

A Reformational Manifesto

The Gospel and Reformational Christianity

Preamble

The immediate purpose of this pamphlet is to introduce the work of the newly formed *Reformational Christian Studies Trust*. The objectives of the Trust are basically scholarly and educational in character. Furthermore, although espousing to be Christian, our outlook is neither primarily theological nor primarily oriented to the life of the churches. While learning from the fullness of the Scriptures, our vision may be said to relate to the way in which the Hebrew prophets drew attention to the fullness of the covenantal calling to humankind to care for and develop creation in a spirit of wholehearted service to God. Our publication program is wide ranging, seeking a contemporary furtherance of the practical and theoretical ongoing transformation of the Greek and modern Western intellectual tradition - offering a biblical perspective upon the philosophical, scientific, political, artistic and other dimensions of this heritage. In this biblical sense, the word 'reformational' refers both to an inner attitude of the renewal of our hearts by the Holy Spirit in tandem with the responsibility to engage in a wide spectrum of cultural pursuits. We claim that the broad contours of this outlook are also deeply in tune with the Good News of the Kingdom of God proclaimed in the New Testament.

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1. Introduction

When a young man protesting at the site of the proposed meeting of the G7 in Germany was asked recently just what really concerned him, he answered:

‘The policies of the Western industrial countries stand for environmental destruction, poverty, refugee problems, genetic technology, nuclear energy, wars, arms trade, hedge funds and the erosion of social welfare’¹

Of course, this is not an exhaustive list or even a summary of all the problems of our world. We could add: climate warming, growing inequality between rich and poor, moral problems such as drug abuse, abortion, a growing acceptance of euthanasia, growing structural unemployment. But perhaps the more fundamental issue concerns the spiritual roots that drives this modern, largely secularist culture

We suggest that it arises from the modernist eighteenth century Enlightenment obsession with science and the scientifically designed technics that produce our material prosperity. This has led to the attempt to use the measure of GDP (Gross Domestic Product) as a measure of productive economic life providing a precise index of our broader cultural well-being. Whilst this so-called ‘objective’ measure of the growing GDP of ‘the economy’ is not in and of itself wrong, as an overall measure of our cultural and spiritual wellbeing it is thoroughly distorted, one that is not limited to the advanced nations of the world. It has increasingly become the dream of other nations of the world, as exemplified by the pressures for large numbers of people to enter Britain and France.

The idea that these deep seated drives have religious roots as expressions of modern idolatry would be greeted as nonsense to most people in this secular

¹ *Die Zeit*, 2015/no 21, 21 May, page 6.

world. In its more open and liberal forms, this world may have reserved a place for the God who made the heavens and the earth, and who has come to us in His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. However, its basic secular commitment has construed religion as something at the periphery of a life centred on the secular, one that is generally considered both private and optional. Otherwise, so the claim goes, it causes the kind of strife and mayhem that disrupts social peace and harmony – exemplified by Ireland and the Middle East. Hence, it is something we all need to learn to get rid of. In this light, the place of religion is considered limited to our private inner rooms. It is not, in the normal course of events, permitted to have any significance in the public civil or political spheres of this secular world.

Few would want to deny that the greatest social and cultural force for division, hardship and strife in the twentieth century was created by the all-pervasive influence of such ideologies as Nazism, Fascism, Capitalism and Communism. Today such forces are considered secular. They are not considered religious in any public sense. However, maybe there is something wrong with the way we have been brought up to think about the place of religion in human life. What do we mean, for example, by an appeal to the depths of our hearts? More to the point, what is meant by the way in which the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments refer to the need for both men and women to be circumcised of heart?² Might it just have something to do with the way that we humans – in both our secular and worship life – live out everyday lives in the home, at school, at our jobs, our political and other meetings, even our sports and leisure life? Might it just be that we do indeed live life from the roots of our hearts – as integral selves that express themselves in all of these spheres but, at the same time, operate from a realm in which all is united behind them all, as we stand naked before God.

In this light, might it not be that for much of the time we are spiritually asleep, almost oblivious of the ways in which the roots of our lives are captive to spirits that drive and direct us in all that we do. Might it not be that some, or even most of these driving spirits are what used to be described as gods with a small ‘g’ and that, against such idolatry, the Biblical calling was ‘to love and serve’ only the God who created the heavens and the earth? Might it not be that the worship and service rendered to these ‘gods’ is a distortion of the context of the covenantal arrangement made between God and all of humankind made in the image of God? Might it not be that this God acted in Jesus Christ to redeem the human race into the renewal of this covenant as the expression of the coming of the Kingdom of God and the prospect of the New Jerusalem?

² Deuteronomy 10: 12-22, esp 10:16; Jeremiah 4:4; Rom 2:25-29, esp 2:28-29.

In this light it might just be the case, for example, that the modern university is affected by modern secular gods, becoming in its own right a key contributor to the further secularising of our corporate and individual life? In suggesting this, we are not suggesting that the organised church be more involved with the running of the university. We are, in the first place, suggesting that the university needs to reflect on the possibility that its erstwhile description as ‘a degree factory’ might really have something in common with the running of the production line of a factory. After all, both are motivated by the belief that they should be efficient, cost-effective and supply as many goods/graduates as possible with the ability to drive the machine that produces all the skills and technical goods required for our material prosperity. In the second, we are suggesting that the university, as it has developed in the course of human history, is *primarily concerned* with a universal form of theoretical and other knowledge that is not primarily directed to the service of the gods of technicism, economism, scientism and human domination.

In this light, we suggest that the protests of the youth at the recent G7 meeting Germany, have a significance that we all, not only our senior politicians and academics, need to reflect upon.

2. A Sketch of the Primary Cultural and Spiritual Context of Modern Life

The immediate cultural and religious context in which we find ourselves in the Western world is one that is beset by two wide-ranging problems that have very deep spiritual roots. The first is evident in a wide ranging set of factors that may be highlighted by the impossibility of the hope of the developing countries to achieve the present level of the material waste and affluence of the Western world. The contribution of the so-called ‘first world’ may be euphemistically called excessive to the extent of exporting its own garbage so that the clean-up undertaken in China, for example, simply adds more pollution to the atmosphere were this to be done in the US and other Western countries. Our over-abundant production of garbage and green-house gases, our over-utilization of natural resources coupled with the continuing threat of the spread of environmental degradation and global-warming seems to be uncontrollable. This exposes the second wide ranging problem. Democracy may be a great system of government when the bulk of the citizenry are both well-informed regarding the complex issues affecting the wider management of the earth, and an equally keen sense of the calling of the authority of the state to wisely exercise its powers to ‘make

and enforce law' in the effort to help deal with these matters. However, once these conditions are undermined by forms of populism that would either over-exaggerate individualistic liberties or else seek to coerce the state to do the jobs that rightly fall to other social structures, then the stage is set for 'the will of the people' to lower the level of public debate. This, in turn, can lead to the undermining of the responsible freedoms of marriages, families, industry, farming, commerce, education, the arts, the churches, the sciences and the welfare agencies to fulfil their own particular callings in a faithful cooperation with the exercise of the power of the state to monitor the just and fair interests of them all. The continuing rise of family violence, child abuse, the excessive use of drugs and alcohol and the continuing rise of divorce is thus a symptom of deeper potential problems produced by a public with the full rights of universal adult suffrage, but with a seeming great difficulty exercising it responsibly.

