to the third major influence, the immensely influential eighteenth-century movement known as the Enlightenment. Our fourth section takes note of one of the most substantial cultural movements which opposed key aspects of the dominant modern worldview, nineteenth-century Romanticism. Fifth, we ask a crucial question: what was happening to Christianity while this secular worldview rose to dominance in western culture? Finally, we assess the present condition of the modern secular worldview and the culture it has created.

2. THE BASIS OF THE MODERN WORLDVIEW IS THE CLAIM TO HUMAN AUTONOMY

It was in the Renaissance that the initial basis was laid for the development of the modern secular worldview. "Modernity", the civilisation of the West which is the expression of this worldview, finds its roots as long ago as the fourteenth century. Like all broad

historical movements, the Renaissance was a rich and diverse cultural phenomenon, and generalisations can be hazardous. But two main points need to be made. First, in its widest sense, the Renaissance consisted of a rebirth ("renaissance") of classical scholarship, the study of Greek and Latin writers of ancient times. In particular there was a revival of interest in those disciplines which today are referred to as examples of "the humanities", especially languages, literature, poetry, history, moral philosophy. Late medieval thought had been preoccupied with logic, metaphysics, law, and systematic theology. By the fourteenth century, this preoccupation was beginning to be seen as too confining, missing out major aspects of what it means to be "human". It was this concern with the study of what was "human" that led these classical scholars to be described as "humanists". In returning to the classical period, they claimed to have rediscovered those areas of study which had been neglected in the middle ages. In itself this was a valid reorientation. Indeed it proved to be an important preparation for the Reformation. John Calvin himself was a distinguished "humanist" scholar in this sense.

Secondly, however, this reorientation of scholarly interest was by no means independent of broader conceptions regarding the nature of human beings, the nature of the world, the meaning of history and so on. "Worldview" questions were deeply involved in the humanist movement. As we shall see in Unit Six, scholarship is never religiously neutral; it is always motivated by the worldview of the scholar. So the question we need to ask is: what worldviews were associated with the rebirth of humanist scholarship?

In the first place, it is essential to note that many of the humanists were devout Christians who were unsatisfied with what they saw as the constraints of medieval Christianity. They were seeking new ways to express their faith. Indeed, one stream emerging from the Renaissance can be described as 'Christian humanism". (An important question is how far such 'Christian humanism" was authentically Christian. The Christian humanism of Erasmus, for example, was certainly much less close to the Scriptures than that of Calvin. We will not pursue this question here, however).

But another stream of Renaissance humanism was quite different. Associated especially with the Northern Italian humanists such as Pico della Mirandola, Machiavelli, Bocaccio, this stream was crucial in laying the foundations for "secular humanism". While outwardly Christian, the actual content of their thinking revealed profound departures from the biblical worldview. It is this stream of Renaissance humanism with which we shall be concerned in this unit.

What then were the principal ingredients of the emerging secular humanist vision of life? Let us first define what we mean by "secular". Walsh and Middleton point out that the word "secular" comes from the Latin word saeculum, meaning "age", i.e. "the created world viewed especially as temporal or historical"(115). Essentially it meant the realm of ordinary life in contrast to the "higher" spiritual realm of eternity. We have already seen how this elevation of the "spiritual" or "eternal" realm over the earthly or temporal is based on an unbiblical dualism. So a shift of attention towards the "lower" realm of the saeculum might in itself indicate a healthy development. For the purpose of God"s redemptive work is indeed to restore the whole of creation and history. But a renewed concern with the saeculum would only be healthy if the goal was to bring it more fully under the Word of God. This, however, was not the goal of secular humanism.

Having defined "secular", we now ask what humanism actually means. By humanism we mean the belief that human beings are autonomous. This means that human beings are their own source of meaning and authority. This affirmation does not necessarily imply a denial of all other authorities, or even of divine authority. But it does imply that the authority of human beings is the final arbiter in cases of conflict.

Let us look at the consequences of the humanist view of human beings. Whereas in the biblical view, human nature is seen as being constituted by the structuring law of God, in the secular humanist view human beings are regarded as actually creating their own nature. Man has the power to determine the very essence of his own being. Thus Pico della Mirandola depicts God as calling Adam "the free and proud shaper of your own being" (Walsh and Middleton: 119). In secular humanism, man is his own creator.

This is the basis of the humanist view of human freedom. Freedom comes to be understood as the unlimited development of the human personality. As we saw in Unit Two, in the biblical view the created limits of human nature are the very condition of freedom: they are what makes human life possible. Secularism reverses this by regarding divine law (indeed any imposed law) as a restriction on human freedom. This notion of human freedom is fundamental to the modern secular worldview. It represents a decisive break with the outlook of the middle ages. This outlook, though dualistic, was still Christian in intention. Man was a creature of God in need of redemption by God's grace. Secular humanism denies this need of divine redemption. But it substitutes for it a secularised view of redemption. Redemption in humanism is seen as being attained through the unconstrained exercise of human freedom. Humanist redemption is liberation from any constraint not freely chosen. Just as the biblical idea of creation

is distorted into the humanist idea of self-creation, so the biblical idea of redemption is distorted into the humanist idea of self-liberation.

It is important to note that while secular humanism has discarded the Christian content of the medieval worldview, it has not been able to shake off the dualistic shell of this worldview. Walsh and Middleton point out that in the modern age the idea of divine grace has been replaced with that of human freedom as the higher realm in a two-realm framework.

Thus the medieval scheme:

GRACE
NATURE

is transformed into the modern humanist scheme:

FREEDOM
NATURE

We have said that secular humanism is based on the beliefs in human autonomy, human self-creation and human self-redemption. But a further crucial aspect of secular humanism is its view of nature, the lower realm of the humanist dualism.

3. THE HUMANIST VIEW OF NATURE; MASTERY, NOT STEWARDSHIP

The secular humanist view of human beings is crucially linked to views of non-human nature, and of the relationship between humans and non-human nature. Let us see how this developed. While the early humanists, (such as Pico), still retained a belief that the order of nature was given by God, this belief was eventually jettisoned by later humanists. The non-human creation was still seen as being law-governed (that is, it operated according to fixed regularities), but these laws were no longer seen as coming from God. Rather they were seen as being intrinsic to nature: nature itself was under no divine laws. Not only were human beings seen as independent from God's laws, so was the non-human creation. The claim that man was autonomous was thus followed by the claim that nature was autonomous.

But there is a crucial difference between the two kinds of autonomy. For while nature is determined independently of God, this determination is purely impersonal. By contrast, human beings determine themselves. Nature is determined, but humans are self-

determining. Man is possessed of a free personality out of which he creates his own norms and purposes. Nature, however, cannot generate laws for itself in this way. It merely operates according to impersonally determined processes.

It is not difficult to anticipate the next implication following from the secular humanist worldview. If there are no God-given limits that man must respect in his dealings with nature, and if man is the sole source of norms, then man is free to impose his own will on nature in any way he thinks fit. Man has complete freedom to pursue his self-chosen projects by using nature for himself. The result is that nature is not seen as something to be explored with a view to discovering the laws of God which structure it, but exploited as the arena for the free expression of human autonomy.

Thus there emerged the belief that nature, far from being the God-given context of human life and stewardship, was rather an obstacle to be overcome as humans pursued their own ends. The idea arose that man was engaged in a "struggle" against natural forces: the creative imagination of free human reason was pitted against the brute force of raw nature. Hence the phrase: "nature is red in tooth and claw". As Walsh and Middleton put it: "The basic dichotomy became that between free, autonomous man - the rational subject - and determined, law-bound nature - the object which exists essentially for human manipulation and control" (119).

This belief represents a momentous change in man's perception of his own place in the cosmos. It means that man's relationship with nature takes priority over his relationship with God. If man discovers himself by exercising mastery over nature rather than by conforming to the will of God, then a relationship with God is no longer man's first need. But it also means that man's relationship with nature assumes far greater significance than his relationship with other human beings. Bob Goudzwaard explains that this new vision of human life:

> ...clearly entails a spiritual choice as to cultural direction, namely, that man's destiny is realized primarily in his relation to the natural things of this world and not in relation to his fellowmen. The centrality of interhuman relations is far more characteristic of oriental civilizations. There a person derives his identity and dignity particularly from the social relationships in which he moves. The centrality of the relationship of man with nature, however, is one of the most characteristic features of western

> culture since the Renaissance. In the modern age, the value of human personality and the social order depends to a great extent on our individual or collective ability in the areas of productive labour, economy, science, technology, and art. We distinguish ourselves as human beings primarily by the shape we give to this world through human thought and creative activity rather than by the meaning of our lives to other persons. (24) (our emphasis)

As we shall soon see, this conviction is the deepest reason why the leading "gods of our age" are science, technology and economic growth.

****

SHORT ASSIGNMENT

Suggest how the belief that humans can determine their own norms might be revealed in these areas:

1. **feminist views of the family;**

2. **the policy of nuclear deterrence;**

3. **scientific research on animals.**

****

4. MASTERY OF NATURE THROUGH SCIENCE

We have seen that the two fundamental beliefs of the secular humanism which originated in the Renaissance period were,first, the claim to human autonomy, and second, the idea of human domination of nature. The next major advance in the development of the modern secular worldview sprang from the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century. The expanding possibilities of science which were developed during the seventeenth century in particular, were eagerly seized upon by secular humanists. It seemed as if science was making possible the realisation of the humanist vision of dominating nature. As Walsh and Middleton put it: "The mastery over nature first took form in the realm of science" (120). But it was not simply that the humanists seized an opportunity presented by new scientific developments. The

humanists themselves helped to create a favourable climate for scientific advance and hastened its progress. "The new [humanist] vision of human conquest and exploration of nature for our own ends soon embodied the power of scientific discovery and invention, and greatly contributed to the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century" (Walsh and Middleton:121).

This does not at all suggest that science itself was wholly a product of humanism. If one examines the writings of Kepler and Copernicus one finds that any concern with control is rather marginal. Indeed they are clearly motivated by a desire to give glory to God. For example Kepler concludes his Cosmic Harmony with these words:

> "Thanks be to Thee, Oh Lord our Creator, who hast granted me visions of beauty in Thy creation, and with the work of these Thy hands I give praise. Lo, I have completed the work to which I have been called; I have exploited the gifts Thou hast bestowed upon me; I have proclaimed the splendour of Thy work unto those who will read these proofs. In as much as I, in the limitations of my mind, have been able to grasp them."

Similar motives were behind Reformer William Turner's revival of interest in ornithology after some two millenia of neglect. Indeed in the seventeenth century there were a considerable number of Christian philosophers and scientists who explicitly protested against the secular humanist view of nature.

Cambridge Platonist Henry More maintained that "creatures are made to enjoy themselves, as well as to serve us". God "...takes pleasure that all his creatures enjoy themselves, that have life and sense and are capable of enjoyment". To think otherwise, More tells us, is "provinciality and ignorance". The biologist John Ray said: "There is a greater depth of art and skill in the structure of the meanest insect than thou, [man], art able to fathom or comprehend". When the psalmist, (Psalm 148), calls upon the insects to praise the Lord, he cannot mean this literally; what he must rather mean, Ray says, is that even the most vile and contemptible of God's creatures can be fruitfully be studied as illustrations of his glory.

Even though humanists were among the most eager propagandists of science, the influence of the Protestant Reformation was especially important. Breaking with the 'other-worldly' character of medieval Christianity, the Reformation directed people's attention to the inherent goodness of creation and fostered a spirit of investigation into its rich potentials. Opinions differ as to which of these two

worldviews - humanist or Protestant - was the decisive factor in the seventeenth century advances in science. As Walsh and Middleton explain in their section "Science, Modernity and the Christian World View" (126-8), the relationship between the Reformation, humanism and the rise of science was a complex one. But we should note that just as "humanist scholarship" in the Renaissance period came to be directed by profoundly differing spiritual orientations, so too did the new science of the seventeenth century. This century saw the emergence both of science pursued in a Christian direction, and science used as a means of advancing the humanist vision.

No doubt at the time it was often difficult to distinguish between the two; probably the difference may not have been recognised fully by many people. Although the Puritans dominated the early development of science in Gresham College, the Royal Society and the Invisible College, the humanist vision of science subsequently became dominant in western culture. The secular humanism of the Renaissance thus developed into the scientific humanism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As we shall see shortly, not all humanism is based on faith in science; but scientific humanism has been the most influential variety of humanism in the modern world. As Walsh and Middleton put it: "Human horizons were expanding, and modern science was on the upsurge. Indeed science was to take the leading cultural role in the early development of the West" (121).

Let us probe further into the reasons why science was so eagerly seized upon by seventeenth century humanists such as Francis Bacon. We should note that Bacon was a professing Christian. R. Hooykaas has pointed out that Bacon saw scientific research as a means of alleviating the burdens of human life; it was for Bacon a "duty of charity". Hooykaas writes:

> Mankind in Bacon's time lived in a continual fear of the powers of nature. Though in Christian theory nature had no divine power, she had kept it in practice and in general belief. Inundation, drought, hunger, disease and pestilence visited man as irresistible natural disasters...(Religion and the Rise of Science, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972, p.70)

Bacon repudiated this submissive attitude to natural forces and argued that they could and should be controlled by human beings. Hooykaas goes on:

> He blew the trumpet in the war against the sins of laziness, despair, pride and ignorance and he urged his contemporaries, for the sake of God and their neighbours, to re-assume the rights that God had given them and to restore that dominion over nature which God had allotted to man. It was not his love of philosophical novelties, but moral indignations which inspired his crusade.... His ideal was a science in the service of man, as the result of the restoration of the rule of man over nature. This to him was not a purely human but a divinely inspired work: 'The beginning is from God...the Father of Lights'. (71)

All this appears to express exactly the sort of view of man's place in creation that is found in the biblical worldview. But, however sincere Bacon may have been in his Christian convictions, he also betrayed motives which were much closer to the secular humanist idea of the conquest of nature for the realisation of autonomous human ends. Bacon seemed to attribute to science a redemptive role which properly belonged to God alone. Walsh and Middleton write:

> While the restoration of our moral innocence was in the hands of God, the restoration of our dominion over nature was, in Bacon's opinion, in our own competent hands. Here we have an illustration of how the nature/grace scheme prepared the way for modern secularism. Because God had been excluded from a relevant role in our cultural, and specifically scientific, life, some other mode of salvation had to redeem our dominion over creation. Thus Bacon proclaimed instead an essentially humanistic, and thus secular, way of salvation. (121-2)

The second major thinker discussed in Walsh and Middleton's account of the rise of the modern worldview is Rene Descartes. They bring out some of the differences between Descartes' abstract rationalist approach and Bacon's empirical approach (122-4). The essential points to note are these:-

1. Both Bacon and Descartes accepted the humanist dichotomy between human freedom and law-governed nature.

2. Both also reflected the humanist goal of human mastery over nature through science.

3. While Bacon stressed the importance of experiment in acquiring scientific knowledge, Descartes emphasised the crucial role of abstract reasoning in that process. Both emphases were crucial for the development of modern natural science. Put simply, if experiment produced the data about the world, then reason provided the mental tools with which such data could be arranged into an intelligible order.

