

On Being a Reformational Philosopher: Spirituality, Religion, and the Call to Love

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Outline:

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1. Biography

Dates	Places	Schools	Churches
1950-1968	Escalon, California	Ripon Christian Schools	Escalon Christian Reformed Church
1968-1972	Sioux Center, Iowa	Dordt College	
1972-1977	Toronto, Ontario	Institute for Christian Studies	Hart House Fellowship (CRC)
1977-1981	Berlin and Amsterdam	Freie Universität Berlin; Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam	Hendrik-Kraemer-Haus & Kirche zur Heimat
1981-1985	Edmonton, Alberta	King’s University College	Garneau United Church
1985-2002	Grand Rapids, Michigan	Calvin College	Church of the Servant (CRC)
2002-now	Toronto, Ontario	Institute for Christian Studies & University of Toronto	Beach United Church
2012-now	Grand Rapids, Michigan	(Calvin College)	Westminster Presbyterian Church (PC-USA)

2. Spirituality and Religion

Often I hear people say, “I’m spiritual, but not religious.” I haven’t heard anyone say, “I’m religious, but not spiritual.” In a postsecular society, spirituality strikes many people as a good thing; religion, not so much. Unless they are hard-bitten secularists, people do not mind

saying that they yearn for connection with something greater than themselves; that they feel reverence for nature; or that a loved one who has died lives on in their hearts. Yet they are reluctant to embalm such spirituality within the trappings of organized religion, such as liturgical practices, scriptural teachings, and theological doctrines. Organized religion seems to squelch rather than foster their spirituality.

I strongly empathize with such people; some of them are my closest friends. I, too, often find organized religion less than spirit affirming or spirit filled. In fact, my life as a religious believer has been a continual search for authentically spiritual religious communities. Fortunately I have found these from time to time, and I currently participate in just such a community at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. During my early years in Toronto in the 1970s, precisely that combination of spirituality and religion excited and sustained me as a graduate student at ICS and as a member of the Hart House Fellowship at the University of Toronto, where I helped provide musical and liturgical leadership.

Yet I am sufficiently “traditionalist” to think that spirituality without religion is hard to sustain, although also sufficiently nontraditionalist to say religion without spirituality is not worth sustaining. The difficulty of sustaining spirituality without religion has three sides. First, no matter how pure you want your spiritual orientation to be, you usually need a religiously committed community to keep you on track. There are so many strong and competing spiritual forces in postsecular society—consumerism and individualism, for example—that one easily succumbs to them in the absence of religious partners. Second, the practices of religion have developed over the generations to help bring spiritual orientations to public expression. If you do not engage in such practices, you lose many of the resources to manifest and share your spiritual orientation. Spiritual orientation then becomes a merely personal or private matter, contrary to

what it means to be spiritual. Third, spirituality without religion often becomes haphazard because it lacks the guidance provided by the teachings or rituals of an organized religion. The non-religious person easily becomes a spiritual bricoleur, tinkering with whatever practices or ideas or leaders come one's way. Such haphazard spirituality is unlikely to provide reliable orientation for life. Of course, a deeply spiritual person can make up for these three disadvantages. But to do so requires a devotion and dedication that most people cannot muster on their own, even when supported by spiritual companions.

To this point I have used the terms “spiritual” and “religious” without defining them. I use “spiritual” in roughly the same sense as Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven use the term “religious,” and I use “religion” and its cognates in roughly the same sense as they use “faith.”¹ “Spiritual” pertains to the connected orientation of the entire human being or an entire community or an entire society or culture toward what matters most for them. This orientation is an all-encompassing direction in how one connects with others, and it can show up in many different, non-religious ways. Nationalism and consumerism are forms of spirituality where what matters most is either political or economic. Nature mysticism and the quest for individual authenticity are forms of spirituality where what matters most is either impersonal or deeply personal. Apart from nature mysticism, none of these specific forms of contemporary spirituality receives encouragement or endorsement from the core practices and teachings of traditional religions (even though we do find contemporary expressions of religion that embrace nationalism or consumerism or self-fulfillment). That's one reason why, as I suggested before, the pursuit of spirituality without religion can leave us vulnerable to spiritual forces that channel our devotion and dedication into directions that, in the long run, leave us spiritually empty.