Another symptom of our condition is the rise, since September 11, 2001, of the exercise of forms of civic and political terrorism. These have been inspired by a resurgence of religious-style movements directed at the way in which Western colonial influence, its secularism, its worldly affluence and its apparent sympathy with the autocratic regimes that have ruled their homelands. The religious nature of this terrorism has caught many in the West napping. For more than a century now the dominant ideological expectation has been for the (apparently) self-evident universal secularising trends triumphing in the West to be reproduced everywhere. The advent of religious-style terrorism therefore counts as an important wakeup call for our need to revise the nature and character of *religiousness*, if not of what is called organised religion. Religiousness – in the form of communal spiritualities capable of giving the inner drive motivating the purposes of the ways in which the various human cultural pursuits are pursued – have, in fact, been powerfully operative in the recent history of the Western world and is imperialist impact everywhere. The ideologies of Nazism, individualistic Capitalism and Communism are all significant cases in point.

As noted in our Introduction, these wide-ranging problems are also reflected in the ways in which the modern University has trodden a path towards the 'degree factory.' Although this description is probably unfair in the extent of its implied criticism, it nonetheless does capture something of the level of commercialism characterising the tone of the spirits of the times in which we live. This, amongst other things, severely threatens the very idea of the University as the primary purveyor of the diversity and universality of theoretical truth in the very wide range of disciplines of the intellectual culture of both the Western and non-Western worlds. At the time of the emergence of the University in the Western world in the twelfth and thirteenth century, it began to vie with the Church in this role, and for centuries the two institutions were more or less at peace – during the time that Scholastic philosophy reigned supreme. However,

during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries an increasing antagonism developed, especially in the wake of the secularist emphases taken up by many of the University institutions. Theology, the former Queen of the sciences, was dethroned. Secular science and the human expression of freedom in the Humanities began to reign supreme. However, the role of the University as the primary purveyor of the intellectual culture of the Western world has gradually been overtaken by that of a different role. From the vantage point of the student this is that of the need to be able to earn a living that enables her or him to partake of the huge variety of material goodies that are available 'on the market.' From the vantage point of the managers of companies and the bureaucrats running the state apparatus, the prime task of the University is one of training people in the abilities to exercise the technocratic expertise needed to run the sheer complexity of the commerce, banking, electronics, computing, scientific know-how, technology, farming, law and engineering required to maintain the order of our modern metropolis.

The result of the high level of academic specialization together with the virtual abdication of the role of philosophy to give any lead in the theoretical articulation of the way the cosmos might demonstrate a unifying vision for all disciplines is the emergence of what we may term 'the Multiversity.' Together with the over-emphasis upon its role of providing a training for the modern equivalent of trades and professions, the very Idea of the University, as it developed from the precursors to the Western world until recent times, is under threat. The distinction between the task of equipping students to get jobs to enable them to contribute to the economy (it could be argued that even the age-old professions of lawyers and medical doctors succumbed to this fate), providing them with the opportunity to explore and evaluate the intellectual and spiritual challenges that prepare them, as future leaders, to exercise responsible and mature innovatory policies that are informed by a wise and critical appreciation of our history, is depriving us of the needed prophetic voices that are able to rebuke our short-sighted foolishness on many issues. We desperately need to be able to evaluate and preserve the expertise of particular disciplines within a context that is structured by a more universal and integrated view of the world that is able to challenge us to impart some genuine sense of direction to the future world that will be inhabited by our children and grand-children.

All of these problems have deep spiritual roots that basically arise from the influence of the eighteenth century Enlightenment (especially in France) that sought to replace the largely moribund Church and its theology, coupled with the *ancien regime* of divine right monarchies, by the equally dogmatic secularist emphasis upon Reason, Science, Technology and Education, unaided by the organised religion of the Churches.

Along with the immense benefits conferred by this optimistic secularist creed the twentieth century has reaped an equally tragic underbelly in the downside of its hopes and dreams as inspired by the worship and service of its gods of Reason, Science, Technology and Education. The immense scale of modern technology upon weaponry and warfare became very apparent in the Great War of 1914-18, whose centenary we currently 'celebrate'. This was followed in World War II by the huge down-side that resulted from the unlocking of the horrendous resources of the energy within the atom, as it unleashed its absolute destructive terror upon innocent civilians at Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, heralding the Cold War and its aftermath in the many conflicts in the Middle East.

One of the most far-reaching longer-term influences on the secularisation of the Western world was the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*, in 1859. On the one hand this was a great scientific achievement that challenged the very foundations of the biological sciences from the time of Aristotle. At the same time, if we advocate a view of science that is to be relatively free of the influence of irrefutable 'metaphysical speculations', then its overall methodology needs to be better appreciated. This may be understood from an analysis of the structure of Darwin's masterpiece. *The Origin* actually presents two related but nonetheless distinct theories, something that is evident from a cursory look at the contents page. The first few chapters, sometimes called the 'special theory' with obvious analogies with Einstein and relativity, follow the dictates of a Baconian-style methodology that tries to stick very close to the facts, taking care not to over-generalise and go beyond their legitimate empirical generality. This is the pattern of the argument in the first five chapters. They have as their main goal the demonstration that the planned breeding of pigeons and domestic animals demonstrate the ability of variations in the heredity passed on to the next generation. This, together with careful 'breeder selection' policies, is able to effect small but significant changes in their biological form. To this he adds the implications of the features of his celebrated study of the finches on the Galapagos Islands. He broadly succeeds in this first goal of showing that new varieties, if not new species, are capable of emerging as a consequence of both 'breeding selection' and what he refers to as 'natural selection.'

The second theory, sometimes called the 'general theory,' is both far more speculative and far more radical. It claims that the natural processes of variations in the heredity passed from one generation to the next - evidenced in the 'special theory' - apply universally. This offers a comprehensive account of how all living creatures have gained their present specificity – in terms of the taxonomy of phyla, class, order, family, genus and species. The tree of life presents the picture of all living forms

growing in complexity and diversity from a common trunk that divides first into large branches or sub-trunks, then into smaller branches and twigs, and finally into leaves. This tree-of-life image was accepted - in some form or other – by most scientists in the late nineteenth into the twentieth century.

Contrary to popular belief, however, this was not initially seen as the triumph of Darwinism – understood as the small variations in biological form that were then weeded out by processes of natural selection. In fact, as an integral part of their adoption of the general idea of ‘evolution’ most biologists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, did not restrict themselves to the Darwinian mechanism inherent to Darwin’s special theory. Instead they were open to a variety of the means by which evolutionary change came about. This meant that, in the widespread adoption of what we have called the general theory of evolution, there was a considerable openness to a variety of explanations as to how species were able to change from one generation to the next.³

It was the Neo-Darwinism developed in the 1930s and 1940s that saw the resurgence of the exclusivity of the combination of genetic random mutations in conjunction with natural selection as having the ability to be able to explain ‘the design of nature that had no room for any kind of metaphysical source of design.’ This group of scientists included Julian Huxley, J.B. Haldane, Ernst Mayr, and G.G. Simpson, and its chief modern advocate is, of course, Richard Dawkins. Generally it denoted the bringing together of Gregor Mendel’s theory of Genetics with Charles Darwin’ theory of evolution by natural selection. The emphasis on genetics was supposed to be able to provide the chance variations – as mutations – in the variations of heredity passed on from parents to children. Those least well equipped for survival in the natural environment were then weeded out by processes of natural selection, and so the evolution of species was deemed to come about in very small increments. Then, with the discovery of the molecular structure of DNA in 1953, the more precise chemical character of the gene began to emerge, and with it the whole way in which DNA functioned in the switching on and off of gene replications in the production of proteins in the cell.