Perhaps the most important idea of Descartes which we need to note in this context is his view of the basic character of nature. Descartes' conception of the possibilities of reason assumed that nature could lend itself to rational analysis. For Descartes this meant that the world operated according to rigidly determined laws, which could be discovered by reason. He thus developed the idea that the world was one great self-subsistent machine, a "mechanistic" idea. Floyd Matson summarises the mechanistic worldview (he refers to it as "scientific") as follows:

> The scientific world view...looked upon an infinite universe of perfect symmetry and absolute precision. It was nothing less than the image of the great Machine. All that happened on earth and in the heavens, as J. Robert Oppenheimer has written of this cosmic vision, had its natural and knowable efficient cause.... " the great machine had a determinate course. A knowledge of its present and therefore its future for all time was, in principle, man's to obtain, and perhaps in practice as well." (The Broken Image, New York: George Braziller, 1964, p.19)

But we also need to note the crucial difference between Descartes' approach and Isaac Newton's more Christian law-based understanding of reality. Newton reacted strongly against Descartes' mechanistic view, asserting a God-ordered, law-governed structure in the universe. As we know, Newton actually produced the major scientific breakthrough, but this was later often read within a rationalist framework. The Scientific Revolution, based on faith in God and the order of his works, was thus reinterpreted into a man-centred faith in science.

A further conclusion drawn by scientific humanists was that if man could obtain reliable knowledge of how the world will operate in the future, then it would be possible to predict how nature would respond to human manipulation. The possibility of predicting how the world will work would then give the power to control it. Nature's operation could be anticipated by human scientific knowledge. Thus scientific knowledge enables prediction which enables control. In this way, science could endow human beings with the power to dominate nature and realise their limitless ambitions. Thus in the eighteenth century we see emerging a vision of science as the source of knowledge by which means nature could be manipulated in the quest for a "secular paradise" (Walsh and Middleton:p.126). Now, investing such great hopes in the promise of science indicates basic religious commitment. Faith in divine revelation and redemption was being replaced by an idolatrous faith in science. Attributing a redemptive power to science makes science, which is merely one creational gift, into an absolute. This "absolutisation" of science is what Walsh and Middleton (and many other writers), refer to as scientism.

(A cautionary note: when we speak of "scientism", we do not mean simply a positive appreciation of the benefits of science. Our critique of "scientism" is certainly not anti-scientific; it only wishes to limit science to its proper, limited context. There have indeed been many anti-scientific critiques of scientism; but such is not the Christian position.)

Scientific humanists would reject the very notion of "faith in science" as a contradiction in terms. They would claim that science removes the need for faith. But if our earlier discussion in Unit One of the role played by faith in human life is correct, then putting faith in science is a real possibility. Floyd Matson's comment supports this suggestion:

> Even while Nature and Nature's laws still lay hid in night, Francis Bacon had looked forward to a time when "Natural Magick" would achieve the transmutation of the elements. In the generation of Newton, when all was night, the belief in science swiftly became the faith of Scientism - the magical conception of natural science as omniscient and omnipotent. It was a scientist of our own day who observed that modern man may have succeeded in emancipating himself from his belief in the magical powers of supernatural agencies only to plunge into an equally naive commitment to the magical powers of science... (The Broken Image, pp.21-2)

The continuing power of this "naive commitment" to science is clearly expressed in the following statement by Philip Handler, a President of the USA National Academy of Science in an essay entitled " In Praise of Science":

> Our current malaise stems from a few bad experiences - from time-delay in meeting the high hopes and expectations raised in the minds of those who appreciate the great power of science, the force of technology. Those expectations have taken on a new light as science has also revealed the true condition of man on earth.... I retain my faith that the science that has revealed the most awesome and profound beauties we have yet beheld is also the principal tool that our civilization has developed to mitigate the condition of man. New York Review of Book, (Supplement) 27 September, 1979, p.15) (our emphasis)

****

SHORT ASSIGNMENT

There is still much contemporary evidence of the continuing influence of scientism. But what signs are there today in medicine, psychiatry or ecology that the authority of science and scientists is being called into question?

****

5. THE ENLIGHTENMENT: THE "AGE OF REASON"

In their account of the rise of the modern secular worldview, Walsh and Middleton concentrate on its early development in the Renaissance and the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century. But another profoundly important phase of its development occurred in the eighteenth-century movement known as the 'Enlightenment". We need to examine briefly some of the main features of this movement.

We have seen that an essential aspect of the scientific revolution was the rationalism of Descartes. In the seventeenth century this rationalism was confined largely to a minority of scientists and philosophers. In the eighteenth century, however, the view of human

reason as the source of all real knowledge became widespread. The eighteenth century has thus been called the "age of reason". Autonomous human reason came increasingly to be seen as ushering in a new era of illumination. Vast hopes came to be invested in the power of reason to unlock the hidden truths of the world. As Lesslie Newbigin comments in The Other Side of 1984

> "Enlightenment" is a word with profound religious overtones. It is the word to describe the decisive experience of the Buddha. It is the word used in the Johannine writings to describe the coming of Jesus: "The light has come into the world" (John 3:19). The leading thinkers of the mid-eighteenth century felt themselves to be at such a moment of enlightenment...(7)
>
> Basil Willey...says that the feeling of exhilaration which so manifestly marked the birth of modern European culture came from the conviction that things which had been previously obscure were now being "explained". In place of "dogmatic" or "unscientific" explanations which no longer satisfied the mind, the true explanation of things was now coming to light.(8)

One of the great Enlightenment thinkers was Immanual Kant. He began his essay "What is Enlightenment?" with words which capture well the spirit of his age:

> Enlightenment is man's release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another. Self-incurred is this tutelage when its cause lies not in lack of reason but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another. Sapere aude! "Have the courage to use your own reason!" - that is the motto of enlightenment.
>
> Laziness and cowardice are reasons why so great a portion of mankind, after nature has long since discharged them from external direction, nevertheless remains under lifelong tutelage, and why it is so easy for others to set themselves up as their guardians. (L.W. Beck, ed., Kant On History, Indianapolis: Bobbs - Merill Educational Publishing, 1963,p.3. (first published 1874)).

For the Enlightenment thinkers, any knowledge based on revelation was therefore superfluous, deceptive, and, in Kant's phrase, "dangerous to human adulthood". Kant believed that "religious dependence is both the most damaging and the most humiliating of all".

This then was the spirit that characterised the "age of reason". Its influence was noticeable in many fields of culture, in art, literature, politics, education, and also theology. To be fully human was to be "rational" in all fields of human life. By following the dictates of a reason unspoiled by faith, tradition, and dogma, true human fulfilment and happiness could be realised. Newbigin expresses the new evaluation of reason thus: 'Reason is a faculty common to all human beings and is in principle the same everywhere. Provided it is not perverted by the imposition of dogmas from without, reason is capable of discovering what the nature of things is and what - therefore - are 'Nature's laws'"(12).

The Enlightenment was a period of great humanist optimism. One expression of the lofty ambitions of the Enlightenment thinkers was the massive enterprise undertaken by the French "philosophes". They aimed to compile all human knowledge into one great book, an "Encyclopedia", and make it available to all. This quest for systematic and comprehensive knowledge of the world reveals the expanding faith in the range and power of human reason in this period.

A highly significant implication of this unbounded faith in the power of reason and science now needs to be mentioned. In the seventeenth century, the ambition of human control through science was seen as applying only to the non-human realm, to nature. Human beings, as free rational agents, were seen as transcending nature: science was to be an instrument of human control. But in the eighteenth century, some thinkers began to propose the idea that human beings themselves could be explained scientifically. If reason and science could explain everything, why exclude humanity? This transition represented a further extension of the humanist theme of domination of nature. What had happened was that man was now being seen as part of nature. If nature could be understood as a great mechanism, then so could human beings. Attempts therefore were made to explain human conduct in the same terms as those of natural science, by causal, mechanistic laws.

These were the conclusions arrived at by thinkers like Holbach and La Mettrie. Both proposed purely materialistic conceptions of human nature. They tried, for example, to explain psychic and emotional life purely in terms of nerve and brain activity. Matson writes:

> Man, according to Holbach, is entirely the work of Nature. "He exists in Nature. He is submitted to her laws. He cannot deliver himself from them!" All the processes of nature, moral and political no less than physical, were reducible to matter and motion and completely accounted for in mechanical terms...."Let us conclude boldly then," added La Mettrie, "that man is a machine, and that there is only one substance, differently modified, in the whole world...." The human organism was to be regarded as an automatic clock.... A knowledge of the clockwork was all that was neccessary to comprehend the full range of human behaviour. (29-30)

Now such utterances were clearly in complete contrast to the earlier humanist affirmations of the freedom and dignity of man. However, in spite of this obvious tension in humanist thought, thinkers like Holbach were expressing essentially the same underlying humanistic spirit as found in Kant. The key point here is that the central humanist belief in the autonomous freedom of human beings harboured a fatal contradiction. Some concluded that, if no prior limits were set to human freedom, then there was no final reason why control over nature should not be extended to control over humanity. A belief in complete autonomy can lead either to a passionate defence of human freedom from external control or to a justification of external control over human beings.

While many humanists still proclaim the dignity and liberty of the individual, others seek to extend control over human beings and society. This strand of modern humanism originated with the nineteenth-century French sociologists Saint-Simon and August Comte, and was continued by e.g. the British utilitarian Jeremy Bentham. A prominent contemporary representative is the psychologist B.F. Skinner, (author of the influential book Beyond Freedom and Dignity). This tradition emphasises the need for scientific study of society, and the manipulation of human behaviour in order to improve human welfare. While these two strands of humanism are sharply opposed in many of their ideals and practical goals, they both display the same ultimate commitment to human autonomy. Secular humanism has given birth to fiercely quarrelling offspring. It is an inherently unstable worldview.

6. THE ROMANTIC REACTION

We have been tracing how the vision of life rooted in the belief in human autonomy and the scientific control of nature has come to play the leading role in the shaping of modern culture. But this vision of life has not gone unchallenged. Loud dissenting voices have been raised against the damaging effects of modernity. This is only to be expected, for when in history powerful cultural movements rise to dominance, counter-movements frequently appear in reaction.

We can suggest an explanation for this cultural "see-saw" process from the standpoint of the biblical worldview. We saw earlier that the creation is a balanced and carefully integrated structure, with each creature and aspect of creation finding its proper place and function within the whole of created life. When the significance of one aspect of created human life is idolatrously exaggerated, then the other suppressed aspects "rise up in protest" as it were. The Word of God calls upon human beings to honour the coherence and balance of creation by respecting its divinely-given limits and norms. If humans violate this balance, turning one creaturely aspect into an idol, they inevitably feel the pain which this violation brings, and react against this pain by switching allegiance to other aspects of life.

Such pain was increasingly experienced as the modern secular worldview came to dominate western culture. Modern culture has developed in a distorted, lop-sided direction due to the exaggerated emphasis on scientific and technological control of nature, and unrestrained economic growth. The modern worldview has been reductionist in character: many of the rich and diverse possibilities for human cultural development which are rooted in the creation order have been stultified, due to the narrow preoccupation with material progress through science and technology. Divine norms for human life such as community and neighbourliness, ecological stewardship, social justice, artistic expression and so on, have been systematically violated. So it is not surprising, therefore, that a powerful cultural movement has arisen in protest against this narrow vision of life - a "counterculture".

This word gained currency especially in the nineteen-sixties and was used to refer to the explosion of youth protest expressing itself in the abandonment of traditional morality, the rejection of established authority, the emergence of rock music, and the experimentation with "alternative" life-styles. But we can use the term "counterculture" in a more general sense to refer to the entire constellation of protests against the modern scientific humanist worldview. These protests arose as early as the eighteenth century, but gathered pace

especially in nineteenth-century Europe. They had many different emphases but acquired a certain focus in the movement which came to be known generally as "Romanticism". The modern world cannot be fully understood without noting the widespread and deep influence of what Theodore Roszak has called the "romantic counterpoint" to scientific humanism. H.G.Schenk, a distinguished scholar of the romantic movement wrote in 1966 that romanticism was "still the most recent European-wide spiritual and intellectual movement". He went on:

> In its territorial extent Romanticism not only affected all parts of Europe, with the exception of Turkey, but to a lesser extent even the Americas. Its scope was the widest imaginable. Far from being confined to literature in general, or poetry in particular, it manifested itself also in varying degress in music and the visual arts, historiography and social thought, and in man's general outlook on life in this world and the next. The balance between man's rational and intuitive faculties, the approach to nature, the method of tackling medical and other sciences, and even the style of playing the time-honoured game of chess - all these and many other things besides came to be transformed by that all-embracing movement. (The Mind of the European Romantics, Oxford: 1966, p.xxi)

(We might note that romanticism exercised a much more widespread cultural influence in Europe than in North America. This may be a reason why it receives little attention in Walsh and Middleton's book, which is written from a North American perspective).
What was the the main burden of the romantic protest? Arthur Holmes characterizes it as follows:

> Romantic humanism is, in large measure, a reaction against scientism and the technological mentality. Its roots lie as far back as Greek Cynics who, like Antisthenes and Diogenes, repudiated the corrupting influence of institutionalized society in favor of an innocent state of nature. The same thing keeps reappearing. Nineteenth-century Romanticism is usually traced to writers who, like Rousseau, espoused the virtues of a free spirit and a self-reliant soul, because human nature has been alienated from its essential goodness by the artificiality of an externalized culture. The American transcendentalist Thoreau regarded men and

> women more as part of nature than as members of society, and advocated communion with nature as the necessary means to clear-minded self-reliance. The value of life is in the experience. Nineteenth-century Romanticists generally reacted against value-free scientific objectivity and the analytic mind. "We murder to dissect", wrote Wordsworth. Natural instinct, intuition, and feeling, rather, are value-laden and more to be prized. (23)

Some other principal representatives of romanticism include continental figures such as Schelling, Fichte, Kierkegaard, Wagner, Nietzsche, and British writers such as Shelley, Blake, Coleridge and Ruskin. The "romantic" movement in music also gives evidence of a change of emphasis from order to free expression. In this context we shall only deal briefly with the romantic view of nature and man's relationship to it.

Holmes describes romanticism as a variety of humanism. We earlier characterised secular humanism in terms of two fundamental emphases: the claim to human autonomy, and the dichotomy between freedom and nature. The first of these remains the basic starting point of romanticism: it does not signify a return to the Christian view of man as standing under divine norms. But there is an important change in the second element, the freedom/nature dichotomy. In the dichotomy between human freedom and law-bound nature, human freedom comes to be seen as realised through the scientific-technological domination of nature. Freedom is viewed as power over nature, an object to be manipulated for human ends. In the romantic conception, however, nature is no longer seen as standing in opposition to humanity. Rather, humanity is seen as being part of nature, intrinsically and "organically" related to it. Nature is not an object of control, but of reverence, even worship. What is "natural" is seen as possessing intrinsic goodness. Whereas in the scientific worldview human beings are seen as the source of norms, in romanticism nature itself comes to be viewed as the source of norms.

But note that "nature" in the romantic view is conceived of quite differently from the way in which it is viewed from the scientific-humanist standpoint. For the latter, nature is objective, impersonal and mechanistically determined. But in romanticism, nature "comes alive" as it were; it is seen as filled with vitality, richness and feeling. This has crucial implications for how human beings see themselves. If man is part of nature, then the most important characteristic of humanness comes to be seen no longer as mind or reason, but rather as the sub-rational forces of passion, and

imagination. Acts of impulse rather than of rational control are typical of true humanness. Peter Gay relates a suggestive anecdote:

> The philosopher, weary of oppressive schedules, mechanical regularity, and hateful discipline, on occasion exalted imprecision into a virtue. In the winter of 1750, Jean-Jacques Rousseau threw away his watch. "Thank heavens", he remembered exclaiming after this sublime gesture, "I shall no longer need to know what time it is!" With this single impulsive act Rousseau overthrew, for himself at least, the tyranny of absolute, objective Newtonian time. (The Enlightenment; An Interpretation. Vol I: The Rise of Modern Paganism. London: Wildwood House, 1970, p.245)

This kind of impulsive act reflects a wider view in which true humanness is realized in unleashing one's natural energies from external restraint, particularly restraint imposed by the demands of a scientific and industrial culture. If what was natural was good, then scientific control of natural forces was unnatural. Free expression of natural impulse and feeling should therefore be fostered. This notion of free expression is apparent in Rousseau's novel, Emile, in which he describes the ideal kind of natural education for a child. The first book to which the young Emile is introduced is Robinson Crusoe. Peter Gay comments: "It is an obvious choice: the adventures of Robinson Crusoe are a kind of thought experiment much like the education of Emile - Crusoe is man naked, free of accidental trappings, free of society, face to face with nature, alone" (Vol 2: 545).