“Religion,” by contrast, refers to institutionalized worship and faith. It involves a distinctive array of practices and organizations that have their own legitimacy and worth in relationship to other institutions. Worship services, for example, are different from political ceremonies or artistic performances, and as religious communities (not simply as buildings), churches or synagogues or mosques are distinct from businesses, families, and social clubs. Of course, there is a political dimension to worship services, and the arts play an important role in many liturgical events. So too, there are “business” and “social” sides to religious communities, and the ethical bonds among religious believers can be nearly as strong and as fraught as family ties. Yet, as a distinctive array of practices and organizations, religion has its own legitimacy and worth in a differentiated society such as our own.

What is that legitimacy and worth? What is the normative task of religion in a differentiated society? In my view, religion’s purpose is to help people worshipfully disclose the ultimate meaning of their lives—to find what ultimately sustains them in the face of both good and evil—and to do this while placing their hope and trust—their faith—in this source of ultimate sustenance. Insofar as people name this source “God,” I can say more simply that religion should help people worshipfully find and have faith in “God.” [By putting “God” in quotation marks, I indicate that this characterization is functional rather than prescriptive. I am not saying that, to count as a religion, an array of practices and organization must either be monotheistic or be directed toward the God of the Hebrew, Christian, or Islamic scriptures.] Typically, in my view, religionists have authoritative touchstones for their quest and their confidence, namely, the stories of faith in which “God” speaks to them. In scriptural religions, such touchstones are encapsulated in certain sacred writings, around which the activities and symbols of worship revolve. Religions also have meaning-ful rituals in which “God” shows up,

rituals that help their adherents to reenact the disclosure of religious meaning, to remember and celebrate their “God,” and to participate in “God’s” appearance. Both the teachings and the doctrines of a religion, insofar as it has them, arise from these stories and rituals and must in the end be true to them. The same applies to theology, insofar as a religion has a theology: its source and its test lie in the stories and rituals of this religion.²

3. Faith and Scripture

Given these preliminary remarks about spirituality and religion, let me now turn to the relation between faith and scripture. From here on, when I speak of faith, scripture, worship, and theology, I do so in the context of the Christian religion. I do not assume that all the claims to follow apply equally to Judaism or Islam or any other religion, although some might. I am not sufficiently well versed in the world’s religions to make generic claims about all of them beyond the few I have made already. As a life-long adherent of the Christian religion, however, I have more confidence making specific claims about it.

To begin, I would note that “faith and scripture” is a truncated theme. On my view of religion’s normative task, one should also speak about stories and rituals and about worship and meaning. Perhaps to focus on faith and scripture is a peculiarly Protestant thing to do—specifically, a remarkably Reformed thing to do. This focus is inadequate. Even in the context of Reformed Christianity, the stories of faith, the rituals of worship, and the search for meaningful disclosure are part and parcel of true religion. If we do not include the full scope of what religion comes to, we will be inclined to reduce faith to propositional beliefs and to treat scripture as little more than a source of such beliefs. This is a constant temptation, especially for philosophers and theologians, and it’s one I aim to resist. At a minimum, then, we need to discuss both faith and worship, and we need to consider both of them in relation to scripture and scholarship.

Let me tell a personal story to illustrate why we should expand our theme to include worship. In the Escalon Christian Reformed Church (CRC) where I grew up, the sacrament of the Eucharist was a somber affair. The service of communion, as we called it, took place only once every three months. On the Sunday before communion, the pastor read aloud a denominational document that admonished each of us to examine ourselves, confess our sins, and consider whether we were worthy to sup at the Lord's Table. From what I could tell as a child, the adults took this admonition seriously. Certainly my parents, especially my mom, seemed to undergo intense introspection as she prepared for communion. Indeed, some members would decide, upon reflection, not to take communion.