This serves to introduce the emergence of Christian Fundamentalism, particularly in the United States of America, as an example of our second principal ‘democratic’ feature of our problematic current cultural and religious environment. The significance of this movement for the polarization between those adopting the broader

³ Refer, for example to Peter J. Bowler, *The Non-Darwinian Revolution: Reinterpreting a Historical Myth*, Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992, and his *The Eclipse of Darwinism*, Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992.

contours of the materialist and anti-theistic outlook provided by a generalized comprehensive evolutionary vision, on the one hand and a ‘creationist movement’ appealing to the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments - as if they offered an elemental form of science, is very well known. However, while the Scriptures do present us with a more comprehensive picture of the origins and purposes of the cosmos, with human beings in particular, being given the task to care for and develop its God-given potential, its spiritual antithesis with the humanistic naturalism, challenges us to provide a theoretical account of the origin and genesis of the cosmos under the lawful guiding hand of the Creator that can stimulate a genuine alternative to all-encompassing materialism promoted by people such as Richard Dawkins.

A good example of the more materialist and anti-theistic outlook supposedly offering a more open and conciliatory outlook was provided by Julian Huxley, grandson of Darwin’s ‘bulldog,’ Thomas Huxley. As one of the architects of Neo-Darwinism, Julian Huxley penned a significant opening essay called *The Humanist Frame* that also entitles a book that includes particular contributions to a wide range of human cultural spheres presented by a wide range of British authors.⁴ Huxley’s essay can be seen as a contribution to the further development of the Radical Enlightenment project pioneered by the seventeenth century philosopher Baruch Spinoza.⁵ The work of the latter thinker entitled *Theological-Political Treatise* (known in its time under its Latin title *Tractatus Theologico – Politicus*) was described as ‘a book forged in hell’ written by the devil himself.⁶ In this book that Spinoza developed the basis and the implications of treating God as the equivalent of Nature and at the same time tried to bring a unify this as the metaphysical substance of the universe by seeing it is having both an aspect of mind and an aspect of geometrical extension, thus endeavouring to bring the Cartesian dualism along these lines into a unified substance. In the wake of Darwin’s theory, two British thinkers – C. Lloyd Morgan and Samuel Alexander⁷ – tried to develop a philosophy of Emergent Evolution in which the word ‘evolution’ symbolised both the innovations of new levels of reality – in particular from inanimate matter, to living things, and then mind – as well as the unfolding of

⁴ Julian Huxley, (author and editor) *The Humanist Frame*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1961.

⁵ See, for example, the account of the early seventeenth century precursor to the later and more well-known later Enlightenment of Voltaire and Diderot, given by Jonathan Israel in his *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650-1750*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

⁶ See Steven Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell: Spinoza’s Scandalous Treatise and the Birth of the Secular Age*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011, ppxi-xv.

⁷ C. Lloyd Morgan, *Emergent Evolution*, London: Williams and Norgate, 1927; Samuel Alexander, *Space, Time and Deity* :Gifford Lectures, 1916-18,

progressive innovations at each particular level of reality.⁸ All this provided the background against which to understand Julian Huxley's own contribution in *The Humanist Frame*. He simply developed the evolutionary picture of a godlike Nature emerging into the form of a humanity that undergoes a psycho-social evolution that, in particular, is demonstrated in the various religions developed by humans in their quest for meaning and significance. Significantly, however, any form of monotheistic religion is excluded - it is considered by him as outmoded by the growth in scientific knowledge.

Within this broader context, various contributions in more recent years have seen a much more sophisticated critique of what may be called the Neo-Darwinian worldview and its overall philosophy of biology. Some of the more significant contributions to this criticism have come from people, such as Stephen Meyer and Michael Behe, allied with what has been termed the Intelligent Design movement.⁹ In more recent years, however, a contribution has been made to the significant critical role of theories in science. Thomas Nagel, an American philosopher of standing, has offered a timely criticism that avoids many features of the supposed religion-science polarity of this debate. His recent book is entitled *Mind and Cosmos*¹⁰ and has, as its provocative subtitle *Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is almost certainly false*.

This book is significant precisely because, while it shares with people like Meyer and Behe, a critique of the Neo-Darwinian naturalistic worldview, it does not advocate a recognisably theistic stance akin to that of Intelligent Design.¹¹ Indeed, in its attempt to claim that thought and mind may not simply be reduced to the laws of physics and chemistry, but exhibit an intrinsic aspect of the cosmos – one that together with the physical, provides a more adequate foundation for the modern secularist outlook - might be more correctly construed as a recent attempt to rehabilitate the outlook of Spinoza. Indeed, at one point he says that 'The unifying conception' that he advocates is not only incompatible with Neo-Darwinism, but 'is also incompatible with the kind of theism that explains certain features of the natural world by divine intervention which is not part of the natural order.'¹² Rather, its principal argument

⁸ For a good historical survey of this, refer to David Blitz, *Emergent Evolution*, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2010.

⁹ Stephen Meyer, *Signature in the Cell*, New York: HarperOne, 2009; *Darwin's Dilemma*, New York, HarperOne, 2013. Michael Behe, *Darwin's Black Box* New York: Free Press, 1996; *The Edge of Evolution*, New York: Free Press, 2007.

¹⁰ Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, Oxford New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p7.

¹² We will have occasion to return to this matter in Section 5 of this essay.

concerns the character of what he calls the activity of ‘mind’ in the cosmos, with a more specific quasi-empirical orientation to what it means to be human, claiming that the materialistic Neo-Darwinist stance, for more than one hundred and fifty years now, has had a significant role in shaping the dominant but narrow scientific outlook of our culture, has been a significant contributor to our spiritual malaise.¹³ In itself, of course, this criticism is not new. It is witnessed in the traditions of ‘Social Darwinism’ in relation to the diverse ideologies of Nazism (conflict between races), Communism (conflict between classes) and capitalism (ultra-emphasis upon the economic initiative of individuals/ groups legitimising the cut-throat tactics of competitiveness within business and industrial life.) that have done much to shape the West from the late nineteenth to the twenty-first century.

We cite all of these various contributions as significant indicators in the ‘increasing temperature’ of our age. From this kind of recognition of our cultural and social context, we turn now to an attempt to authenticate the spiritual roots of the starting point that we ourselves wish to advocate, and from which it is our intention to try to make a contribution, however small, to our collective possible future.

3. Introduction to the Integral Character of the Gospel.

Our civilizational condition is one that, on the surface, is full of activity. Digging deeper, however, there is a strong sense of it losing its way. Hence, the good news of the Gospel of God, set out in the New Testament, strikes a very contemporary theme. It is the way in which God has indeed done much that is of significance for the giving of spiritual health- as salvation – for a humanity that has lost its way in the world. In our day this humanity, having presumptively placed itself in charge of a world that does not really belong to them (or us), has somehow found itself with a profound sense of loss concerning the spiritual understanding of the roots of its tasks and mission in the world. However, who says that humankind actually *owns* the world? Biblical teaching makes it very plain that we – humankind – may be *in charge* of the world. However, it emphasise just as strongly that we are definitely *not its owner*. Rather, our status is that of the *stewards* put in charge of the world, having been given the task to rule, care for and develop it as God’s vice-regent. Furthermore, this God-given task has *not* been given simply to great clerics and political leaders. It has been given to all of us, both together and individually. Our secular tasks – in the home, at school, on the farm, in business and the factory, the university and elsewhere, every bit as much as what is involved with church and private devotions, is concerned with

¹³ In some important respects, Nagel’s point of view may be thought of as widening the broadly evolutionary, but denying the exclusively Darwinian mechanism and allowing for the cosmic reality of mind as bringing order and development to the process. As such, it is a form of *ennoetism* that, in the hands of Spinoza, sought to provide a diverse monism of matter and spirit/mind involving God as Nature, replacing the various dualisms of his mentor Rene Descartes.

the God-given calling of the whole human race to manage and care for the earth. As the words of John 3.16, in a modern translation of the original Greek, put it:

*This, you see, is how much God loved the world: enough to give his only, special son, so that everyone who believes in him should not be lost but share in the life of God's new age.*¹⁴

This translation of the words of John 3.16 has a significant twist to it. It replaces the more familiar words of 'the gift of eternal life' with the 'sharing in the life of God's new age'. It is perhaps significant that neither this nor the older translations mention the future life in heaven, espoused by the typical Greek view of Plato, that have inspired the 'heavenly' religious impulse of much of Christianity for centuries. Indeed this 'other-worldly' concern has its origins in the way the Eastern-imported views of Orphism and then of the Pythagoreanism of the sixth century BC came to make their contribution to the Greek outlook.¹⁵ But it is much more difficult to read the 'heavenly destiny' of human life into the translation due to Tom Wright, cited above.