In briefly surveying the landscape of modern secular culture, we have only addressed ourselves to the scientific-technological worldview which has been dominant within it, and one of the major challenges to this worldview, romanticism. There are, of course, a great variety of other movements of thought which have left their mark upon modern culture and society. The modern scientific worldview itself has spawned a wide variety of different "schools of thought". such as positivism, pragmatism, evolutionism, behaviourism and so on, which we have not yet mentioned. Nor have we looked, for example, at nihilism and existentialism, two tremendously important late nineteenth and twentieth-century "countercultural" movements. And we have referred only in passing to Marxism. Discussions of these contemporary movements will be found in further OCC courses in particular disciplines. You can pursue some of them in some of the assignment options for this unit.

****

SHORT ASSIGNMENT

Romantic thinkers and artists did not only romanticize nature. Other things also became the object of their devotions. Romantic views of the past influenced the Gothic revival in architecture; romantic interpretations of religion were present in the Anglo-Catholic Oxford movement in England and parallel traditionalist movements in Europe; romantic idolisation of the nation or state was influential in the development of nationalism; and romantic attitudes to women were strongly evident.

What Enlightenment emphases do you think each of these were reacting against? Are any of these romantic attitudes still evident today?

****

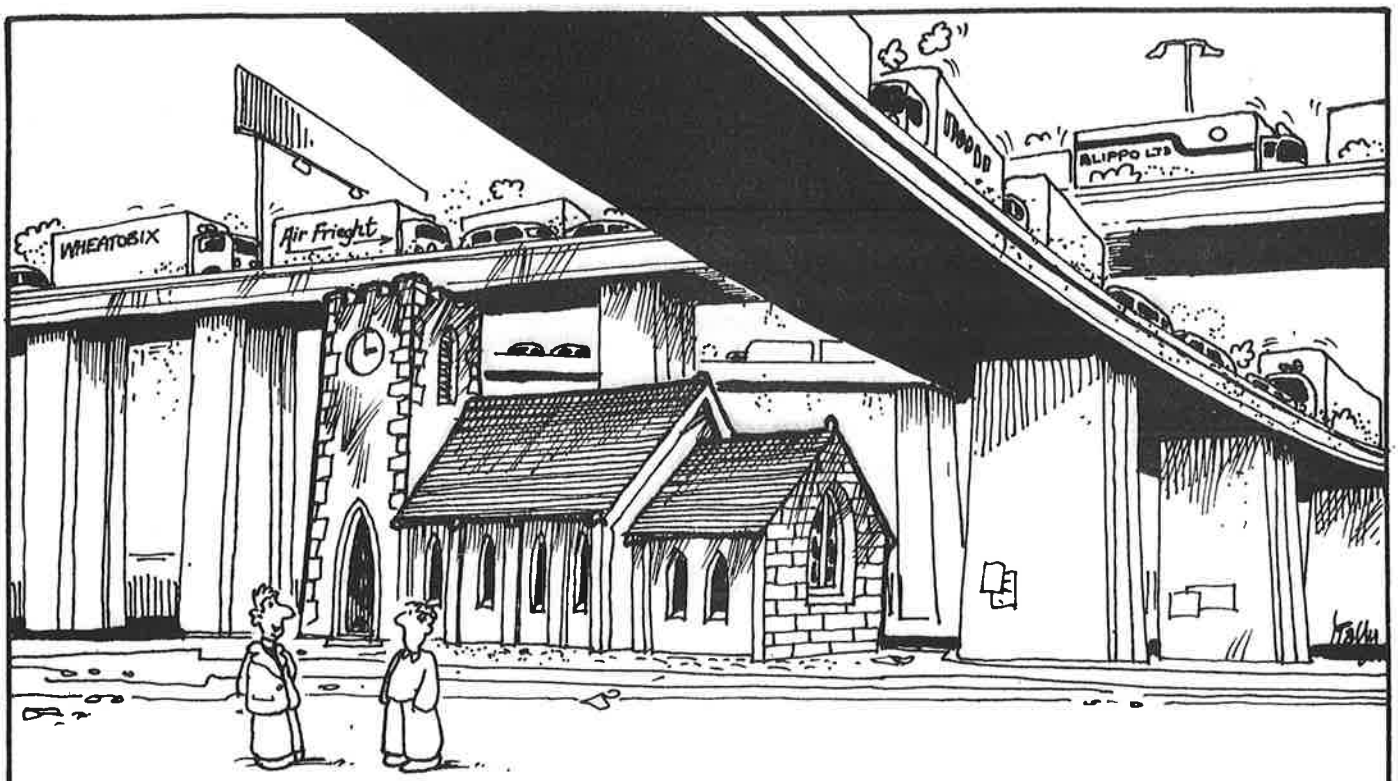
7. THE GODS OF OUR AGE

So far we have traced the historical origins and development of the modern secular worldview. But how are the effects of this worldview to be seen in contemporary western culture? The burden of chapter 9 of Walsh and Middleton is that the original humanist goal of realising human freedom through scientific mastery over nature has acquired a threefold cultural focus in contemporary western culture.

First, the earlier scientism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries has persisted. However, it is not advocated as confidently as before. Indeed, scientism as an explicit faith is increasingly being criticised in academic circles as a dubious dogma. And at a wider social level, people are increasingly doubting the supposed authority of "experts". Scientism gets a bad press today. However, in spite of this, it remains a powerful cultural force. In the main power centres of culture (government, large companies, science and technology departments of universities), scientism remains a tacit faith, accepted in practice if not in theory.

Second, the object of science - the technological control of the environment - has increased in importance, and great faith has been vested in the promise of technological progress. Technicism, faith in technology, has developed major cultural momentum. The French Christian sociologist Jacques Ellul sees this as the primary cultural force today. Walsh and Middleton take a different view. They see

technicism as subservient to the third major cultural force at work today: economism.



'It's not a bad site really — as soon as the vandals pinch the lead off the roof the exhaust fumes give us a new layer!'

This cartoon appeared in the September 1983 issue of Third Way and is reproduced by kind permission.

The object of technological progress - increasing material prosperity - has, in their view, now become the leading dynamic of contemporary culture. This has been the outcome of the massive expansion of productive possibilities which took place as a result of technological developments in the Industrial Revolution, making possible continual increases in economic growth (defined in terms of Gross National Product - a very limited definition of true "wealth"). Thus economism has now become the "head" of the three-tiered idol of modern culture.

Note Walsh and Middleton's definition of economism: "the absolutisation of mankind's good ability to make economic choices" (138). Economic activity, production, the efficient use of resources, even growth: all of these are good creational possibilities. There is nothing intrinsically wrong about economic life. We are called to be fruitful stewards of material resources. A Christian critique of

economism does not therefore imply a return to a technologically primitive or economically static society. Rather it calls for modern economic life to be reordered under the guidance of the norm of stewardship. The problem is that this norm has been crudely set aside in contemporary society. The primary norms accepted as valid have been technological efficiency and material progress.

An example of this absolutization of technology and economic growth can be seen in the dominant western attitude to the so-called "underdeveloped" nations of the Two-Thirds World. Leslie Sklair describes this as "techno-economism", a word very close in meaning to Walsh and Middleton's terms "technicism" and "economism". Sklair shows how "techno-economism" is much more than a narrow economic theory:

> Techno-economism holds that all of the most important problems that face mankind can only be solved by the rational application of science and technology for economic development. Thus, indicators such as the Gross National Product of a country, the industrial productivity per man-hour of its workers, and the balance of payments between imports and exports, are taken to measure the economic performance of the country as a whole, and, indeed, its general standing in the world. Those things that tend to improve economic performance are by and large deemed to be good, and those things that interfere with it, and tend to lower the rate of economic growth, are deemed to be bad. Therefore, as can be seen from this brief characterization, techno-economism is not only a theory of socio-economic change, but also a political and moral philosophy. (Organized Knowledge, St Albans, Herts: Paladin, 1973, pp. 241-2)

This attitude towards the "development" of non-western nations shows how these cultural forces have become objects of faith: "how could any other nation see the world in a different way?" is the question assumed by western "developers".
But Walsh and Middleton press their critique further by relating it to the biblical notion of idolatry, which we examined in Unit Three. Let us try and draw out the distinctiveness of their approach.

As we noted in Unit Three, when human beings rebel against God, they inevitably invest their faith and hope in an aspect of God's creation. This worshipping of the creature rather than the Creator is what

constitutes idolatry. In chapter 9, Walsh and Middleton present a model of the leading objects of idolatry in contemporary western culture based on the description of Nebuchadnezzar's statue in Daniel 2. In their account of contemporary idolatry, they translate the description of the dominant driving forces of our culture into religious language. This shows how, in spite of the professed secularity of modern people, they are in fact just as much religious beings as people of any age.

Walsh and Middleton argue that the religious character of the modern secular worldview is demonstrated in the following ways:

> 1. It rests on an authoritative revelation: science (132)
> 2. It invests its hope in a saving power: technology (132-4)
> 3. It believes it has found the source of happiness: economic prosperity (138)

We might also add the following:

> 4. It claims to know the meaning of history: the unending pursuit of progress
> 5. It imagines it has established the basis of human community: shared consumption of the material fruits of economic growth

The religious character of the modern secular worldview is usually denied today. The kind of brazen faith in technology exemplified by the Gould Inc. publicity, cited by Walsh and Middleton on p.135, is exceptional. But, while explicit faith in technology and material prosperity is seldom voiced so clearly, there remains a pragmatic acceptance of the primary of these goals. Such implicit faith is revealed in a variety of ways through statements of politicians and industrialists, and especially in advertising. Walsh and Middleton cite one such example from an oil company advertisement, on p.27. Consider a British example. A recent advert for "Apricot" word-processors contains a huge picture of an apricot, alongside one of a word-processor. The caption reads simply: "Created by nature; perfected by man". It may seem innocuous enough at first sight, but it conveys the implicit suggestion that human technology makes up what is deficient in the natural world. It capitalizes on the unstated assumption that human technique is superior to anything "nature" can create, and thus connotes the idea of technology as a "saving power".

****

SHORT ASSIGNMENT

Note down the concrete examples of contemporary idolatry in chapter 9 of Walsh and Middleton, and then try to find further current examples. You might consider the following:

- advertisments like the one for "Apricot"
- statements by political leaders (of all parties)
- responses by industrialists to attacks on pollution or redundancies
- justifications for the rapid introduction of information technology

****

8. OTHER "GODS OF OUR AGE"

If scientism, technicism and economism are the dominant gods of our age, they are not the only ones. The inability of these gods to produce genuine human fulfilment has led to various reactions in recent decades. People have sought hope in different gods. We cannot possibly survey all of them; we look at two prominent examples of the newer idolatries of our culture. The first we call "ecological romanticism".

In section 6 we looked at one major nineteenth century reaction to scientific humanism, romanticism. Though voiced widely and loudly, the nineteenth-century romantic reaction could not fundamentally reverse the direction of modernity, although it certainly left its own mark on western culture, especially in the arts, music and philosophy. In the nineteenth century it remained as a voice of protest. As we mentioned earlier, this kind of protest has been powerfully heard again in recent decades and it is important to recognise its continuing influence in contemporary society. We referred earlier to the youth protest movement in the 1960's, the "counter-culture". This was perhaps the most strident and visible aspect of the post-war reaction to scientific humanism.

The counter-culture had many different emphases (many of which are surveyed critically in Os Guinness' 'Dust of Death'; see "Additional Readings" at the end of this unit). The one we want to note is the renewed fascination with ecology and nature. At the "grass roots" came the concern for an "alternative life-style" which was systematically opposed to the scientific-technological outlook. For our purposes what is most noteworthy is that the concern with the "de-

humanisation" of man came to include a concern about the "de-naturing" of nature. Instead of being reduced to mathematical formulae for science and raw materials for industrial technology, nature,(or rather Nature), came to be seen in a new light. Nature became re-enchanted. What was not "natural" was rejected as "artificial" or "plastic". "Natural" foods were to be celebrated and "junk" foods full of "chemicals" were to be rejected. Behind the new rhetoric - which the hated corporations were all too soon to exploit - was a significant, shift from faith in science and technology to faith in Nature.

With this shift came a new perception of man's relationship with nature. No longer was nature "raw" chaotic matter in motion to be organised by science and technology into sophisticated "scientifically designed" products for the ever-increasing enrichment of man. Rather Nature came to be presented by the new science of ecology as an amazingly complex system with its own self-regulation - hence the emphasis on the "balance of Nature" which western scientific technology was in the process of wrecking. The new imperative was not power over nature based upon the presupposition that man was essentially separate from nature, but rather conformity and submission to the ways of nature. For man was now seen as one element, albeit the dominant one, within the total ecosystem.

A classic exponent of this ecological romanticism was Aldous Huxley. His book Island was published in 1962; by 1968 half a million copies were in print. Science education on the island of "Pala" is described thus:

> We don't have the money for large-scale research in physics and chemistry, and we don't really have any practical need for that kind of research - no heavy industries to be made more competitive, no armaments to be made more diabolical, not the faintest desire to land on the backside of the moon. Only the modest ambition to live as fully human beings in harmony with the rest of life on this island at this latitude on this planet. (N.Y.: Bantam Books, 1968, p.216).

Subsequently the school Principal explains that ecology is introduced early in education at the same time as multiplication and division:

> Never give children a chance of imagining that anything exists in isolation. Make it plain from the very first that all living is relationship. Show them relationships in the woods, in the fields, in the ponds and streams, in the village

> and country around it.... we always teach the science of relationship in conjunction with the ethics of relationship. Balance, give and take, no excesses - it's the rule in nature and translated out of fact into morality, it ought to be the rule among people.... Treat Nature well and Nature will treat you well. Hurt or destroy Nature, and Nature will soon destroy you.(217)

This was one element in the reaction to scientific humanism during the nineteen sixties and seventies. It has left its mark on our society. Many things we now take for granted developed in large part out of this renewed interest in nature - health food shops, natural medicines, environmental concerns, opposition to nuclear power, and so on. Some of these things can indeed be readily supported by Christians. Other things associated with the movement cannot, such as the desire to escape into an inner world of consciousness, heightened by hallucinogenic drugs or transcendental meditation, or various forms of sexual libertarianism.

This movement was seeking to be critical of society at a deep level, even though it tended towards the idolisation of nature and natural instincts. But the second example of the newer gods of our time is fundamentally uncritical: personal hedonism. A hedonist is someone who seeks to order his or her individual life so as to maximise personal satisfaction. A hedonist is not concerned with social or cultural critique, but is preoccupied with attaining a high level of individual fulfilment, irrespective of what is taking place in society at large. He or she will seek to take whatever opportunities present themselves in a particular situation in order to pursue this end. It is not surprising to see more people taking this approach to life at a time when the mounting crisis of society seems almost insoluble. Such times of spiralling crisis often lead people to adopt an escapist stance. The preoccupation with "personal peace and affluence", to use a phrase of Francis Schaeffer, (A Christian Manifesto: p.77), is an understandable one when time seems to be running out for a culture.