On communion Sunday the sacrament began with the pastor reading aloud an even longer document. This document laid out the denomination's understanding of "the Lord's Supper" and invited us to remember the Lord's death until he returns. Then the elders, all of them men, solemnly came to the communion table, picked up the trays of cubed Wonder Bread and minuscule wine glasses, and passed them along each row of pews. We children sat silently as church mice while each adult picked out an individual cube of bread and an individual glass of wine and, looking straight ahead, held them quietly until, on cue, everyone "partook" of communion. The ceremony ended with the rapid-fire rattle of shot glasses landing in hard-rubber cup holders on the back of each pew.

As the church custodians, my Dad and I arranged the communion furniture beforehand; my mother always washed the communion elements afterward; and my weekly chore was to dust all the pews. So I fully understood the mechanics of this ceremony. But its meaning escaped me. It was not so much a mystery as a puzzle. So far as I could tell, communion was a ritual to be observed, not a sacrament to be celebrated; only worthy adults, not children and unrepentant

sinner, could participate; and the point of the observance was to help individuals achieve or maintain a higher degree of moral purity. Only later did I realize that this mode of observance both reinforced and issued from the pietistic ethos and theological dogmatism that characterized the church of my youth.

I began to break out of such pietism and dogmatism when I studied at Dordt College and made my first acquaintance with reformational philosophy and theology. Only when I took up graduate studies at the Institute for Christian Studies (ICS) in Toronto, however, did a new way emerge for participating in the sacrament. Thanks especially to the liturgical leadership of the late Bert Polman and the wise pastoring of Morris Greidanus, Hart House Fellowship (the campus ministry of the CRC at the University of Toronto) began to incorporate the Eucharist into every Sunday morning service, with children included as a welcome presence. The ceremony became a joyous feast where we stood in circles to serve each other from delicious home-baked loaves of bread and handcrafted goblets of wine. (Joyce and I even included a symbolic version of this ceremony within our very nontraditional wedding!) Now I experienced the sacrament as a genuine communion of the saints celebrating the joy of renewal in God's world.

In those days, influenced by the New Jerusalem version of the Bible, we at ICS and Hart House Fellowship often referred to God as "Yahweh." I remember as if it were yesterday one Fall when Cal Seerveld and his graduate students travelled together to New York City in his old beat-up Rambler—we called it Cal's "kingdom car"—to attend the annual meeting of the American Society for Aesthetics, visit art galleries and museums, and take in a theatre performance (Peter Schaffer's *Equus*, as I recall). On Sunday morning Cal and I went to worship at a Christian Reformed Church in New Jersey. It was a communion Sunday. The ceremony

proceeded just as it had at Escalon CRC where I grew up. When the wine came to us in our pew, Cal and I picked out our tiny individual glasses. Just before taking our commemorative sips, however, we spontaneously turned to each other, made direct eye contact, and whispered, “Cheers to Yahweh!” It was a quietly graceful moment of liturgical liberation. Ever since, communion has been a joyous celebration, not a solemn observance, and this sacrament both enriches and sustains my life of faith. If you ask me why, contra Bertrand Russell, I am not a nonChristian, this is one reason I can give. I experience God’s loving presence and the communion of saints in the Eucharistic feast, and that renews my trust and uplifts my hope in the One who ultimately sustains me and the world in which I live.

Christian faith is enveloped in the practices of worship, as in a warm blanket; stripped of those practices, it would be a cold and paltry thing. That says something about the role of scripture in the life of faith and in the practices of faithful scholarship. Members of an authentically spiritual Christian community typically do not come to their scriptures as blank slates, waiting for the words and their message to imprint themselves on their passive minds. Nor do they come armed to the teeth with theological weapons, ready to beat the scriptural text into doctrinal submission. Rather, they come like children eager for a good story, ready to be surprised yet again, or maybe for the first time, by the storied good news. And, like a really good children’s story read or told aloud, the scriptures come alive for people of faith within the practices of worship, as they hear God speaking to them through the scriptures.