The more traditional translation has often been described as 'the Gospel in a Nutshell'. As such the words of this short text speak of God's Love, the World, believing in Jesus the Son of God and Eternal Life. However, the usual way in which these terms have been taken to relate to one another, leaves very much to be desired. Indeed, they have very often been understood so as to emphasise the love of God for humans in ways that separate our spiritual life from our God-given calling 'to both till and keep the garden of creation' that is a very central feature of our humanity, biblically defined, as God's image-bearers.

This is true to the extent that the verse has and continues to be often read so that it focuses upon our hopes of the eternal salvation of our souls in a disembodied heaven once we die. The following rendition of the words of the John 3.16, for example, was once found on the blackboard in the backroom kitchen, study area of a church:

*the people of
For God so Loved ^ the World, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him
should not perish but have eternal life.*

¹⁴ John 3.16. N.T. Wright, *The Kingdom New Testament: A Contemporary Translation*, Harper Row, 2011.

¹⁵ See pp73-89 of Werner Jaeger, *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers*, Chapter 5 entitled *The Origin of the Soul's Divinity*, Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 1967.

There can be no doubt that the efforts of those responsible for putting this on the blackboard were motivated by very noble intentions: the bringing home of the very personal and individual way the living person Jesus Christ wants to relate to and influence our lives, today. However, whilst this attempt to emphasise that God's love for the world is *not* abstract and far off, but rather focused upon the reality of our individual human-ness, is understandable, it is all too easily able to wrench our heart relationship to God from its God-given context of 'the world' as the creation in which we are called to be stewards and managers of something that actually belongs, *not* to humans, but to God. The whole verse thereby misses the major emphasis given to it by the Biblical outlook upon 'the world' – as the earthly domain given to humankind to care for and develop to the glory of God.

This is particularly apparent once we take into account the meaning of the verse 17, the one that follows the quotation given above:

After all, God didn't send the son into the world to condemn the world, but so that the world could be saved by him.¹⁶

It should be noted that this rendering of verse John 3.17, again from Tom Wright, is a lot less controversial, as a cursory look at the King James Version, will verify. The thrust of the mission of Jesus, as Messiah, to *save the world*, rather than *escape from it* to some disembodied heaven, is therefore incontestable.

To appreciate something of the nineteenth historical (in)-significance of the gospel we might cite the sharp criticism of Karl Marx's dismissal of the Christianity of his day as 'the opiate of the masses'. In more biblical terms we suggest that this nineteenth century 'half-gospel,' had a 'spiritual' meaning that was based upon 'a split of our heart or soul relationship to God' from our overall human responsibility to shape and cultivate (reforming) the natural, social and cultural dimensions of 'the world'. Of course Marx's accusation against the Christianity of his day has a lot more baggage to it than this. Nonetheless, we may affirm that, for much the greater part, the Christianity of Marx's day was either characterised by a genuine spiritual conversion experience coupled to a 'heavenly escape' from the world or else a social involvement (the social gospel) in the world, that was short on preaching the need for a radical change of heart. Thus the embracing of God's grace by faith - as the spiritual fuel through which to engage with the huge challenges of the secular realms of culture - such as social welfare, agriculture, industry, medicine, science, scholarship, the arts, engineering and technology, is integral to the gospel. However, the emphasis upon our 'spiritual' life that seeks to separate it from cultural and social engagement is

¹⁶ Ibid, John 3.17.

equally deficient. This is evident, for example, from the preaching of John the Baptist in the Judean wilderness. The people, in positively responding to his message, then asked him: What shall we do? He replied:

Anyone who has two cloaks, should give one to someone who hasn't got one. The same applies to anyone who has plenty of food.¹⁷

Does this apply to nations as well as to individuals? The sheer impossibility of the countries of 'the third world' 'catching up' with the level of the excessive use and waste of the resources of creation that is presently characteristic of 'the first world,' should cause us in the West to seriously re-consider what this might mean.

4. The Split between Spiritual and Secular in Ancient Gnosticism and Beyond.

The manner in which the outlook of the 'spiritual half-gospel' has posed very pertinent questions concerning the very character of the gospel may be traced back to the gnostic movement of first three centuries of the early Christian movement. The gospel – as the Good News of the Kingdom of God, announced with the coming of Jesus, as Messiah - was forced to contend with the promise of a salvation both in this life and beyond it into a realm of pure spirit. The challenge of this 'ultra-spiritual' strain was very strong, particularly in the Eastern part of the Roman Empire that, geographically, is what we call today the Middle East. This broader cultural world was not only Greek-speaking; its general religious and cultural ethos went under the name of *Hellenism*, a word that derives from the Greek *Hellene* meaning Greek.

The beginnings of this *Hellenistic* period of human history date from the military conquest of the Persian Empire by Alexander the Great around 330-320 BC. This conquest was followed by the establishment of many Greek *poleis* or city states throughout the region, each with their forms of Greek culture – illustrated by the gymnasium and their naked participation in various games, discussions in the agora, the performance of Greek plays in the theatre, as well as the worship of various deities in the temples dedicated to them.

In the centuries before the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the broad thrust of *Hellenism* was mainly in one direction - from the Greeks to the various long-standing traditions of Egypt and Mesopotamia. The latter traditions may be illustrated by the seeking of omens from the gods who were considered responsible

¹⁷ Ibid, Luke 3:11.

for controlling human destiny, as with the case of the Babylonian traditions of astrology. In the early centuries following the emergence of the nascent Christian movement, however, there was a much greater two-way traffic-flow between the heritage of Greek philosophy and the residues of the ideas of astrology, magic, reincarnation and the like, from the various Eastern traditions of the particular regions of the overall area. This was reflected in the spirituality of Greek ideas linked to Plato that formed the desire for a form of spirituality that viewed human destiny in an otherworldly realm – somewhat loosely referred to as ‘heaven’. In broad terms, this may be considered a summary of the overall worldview called Gnosticism.¹⁸

In the teaching of Marcion, for example, this form of gnostic worldview was characterised not only by the strong dualism of an evil, material earthly world, and an ethereal spiritual realm, free from all the lower worldly desires and privations found on earth. There were, in fact, two gods – the inferior god of the creation of the material world was identified with the Jewish deity revealed in what Christians came to call their Old Testament, and the redeemer, superior God of the New Testament, made manifest in Jesus Christ.

The specifically Marcionite features of this dualism may have been officially rejected by the greater Christian movement, as both wrong and dangerous. However, the general outlook of Christianity through the centuries has nonetheless been strongly influenced by the hope of finding an eventual destiny in heaven. This is in spite of the emphasis made in all the creeds concerning the future hope of the resurrection of the body, as opposed to the heavenly destiny of the soul.¹⁹ Furthermore, this has very often been associated with a form of Christian discipleship that either tries to withdraw from ‘the world’, or else tries to live what amounts to a dual life – a ‘spiritual’ one in which personal, family and church life take priority, and a ‘secular’ life in one’s work and wider interests or callings that are viewed as primarily concerned with accumulating the wealth needed to get along in the world.