The particular means of arriving at personal peace may vary widely. For some it may be the more obvious goals such as material wealth, social status or sexual gratification. For others it may be a preoccupation with physical or emotional well-being. Certainly these two latter goals have been under-valued in modern society; they have been primary victims of the pressures of the "ratrace". But where people devote most of their leisure time to fine-tuning their bodily or psychic health, idolatry may not be far away. The " cult of the body", and perhaps more significantly, the " cult of the psyche", which have developed particularly in centres of affluence such as

California, are evidence of this.

We cannot neatly divide idolatry up into two forms, collective and individual. For personal idolatries feed the collective forces which assume idolatrous positions in society; and collective idols such as economic growth and nationalism are sustained by continuing patterns of individual behaviour such as consumption patterns, voting habits, leisure pursuits, family interaction, and so on. We are all personally responsible to some degree for the collective acts of idolatry which shape the society in which we participate.

9. A CULTURE IN CRISIS: THE COLLAPSE OF THE MODERN SECULAR WORLDVIEW

Walsh and Middleton continue their analysis of contemporary culture by pointing to the increasing disillusionment with the gods of our age (139-46). They describe how more and more people are realising that the promise of science, technology and economic growth to usher in an age of prosperity and human fulfilment has been betrayed. "The evidence suggests that we are in a culture in decline, a culture losing faith in its underlying worldview" (142). Or, in the words of H. Evan Runner:

> Our modern western society and civilization, which today displays everywhere its terribly diseased condition, was driven and given direction in its development through the modern centuries by humanism. Today the "drive" is gone, and a clear direction and forward movement is not discernible. Things appeared to have arrived at some sort of standstill, and men flounder helplessly about. For some time now, in the world of the theatre, of politics, of education, of the arts, the words most frequently heard are: crisis, malaise, loss of meaning, lack of direction. In just about every sphere of cultural life one can hear the question repeatedly being asked: Where do we go from here? But an answer is not forthcoming. ("Christianity and Humanism", p.1)

In the nineteen-fifties, people who warned of this imminent collapse of the foundations of modern culture were dismissed as pessimists or cranks. In the nineteen-eighties, their prophecies are becoming part of popular wisdom. The question now is not: when will the promise of universal prosperity be finally realised? but: how can we survive in a collapsing culture? A few leading public figures persist in holding

out the possibility of future prosperity (although they are more sober in their predictions). But at the grass roots, increasing numbers of people have fundamental doubts. The statistic quoted by Walsh and Middleton on p.142 indeed indicates a massive shift in popular expectations about the future. The mounting threats to human health and even life which surround us are creating a climate of fear and insecurity. These threats include ecological breakdown, the exhaustion of non-renewable energy resources, the loss of meaningful work, high levels of noise and stress, the breakdown of families, neighbourhoods and other small communities, increasingly fierce competition in work and business, a high incidence of emotional and psychological disorders, the numbing effects of television, and ultimately, the possibility of a nuclear holocaust. As Walsh and Middleton put it:

> How the vision is shattered! The age of unlimited economic expansion is coming to an abrupt close. We are coming up against the limits of creation itself. God's covenantal curses are raining on our heads for our idolatrous disobedience. The secular gods have not delivered. When a culture's gods fail, the time is ripe for serious worldview reconsideration (140).

****

SHORT ASSIGNMENT

Find contemporary examples of disillusionment with the"gods of our age", or of the quest for new ones, in <u>two</u> of the following:

1. the lyrics of recent pop/rock songs
2. a popular film or TV series
3. behaviour of ethnic minorities
4. the way people use their leisure time
5. sport

****

ADDITIONAL READINGS:

1. Tony Walter, **Addicted to Mobility: The morality of the motor car** (Third Way article). In this article, Walter uncovers the priorities that lie behind current British attitudes to transport.

SHORT ASSIGNMENT

Which of the various "gods of our age" discussed in this unit are illustrated in this article?

****

2. Margaret Thatcher, "**The Spirit of the Nation**" (a sermon reproduced as a Third Way article).

SHORT ASSIGNMEMT

How far can the values and virtues which Mrs. Thatcher sees as basic to the "spirit of the nation", be described as "Christian"? How far do they suggest the influence of the "gods of our age"?

****

UNIT FIVE: MAJOR ASSIGNMENT OPTIONS

Intermediate

1. Bob Goudzwaard, **Idols of Our Time** (Leicester: IVP, 1984) (107pp)

An excellent introductory analysis of four kinds of idolatry in contemporary western society: material prosperity, military security, revolutionism and nationalism. Clear, easy to read and prophetic.

Essay question: Show how each of these idolatries displays the features of an "ideology" described on p.24. Suggest one concrete step that could be taken by individuals or organisations to renounce each of these idols.

2. Tony Walter, **A Long Way From Home: A Sociological Exploration of Contemporary Idolatry** (Exeter: Paternoster, 1979) Chapters 1,10,11, and any four of the rest (approx. 100pp)

The title describes the book well, but non-sociologists will also find it quite accessible. The examples of idolatry assessed in the book include: work, family, suburban life, individualism, ecology, race and the media. Also an option for Unit Six.

Essay question: "Human culture has become the means by which mankind solves the problem of the fall" (p,192). Explain how the book illustrates this claim.

3. Tony Walter, **All You Love is Need** (London: SPCK/Third Way, 1985) (160pp)

This book argues the intriguing case that a quite new morality has emerged in today's society, based upon a self-centred humanist "ethic of need". The author illustrates it by pointing to the "needs of the self", "children's needs", "sexual needs", "material needs", "welfare needs". Christ can liberate us from slavery to needs.

Essay question: Show how the contemporary dilemma of "needs" can be found in the roots of the modern secular worldview.

4. James W. Sire, **The Universe Next Door** Chapters 6-8 (100pp)

In these chapters Sire critically evaluates three contemporary worldviews which have been highly influential especially since the nineteen-sixties, and which are not dealt with in the course; (Existentialism, Eastern thought, and the 'New Consciousness').

Essay question: In what ways would you expect adherents of each of these three worldviews to be critical of contemporary Christianity? How would you respond to such criticisms?

5. C.S. Evans. **Reserving the Person: A Look at the Human Sciences** (Leicester: IVP, 1977) Chapters 1-6 (75pp)

This book consists of a critical survey of secular views of humanness in psychology, philosophy, and sociology, and assesses the strengths and weaknesses of various Christian responses to these secular views. Also an option for Unit Six.

Essay question: Explain how each of the thinkers discussed in these chapters falls into the error of "scientism".

Advanced

6. Alan Storkey, **A Christian Social Perspective** Chapters 1,2 and one of: 6,11,13 (approx 80 pp)

Essay question: Why did humanism develop both an individualist and a collectivist direction? How have individualism and collectivism manifested themselves in twentieth-century Britain?

7. Bob Goudzwaard, **Capitalism and Progress: A Diagnosis of Western Society** (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) Preface and Introduction, and chapters 1-8, 10. (100 pp)

This is a penetrating and comprehensive analysis of the roots and development of western capitalist society. Although especially of interest to students in economics, it will appeal to anyone seeking insight into the spiritual direction of modern culture. Also an option for Unit Six.

Essay question: What are the essential differences between the medieval, the Reformed and the secular humanist views of material progress, and what were their actual consequences in social and economic life?

Further Reading

Os Guinness, **Dust of Death** (Leicester: IVP, 1974) (Intermediate)

John Francis Kavanaugh, **Following Christ in a Consumer Society** (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis) (Advanced)

David Lyon, **The Steeple's Shadow: Myths and Realities of Secularization** (London: SPCK/Third Way, 1985) (Advanced)

Theodore Roszak, **Where the Wasteland Ends** (N.Y.: Anchor, 1975) (Advanced)

UNIT SIX

Living out the Biblical Worldview Today

UNIT SIX: LIVING OUT THE BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW TODAY

TEXTBOOK READINGS: **Walsh and Middleton Chapters 10-12**
Wolters Chapters 5 (and pp.8-9; and conclusion)

1. THE NEED FOR A COMPREHENSIVE VISION

In Unit Five we began the task of understanding the worldview which has given rise to "modernity". We examined the origins and development of the secular vision of life which has come to dominate western culture and looked at the particular forms of idolatry which currently sustain it. We concluded by noting the breakdown of this vision of life and some of the signs of the spiritual crisis which this breakdown has provoked. The question to be addressed in this final unit is the direction which an integrated Christian response to this crisis should take.

The point we want to emphasise in this section is that the scope of a Christian response should be as wide as the horizon of the biblical worldview, and as comprehensive as the range of creation, fall and redemption. If the biblical worldview embraces the whole of creation and culture, then a vision for contemporary Christian witness cannot be satisfied with anything narrower.

This does not mean of course that each individual Christian must be involved in every aspect of such a witness. Each Christian, and perhaps certain Christian groups or communities, will need to focus on their particular local responsibilities, depending on what they may be called to by God. But it does mean that every Christian needs to approach his or her particular tasks with a wide-ranging vision. Briefly put, we need to "think globally" and "act locally". By "global Christian thinking" we do not mean concentrating on international affairs, (although the international dimension of all our actions is becoming increasingly important). Rather, it means first viewing the whole of reality from the standpoint of the "transforming vision"; and second, recognising the inter-relatedness of all aspects of the world. We want to make a few comments about each point.

1. In Unit Four we examined in some detail the problem of "split vision", the tendency of Christians to restrict the redemptive power of the Gospel to one narrow area of life. Here we want to point to a different problem. Sometimes Christians who have broken in principle

with this dualistic attitude nevertheless display a certain selectivity in their criticism of contemporary society. They want to be "transformers" of the world, but see only certain aspects of society as being in need of transformation.

Walsh and Middleton give the example of Christians who are opposed to abortion, secularised education and pornography, but who retain an uncritical commitment to economic growth or escalating nuclear defences. This example of selectivity can, of course, be reversed (such a reversal is more evident in Britain than in the USA at present). Christians who are anti-nuclear and anti-capitalist may nevertheless be complacent over legislation allowing abortion on demand or over the suppression of religious liberties in socialist states. Frequently, Christian justifications are offered both for a critical attitude in one area, and for a complacent acceptance of the status quo in another. Such selectivity compromises the biblical demand for obedience in all areas of life. Andrew Kirk, in A New World Coming, points us in the right direction by exposing both the personal aggression of abortion and the global aggression of military and economic imperialism (chapter 2).

In order to avoid falling into selectivity in Christian cultural witness, we need a unified and all-embracing perspective enabling us to measure contemporary culture against the full range of biblical and creational norms. The lack of such a perspective is one reason for the increasing divisions among Christians who are seeking social and cultural change. A recent book has documented the increasing fragmentation of American evangelical political thought which occurred after evangelicals began to take up political action (Robert Booth Fowler, A New Engagement: Evangelical Political Thought 1966-76. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982). Reviewing the book Os Guinness comments: "The new diversity bordered on warring disunity and in resembling the spectrum of debate in the nation as a whole, Evangelicalism's victory was pyrrhic: it gained in prominence, but lost its potency for being a genuine alternative to other American options" (Third Way April 1984). While any Christian's vision can be distorted or limited, a comprehensive vision might help Christians to transcend their partisan affiliations and indeed work towards a genuine "third way" in contemporary culture.

2. We have already noted in Unit Five the need to recognise that the various symptoms of our cultural crisis are closely interwoven. Walsh and Middleton list some of the ways in which such symptoms are interrelated today (150-1). Any critical attitude to society must take account of this interdependence of problems if it is to be effective in charting long-term alternatives. But a Christian will also want to add that this interrelatedness of crises exists because

of the prior coherence of creation. We encountered this idea of creation as a coherent order in Unit Two, and also mentioned it briefly in our discussion of the "romantic reaction" to the modern scientific worldview. Since God's creation is a coherent order, disturbing it in one area will lead to disturbances in other areas too. Thus restoring harmony to God's world requires that we see how its different aspects are related to each other. This is part of what having a comprehensive vision means.

2. DEVELOPING A NORMATIVE VISION

The comprehensive vision which Christians need to bring to contemporary culture needs to be rooted in the conviction that God's norms for all of life can be known, can be obeyed, and will bring restoration. "An obedient response to God's good creational norms is thus fundamental to a Christian cultural witness. Here the gospel of Christ can heal our culture.... Cultural restoration is impossible without a renewed response to God's law" (Walsh and Middleton: 156,157).

In Unit Two we considered at length how creation is constituted and sustained by the Word of God, by his laws for the whole of reality. We also saw how human beings stand in a covenantal relationship with God as trustees of his creation. Obedience to creational norms brings life, blessing and peace, while disobedience guarantees pain, disorder and death.

This is an appropriate point at which to draw attention to some key points in Wolter's discussion of the wide implications of "structure" and "direction", two key terms we introduced earlier. First, divine norms can be discerned in every area of reality, however complex or apparently technical that area may be. Wolters writes:

> Because [Christians] believe that creational structure underlies all of reality, they seek and find evidence of lawful constancy in the flux of experience, and of invariant principles amidst a variety of historical events and institutions.... In every situation they explicitly look for and recognise the presence of creational structure, distinguishing this sharply from the human abuse to which it is subject.(73)

Second, note that the question of spiritual direction is not a separate moment in the task of discerning norms. The structures

pertaining to the human realm of creation are norms calling for human response, and this response is a spiritual one expressed in varying degrees of obedience or disobedience. What we actually observe in reality is always a complex combination of obedient and disobedient responses to God's structural norms. We never simply observe "structures", but always directed structures, structures put to good or bad use by human beings. Therefore we must be simultaneously attentive both to structure and direction when seeking to discern divine norms for any area of life.

Having made these introductory comments on the overall task of developing a normative vision for culture, let us move further into concrete applications. Wolters divides his discussion into "social" renewal and "personal" renewal. (You will find more on the personal aspects in the paper "Self or Society? Is There a Choice?" by James Olthuis.) Walsh and Middleton concentrate on the cultural and social aspects in particular. But there is a difference of emphasis in the two discussions which is worth noting. Wolters' discussion of societal renewal focuses on the norms pertaining to particular social institutions, while Walsh and Middleton focus rather on general cultural norms such as justice, stewardship, love and so on, which apply to all areas of life. The two emphases are intimately related, as we shall see. Let us look at Walsh and Middleton's discussion first.

Walsh and Middleton emphasise the importance of taking into account the "multidimensionality" of created reality and breaking with the reductionism of the modern worldview (153). The call for "a simultaneous realisation of norms" (157) is another way of saying the same things. Walsh and Middleton show how this general biblical principle can fruitfully open up a Christian alternative to the reductionism of modern society (153-9). One implication is that we do not have to choose between obeying different norms. In some current discussion of the welfare state, for instance, it is implied that too much social justice will undermine economic efficiency. This neglects the fact that adequate provision for the poor and underprivileged is itself a factor in economic efficiency. For by restoring the poor to a position of economic and social self-respect, we create a larger and healthier work-force.

Or, it is said that if economic efficiency means large scale redundancies with no prospect of jobs for those dismissed, then that is a necessary and unavoidable price to pay. ("There is no alternative"?) But how can it be efficient to have millions of able-bodied workers remaining idle for months on end? These either/or contrasts betray the failure to understand the coherent relationships between all the various creational norms. Walsh and Middleton write:

"When they are properly understood, the norms of economics and justice function harmoniously. They are not meant to be played off against each other" (157).