How do we hear the inscripturated stories of faith and listen for God’s voice? Certainly, we can sit down by ourselves or in a circle of family or friends, read the text, meditate on it, talk about it, consult commentaries on it, and the like. Maybe those who are academically inclined do this sort of thing more than others do. Yet the primary site for listening and learning is within the

worshipping community of faith. Within worship we hear the storied good news in the music, we see it in the liturgical art, we sing it together in the selected hymns, we receive it from the reading of scripture passages, we reflect on it through the homily or sermon, and we respond to it in prayers and offerings and other liturgical actions. In all of this we expect God to address us, to call us via the stories of faith to hope and trust in God, even as we await God's appearance within the rituals of our worship. When a sensitive or dramatic reading of scripture passages, for example, and the pastoral or prophetic delivery of a sermon speak to your heart, you hear the voice of God. When the choir's accomplished singing moves you to tears of joy or sorrow, or when a benediction delivered with compassion and conviction assures you of amazing grace, you witness the presence of God in our midst. I cannot explain scientifically how this happens, but I know it does. It takes place in my own life, and in the lives of those I worship with.

Earlier I described sacred writings as encapsulated stories of faith that serve as a scriptural religion's authoritative touchstone. That is how I see the Christian Bible. But what do "authoritative" and "touchstone" mean? Without wading into centuries of debate about divine inspiration, canonicity, and the like—about which I am no expert!—let me simply explain how I understand these terms. First, "touchstone." Historically a touchstone was a black stone used to test the relative purity of gold and silver. If you rubbed a pure piece of gold on the stone, rubbed another gold piece of unknown quality next to it, and then treated the rubbings with nitric acid, you could see the difference in the markings left by each piece and thus tell how pure the new piece was. So a touchstone was a way to test for quality in metals. By metaphorical extension "touchstone" has primarily come to mean a way to test for quality or genuineness. Secondarily it has also come to mean a quintessential feature or a peak achievement.

The Bible is a touchstone in both of these ways. It serves to test the quality of our faith, and it is the very heart and summation of what our hope and trust come to. The Bible is not the only test, and there is much more to our hope and trust than what the Bible contains. Yet, when push comes to shove, any other test (such as the testimony of fellow believers) and any other content (such as the historic creeds) receive their credibility in light of scripture. Scripture, you could say, is the touchstone of all touchstones in the life of faith.

That's why the scripturally encapsulated stories of the Christian faith are authoritative. Think about it. How exactly do the scriptures serve as the chief touchstone for faith? It's not as if they just sit there like black rocks, waiting for us to dump faith samples on them. Yet the scriptures, in their complex historical origins, their diverse literary forms, and their multi-layered hermeneutical transmission, are authoritative for those who would trust in the God they reveal. To understand this, we need to recognize who the scriptures say God is. According to the scriptures, God, as creator and sustainer of all, continually calls us to love God and all creation, offers trustworthy guidance as we respond to this call, and inspires us to continue day by day to walk in these ways. (This is how I would suggest a Trinitarian understanding of God without using traditional doctrinal terminology.) The scriptures are authoritative because they are completely reliable in revealing who God is and how we should respond. We find God's call to love resounding in the scriptures. We learn to follow the guidance God gives there. We inhale the inspiration the scriptures offer for a faithful walk with God. So the scriptures are authoritative, not as an inert touchstone, but as a vibrant medium for God's call and guidance and inspiration. Someone who wishes to follow Jesus will heed the call to love resounding in the scriptures, relying on them to point one's responses in fruitful directions, and receiving strength from the inspiration they offer. (Debates about "the inspiration of scripture" will always come up

short, it seems to me, if they never turn from asking how God inspires the scriptures to describing how God through the scriptures inspires us.)