5. The Spiritualities that have Shaped the Modern World

The movements we have come to know as the Renaissance and the Reformation both produced a new impetus to the culture and religion of the Western world by a conscious attempt to take a new look at the past – as a means of redirecting and reforming the future. For the Renaissance the source of this new future vision came

¹⁸ Refer to Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity*, Boston: Beacon Press, 2nd Edition, 1963, pp12-27

¹⁹ Refer, for example to the classic work of Oscar Cullmann, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead? The Witness of the New Testament*, London: Epworth Press, 1958.

from the knowledge of the past that was found in the newly accessible Greek manuscripts that had found their way to the West as a result of the sacking of the city of Constantinople by the Islamic Empire of the Ottoman Turks, in 1453. Ironically, some of these – such as the *Corpus Hermeticum*²⁰ - were themselves characterised by a strong Gnosticism – a *Hellenistic* way of reading Plato, entailing various forms of magic and the like, that became a significant feature of the life of the Courts of 16th century Europe.²¹

For the Reformation the source of the new future vision was, of course, the Bible. Indeed, the Marxist historian, Christopher Hill, cites an anecdote to the following effect:

*The story is told of an exchange between the legendary economic historian Jack Fisher and an importunate pupil who was pressing him for a reading list on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English economic history. He said 'If you really want to understand the period, go away and read the Bible.'*²²

Hill's book *The English Bible and the Seventeenth Century Revolution*, from which the above quote is taken, is not without its bias. Nonetheless, this bias does help to convey what is arguably a much needed corrective to the 'spiritual' and 'theological' lenses through which many Christian traditions assume it is correct to read the Bible. In spite of serious deficiencies with regard to the spiritual life of the heart enlivened by the Holy Spirit and its rejection of God, in favour of the worship and service of the secular in human life, because the focus of Hill's study is economic, political and broadly cultural, it provides something of a healthy corrective to the common understanding of the climate of the reformation in the England of the seventeenth century.

The other major movement that has influenced the spiritual direction in which Western culture became distinctly modern and secular, is the eighteenth century Enlightenment. In this respect, there were two major achievements in the English culture of the seventeenth century that caused many Western Europeans – particularly in France – to embark upon a completely new phase of human history. Western Europe, it was believed, had reached a point that had surpassed all the earlier achievements of human history, and stood at the beginning of a new era, one

²⁰ Refer to Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1964, as well as her other writings on the 16th century Renaissance.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Christopher Hill, *The English Bible and the Seventeenth Century Revolution*, London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1993, p4.

characterised by a sense that was critical of all authority. They did not believe that human nature was in any way inherently sinful, and based the future hope of finding happiness in this life solely upon the human efforts of science, technology and education, seriously neglecting the propensity of the twisted ways in which we humans are able to pervert the truth as we find it.²³

The two particular achievements in seventeenth century English culture influencing the development of this kind of outlook were first, the publication of what is probably the most significant scientific achievement of all time – Isaac Newton’s *Principia Mathematica* – in 1687; and second, what is usually referred to as the *Glorious Revolution* of 1688, when the Whig party in Parliament took the initiative to invite the daughter of King James II, Mary, together with her Dutch husband, William of Orange, to invade England and challenge the very unpopular and threatening rule of the Catholic King James II – who, amongst other things, was head of the Anglican Church. England thereby came to set a new pattern for constitutional government, one in which the Monarch continued to reign, but was obliged to work in cooperation with representatives of the English nation, and accountable to Parliament through the ministers of the Government.

In the 1720s these, as well as other developments in English life, caught the attention of a young Frenchman, whom we have come to know as Voltaire. Voltaire was, at this time, in England in exile from his native France. As a result of the influence of these kinds of features of early eighteenth century English life and culture, he wrote and published a series of essays – *The English Letters*²⁴ – that vehemently criticised many features of French life – especially its lack of freedom of conscience in matters of religion, its authoritarian monarchical rule, and its comparative neglect of Newton in favour of Descartes.

Voltaire, however, was no atheist. He had famously said that ‘If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him’. In his critique of Christianity – in particular the abuses of the clerical power of the Catholic Church in France, as well as what he took to be the absurdity of much of the Bible – he was a Deist, one who believed that Reason was the light by which the Creator God both ruled the world of Nature (as an absentee landlord, having created Nature together with its laws, and then left it to run on its own) as well as the human world of culture and political life, the norms of which could be discerned by the application of human reason.

²³ See, for example, Paul Hazard, *The European Mind 1680-1715*, translated from the French by J. Lewis May, published by Pelican Books, 1964. The significance of these dates – encompassing the two events cited, should not be overlooked.

²⁴ These essays were also known as *Lettres Philosophiques* – Philosophical Letters – and were published in both French and English in 1734.

In the course of the French Revolution that occurred at the end of the century of Enlightenment, the moderate Deistic ideology of Voltaire and others, gave way to a much more overt atheistic form of humanism that arguably found its outlet in the reign of terror, led by Robespierre and the Council of Public Safety during 1793-94.²⁵ In the years that followed, the French National Assembly coined the categories of right, left and centre, describing the spectrum of political outlooks that have shaped modern times. The advocates of a return to the *ancien regime* (the conservatives and reactionaries) sat on the right hand of the speaker of the assembly. Those who stood for a furthering of the revolutionary aims to abolish privilege and inequality (the radicals) sat on the left hand of the speaker; and those standing for more moderate, immediate gains, while pursuing these overall objectives in the long term (the liberals), sat in the centre.²⁶ Moreover, the liberals also tended to embrace the newly found French nationalism that emerged with the Revolution, a significant feature that spread elsewhere – to Germany and Italy in particular - during the nineteenth century.

In this light, the nineteenth century political and cultural life of Western Europe (including Russia), unfolded in a manner that involved the conflicts between right, left and centre. In this respect, the Russian anarchist (one section of the left) Michael Bakunin, revised Voltaire's saying concerning the existence of God in the words, 'If God really existed, it would be necessary to abolish him.'²⁷ For him, God was to be identified with support for the European establishment – its dependence upon the divine rights of Monarchs to rule autocratically, together with the intolerant clerical rule of established churches, and the bourgeois morality that went along with it all.

It is also clear that the unfolding of German philosophy from Kant and Hegel to Feuerbach, Marx and Nietzsche, had a huge impact upon the way the right, left and centre - particularly with regard to the various nationalisms and established forms of Christianity – in the form of Monarchies and their associated Established churches – unfolded in the nineteenth century. Marx, indebted to both Hegel and Feuerbach, led the way of Radicalism in his adoption of a materialist understanding of history founded in the revolutions that were thrown up by what he called class struggles. The

²⁵ Refer to A. Aulard, *Christianity and the French Revolution*, translated from the French, by Lady Frazer, New York: Howard Fertig, 1966, pp95-131. The role played by Robespierre and the Committee of Public Safety, interestingly enough, was that of attempting to restrain the rabid anti-Christianisation, with its enthronement of the worship of the cult of Reason.

²⁶ Refer to Crane Brinton, *Ideas and Men*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1950, p320 and Chapters 10-14, for a greater in-depth study of the right, centre and left responses to the French Revolution.