Let us now consider how such norms can guide our analysis of social institutions, the focus of Wolters' parallel discussion. (The term "social institution" is being used here in a very broad sense to include any structured relationship found in society, whether at the "micro" level of marriage, family, or friendship, or at the "macro" level of large corporations, media organisations, the state, and so on.) The general norms we have just discussed apply to every situation, as we said. There are no situations where we are released from the command to be stewardly, just or loving. But the norm of justice, for instance, calls for different kinds of action according to the social institution in which it is to be exercised. Doing justice in a business corporation, for example, requires such things as fair wages, the exercise of rights of worker participation, and so on. Doing justice in a family, however, requires parents to do such things as spending sufficient time with children, and practising even-handed discipline. The kind of action called for in responding to the norm of justice is determined by the particular character of the social institution in question. When we seek to discover what normative Christian action in society involves, we therefore need to identify what is distinctive about these various kinds of institution.

This distinctiveness is ultimately rooted in the creation order. Wolters states the basic principle thus: 'Human society gives evidence that a structured order underlies the great diversity of societal forms in different cultures and periods of history.... However society arranges itself, it must always do its arranging in terms of creational givens" (80).

This idea that present-day social institutions are based in the creation order is sometimes disputed by Christians. One reason for this is that the idea has been misinterpreted and used as a justification for a conservative attitude towards the existing forms of social institutions. The western patriarchal family pattern is sometimes defended on the basis of a supposed origin in the creation order, whereas this pattern reflects as much sinful distortion as creational insight. Rather, the idea should serve as the basis for a critique of existing forms of social institution. What is rooted in the creation order is not any particular historical form, but the abiding, structuring norm for each institution; learning to distinguish between the two is an important part of biblical wisdom.

Another reason why the idea has been disputed among Christians is that Scripture speaks (in an explicit way) about relatively few of the

social institutions seen in present society. Here you might wish to review our discussion of the relationship between creational revelation and biblical revelation, for only if we are clear on this can we give an adequate response to the above criticism. The basic point is that we have no reason to expect to find the specific structured order of most contemporary social institutions set out in Scripture. And even where Scripture does speak directly about certain institutions such as the family and the state, we cannot acquire an exhaustive understanding of their normative order from these references alone. The discovery of such order emerges as we seek sensitively to read our experience of creation in the light of Scriptural guidelines. The Bible does not give a detailed account of the normative order of a twentieth-century business corporation; but it does supply many precedents concerning the normative practice of economic stewardship in earlier times. Both biblical insight and business experience are indispensable in such a process of discovery. Note, however, that the accrued wisdom derived from even long years of experience in a certain area may be misguided. Interpreting experience can be a precarious task and can easily go wrong. Biblically-trained insight into creational norms is not to be confused with what is usually described as "conventional wisdom", i.e. the standards accepted by leading opinion in a given field. A Christian will very likely come to different conclusions as to what <u>really</u> is "unprofessional or unbusinesslike" conduct (Wolters:81).
Wolters suggests an important clue regarding this process of biblically-directed learning from experience. He suggests we need to be on the alert for the way in which particular institutions "resist" being run in ways that distort their normative structure (81). When he says that a business resists being run like a family, this does not mean that there cannot be such a thing as a "family business" (i.e. one which is owned and managed primarily by members of the same family), but it does mean, for instance, that a managing director ought not to expect the same kind of <u>filial</u> loyalty and affection from employees that he or she would rightly expect from a son within the context of the family.

Consider a more topical example. The higher educational policy of the present British government is partly based on the principle that universities should be more "cost-effective". Now cost-effectiveness is certainly a creational norm. Inefficiency, in any area, is a form of bad stewardship of resources. But educational efficiency cannot be confused with economic efficiency. It is not possible to measure the "products" of university research and teaching in the terms of a company balance-sheet. They need to be measured in specifically academic terms: a university is being efficient if it is using to the full its opportunities for the advancement of systematic understanding of the world.

This point leads us on to a general principle. The primary task in discovering the normative structure of a social institution is the identification of its characteristic responsibility. As Wolters points out, social institutions, like all creatures, have been created "after their kind" (81). Each has its own divinely appointed function, its "raison d'etre". Each is called to fulfil a particular kind of function in human social life as God intended it. Such responsibilities are not simply thought up independently by human beings, even though it is they who actually fulfil them in practice.

We suggested above that the characteristic responsibility of a university is the "advancement of systematic understanding of the world". This of course is only a very basic principle and needs to be fleshed out in much more detail. But it does already exclude certain other notions of what a university is primarily about. A university does not exist primarily to provide trained technical experts for industry, although it may in fact do this. Nor is it to function like an extension of the research department of a political party. When very close links come to be established between universities and either industries or political parties, the danger exists that their primary responsibility will be compromised.

What is the characteristic responsibility of a family? It is not, for example, the sustaining of the relationship between husband and wife. This task is the responsibility of husband and wife as marriage partners: marriage is an institution which has its own purpose, whether or not children are present. A family is primarily a relationship between parents and children. When couples decide to have children primarily in order to stabilise a shaky marriage relationship, then the needs of the children are likely to be sacrificed for those of the husband and wife. Such a family is likely to burden children with the task of fulfilling needs of the parents which as children they are unable to meet. Rather, a family is primarily a structure in which children can grow to mature adulthood in a context of strong mutual commitment and supportive love. This should characterise all its various activities and practices.

We could define the characteristic responsibility of a business corporation as the stewardly provision of humanly necessary goods and services; of the state as the administration of public affairs through just laws; of the political party as the advocacy of certain convictions about what justice in society is; and so on. These "thumbnail" definitions are, of course, only the beginning of a Christian perspective in various areas, but much confusion is likely to follow if they are overlooked.

Each kind of institution is thus called to fulfil a unique kind of responsibility before God in the service of humankind. Thus Wolters speaks of the principle of "differentiated responsiblity" (82). All human beings are responsible beings in society, but they are held responsible in specific structured ways. The principle of differentiated responsibility can serve as a helpful basis for developing a comprehensive Christian witness in society. A primary goal of Christian social and cultural action should therefore be to strengthen the ability of various institutions to fulfil their normative responsibilities. Christians will need to ask questions like the following:

- how can companies be prompted to concentrate production on goods and services that contribute to healthy, integrated human living?

- how can tax and social security be arranged so as to foster rather than undermine strong family life?

- how can trades unions be encouraged to fight for meaningful work rather than merely pressing for higher wages?

- how can media organisations (like the Press Council) stimulate responsible reporting and discourage the trivialisation of news?

Another important implication drawn by Wolters from the principle of differentiated responsibility is that each social institution must honour the characteristic tasks assigned to other institutions. They may not undermine or override the responsible exercise of tasks which do not primarily belong to them. This interference can take place unintentionally: when a trade union insists on maximum overtime or shiftwork opportunities, it may well place extra pressures on the families of its workers; or when television journalists seek to expose the full reality of a serious problem like soccer hooliganism, they may unwittingly be granting status to the perpetrators, thus making the law-enforcement task of the state even more difficult.

Wolters suggests some examples of more overt and deliberate attempts to restrict the power or freedom of certain social institutions, such as when multinational corporations rapidly transfer investment from one country to another in order to evade government regulations designed to redistribute wealth and promote social justice. Larger institutions like the multinational corporation or the state are especially prone to attempting such control. Wolters uses the term "totalitarianism" in this context to refer to any attempt by one institution to dominate all the others. (He is extending its meaning beyond its original political sense, when it referred especially to the control of the whole society by fascist or communist regimes).

While we obviously reject such state totalitarianism, we should bear in mind that a totalitarian state feeds off an irresponsible society. As Walsh and Middleton point out:

> The tragic irony of the present situation is that people are desperately holding on to their hedonistic freedom, doing as they please, but the end result could well be the imposition of limits by an authoritarian state. If people cannot exercise internal self-restraint, then the spector of external control looms large.(156)

Swiss theologian Emil Brunner issued a similar warning forty years ago, as the world fought against fascism: "...the greater the decline in the moral vigour of society, the more tasks the State must take upon itself, and the greater the expansion of the element of compulsion in justice, the nearer the approach to the totalitarian State" (Justice and the Social Order, London: Lutterworth, 1945, p182).

****

SHORT ASSIGNMENT

Select one of the following major social institutions of which you have experience:

- a large daily newspaper;
- a trades union;
- a political party;
- a major orchestra, art gallery or theatre;
- a local authority;
- a church denomination;
- a charitable group;
- a library;
- a college or university;
- a large company;
- a bank;
- a professional association;
- a supermarket;
- a transport system
- the government.

Identify its "characteristic responsibility" and consider how far it is actually fulfilling it today. Does it in any way restrict your ability to do God's will?

****

3. A CORPORATE RESPONSE

We have seen that a Christian response to the spiritual crisis of our culture must be based on a comprehensive, normative vision of God's will. Now we want to propose that this response must also be a corporate one. Christian cultural witness today will be of limited effect unless we recognise that this task is fully a communal responsibility. One of the major obstacles to such communal witness is the pervasive individualism within the Church, a problem we already encountered in Unit Three. We saw there that the New Testament describes the Church as a body, an "organic community" of people united by the Spirit and working together to live out the Gospel of the Kingdom. Thankfully, in many parts of the world, local churches are beginning to move nearer to this biblical model. Fellowship and practical sharing are becoming more genuine, corporate worship is actually becoming a corporate, instead of a purely individual, expression, and increasing numbers of household communities within the churches are emerging.

Such developments are exciting and are the essential foundations for any lasting Christian witness in society at large. But, heartening as they are, they will not be enough in themselves. For they are primarily changes in the internal life of the churches. Most of human life however takes place outside the immediate context of the local church. It is at work, in the home, in public life, at study, that the dominant direction of society and culture is determined. If the supportive context of Christian community is confined to the local church then our cultural and social action will be seriously weakened. For we will be fighting the spiritual battle for culture in isolation from other Christians. What we need to consider, therefore, is how Christians can act communally in areas beyond the church itself.

When thinking about Christian witness in society, we frequently limit ourselves to what we can do as individual Christians at work or study. Initially, what comes to mind are things like: maintaining high standards of personal integrity in business, showing concern for workmates under pressure, writing a letter to a newspaper, adopting a modest personal lifestyle, and so on. All such things are indeed essential and should be a matter of course for all Christians. Such

actions will probably make up a large part of our daily lives, and their cumulative impact can be very significant. For instance, the presence of impeccably honest people on company boards of directors no doubt limits the scope for financial corruption.

However, because of the highly organised and complex structure of modern society, it is frequently difficult to bring about real changes as individual Christians. So much of life and work today is directed by organisations and institutions, many of which are very large and powerful. Our age has rightly been called "the age of the organisation". Particularly because ours is an "age of organisation", it is often only concerted, corporate action that can affect major decisions being taken by those organisations.

As Walsh and Middleton acknowledge (159), we can easily be overwhelmed with a sense of powerlessness when we try to imagine building a Christian witness in a society dominated by large organisations run largely on secular principles. Anticipating the question, "What can I, one lonely Christian, do?", they answer:

> "Nothing! By yourself you can do nothing in the kingdom of God. Just as our renewal in the image of God is communal, so our task of implementing a Christian cultural vision is communal. We need community not only because the problems are so big but also because we are the body of Christ" (160).

What then do we mean by "communal Christian cultural action"? It may sound impressive, but it needs to be made more specific. Communal Christian action can take place in many different ways, depending on cirumstances. There is no fixed pattern to which everyone must conform. Here are just some of the possibilities:

First, there are workplace groups, where Christians working in the same factory, office, school, or college meet to support each other and discuss issues arising at that workplace. They might also take initiatives to redress an injustice, press for a certain decision, or resolve a difficult conflict. Christians working in the marketing division of a large corporation might oppose manipulative advertising methods; those within a trades union chapel might seek to avert a damaging shop-floor dispute; a group within a political party might press together for policies closer to biblical norms of justice, peacemaking and stewardship.

Second, there are wider specialist study and action groups, drawing together Christian lawyers, politicians, artists, trades unionists,

engineers, nurses, and so on and investigating what a Christian perspective would be in these areas. Some focus more on mutual support and exchange of experiences, while others are study orientated. Many of the "Professional Groups" operating under the auspices of the UCCF (Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship), and many of the organisations listed in Walsh and Middleton's bibliography are of this kind. Other groups also engage in public action. For example, the Jubilee Centre, a Christian economic research institute based in Cambridge, has spearheaded opposition to the abolition of Sunday trading laws in Britain. Some of the Shaftesbury Project's specialist groups also take similar initiatives. (See the Resources Pack for more details of such groups).

A third level of Christian action is the formation of alternative Christian organisations. Most of the groups listed in section 3 see their primary role as equipping Christians whose primary work lies within organisations (companies, professional groups, factories, political parties, etc), which are not specifically Christian. They are adopting a strategy of Christian "penetration" of existing institutions. Some groups, however, have gone a stage further by establishing distinctively Christian organisations like schools, trades unions, companies and political movements. Such alternative organisations seek to live out a specifically Christian way of doing business, labour relations, education and so on in a structure designed for that purpose.

These already exist in, for example, publishing, economics, and the arts. Christian publishing companies exist to provide a channel of Christian writing which secular publishers would not normally accept. More recently alternative groups have been developed in the economic field. The Jubilee research centre referred to above is such a group. Traidcraft is a marketing company based on Christian principles which seeks to engage in just trading relations with Two-Thirds World producers. And a group called Christian Industrial Enterprises attempts to support new business initiatives reflecting Christian priorities. In the arts a number of Christian groups are emerging in theatre, music, advertising and design.

But what about the role of the churches in facilitating Christian social and cultural witness? Bishop Lesslie Newbigin, in his book The Other Side of 1984, proposes this basic guideline:

> In the end, the witness of the Church in respect of public issues will depend more upon the day-to-day behaviour of its members than on its official words and actions. A church, acting officially in its corporate capacity, may decide to speak or not to

speak on a public issue, but the Church is in any case involved in these issues because its members are citizens, workers,employers,teachers, writers, buyers - members of society whose words and behaviour are constantly shaping public life in one direction or another. From this there is no possibility of withdrawal. For them the question is whether their judgements, and therefore their words and actions in the public sphere, are governed by the reigning assumptions of society or by their Christian obedience. A church acting corporately is probably wise to confine its official pronouncements on public questions to a limited range of matters where great ethical issues are at stake. But the Church must be constantly assisting its members to form their judgement upon these matters in the light of their faith (41).