This is not to deny that the scriptures as we have received them are the collected and literarily disparate writings of many human beings from diverse historical and societal settings, available to us only because of translators, archeologists, biblical scholars, and the like, and always already caught up in traditions of interpretation that every believer inhabits, whether one recognizes this or not. Rather it is to affirm why it is important to recognize the highly mediated character of the Bible. The reason this is important is not in order to deny the Bible's authoritative role within the life of faith but rather both to appreciate and to relativize all the human effort that enters its creation, transmission, and reception. In the end, the point of all this effort is so that people can worshipfully listen for God's voice and faithfully respond—so they can live the life of faith.

The life of faith, however, is not simply that part of our lives where we engage in overt worship, gathering with fellow Christians to listen and look for God. To lead the life of Christian faith is to live all of one's life in response to God's call and guidance and inspiration. It is to respond in one's buying and selling, in one's voting and debating, in one's parenting or friendships—to follow Jesus in all that one is, in every relationship one has, in everything one does. Or rather we *try* to do all of this, since so much of who we are and what we do is caught up in practices, institutions, and societal patterns over which we have little direct control. To lead the life of Christian faith is to have one's spiritual orientation set by the Christian community's inscripturated stories of faith and shared rituals of worship insofar as these disclose the God who calls and guides and inspires us, and to let this orientation permeate everything one is and does.

4. Christian Scholarship

That, in essence, also is what it means to be a Christian scholar. A Christian scholar is someone who seeks to have the spiritual orientation of one's scholarly work set by the scriptures and worship of the Christian community, insofar as these disclose the God of love. Hidden within this simple summary, however, are countless complications. For one thing, scholarship involves many different practices as well as many different results, practices such as teaching, research, writing, and administration, and results such as curriculum and courses, research findings and published writings, and the collective decisions and policies reached in university governance. Moreover, these practices and results are embedded in institutional, sectoral, and societal patterns over which an individual scholar has little say, such as the systems for evaluating students' work, the standards and operations of the academic profession, and the frameworks that govern the publication and dissemination of academic research and writing. Complications also arise from the side of Christianity. There seem to be so many different traditions of scriptural interpretation and liturgical practice and so many different ways in which Christians have expected these either to inform or not inform the practices and results of scholarship. Facing such complications, how should one actually pursue Christian scholarship?

Unless one is a complete individualist and thinks one can carve out an authentically Christian path in scholarship all on one's own, one needs either to embed one's work within a religiously inflected tradition of some sort or to recognize the tradition within which one's work already is embedded. In the discipline of philosophy, where I do most of my scholarly work, someone in North America does not have unlimited options. You could embrace Thomism of some sort, for example, or Radical Orthodoxy, or the Reformed Kuyperian tradition in one of its two offshoots—Reformed Epistemology and Reformational Philosophy—or a looser array of

Evangelical approaches. There might be other options stemming from the Eastern Orthodox tradition, say, or liberation theology, but I'm not sufficiently well versed in these to say whether they actually are or have become traditions *in philosophy*.

Not surprisingly, given my biography, I locate my own scholarship in the reformational tradition. Moreover, specific crystallizations of scripture and worship in this tradition serve as *Leitmotiven* in my work as a philosopher. Three of these stem from the Kuyperian movement in general. One is a theological narrative that always returns to everything having been created good and ever looks forward to a culminating renewal of all creation. A second, stemming from this narrative, is the conviction that members of religious communities and their organizations are called to be agents of renewal in culture and society, including scholarship and education. Third, such renewal is not simply about changing persons. It is equally about criticizing and changing cultural practices, social institutions, and the very structure of society where these impede the interconnected flourishing of all earth's inhabitants. In other words, my scholarship orients itself to the goodness and redeemability of creation and the call to renew and transform culture and society. Christian scholars from other traditions might not emphasize these themes, or they might have significantly different understandings of them. Even within the Kuyperian tradition, there would be those who beg to differ. For me, however, these themes are deeply consonant with the inscripturated stories of faith and the shared practices of Christian liturgy, as I have experienced them in the worshipping community.