²⁷ Quoted, for example in M. Bakunin's book *God and the State*, (1871), 1970 Dover Reprint, as a kind of prefatory one line caption.

development of Liberal Theology in Germany followed the path laid down first by Schleiermacher. His romantic attempt to found our basic relationship to God in religious feeling was followed by the influence of Hegel and the development of a national feeling that was able to pave the way for the newly founded Nation-State of Germany, first under Bismarck and then the German Kaiser Wilhelm. This Liberalism considered that German cultural superiority lent it something of a divine right to lead other nations and, as such, became allied with the major forces of conservatism. These were found in the three great houses that had ruled Austria-Hungary – the Hapsburgs (with links to Roman Catholicism); Prussia (and, from 1871), Germany – the Hohenzollerns (with Protestant links to both Lutherans and Reformed); and Russia - the Romanovs (with strong links with Eastern Orthodoxy).²⁸

The ways in which the details of these various currents were at work, eventually led to the outbreak of the Great War in August, 1914. Everyone naively considered that the conflict would be over by Christmas of that same year. However, the realities of what it meant to fight a modern war - with the sophistication of technologies that rendered the combatants all but extensions of machines – brought about the reality of a hitherto undreamed of level of evil in human history. At the outset of hostilities in August, 1914, expressions of nationalism on all sides, produced an air of euphoria that exuded the utter naivety of nationalistic confidence. Innocent young men marching with bands playing and crowds cheering hinted at a nationalistic mission in which the worship of ‘God, King and Country’ on the part of both the British and the Germans (not even to mention the French, the Russians, the Austro-Hungarians, the Italians, the Ottoman Turks and the United States) might be construed as effectively placing nationalistic demands upon the unity of the Trinity ‘demanding a metaphysical divorce,’ between God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit²⁹ All but innocent of the political and nationalistic hullabaloo - with very little knowledge either what the fuss was all about or what the grotesque character of the conditions of modern warfare held for them – the soldiers, sailors and airmen ventured forth into ‘the war that was to end all wars’.

²⁸ The eleven episodes of the BBC Television Series entitled *Fall of Eagles* covers the drama of the events associated with the various ways in which the fortunes of the Monarchies of the Hohenzollerns of Prussia (then Germany), the Hapsburgs of Austria-Hungary and the Romanovs of Russia from 1848 through to 1918. In doing so we are confronted with the ways in which the Conservative forces epitomised by these regimes came to grief in a big way as they pursued the path to war, only to collapse before the Liberal forces of England and France, as they all then helped unleash the Radical Communists forces of what became the Soviet Union.

²⁹ For a study of the ways in which various ‘Christian’ European powers, supported by various Churches and their individual members, supported the various nationalisms – over any genuine sense of the international unity of the Body of Christ in the world, refer to Philip Jenkins, *The Great and Holy War: How World War I Became a Religious Crusade*, New York: HarperOne, 2014.

2014 counts as the one hundredth anniversary of the outbreak of the Great War. Indeed, in her traditional Christmas address, the British Queen and Head of the British Commonwealth of Nations, drew attention to the brief Christmas truce in 1914, that was spontaneously celebrated by combatants from Britain, Germany and France, resulting in a genuine expression of the brotherhood of all peoples that is arguably at the core of the Christian hope of breaking down the barriers between Jew and Gentile in Christ, and also expressed in Schiller's *Ode to Joy* immortalised in the last movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. The event of the fraternising of people who were enemy combatants - living in the opposing trenches that had become their homes – venturing out from them initially like frightened rabbits onto the scarred and bloody frozen landscape of a no-man's land that held nothing but the promise of death for them all - is either miraculous, the height of absurdity or, more likely, both.³⁰

Indeed, perhaps the proper way to view it is as a taste of God's grace in the middle of an apocalyptic disaster of gigantic proportions. Just what the causes of the war were, just why it was able to escalate into such a conflagration so quickly, are still questions that perplex many historians. However, we should perhaps rise above the all too perfunctory analyses of just how and why it occurred, and confront the deeper cosmic reality pervading its ushering in of what could well prove to be the decline in the cultural power and influence of the Western world. In particular its traditional Christian veneer masking the long pagan traditions of kingship and hierarchy that go back to Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, were mediated by both Hellenism and the Emperors of the Roman Empire³¹ collapsed in a big way in the course of the Great War. Many of the good things of our indebtedness to what is often referred to as *the Judaeo-Christian tradition* have also increasingly come under fire so that we are in danger of their being swept away.

Whatever its short and long term causes, the results of the war were a dramatic embodying of the dynasties that claimed, in one form or another, to represent God in the church and the world – the Hapsburgs, the Hohenzollerns and the Romanovs.

³⁰ Refer to the movie *Joyeux Noel*, (Merry Christmas) written and directed by the French director Christian Carion. A DVD of the movie was released in 2005, by Sony Pictures. It features a very valuable commentary and interview (in French with English subtitles) by Christian Carion himself. It discusses the ways in which the film incorporates a range of 'poetic licences' with the different historical incidents brought into the one film.

³¹ The contrast between the religiousness of the ways in which the Kingships of Egypt and Mesopotamia were connected with their gods, with the very different calling of the Jewish social order, is one of the many things that has been highlighted by modern archaeological studies. See, for example, Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society & Nature*, especially, the Epilogue entitled *The Hebrews*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948, pp337-0344. For an elucidation of the alternative Biblical view of social order, see Joshua Berman, *Created Equal: How the Bible Broke with Ancient Political Thought*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Whatever mistaken ideas might have been involved with the appreciation of this kind of supposed divine representation, the end of the Great War saw its demise in a way that further heralded the emergence of a secular world.

To begin to appreciate this, we could not do better than try to grasp its profounder meaning as a conflict between two half-right, half-wrong 'allied Christian powers' who, both appealing to 'God, King and Country', were in a battle of two Beasts fighting one another with the Lamb looking on with utter horror and amazement - a smile on his face, as he authored the enactment of the Christmas truce. This smile nonetheless covered a deep remembrance of the great pain suffered on a Roman Cross. Once again, as with the many times before and since, the peace, truth, mercy, Christian brotherhood and the love for their neighbours, in spite of the respite of the Christmas truce, were all trampled into the dust. In its wake followed the triumph of revolution (in Russia), a further weak trust in universal progress (in France, Britain, America) and a renewed Germany, enraged by its being stabbed in the back and blamed by the victors for causing the whole exercise of the war, continued an inner struggle (*Mein Kampf*) that led to a very dark form of nationalism. Almost no-one comprehended the depth of the extremes of this ideology. Nonetheless, almost as a continuation of the conflagration of the Great War, World War II plunged us all into another round of hideous technological and national conflict that itself laid the foundations for the Cold War and then the new threats of the disorder of the world through the self-styled ideology of Islamic Fundamentalism that attacked the West in a mass kamikaze murder in New York on 11th September, 2002.

The hollow sounds of a world inspired by the hopes of a future utopia on earth - rather than in heaven - brought about by the modernist hopes of our *unaided* human ability to solve *all* of the problems introduced by the marvels of modern science, technology and democratic government developed within the bosom of Western civilization - has thus spawned more terror in its wake. We may sum up something of the full scale of the cosmic battle between the various Beasts rising from the tempest of the sea of human history - under the watchful eye of the Lamb - in the imagery of the Book of Revelation:

In the middle of the throne, and all around the throne, were four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind. The first creature was like a lion, the second creature was like an ox, the third creature had a human face, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle. Each of the four creatures had six wings, and they were full of eyes all around and inside. Day and night they take no rest, as they say,

"Holy, holy, holy,

*Lord God Almighty,
Who Was and Who Is and Who Is to Come."*

When the creatures give glory and honour and thanksgiving to the one who is sitting on the throne, the one who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down in front of the one who is sitting on the throne and worship the one who lives forever and ever. They throw down their crowns in front of the throne, saying,

"O Lord our God, you deserve to receive glory and honour and power, because you created all things; because of your will they existed and were created."

Then I heard every creature in heaven, on the earth, under the earth, and in the sea, and everything that is in them, saying

*"To the One on the throne and the lamb
Be blessing and honour and glory
And power forever and ever!"*

"Amen!" cried the four living creatures. As for the elders, they fell down and worshipped.

The next thing I saw was this. When the lamb had opened one of the seven seals, I heard one of the four living creatures say in a voice like thunder, "Come!" And as I watched, there was a white horse. Its rider was holding a bow. He was given a crown, and he went off winning victories, and to win more of them.