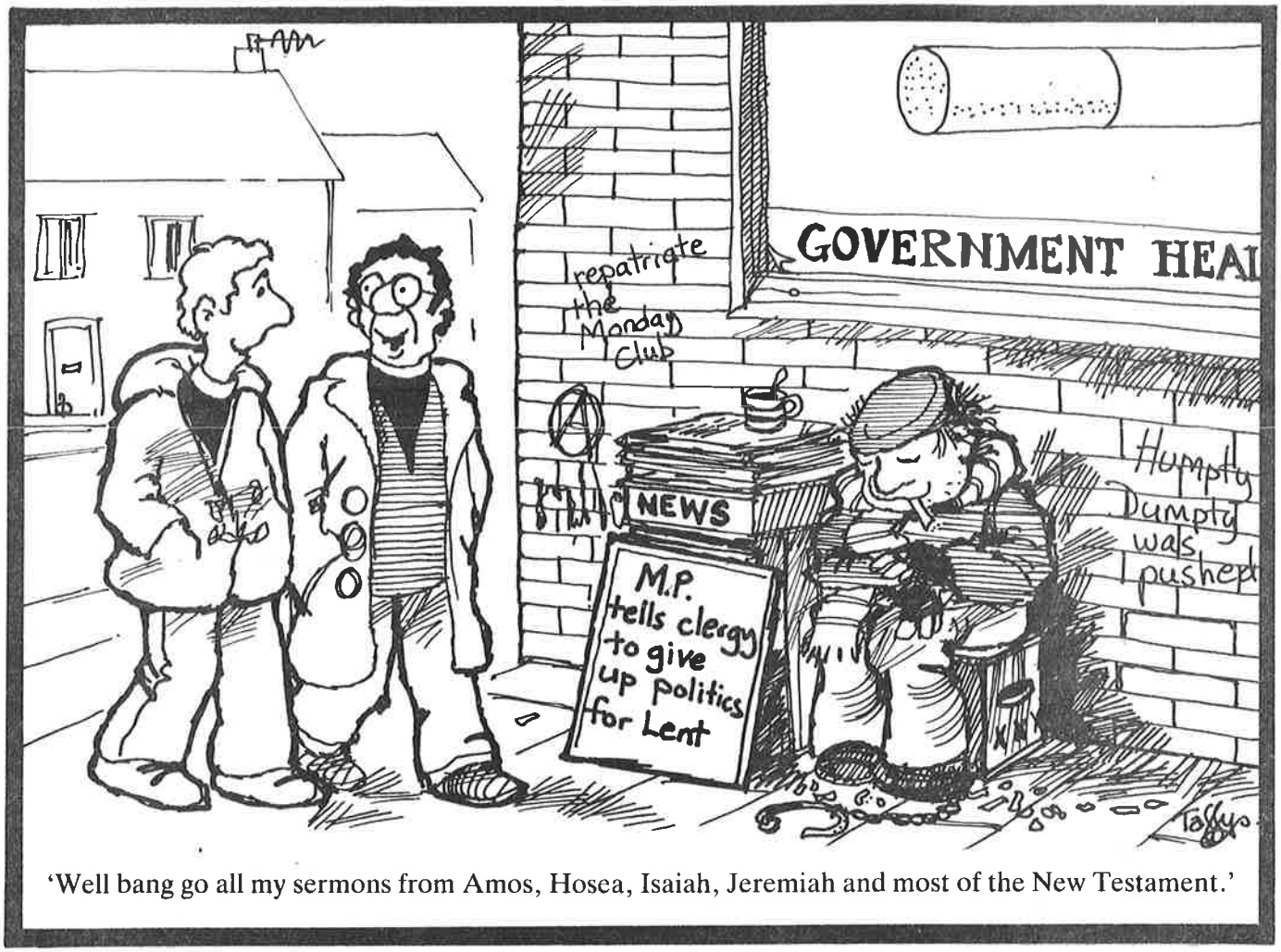
****

SHORT ASSIGNMENT

Suggest specific ways in which the churches can be "constantly assisting its members to form their judgement upon [public] matters in the light of their faith".

Evaluate briefly one particular Christian group, like those listed above, and of which you have some knowledge. How well is it pursuing its goals?

****



'Well bang go all my sermons from Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah and most of the New Testament.'

This cartoon appeared in the April 1984 issue of Third Way and is reproduced by kind permission.

4. TOWARDS A CHRISTIAN ACADEMIC WITNESS

In sections 1-3 we looked at the implications of a Christian worldview for cultural involvement in general. In the final sections, however, we narrow our focus to consider the academic aspect of this witness. Academic studies are indeed only one part of the total task of Christian cultural witness. Living out a Christian worldview involves much more than this, as we have tried to stress throughout. Nevertheless, it is this aspect to which OCC is especially committed. And while recognising its limited focus, we hope to show how academic work can indeed be brought under the Lordship of Christ just like any other area of life.

The following sections are intended to be a preparation for the various "Foundational" courses which you may be planning to take next. These foundational courses outline the implications of a Christian worldview for specific areas of study; here we deal with

some general principles applicable to all areas. We stress that these principles do not apply only to Christians who have an academic career in mind. (They will be in a minority). They are intended to help any Christian involved in a course of disciplined study whether at college, university, home or any other context.

Walsh and Middleton begin their discussion of "worldview and scholarship" (chapter 11) by anticipating a question which seems more and more pressing as our global crises escalate around us:

> Some might argue that in the face of such human tragedies as starvation, political oppression and the threat of nuclear holocaust, it is unconscionable for Christians to engage in the frivolity of scholarship. Why engage in studies when the whole of culture is in such a crisis? (163).

The answer to the question of the importance of academic studies depends on one's view of the relative power of institutions of higher education (and especially the leading universities) in shaping a society. Those who see higher educational institutions as peripheral compared to more visible institutions such as governments, multinational corporations, trades unions or the media, would obviously assign scholarship a low priority. In A Christian Critique of the University, Charles Malik, (who has a distinguished record of both political involvement and university education) argues a different view:

> This great Western institution, the university, dominates the world today more than any other institution: more than the church, more than the government, more than all other institutions. All the leaders of government are graduates of universities, or at least of secondary schools or colleges whose administrators and teachers are themselves graduates of universities. The same applies to all church leaders. How can you create economically without some technical training? But the technical schools which provide this training are some sort of mini- universities, and their administrators and instructors are themselves graduates of colleges, universities or technical institutes. The professionals - doctors, engineers, lawyers etc. - have all passed through the mill of secondary school, the college and the university. And the men of the media are university

> trained.... The universities, then, directly and indirectly dominate the world; their influence is so pervasive and total that whatever problem afflicts them is bound to have far-reaching repercussions throughout the entire fabric of Western civilization. No task is more crucial and urgent today than to examine the state of the mind and spirit in the Western university. (Downers Grove, Ill.: I.V.P, 1982, pp.19-20. Subsequent references to Malik in the text refer to this book).

It is certainly not the case that ideas developed by academics are the only important factor in determining the direction of a culture, or even the most important. It is true, however, that such ideas exercise a very substantial influence on our present culture. The power of a culture's dominant worldview comes to expression in all aspects of its corporate life. But the expression of that worldview within the academic world, and the resulting effects of the academic world on other areas of cultural life, are often overlooked. Jose Miguez Bonino, a Protestant liberation theologian from Argentina, has been closely involved in the struggle of Christians for social justice in contexts of severe repression. Like other liberation theologians, he has warned Christians that theoretical ideas (especially theology), divorced from concrete social action, can be highly dangerous. Nevertheless, at the same time he acknowledges the importance of theory in the overall project of Christian social action. In Towards a Christian Political Ethics (London: SCM, 1983), he writes:

> ... we underestimate the theoretical task and turn our backs on theory only at considerable cost to ourselves and to the effectiveness of our own action. The cost in human life and suffering that we pay for simple pragmatism is too high. Theory is necessary, in the first place, because it is unavoidable; whether acknowledged or not, it is present. It is necessary in order that we can make explicit to ourselves the presuppositions and assumptions of our action suggested to us. It is necessary also in order to give unity and coherence to the struggle. Finally, it is necessary in order that we can make available our experience and transmit it to others, inviting them to join the effort.(9)

If theoretical work is so important, then the spiritual condition of the great institutions devoted to pursuing it is indeed of great

importance. Once again, we can benefit from the experience of Charles Malik:

> The great universities of the Western world raise fundamental questions from the Christian point of view. They are pretty thoroughly secularized. The prevailing atmosphere in them is not congenial to Christian spiritual values. One wonders if Christ would find himself at home in them, and to a Christian nothing is more serious than if Christ is not at home in the great citadels of learning.(13-14)

It is true, of course, that universities and colleges do differ in the degree to which they are prepared to tolerate genuinely Christian (or other unorthodox) perspectives in their teaching and research programmes (outside the field of theology). Those universities where a distinctively Christian heritage has not entirely been lost may be more tolerant, and Christians might experience more freedom in such institutions. Again, there are differences between departments, some more open to divergent perspectives, others less so. And there are notable examples of Christian scholars working within institutions with secular traditions, (for instance, R. H. Tawney at the London School of Economics). The sort of broad generalization suggested by Malik should therefore be applied only with care to particular institutions. But it is broadly correct. To propose that one <u>teach a course</u> from a definitely Christian standpoint would, in most academic contexts, be regarded as advocating "religious propaganda". Individual scholars might well succeed in doing so, but probably only if they did so tacitly.

This is not necessarily because of an overtly anti-Christian or anti-religious bias among academics. It is rather because the very idea of doing scholarship from a distinct "perspective" has generally been seen as a distortion of pure scholarship. Socialist academic Anthony Arblaster writes:

> Teachers or students who have made no secret of their political or religious commitments have frequently been hounded on the grounds that they have shown 'bias' or 'partiality', especially if that bias has been left-wing. An example was when the Chancellor of Warwick University, Lord Radcliffe, suggested in his report on the troubles there in 1970 that there might be some 'teachers so far committed to particular socio-political systems as to disqualify them from the objective analysis

> of their subject that the university tradition itself assumes'. No names were named, but no one at the time doubted that he meant to refer to the socialists on the staff of the university. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, p.17-18)

No doubt similar examples could be found where right-wing academics were similarly "hounded" in departments which were dominated by Marxists. Arblaster argues that "bias" of some kind is unavoidable in an academic context:

> Everyone, teacher or student, displays bias of one kind or another, and if some types of bias go undetected, that is only because they harmonize so neatly with the 'common sense' or conventional wisdom of the age. But as anyone with any knowledge of the history or sociology of ideas will recognise, there is no reason to assume that the dominant orthodoxy of an age is more illuminating or closer to the truth than less familiar, and therefore more conspicuous, opinions. (18) (our emphasis)

One of the consequences of the gradual breakdown of the dominance of the scientific humanist worldview of our culture is that, (at least in certain disciplines), there has been a growing proliferation of contending schools of thought and a recognition that diversity might be an acceptable, or even a necessary, feature of contemporary academic institutions. The situation facing Christians entering college or university is certainly more open than it was two decades ago. But many of the academic orthodoxies of recent decades still persist, and their challengers are not necessarily any more compatible with a Christian worldview. Malik's judgement still applies. And it presents both a challenge and an opportunity to a Christian student entering college or university.

Many Christian students have tended to see their Christian presence at college or university largely in terms of personal evangelism among student colleagues. Charles Malik argues forcefully that this is an altogether too limited approach. Recapturing the universities for Christ, he argues:

> ...means much more than converting a student here and changing a professor there; such converting and changing while necessary and while it must continue, is peripheral and rather pathetic when it comes to the real character and magnitude of the

task; those who interpret the challenge of the university only in these terms miss the whole point; they are either not university graduates themselves, or, if they are they failed to grasp the meaning of the phrase "the state of mind and the spirit in the university as a whole": the "wholeness" of university existence has escaped them.

It means, rather, responsible concern for the contents of the curriculum, how the curriculum came to be what it is, the kind of ideas, attitudes, fundamental interpretation of history and society and man and morals and destiny and being it imparts; it means thinking of the central university policy, regardless of whether it came about by drift or by design, thinking of the kind of spiritual climate and frame of mind it fosters as an ongoing rooted institution both by the topics and practices it includes and the topics and practices it excludes.

All this is a world of concern by itself quite independent of holding evangelizing crusades on the campus, or helping meet individual moral problems of students or professors, or setting up prayer or Bible study groups among members of the university community, or promoting Christian fellowship for the lonely and neglected, or bringing a student here and a student there on his knees before Jesus Christ. All these endeavours are praiseworthy and necessary, but the problem of the university is other than and much more formidable than all of them. It is whether the intellect can be totally independent of Jesus Christ and remain sound and sane and true. (101-2)

****

SHORT ASSIGNMENT

Malik's point is basically correct. But we might question whether he is correct to say that these essentially academic concerns are "quite independent" of evangelism, personal help, or Bible study. Walsh and Middleton suggest on page 166 that there is in fact a crucial link between the two kinds of activity. They argue that Christian academic witness is imperative both for our evangelism and for our pastoral responsibility. What implications does this link have for your own involvement, and that of your student group, in evangelism? What steps could be taken to help members integrate academic witness with evangelism?

****

5. WORLDVIEW INFLUENCES SCHOLARSHIP

a) Scholarship is not neutral.

The view that scholarly activity is given direction by the underlying beliefs and commitments of the scholar is currently becoming more widely held. This is especially the case within the philosophy of science (as Walsh and Middleton point out) and in the social sciences. But it is by no means universally the case. There are a variety of ways in which such influence is denied. "Scientism" is one such way. Scientism still holds sway in many areas, even though its defenders surround their position with many more qualifications nowadays. Charles Malik suggests this definition of scientism: "the worship of science as understood today as the only or the highest avenue to the truth" (49). Compare Evans' definition of scientism in Walsh and Middleton, p.167. Evans quotes the philosopher D.M. Armstrong as an advocate of scientism. Armstrong writes:

> Why this "scientism"? It seems to me that the answer to this question is very simple. If we consider the search for truth, in all its fields, we find that it is only in science that men versed in their subject can, after investigation that is more or less prolonged... reach substantial agreement about what is the case... I conclude that it is the scientific vision of man, and not the philosophical or religious or artistic or moral vision of man, that is the best clue we have to the

> nature of man. And it is rational to argue from the best evidence we have. (quoted in Evans, Preserving the Person, Downers Grove, Ill.: I.V.P, 1977, p.18)

Here science is seen as an alternative to other ways of investigating reality. Armstrong suggests that we have to make a choice between viewing reality scientifically, and viewing it religiously (or morally, philosophically, etc.). This clearly excludes any possibility of scientific study being rooted in and directed by religious belief.

But scientism is only one way in which the influence of religious beliefs on scholarly activity can be denied. In fact, it is not necessary to hold to any version of scientism to make this denial. Others have admitted that scholarship is influenced by the "values" of the scholar. But they often then deny that these values are ultimately religious in character, suggesting that such values are subjective moral preferences. Thus, those who admit the presence of "values" in scholarship nevertheless seek to minimise their influence as far as possible. Still others have held that scholarly activity is directed by certain philosophical assumptions, but then denied that such assumptions express ultimate religious beliefs about life. Although there are important differences between these varying responses, they all refuse to accept that beliefs of a religious character necessarily shape the theorising of the scholar. What we are arguing, in contrast, is that scholarship is indeed necessarily rooted in both philosophy and religion.

Walsh and Middleton's diagram on page 172 illustrates two main points, which we deal with in sub-sections b) and c).

b) The direction and content of an academic discipline are shaped by underlying philosophical frameworks.