Closely related to these Kuyperian *Leitmotiven*, three other faith-oriented themes guide my work, all three received and reworked from the reformational tradition in philosophy, namely, that an unfolding structural diversity is intrinsic to the goodness of creation, that human beings are responsible for the direction in which such diversity unfolds, and that the evil we are

called to resist often is embedded in the way society has come to be structured. In more abstractly philosophical terms, one needs to distinguish and interrelate structure, process, and direction, and this in turn must guide one's thoughts about structural diversity ("sphere sovereignty," in an older vocabulary), normativity ("societal principles," in my own vocabulary), and societal goodness ("interconnected flourishing," in my own terms).³

All of these considerations surface in my ongoing work on the general idea of truth, which I describe as a dynamic correlation between (1) human fidelity to societal principles and (2) a life-giving disclosure of society. I hope this work will contribute in some small way to a renewal of philosophy itself as well as a longer-term reorientation of both religious communities and society in general.⁴ Whether or not this will happen is not for me to say—it depends on so many factors beyond any individual's contribution or influence and, in that sense, it is in God's hands. Yet I experience such work as a deeply spiritual exercise, one that rings true to the Good News as I have received and pursued it within a worshipping community and in a specific intellectual tradition.

5. Reformational Philosophy

At this point you might ask to what extent this self-description of my work aligns with how other scholars in the Kuyperian tradition have described the contours of Christian philosophy. Dirk Vollenhoven, for example, says that Christian philosophy should be "in line with" scripture. Specifically, it should acknowledge the authority of the Bible as God's word and do justice to the biblical themes of God's sovereignty as creator, religion as God's covenant with humankind, and the interplay between humanity's radical fallenness and God's grace in Jesus Christ. Herman Dooyeweerd in his later writings claims that Christian philosophy should express the "biblical ground motive" of creation, fall, and redemption by way of the content it gives to

the central philosophical ideas of origin, unity, and coherent diversity. Henk Hart, my predecessor in systematic philosophy at ICS and my former instructor, suggests that Christian philosophy should articulate an ontology whose ultimate categories give consistent expression to ultimate assumptions of one's ultimate commitment (assumptions pertaining specifically to God as sovereign, God's Word and Spirit, the covenant between God and creation, creation's dependence on God, the Bible, knowledge and truth, and humanity's special calling).⁵ Nicholas Wolterstorff, my former colleague at Calvin College, says Christian scholars (including philosophers) ought to let the "belief-content" of their "authentic Christian commitment" function "as control" within their "devising and weighing of theories"—authentic Christian commitment being "the complex of action and belief" in which one's following of Jesus Christ "ought to be realized."⁶ Jacob Klapwijk calls for a "transformational philosophy" that critically assesses, selects, and appropriates "existing intellectual goods" in order to restructure and redirect their content and thereby incorporate them "into a Christian worldview."⁷

Each of these descriptions is only partially correct, it seems to me. Insofar as the scriptures are the authoritative touchstone for the Christian religion, Christian philosophers should seek always to align the practices and results of their scholarship with the Bible, as Vollenhoven says. The question is, how? Is it sufficient to pick out a few key themes crystallized in one's own *theological* tradition and use these as the central content of a *philosophical* touchstone? So too, the dynamic revelation ("ground motive") of creation, fall, and redemption—expanded eschatologically to include fulfillment—certainly should find expression in how one conceptualizes unity, diversity, and the origin of everything, as Dooyeweerd claims. Yet I wonder whether these philosophical ideas are the crucial ones for a Christian philosophy today and whether other ideas might be more important for expressing that dynamic revelation.

Again, giving expression to one's ultimate Christian commitment in an integral ontology à la Hart certainly has its strengths. But it runs the double risk of overly systematizing the life of faith and overly theologizing the categories of philosophy. Avoiding this double risk, Wolterstorff gives a very precise account of how scholarship and Christian commitment should intersect. Yet he equates the project of Christian scholarship with using certain beliefs to test theories, thereby reducing the scope of both scholarship, which involves an array of different practices and results, and the life of faith, where beliefs themselves derive from other religious practices. Klapwijk, by contrast, rightly emphasizes the need to discover and learn from insights outside one's own religious and intellectual tradition, but he treats a Christian worldview as a static litmus test, almost as if it, and not the scriptures-within-worship, were the authoritative touchstone of Christian philosophy.