When the lamb opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!" And another horse went out, fiery red this time. Its rider was given permission to take peace away from the earth, so that people would kill one another. He was given a great sword.

When the lamb opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come!" As I watched, there was a black horse. Its rider held a pair of scales in his hand. I heard something like a voice coming from the midst of the four living creatures. "A quart of wheat for a denarius!" said the voice. "And three quarts of barley for a denarius! But don't ruin the oil and the wine!"

When the lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come!" As I looked, there was a pale horse, and its rider's name was Death. Hades followed along behind him. They were given authority over a quarter of the

*earth, to kill with the sword, and with famine, and with death, and by means of earth's wild animals.*³²

6. A Calling for Reformational Christianity

The unity of Biblical spirituality - as found in the Jewish Tanakh or Christian Old Testament - is in the way in which human acts in the various dimensions of our world are led and empowered by the spirits that motivate and dwell within our hearts. Human-kind – female and male – is made in the image of God. This idea might be summarised as God giving us humans the calling to communally care for, manage and unfold the potential of creation, as an expression of our whole-hearted love, worship and service of our God, acknowledging that he is the ultimate and righteous creator and ruler of all.

Thus, it is in our hearts - our inner selves - that we can know God. Furthermore, the Scriptures speak of the normativity of this relationship as one in which human hearts (both male and female) need to be circumcised,³³ literally meaning that they are ‘cut’ in a way that opens the deepest layers of our selfhood to the work of the Spirit of God, exposing our inmost motivations, sin and the need for God’s grace to renew our inmost being with the inner resources of his Spirit made available to us by his mercy and grace. However, the flip-side of this spirituality – as revealed in our dual obligation to love God and our neighbour – is to be found in the way its motivating resources affect our daily lives – in our family, marriage, school, tending the vineyard, mending the car, scholarship and research, participating in the fellowship of our local ekklesia–church, keeping-house etc – all as part of the great task given to humankind – to care for, manage and develop the resources of creation in a way that fulfils every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

We may gain some significant insight into the overall nature of this spirituality by looking at three texts from the Tanakh or Old Testament. The first of these is Psalm 139, the second Isaiah 1, and the third, Psalm 147.

Psalm 139

³² Revelation 4.6b-11; 5.13-6.8, N.T. Wright, *The Kingdom New Testament*, op cit. pp503-505.-

³³ Romans 2. 28-29; Deuteronomy 10.16; Jeremiah 4.4

Psalm 139 begins with the realization on the part of the worshipper of Yahweh that this God truly knows him or her through and through:

O Lord, you have searched me and known me!

You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar.

You search out my path and my lying down. You are acquainted with all my ways.

Even before a word is on my tongue, you know it altogether.

You beset me from behind and before; you lay your hand upon me.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.³⁴

What is the emphasis in this Psalm? We sometimes speak of what we can know of, or about, God. Does not this Psalm speak in way that puts the boot on the other foot? Is it not that God already knows us through and through, even though we may not acknowledge him?

There is an interesting verse in the book of I Samuel, where Samuel is reported as seeking the son of Jesse who is the LORD's anointed one to replace Saul as King. It reads as follows:

The LORD said to Samuel: "Do not look upon the outward appearance [of these sons of Jesse]. For the LORD sees not as man sees; man looks upon the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart".³⁵

Isaiah 1

On the other hand, the first chapter of the book of the prophet Isaiah is a confrontation, through the prophet, of the people of Judah to the effect that they do **not know** their covenant God. Isaiah calls upon the heavens and the earth to bear witness to the words of the Lord:

Sons have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me.

The ox knows its owner, and the ass its master's crib; but Israel does not know,

My people does not understand.

³⁴ Psalm 139: 1-6.

³⁵ I Samuel 16.7.

*Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity,
Offspring of evil doers, sons who deal corruptly!
They have forsaken the Lord, they have despised the Holy One of Israel,
They are utterly estranged.³⁶*

The prophet goes on to say that the sacrifices and offerings are vain and futile, and that God is weary of the whole vain and hypocritical performance, declaring that God says to them:

*When you spread forth your hands, I will hide my eyes from you;
Even though you make many prayers, I will not listen;
Your hands are full of blood.³⁷*

Returning to Psalm 139, we next find the worshipper of Yahweh meditating upon the fact that there is nowhere he can go to hide from the presence and knowledge of God, a fact that is implicit in the verses of the prophet Isaiah that we have just read. God may accuse his people of not knowing him, but he knows them only too well! The Psalmist, on the other hand, reflects on the sober thought as to the meaning of God's all-seeing knowledge:

*Whither shall I go from your Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!
If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
Even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.
If I say, "Let only darkness cover me, and the light about me be night,"
Even the darkness is not dark to you, the night is as brought as the day;
For darkness is as light with you.³⁸*

³⁶ Isaiah 1:2-4.

³⁷ Isaiah 1: 15.

³⁸ Psalm 139:7-12.

Now, back again with Isaiah, we find him next telling the people of God's call to them to account and repent, to wash themselves, renew their hearts in a renewed awareness of God and his requirement that they live out the words of his covenant with them before his face in everyday life:

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;

Remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes;

Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression;

Defend the fatherless; plead for the widow.

Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord;

Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow;

Though they are crimson, they shall become like wool.³⁹

Our Psalmist meanwhile continues to reflect upon the ways in which God knows him or her altogether, this time with reference to the intimate details of the way he or she was formed in utero, and how God's plans for their life were written in the book of God. The Psalm concludes with a prayer that God would search and try their every thought, so that their path of life would faithfully reflect the fullness of God's word for that life:

Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!

And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.⁴⁰

In the New Testament, Jesus was asked by the Pharisees as to which was the great commandment of the law? Jesus answered them, saying:

“You shall love the Lord your God with *all your heart*, and with *all your soul*, and with *all your mind*. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it.

³⁹ Isaiah 1: 16-18.

⁴⁰ Psalm 139:23-24.

You shall love your neighbour as yourself. It is on these two commandments that the whole law and prophets depend.⁴¹ ”

Furthermore, in his pointing to the roots of the way we humans live out our lives in outward acts of adultery and murder – in the imaginings of sexual lust and the harbouring of hate of others within our hearts well before we act them out, Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, brings attention to the ways in which our hearts are in radical need of circumcision, in preparation for the full living out of a new heart relationship with God and neighbour⁴².

In the first eleven chapters of the Epistle to the Romans, the Apostle Paul lays out his understanding of the gospel - as it relates to the new way in which God has brought to fulfilment the promises of his Grace and Mercy to enable us, his rebellious image-bearers and radical covenant-breakers, to live out a righteousness that we have been given as a gift – without the slightest bit of merit on our part.

In the first verses of Chapter Twelve, Paul then applies all of this to the consequences of the exercise of the faith in which we should live our daily lives. He writes

*So, my dear family, this is my appeal to you by the mercies of God: offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. Worship like this brings your mind into line with God's. What's more, don't let your-selves be squeezed into the shape dictated by the present age. Instead, be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you can work out what God's will is—what is good, acceptable, and complete.*⁴³

In a nutshell, we may say that the humble and sincere responses to this calling, as the fruit of the gospel working in our hearts, describes what we might reformational Christianity. As an illustration of what might be involved in ‘the transformation of our thinking,’ we will consider the ways in which we might rethink the influence of the naturalistic worldview dominating the culture of the West since the eighteenth century Enlightenment. Consider the example of the following text of the first few verses of Psalm 147:

⁴¹ Matt 22: 34-40; Deuteronomy 6.5

⁴² Matt 5.21-23; 5.27-28;

⁴³ Romans 12: 1-2, N.T. Wright, *The Kingdom New Testament*, op cit, p331.

Psalm 147: 1-5

Praise the Lord!

For it is good to sing praises to our God;

For he is gracious, and a song of praise is seemly.