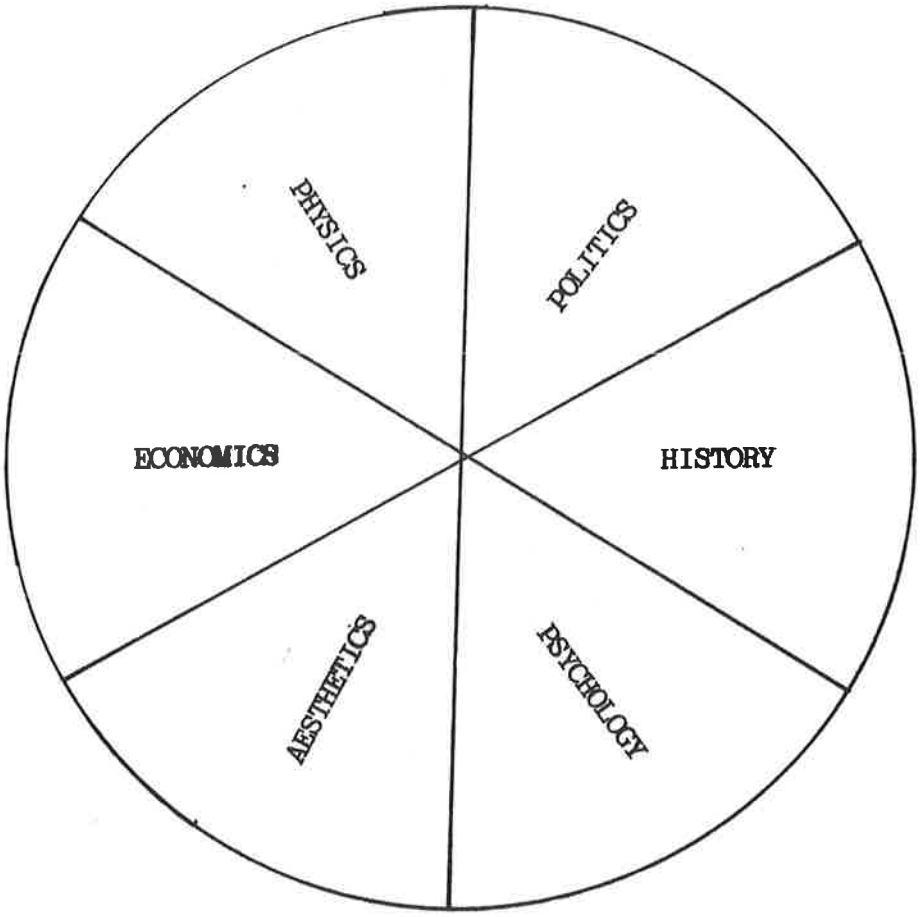
The presence and influence of such frameworks are frequently not recognised by scholars. Only a minority explicitly acknowledge that they are making specific philosophical assumptions in their work, and that the validity of their work rests on the validity of such assumptions. Disagreements are normally conducted by exchanging and defending detailed empirical analyses of an area or problem, without probing deeper into assumptions behind them. But the existence of various competing "schools of thought" within a discipline is evidence of the power of these assumptions. Such schools do not arise from mere differences of factual conclusions about an area of study; rather they show disagreement over what are the facts. Thus, in contemporary economics we see neo-classical theorists battling with

neo-Keynesians and proponents of "radical political economy"; in psychology behaviourists compete with Freudians and proponents of "humanistic" psychology; in history, the positivist/idealist/Marxist debate has coloured much academic discussion for decades; in sociology and political science the proliferation is even greater. Even the American sociologist Don Martindale, who holds to a version of "scientism", argued twenty years ago that the deeper differences between various schools of sociology could only be fully explained by recognising the different traditions of philosophy out of which they have emerged: "As systems of ideas, all the early schools of sociological theory originated as philosophic points of view..."

Walsh and Middleton explain this point further on pages 170-3. They introduce two important distinctions. The first will probably be unfamiliar to you; it is the distinction between a view of the totality of reality as distinct from a view just of one of its specific aspects. The second is the distinction between "theoretical" and "pretheoretical" knowledge (171). You encountered the second distinction in Unit One where we emphasised the distinction between worldviews and theoretical frameworks. In Wolters' words, there is a distinction between "the life-perspective every human being has by virtue of being human and the specialised academic disciplines that are taught by professors..."(8). This should be clear by now. The first distinction calls for further comment.

Walsh and Middleton argue that the various academic disciplines such as history, physics, economics, psychology and so on are concerned with studying a particular aspect, area or dimension of reality. History, for example, involves studying the temporal dimension of reality; it looks at reality in terms of past and present. Economics studies the human capacity to steward resources efficiently. Psychology investigates the psychic layer of human personality. Physics analyses the material constitution of reality. Politics looks at human social interaction with an eye on law and justice in public affairs. (Scholars do differ over the exact definition of these areas of reality. But most accept that such disciplinary distinctions have some validity.)

Philosophy, by contrast, is the study not of particular aspects of reality but of the structure of reality as a whole, of the totality of reality. It looks at the basic structure of the created order of reality and at the interrelationships between its many parts and aspects. We can illustrate this with a simple diagram:



The different segments of the "orange" represent the special academic disciplines, each focusing on a particular aspect of reality; the lines circumscribing and dividing up the "orange" indicate the area of interest of philosophy. In Wolters' words, "philosophy can be described as that comprehensive (totality-orientated) scientific discipline which focuses on the structure of things - that is, on the unity and diversity of creational givens" (9).

It should be noted - and students of philosophy may well have already noted - that this definition of philosophy is not at all widely accepted today among philosophers. Broadly speaking, it reflects more the traditional area of philosophy known as "metaphysics" (or "ontology") than contemporary philosophy in the English-speaking world. Most philosophy in the English-speaking world has avoided "metaphysical" questions and focused much more narrowly on questions about the nature of knowledge (epistemology). Some brief historical comments are necessary here to put this in perspective.

Metaphysics was first developed in the philosophy of ancient Greece, especially that of Plato and Aristotle (whom you briefly encountered in Unit Four). Greek metaphysics was based on the idea of a universal cosmic order within which human beings existed, and to which they were required to conform. (From a Christian standpoint, one of its main problems was that it placed exaggerated emphasis on the capacity of human reason to discern this cosmic order.) Many of its main concerns were taken over into medieval philosophy (although the role of human reason was made subordinate to that of divine revelation). Traditional Roman Catholic philosophy, based largely on the thought of Thomas Aquinas, has continued this metaphysical concern with the cosmic order and the place of human beings within it. By the seventeenth century, however, metaphysics was being subjected to increasing criticism. It was held to be inherently speculative: the reality of a universal cosmic order was increasingly being doubted. Metaphysical claims, it was increasingly thought, could not be justified by the strict canons of "rational" inquiry. This rejection of metaphysics was one of the main philosophical results of the seventeenth-century scientific revolutions and the rise of rationalism.

From the seventeenth century onwards, a variety of different philosophical traditions emerged from humanism. British philosophy moved more in the empiricist direction associated with Francis Bacon. It displayed scepticism about the tendency of continental European philosophers to construct large rationally-derived systems of thought. Such continental schools of philosophy such as rationalism and idealism generally agreed with the empiricist rejection of traditional metaphysics. But they did maintain a much broader conception of the nature of philosophy than that found in the British tradition. (Philosophy in North America and other English-speaking areas generally followed the approach developed by British philosophers.)

This is why the view of philosophy which we are assuming in this course may appear to be closer to the continental traditions in its view of the scope of philosophy. There are, however, many crucial differences of content, the central one being the place of autonomous human reason in the search for truth.

The dominant schools of philosophy in the Anglo-American world in this century have been empiricism and analytic (or linguistic) philosophy. The empiricist tradition, which we encountered in our discussion of Bacon, was continued especially by Locke and Hume, and its influence is evident in twentieth-century philosophers such as A.J.Ayer and Bertrand Russell. Analytic philosophy originated especially in the writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein. It emerged in part as a reaction to the exaggerated claims of empiricism (or scientism) to attain to

certainty about the truth. Philosophers came to doubt that any method of obtaining knowledge could lead to such certainty, and proposed even more limited functions for philosophy. These functions were the logical analysis of language, and the clarification of the meaning of concepts.

This is not the place to examine any further these various schools of philosophy. The primary point we need to note here is simply that, while analytic philosophy has certainly improved the clarity and logical coherence of much philosophical debate, it has also led to a serious narrowing down of philosophical concerns. Rather than philosophy seeking to reflect on the totality of created reality, it has restricted itself to a few particular aspects of it, especially the logical or rational aspect and the linguistic aspect. Charles Malik offers this comment on analytical philosophy:

> In philosophy there is first the singling out of the one element of language and then the endless analyzing of this element. The mystery of the whole of human existence from which this one element has been detached and analyzed ad nauseum is then proclaimed as nonsense.... [A fascinating task] would be to wonder at the mystery of how linguistic analysis under the inspiration of Ludwig Wittgenstein has dominated Anglo-Saxon thought. Who is not a Wittgensteinian today, just as who is not a Freudian or a Marxist? In much of the humanities, and not only in philosophy, linguistic analysis and the spirit of Wittgenstein today reign supreme. (74-5)

We believe that a Christian definition of philosophy should indeed be wide enough to embrace all aspects of created reality. In the words of Walsh and Middleton, philosophy should provide "a view of the whole of reality within which the analysis of the parts occurs" (170).

No doubt some may object that this assigns too high a place to philosophy in relation to other subjects. It may sound as if philosophy is being given a privileged status as the "queen of the sciences". Scholars in the special disciplines may understandably respond that it is no business of philosophers to tell them what they are supposed to be studying. They would, of course be right, in one sense. It is not the task of philosophy to prescribe in an a priori fashion (i.e. before consulting the empirical evidence) the boundaries of each discipline or to suggest what are the basic concepts of a discipline. The philosophers' task is rather to reflect philosophically on the empirical research done by scholars in the

special disciplines, in order to elicit and clarify the philosophical issues at stake. Thus philosophers must always work in close interaction with the work of scholars in various other subjects. Sometimes the empirical results produced by such specialist scholars will compel philosophers to modify their account of the whole of reality; sometimes the critical questions posed by philosophers will require specialist scholars to reassess their evidence and revise their theories. (And, of course, some scholars can manage to combine both the role of philosopher and of empirical researcher.)

One of the primary contributions of Christian philosophers today could be to work towards the integration of the various special disciplines. Today the university is characterised by much fragmentation among the disciplines, and even competition among them for "control" of a certain scholarly territory. This betrays a profound lack of academic integration. A Christian philosophy could assist in restoring genuine inter-disciplinary communication, enabling scholars to pursue better their task of giving an accurate account of the diversity and unity of God's creation.

One final point in this sub-section needs to be made. We have placed considerable emphasis on the influence of philosophical frameworks on scholarly activity. However, there are of course many other influences on scholarly work. These influences include such things as the following:

a) the emotional bias of the scholar (who would expect a German historian, writing in 1946, to render exactly the same account of the second world war as his British counterpart?);

b) faulty logic (simple logical errors can have considerable effect on the conclusions of a theory);

c) economic interests (e.g. the judgement of a scholar financed by an industry or trades union might be "adapted" appropriately);

d) prevailing scholarly fashion (which may reflect the pressure of recent events, or simply "academic chic");

and so on.

Each of these influences might be more or less dominant in particular scholars at particular times. But it could be argued that they are, strictly speaking , external to the scholarly enterprise itself. Philosophy, by contrast, exercises an internal and necessary influence over scholarly activity.

c) Philosophical frameworks are rooted in religious faith commitments

How do scholars come to be influenced by one philosophical framework rather than another? We noted that not many scholars consciously evaluate competing philosophical influences on their academic work. In a fairly pragmatic way, most simply adopt certain assumptions which seem promising for their research. Some, however, are more conscious. Marxist historians, for instance, do not usually regard their historical studies as independent of their Marxist philosophy. They would acknowledge that they are giving a "marxist interpretation of history", (though they would also claim that it is the most adequate account of historical evidence). In either case, however, whether the influence is conscious or unconscious, scholars tend to gravitate towards philosophical frameworks which are most compatible with their deeper beliefs about life; i.e. with their religious worldview. As Walsh and Middleton put it: "Just as all scholarship presupposes a philosophical paradigm, so also philosophical paradigms presuppose a religious worldview of one kind or another." (171) Or, in Wolters' words:

> All academic disciplines are confronted on the foundational level with issues of a philosophical nature (e.g. the status of universals, the problem of freedom and determinism, the justification of belief, etc.) The answers that scientists give, implicitly or explicitly, to such issues depend on philosophical categories that are themselves decisively shaped by a deeper-lying worldview. There is therefore an influence of worldview on scholarship via the mediation of philosophical categories. (97)

(You might find yourself asking at this point questions like: can't religious beliefs influence scholarship directly? why must their influence come via a philosophical framework? does this mean that the religious beliefs one finds in the Bible cannot be applied directly to one's academic work? Some of these questions can be pursued in the major assignments for this unit. And Greidanus' paper "Using the Bible in Christian Scholarship" tackles the question clearly.)

Walsh and Middleton draw out two important implications of the "worldview-philosophy-academic discipline" model we have just discussed.

1. "The question isn't one of "integrating" faith and scholarship. Faith and scholarship are always integrated. The only real question is, which faith?" (172)

The point is that Christian scholars have no choice over whether their academic work is directed by religious commitments. But they do have a choice over which commitments they allow to influence them. For the person seeking to be a truly Christian scholar, this requires sustained and conscious effort, and especially so at a time when Christians are so far behind in integrating their faith with their academic work.

The majority of Christian students, who study full-time for only three or four years, clearly cannot be expected to do all the foundational work necessary. So they must learn from and depend upon the academic direction of other, more mature Christian scholars, whose books should be read alongside other course textbooks. All students depend on the insight and guidance of their teachers, (even though they ought to be encouraged to receive it critically), so this is nothing peculiar to Christians.

2. "Christian renewal in university studies will require some Christian philosophical insight. Without such insight a Christian academic witness will be piecemeal and superficial" (172).

William Hasker makes a similar point:

> "...there is a need to think through the relationships of all branches of knowledge to the Christian faith, so as to produce an integrated Christian view of things that will be functional in the modern world. But it is impossible that such an integrated view will come about without making heavy use of the resources of philosophy. If philosophy did not already exist for this purpose, it would have to be invented"(Metaphysics: Constructing A Worldview, IVP, 1983, p.25).

This certainly doesn't mean that all Christian students have to transfer to philosophy courses. It does mean that students in each discipline should, as far as their aptitudes and opportunities allow, explore critically the philosophical assumptions prevailing in their subject. One specific way to do this would be to take advantage of course options in the philosophy of your discipline (philosophy of economics, biology, history, politics, etc.) These options are not usually in high demand, due to the career-orientated and unreflective attitude of many students during a time of high unemployment. But for Christians they ought to be a priority.

6. TOWARDS A CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHICAL FRAMEWORK

a) What is a Christian Philosophical Framework?

We are now ready to see what a Christian philosophical framework might look like. The outlines of the framework proposed by Walsh and Middleton in chapter 12 are indeed tentative, but they are sufficient to alert you to the kind of philosophical issue that will be raised in the foundational courses to follow. (A more detailed elaboration of this philosophical framework, and a comparison with those developed by other Christians belongs to a foundational course in philosophy.)

It is important to see how the philosophical framework proposed by Walsh and Middleton follows closely from the principle themes of the biblical worldview. A Christian philosophical framework should not be an intellectual system worked out by autonomous rational thought, and then "tacked onto" a Christian worldview. Nor should it simply be a "christianised" version of a secular philosophical framework (although it may resemble such frameworks in certain respects). Rather it is a coherent set of basic categories which arise out of the biblical worldview.

This does not mean that such categories can be logically deduced from the Bible. The Bible does not speak the language of philosophy, so no specifically philosophical categories could be derived from it. We do not find in Scripture discussions of philosophical questions such as "free will verses determinism", or "the justification of knowledge". Rather, to use a phrase introduced by Nicholas Wolterstorff, the categories of a Christian philosophy ought to "comport well with", or "befit" the worldview of Scripture. They should faithfully render the intention of the biblical worldview, but in the special language of philosophy.

b) The Role of Theology

Obviously the work of biblical scholars and theologians is an essential resource for Christian philosophy, for their task is to clarify and expound the central meaning of the biblical worldview. The philosopher's task is nevertheless distinct from the theologians. Both need each other, and both should respect the different task of the other. Sometimes this difference is described in terms of the distinction between "rational inquiry" and "faith". Philosophy, it is said, engages in the former while theology assumes the latter. This is a quite misleading way of describing the difference, however. For, as we have seen, philosophy rests on faith, and theology, like any academic discipline, engages in rational inquiry. The difference is

not one of method, but of focus of attention. Philosophy seeks to analyse the structure of created reality as a whole, while theology reflects on the revelation of God in the Scriptures. Clearly, an individual scholar can engage in both these tasks, but the difference between them is important. Wolters summarizes the difference thus: "Christian philosophy looks at creation in the light of the basic categories of the Bible; Christian theology looks at the Bible in the light of the basic categories of creation" (19). We can add here that the various academic disciplines each look at a particular aspect of creation in the light of both the basic categories of the Bible and those of philosophy.