Beyond these specific questions and concerns, however, I have two broader reservations about Kuyperian characterizations of Christian philosophy. As you might expect, one reservation has to do with their neglecting the importance of worship in religion as such and in the Christian life of faith, as well as its relevance for philosophy. My other reservation has to do with how religion and spirituality intersect. Whatever we take to be the authoritative touchstone for our life of faith, and for philosophy insofar as it belongs to our life of faith, this touchstone itself must disclose the God who calls, guides, and inspires us. In a Christian context, this means the scriptures-within-worship are authoritative *insofar as they disclose the God of love*. It also suggests that those who live according to this touchstone must remain spiritually open within their scriptural interpretation, within their worship practices, and, if they are scholars, within their scholarly pursuits. They need to remain open to being spiritually reoriented by God's self-disclosure.

Such openness to reorientation is crucial for both faith and philosophy. Without it, the life of faith can become self-enclosed and no longer attentive to new ways in which God calls us to love God and our neighbor as ourselves. So too, without openness to spiritual reorientation, the project of Christian philosophy easily becomes self-satisfied rather than self-critical concerning its own deepest assumptions. But self-criticism is required in any good philosophy. Indeed, it is doubly required in any good philosophy that aims to be faithful to scripture-within-worship. That is why, like Wolterstorff, I do not think Christian philosophy should aim first of all to be distinctive. Rather, it should strive to be faithful. Faithfulness, both in life and in philosophy, requires one to remain open to being spiritually reoriented by God's self-disclosure.

This notion of reorientation via divine self-disclosure adds important texture to my previous descriptions of faith and worship and of scripture and scholarship. For the Reformed tradition, and not only the Reformed tradition, does not restrict divine revelation to the vibrant medium of scriptures-within-worship. Indeed, the scriptures themselves testify to the broad scope of divine revelation: "The heavens are telling the glory of God," sings the psalmist (Psalm 19:1, NRSV), and Jesus is Immanuel, God with us, the Word of God made flesh, the Gospels proclaim. Accordingly, reformational philosophy has insisted all along on at least three ways in which the self-disclosure of God occurs: in creation, in scripture, and in Jesus Christ, all via the inspiration of God's Spirit. Moreover, if one understands creation broadly enough to include human history, culture, and society, then God's self-disclosure can occur in other religions as well as in scholarship that either ignores or actively rejects an alignment with scriptures-within-worship.

Such a capacious notion of how divine revelation occurs complicates the project of Christian philosophy. For in seeking to align one's work with scripture-within-worship, one also

needs to pay attention to how God calls and guides and inspires in the very stuff of creation and human life, including the contributions of other philosophers. This provides a better basis for “transformational philosophy,” as Klapwijk calls it, than an appeal to one’s Christian worldview, it seems to me.

Let me share a personal example. Only because of an intense engagement with Theodor Adorno’s negative dialectics, with its anguished reflections on ethics and metaphysics after Auschwitz, did I come to see suffering and societal evil as central topics for contemporary Christian philosophy. And I made this discovery because this engagement first happened during my sojourn in the geopolitically divided city of Berlin in the late 1970s and my exposure there to ecumenical liberation theology at Hendrik-Kraemer-Haus and to the teaching of German Lutheran theologian Helmut Gollwitzer. Suffering and societal evil are not central themes in the writings of Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd. After grappling with Adorno’s writings, however, in a city that still bore the marks of immense societally inflicted suffering, I could not in good conscience ignore or gloss over these themes. Nor could I ignore the importance of eschatological hope when we confront societal evil. Thanks in part to Adorno, both my life of faith and my work in philosophy underwent a profound spiritual reorientation, as God’s call to love came through to me in new and challenging ways. (That helps explain why my ICS inaugural address is subtitled “Suffering, Hope, and Wisdom.”⁸ It also helps explain why, in one of the first speeches I gave to Christian educators after becoming a professor of philosophy, I reformulated the reformational theme of creation, fall, and redemption in terms of alienation/solidarity, creativity/partnership, and liberation/communion—implicitly reversing the order of priority from creation to fallenness and, via the notion of “future liberation,” explicitly giving the reformational theme an eschatological variation.⁹)

6. Conclusion: Christian Philosophy

Perhaps my experience in Berlin helped create a lingering dissatisfaction with many attempts to circumscribe what counts as Christian philosophy. In any case, faith and philosophy are so richly variegated, and openness to spiritual reorientation is so vital to them, that the practices and results of Christian philosophy resist circumscription. Nevertheless, here is how I see the contours of the Christian philosopher's task: A Christian philosopher continually seeks to align the spiritual orientation of his or her philosophical practices and their results with the scriptures-within-worship of the Christian community, insofar as this authoritative touchstone discloses the God of love. One does this best within a religiously inflected tradition of scholarship that takes this touchstone seriously. Moreover, given the dynamic and historically embedded character of both philosophy and scriptures-within-worship, the Christian philosopher needs to remain vigilant and open—persistently vigilant in pursuing the project of alignment, and ever open to having one's philosophy spiritually reoriented by God's self-disclosure.

That, in my view, is what it means to be a follower of Jesus in philosophy. Christian philosophy is a spiritually oriented response, both in practices and in results, to the God of love, faithful to the scriptures-within-worship, and ever open to the surprising ways in which God calls and guides and inspires us to follow Jesus along the pathways of love. And even though my own response occurs in public settings—in the classroom, in the profession, and in the worshipping community of faith—, it arises from a very personal calling. For, as I wrote in my memoir *Dog-Kissed Tears*, “Love is the thread that stitches together my dreams. It is the refusal amid suffering to let go: to let go of life, to let go of hope, to let go of the ones I love most.”¹⁰ To do philosophy in response to such love: that is why I am a Christian philosopher in the reformational tradition.

¹ For a more detailed discussion of spirituality and religion, see Lambert Zuidervaart, “Religion in Public: Passages from Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*,” *University of Toronto Journal for Jewish Thought* 1 (April 2010), <http://cjs.utoronto.ca/tjtt/>. A revised version of this essay will appear in Lambert Zuidervaart, *Religion, Life, and Society: Essays in Reformational Philosophy, Volume 1* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, forthcoming).

² I understand theology to be disciplined, critical, and construction reflection on the stories, rituals, and meaning of a religion and on the religious community and organizations within which these take shape.

³ I understand philosophy to be disciplined, critical, and constructive reflection on the structures, processes, and direction of the entire creation and on creation’s origin and destiny.

⁴ I give a brief reflection on why the topic of truth is important for both Christianity and philosophy in “Truth and Goodness Intersect,” *ICS Perspective* 48.2 (September 2014): 8-9.

⁵ Hendrik Hart, *Understanding Our World: An Integral Ontology* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), 325-59.

⁶ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 76, 72. Wolterstorff, 72-3, succinctly summarizes what he takes authentic Christian commitment to be.

⁷ Jacob Klapwijk, “Reformational Philosophy on the Boundary between the Past and the Future,” *Philosophia Reformata* 52 (1987): 105. See also Jacob Klapwijk, “Antithesis, Synthesis, and the Idea of Transformational Philosophy,” *Philosophia Reformata* 51 (1986): 138-52.

⁸ See Lambert Zuidervaart, “Earth’s Lament: Suffering, Hope, and Wisdom,” Inaugural lecture, Institute for Christian Studies, Toronto, November 21, 2003.

⁹ See Lambert Zuidervaart, “Salt for Humankind: Challenges of Academic Discipleship” (1982/2002), the revised version of “Salt for Humankind: Blessings in Educational Discipleship,” a keynote address given at the Annual Convention of the Christian Educators Association of Alberta, October 21, 1982.

¹⁰ Lambert Zuidervaart, *Dog-Kissed Tears: Songs of Friendship, Loss, and Healing* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, Resource Publications, 2010), 43.