The fact that scholarly activity (whether in philosophy or other disciplines) is focused on creation has an important implication that we should now explore.

c) Scholarship and Creation

The first point to note is that scholarship is not an attempt to impose order on reality, but to give an account of the order which God has already established in creation. Walsh and Middleton's comment about philosophy applies to all scholarship:

> "The Christian attempt at philosophizing begins with the perspective that everything, including humans and their theories, is subject to and exists only in response to God's creational law (or word). All of life responds to and is dependent on God's norms. Thus all creation is 'subjective' in the sense that it is subject to God's law (175-6).

Christian scholarship must begin with this recognition of "subjectivity" under God. Some humanist philosophers have supposed that the reality studied by scholars is a disordered mass of chaotic phenomena requiring the ordering activity of the human mind. But in a biblical view, reality is already ordered. What Christian scholars do is simply to use their God-given rational faculties to discover this order. Thus:

> If God's word orders the creation, then the scientific enterprise is best seen as a fallible attempt to formulate how his word in fact orders specific kinds of creaturely life" (Walsh and Middleton: 176)

And further:

> ...our so-called scientific laws are not to be confused with God's law for creation. Scientific laws are theoretical constructions attempting to account for the lawfulness of creation. They are best understood as provisional theoretical approximations of how God orders the creation, and thus they should be held tentatively (178).

(A note of explanation: the word "scientific" is being used here in a much wider sense than in its normal English usage, in which it refers primarily to the "natural sciences". By "scientific enterprise", Walsh and Middleton mean the attempt to give a theoretical account of any area of creation, whether the physical world, biological life, economic behaviour, artistic activity, politics or religious behaviour).

This basic point implies that, while Christian scholars should be deeply committed to their studies, they should constantly be aware that their theories can never fully express God's law for creation. Not only is the human mind finite in power, but it is also fallen and therefore prone to miss the truth.

This awareness should exclude all tendencies to intellectual pride. Intellectual pride is repeatedly seen in academic circles today Apart from the obvious examples such as the attempts to defend a position for the sake of career, there is the more subtle and pervasive assumption that academic specialists have superior insight into the truth over that of lay people. The idea that ordinary human wisdom and experience might actually correct academic theories is a challenge to intellectual pride which many academics are unwilling to accept.

d) Universality and Individuality

The order of creation established by God is a universal order. This means that it holds at all times and in all places. But this order allows for great variety among the individual things which exist under it; things, animals, events, human beings, social relationships, cultural products, all vary greatly, even though they all exist within the same universal order. As Walsh and Middleton point out: "While God's law does order creational life, it leaves room, especially in human life, for differing responses. God's law for our cultural life is a calling to which we respond, not a deterministic force" (178). What scientists observe in reality are always individual things existing in response to God's law. Political scientists never perceive "the divine law of justice" as such: they see particular human acts of justice and injustice, just and unjust governments, and so on. One of the important tasks of the scientist is to discern the

universal order within the multitude of individual responses to it.

This historical variety in human responses to God's law is legitimate and is indeed intended by God. At the beginning of creation, God commissioned humankind to "subdue the earth", to "till and keep the garden", but issued no blueprint of how this was to be done. God intends human beings to release the potentials of creation in multiple ways, and to produce rich diversity within human culture. Different architectural and musical traditions develop; different forms of government are set up; different economic activities are engaged in. All of these are examples of legitimate creationally-based diversity. No particular historical response to a divine law should be taken as having universal validity. Such responses exemplify these laws, but never wholly exhaust the possibilities allowed for within them.

But the situation is more complex than this. Apart from legitimate historical variation within responses to God's law, there are also multiple illegitimate, distorted human responses, and it is not always easy to distinguish between the two. Walsh and Middleton do not clearly distinguish between these two points on pp 178-9, but the distinction is important. They do comment on the second: "Recognising that responses to creational laws are always historically conditioned is a natural consequence of the distinction...between structure and direction. While there is one structure of the creation (God's abiding, ordering and directing word), there are two possible directions in response (obedience or disobedience)" (179). Thus, pursuing the example they suggest, nuclear fission is indeed a possibility that God structured into the creation; it is an example of a legitimate historical variety within the general field of technology. The Bible never suggests that only one kind of technology (e.g. water power or solar energy) is to be preferred. But the spiritual direction of much modern nuclear technology is indeed profoundly distorted. The same structure/direction distinction must be applied in every field of scholarship.

e) Recognising Multidimensionality

We have said that each discipline focuses on a particular aspect of created reality. But there has always been the temptation among idolatry-prone human scholars to seize upon one of these aspects and then try to use it to explain other (or even all) areas of reality. Walsh and Middleton describe this temptation as "reductionism": they write: "reductionism ultimately amounts to idol worship. When something in creation is not allowed to stand in its own creational integrity, but is rather consistently reduced to or explained in terms of something else, then a form of idolatry is lurking nearby" (180). Charles Malik makes a similar point in slightly different language:

> A truth in mathematics does not belong to the same order of truth as a truth in physics or biology, or as the truth that you and I are mortal and fallible....[In all instances of reductionism] there is a narrowing of vision whereby all truth, including the ordering of truths, is tendentiously reduced to some one particular truth; and this is wholly inadmissible. For the moment a truth arrogates to itself a place that is not its own or denies other truths, it becomes untruth. (35)

The error of reductionism has given rise to a multitude of philosophical schools of thought, or "-isms". Idealism absolutises the realm of human ideas; naturalism reduces reality to natural causes; evolutionism transfers categories of biological growth to all areas of life and society; Marx's dialectical materialism sought to explain life in terms of economic power relations; many other examples could be given. (Not every "-ism" is necessarily an instance of reductionism, however; and not every instance of reductionism has given rise to an "-ism". But there is a rough correlation between the two.) .

Walsh and Middleton point out that we can only judge a position to be reductionist if we have a view of how things ought to be viewed according to their own created nature. For example, to critique the reductionism involved in explaining human thinking only in terms of physico-chemical behaviour, we must know what is distinctive about human thinking over and above physico-chemical properties. We must have some notion of "irreducibles" (180). By irreducibles they mean distinct structural aspects of the creation, aspects which have their own created integrity and norms, and which resist being collapsed into each other. Creation, we have seen, is multidimensional; its many dimensions must not be reduced to each other. They are "irreducibles".

Donald MacKay warns against confusing reductionism with legitimate scientific analysis. It is not inherently reductionist to analyse the chemical properties of the human brain, for the brain does have a chemical aspect. And, as Alan Storkey points out, it is in the nature of a science to focus on a particular aspect of a thing being studied, i.e. to engage in a process of "abstraction" (which really means "focusing") (Walsh and Middleton: 183). MacKay goes on to state that the problem arises when chemists seek to give exclusively chemical explanations of things which are more than chemical. He writes:

> In biology, for example, [scientific analysis] becomes dangerous only if the scientist imagines that all questions of biological interest can be stated and handled in the terms of chemistry or of physics. For the truth is that physics and chemistry have no terms for some of the main concepts and problems that interest the biologist.
>
> What are the chemical or physical equivalents of biological 'adaption', for example? At first sight the answer might seem simple. The chemist or physicist would expect (in principle) to be able to explain what all the atoms and molecules are doing in an animal that is or becomes adapted to its environment. But does that make 'adaption' a physical concept?
>
> Of course not; indeed for physics as such it is strictly meaningless.... It is defined for an approach from a different angle, so to speak, an approach which in no way denies the validity of the other, but which recognises aspects that the other misses. (The Clockwork Image, IVP, 1974, p.45)

Consider an example from political science. In one theory, the subject-matter of the discipline has been defined as "the authoritative allocation of values". This is a highly general definition which misses the crucial focus of political studies, i.e. the proper activities of governments. To define politics simply in terms of "authoritative allocation" is reductionist because there is so much more to politics than this. Such "authoritative allocation" takes place in many other spheres of life apart from politics, so the definition doesn't properly distinguish politics from other disciplines. The temptation is then to look for any example of "authoritative allocation" and conclude that it belongs in the field of political science. Logically, the "authoritative allocation of values" within the family (which is the task of parents) would fall within the field of political science, which would be absurd.

Consider another example, this time from the field of aesthetics. The "formalist" school of aesthetics regards the essence of an artwork to be contained in its abstract form, irrespective of the reference, emotional impact, or moral significance of the artwork. It reduces the full multidimensional reality of the artwork to only one of its aspects. One formalist was art critic Clement Greenberg. Hilton Kramer writes that, in Greenberg's art criticism: "Artists appear... as anonymous inventors and manipulators of form-machines on the stage

of history; they exist as impersonal exponents of aesthetic laws.... There is in Mr Greenberg's writing a fear of the personal element in art, an embarrassment in the face of anything but the formal and the historical, which I find chilling and unreal" ("A Critic on the side of History: Notes on Clement Greenberg", in The Age of the Avant-Garde, N.Y.: 1973, p.503.)

The denial of multidimesionality in creation leads to reductionism in scholarship. Such reductionism has many distorting effects. One of them is the disintegration of the various branches of learning. Scholarship ought to reflect the coherence of creation. Each discipline should take its own place in the academic enterprise, neither attempting to extend its boundaries beyond their proper place, nor denying its proper relationships with other disciplines.

At the moment, scholarship is in a deep crisis of disintegration. Each discipline has pursued its own course, often directed by some underlying philosophy, without seeing how it relates to other disciplines. The result is that academics from different disciplines often cannot even talk to each other, never mind cooperate in a common enterprise. There has recently been an increase in efforts to promote "inter-disciplinary" studies, and these are welcome. But such studies would be better integrated if they were to investigate deeper philosophical and religious differences. Otherwise they will simply adopt an eclectic approach, taking aspects from each area and putting them together in a merely pragmatic way. Here is an important challenge to Christian students and scholars. Integration and "healing" can also be brought to the academic world.

****

SHORT ASSIGNMENT

Find a concrete illustration of one of the kinds of reductionism discussed above, or in Walsh and Middleton (180, 183). Try to identify what "irreducibles" are being explained away.

****

ADDITIONAL READINGS

1. James Olthuis, Self or Society: Is There A Choice? In this paper Olthuis shows how personal faith and maturity are indispensable for truly healing cultural and social change.

SHORT ASSIGNMENT

Christians have sometimes argued against getting involved in social and cultural action by saying that "You can't change society without changing the individual first". What is true in this statement? In what ways could it be misused?

****

2. Sidney Greidanus, **The Use of the Bible in Christian Scholarship**. This article discusses how we ought to allow the Bible to function in our academic activity, and warns against wrong uses. It helps clarify the points made in Wolters, pp.31-35.

There is no short assignment for this reading.

****

3. Paul Helm, **Developing a Christian Mind** and a response by Richard Russell, **Thinking Through a Christian Mind** (Third Way articles). In his article, Paul Helm argues for a position he calls "interactionism", the view that there is a "two-way traffic" between Scripture and scholarship. Richard Russell questions this view.

SHORT ASSIGNMENT

Identify the essential agreements and disgreements between the two articles and say which side you find more convincing.

****

UNIT SIX: MAJOR ASSIGNMENT OPTIONS

Intermediate

1. John V. Taylor, **Enough is Enough** (London: S.C.M, 1975) (114pp)

This book develops a profound critique of contemporary social and economic life, and shows how biblical insights can give practical direction for Christian lifestyle.

Essay question: Explain why proposals for changes in personal and family lifestyle like those suggested by Taylor are essential if larger structural change is to be possible.

2. Os Guinness, **Doubt: Faith in Two Minds** Chapters 5,10-15,17 (110pp)

Essay question: What principles can you identify in these chapters which might be relevant for a Christian view of counselling?

3. C.J.H. Wright, **Living as the People of God** Chapters 5-9 (100pp)

Essay question: Identify five features of contemporary society which seem to violate the biblical norms highlighted in these chapters. Suggest one specific step which could be taken in each case to move society nearer to biblical obedience.

4. C.S. Evans, **Preserving the Person** Chapters 7-12 (80pp)

Essay question: Summarize the key differences between the six Christian responses to reductionism in the human sciences, described in these chapters. How convincing do you find Evans' own position?

5. Charles Malik, **A Christian Critique of the University** (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1982)

In this book, Malik presents a trenchant critique of the damaging effects of secularism within the modern university and calls for a concerted Christian response. Compelling reading.

Essay question: If Walsh and Middleton were asked to write a critical review of his book, where would you expect them to agree and disagree with Malik's views?

Advanced

6. Bob Goudzwaard, **Capitalism and Progress** Chapters 11-21 (130pp)

Essay question: What have been the consequences of western society's lack of regard for God's norms for economy, technology, morality and justice? What changes would be necessary to reverse these consequences?

7. Alan Storkey, **A Christian Social Perspective** Chapters 3,5,14 (110pp)

Essay question: Show how the Christian view of knowledge and science developed in chapter 3 is the basis for the Christian perspectives on sociology and economics presented in chapters 5 and 14.

8. Arthur Holmes, **Contours of a Worldview** Chapters 1-3, 8-9, 13 (85pp)

Essay question: To what extent does Holmes think that Christian commitment (or faith) should govern Christian thinking?

9. Nicholas Wolterstorff, **Reason Within the Bounds of Religion** (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) Chapters 1-4, 7-17 (100pp)

This book argues cogently that Christian faith ought to control theoretical or scholarly work done by Christians. Recommended especially for students with an interest in philosophy.

Essay question: How does Wolterstorff think Christian faith should "control" theoretical work? Do you have any criticisms of his approach?

10. H. Evan Runner, **The Relation of the Bible to Learning** (St. Catharine's, Ontario: Paideia, 1982) Preface, Lectures I - IV (150pp)

This is an advanced analysis of how the Word of God should govern Christian scholarship. A preface provides some necessary background to the context of the lectures of which this book is the text. Recommended especially for students in philosophy and theology.

Essay question: What are the central features of Runner's critique of "autonomous reason" in its various expressions?

Further reading:

William Hasker, **Metaphysics: Constructing a World View** (Leicester: IVP, 1983) (Intermediate)

Arthur Holmes, **The Idea of a Christian College** (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) (Intermediate)

Francis Schaeffer, **The Christian Manifesto** (Basingstoke, Hants: Pickering, 1982) (Intermediate)

OCC is governed by an Academic Board consisting of British Christian scholars and educationists.

Academic Board:

Mr Alan Storkey, joint co-ordinator of pastoral studies, Oak Hill College, London.
Dr Tony Cramp, lecturer in economics and Fellow of Emmanuel College, Cambridge.
Rev. John Peck, head of College House, Suffolk.
Mrs Ann Holt, warden of the Cambridge Curriculum Development Centre, Cambridge.
Mr Jonathan Chaplin, Ph.D candidate in political theory at the London School of Economics.

The Academic Secretary, Adrienne Chaplin, and the Administrative Secretary, Ruth Edwards, can be contacted by writing to:-

57 St Barnabas Road,
Cambridge, CB1 2BX