The LORD builds up Jerusalem;

He gathers the outcasts of Israel.

He heals the broken-hearted, and binds up their wounds.

He determines the number of the stars,

He gives to all of them their names.

Great is our LORD, and abundant in power;

His understanding is beyond measure.

These words, in addition to all that follow them in the course of the Psalm, speak of God actively ordering the Creation – both with respect to the big things concerning the stars, as well as the details of binding the wounds of the poor, the broken-hearted, and the down-trodden. In our worship-life, modern Christians and Jews, continue to sing the praises of the One who does this. However, when it comes to our science and general understanding of the world in our day to day lives, we are dominated by a different conception of the way the world is ordered. This has virtually removed any genuine sense of God's activity in the world. This outlook, it needs to be said, is not simply the result of the factual observations of modern and not-so-modern science. Rather, it is the result of the basic contours of a naturalistic philosophy that has nurtured the natural sciences since the later decades of the seventeenth century, when the thinkers of the Enlightenment began to thoroughly renovate the idea of natural law.

This may be appreciated as taking place in two major steps - the first under the influence of Deism; the second under the influence of a naturalistic mechanism-cum-atheism. Deism entailed the view of God as a Creator of the cosmos of which we are part. But this creator God was considered to have brought about a cosmos complete with its own set of laws that implied it is quite capable of ticking away on its own with 'no need for God's further intervention or active upholding.' In this view of lawfulness, creatures - such as sub-atomic particles, the nuclei of atoms, inanimate molecules and the many organic molecules within cells that are themselves not its living parts, as well as animals, plants, planets, stars and humankind – come into existence in a way that considers the lawfulness governing them to be somehow

inherent within their very own being. Law is therefore fully part of the created cosmos, which is then completely capable of running on its own. This view of natural law, of course, made for a serious problem in the understanding of how miracles were able to occur. The whole deistic idea was that were if God were to ‘intervene supernaturally’ into a world running according to laws that he had put into it, then he would be a law-breaker. Nonetheless, in the discussions between theists and deists over the years of the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, the dominant way in which miracles were understood by the theists was in terms of a dualistic view in which *naturalistic* lawfulness operated from the time of creation, providing the basis for scientific explanation. Over and above that, God was considered able to act into this natural law order by way of miracles through *super-natural* intervention. ⁴⁴

This means, for example, that we can ordinarily affirm that the regularity and trustworthiness of the lawfulness of creation as entailing Newton’s law of gravity as a universal ‘natural law’ – part of the Creation as it came from the handiwork of God. The problem with this is that we run into conceptual or philosophical difficulties when confronted with the gospel accounts of Jesus’ miracles. Jesus’ walking on water, for example, is an instance of the universality of the law of gravity being somehow superseded or suspended within a certain realm of the creation.

The second step towards the radical mechanistic naturalism of modern times follows once Deism is replaced by a mechanistic atheism. The major move here is that Creation is no longer ‘created’. It is eternal, with natural law now being understood as inherently integral to its eternity, together with an affirmation that changes or innovations to the unfolding of ‘creation’ occur by means of this natural law. In other words, once the eternality of ‘creation’ is posited, then natural law is still understood as an intrinsic part of it, but as there is no-one inhabiting the transcendent world beyond this law-order, the standpoint of mechanistic atheism is one in which ‘supernatural intervention’ is simply a contradiction in terms. Nagel’s move to transforming the mechanistic or physicalistic Neo-Darwinist picture is one that tries to bring in a role for a universal *Nous*, *Mind* or *Reason* playing a part in governing the cosmos from ‘the inside’. In this respect it therefore remains a form of naturalism, one that shows a kinship with the kind of outlook that Plato, in the latter half of his dialogue *Phaedo*, describes the youthful Socrates seeking in Anaxagoras but was disappointed. ⁴⁵

⁴⁴ It is at this point that we may appreciate the significance of the quote made from Thomas Nagel’s *Mind and Cosmos* p7 quoted on page six of this essay.

⁴⁵ Plato, *Phaedo*, 97c -100c.

In this respect, Nagel is proposing a return to the broader classical Greek naturalistic tradition, which Werner Jaeger, in his 1936 Gifford lectures, describes as a cosmic order from *within* the world, compared with the Hebrew view of God's ordering of creation from *outside* the world.⁴⁶ In this light, it is clear that the Deistic view of lawfulness already considered briefly above, for all its claim for a Creator God, has really a lot more in common with the Greek naturalistic (whether it be physicalistic, mechanistic or in some sense mind-like) of order than the biblical view of the Hebrews.

What if we were to change gears, and claim that lawfulness is *not part of creation*? Rather, the regularity and lawfulness of creation is at 'the interface' between God's ongoing faithful supervision of the cosmos— in both 'the natural' world in which humans have little or no law-making power, as well as 'the cultural' world in which we *do play* a significant part in the ordering of creation, including the physical, biological and environmental dimensions of our actions as they impact upon it. This would entail the idea that lawfulness, in the context of human affairs, is *a normative calling* for the ways in which we humans engage with our world. At the same time, however, 'human values' are not the absolute creation of humans. These 'values' are the result of the way we humans variously *respond* to the overall *normative ordering* of creation under God. This response entails the way we concretise or positivise such norms in, for example, the legal system of a state. This positive form of law, however, may and usually is defective in at least some features of its calling to realize the universal norm of justice.

We need to distinguish between *the calling* of a public legal system to realize this *norm* that we all experience the world, and *the concrete form* of this same set of public laws that are supposed to realize this norm of justice. The ongoing opportunity to engage in need for the former to more faithfully achieve the latter therefore provides us with a specific instance in which reformational Christianity, along with

⁴⁶ Werner Jaeger, in his important study entitled *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers*, Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 1936, makes as significant distinction between the activity of the Hebrew Logos and the conception of the latter within Greek religious-philosophical thought, when he writes that: *The Logos, in the Hebrew account of creation is a substantialization of the power of God the Creator, who is stationed outside of the world, bringing it into existence by his own personal fiat, and then continuing to order it. The Greek gods are stationed inside the world; they are descended from Ouranos and Gaia, the two greatest and most exalted parts of the universe, generated by the might power of Eros, who likewise belongs within the world as an all-engendering force* Ibid, p16. This is very significant for the way that we read the ways that God acts in the world, as related in Psalm 147.

other outlooks upon life, has the opportunity to make a contribution to modern life by seeking to reform the system by whatever means may be available.

Then again, in the context of the fallen world in which sin and idolatry are rife, God acts redemptively – restoring creation to normalcy. If all happenings in the Creation occur within a context in which God’s ongoing faithfulness to the achievement of his will, is the principal significant factor, then is it not possible that miracles occur *not* arbitrarily, but are part of the redemptive activity of God bringing the creation to its fulfilment? Looked at this way, what we experience as the lawfulness of gravity keeping the boat afloat and Jesus’ act of walking on the water - in apparent defiance of gravity – are both part of God’s faithful rule of Creation. Our experience of ‘walking on’ terra firma is part of God’s faithfulness; the example of Jesus’ walking on water, commanding the waves and the storm, is also testimony to the way in which God is active, revealing to us humans, that he [Jesus] has been given power to bring healing and redemption to a fallen and rebellious world. This is *not* a simple example of an intervention into the clockwork mechanism of a world order governed by a sovereign naturalistic law, supposedly created by God at the beginning and then left to run on its own under the steam of ‘natural law’. The whole exercise of the lawfulness of the cosmos is one that functions at the boundary between God as creator and redeemer of the cosmos, and the created cosmos of which we ourselves are part.

This, of course, begins to open up a big subject. In biblical terms, it suffices to say that lawfulness basically derives from the way in which God’s will is faithfully exercised with regard to the sovereign Word of his overall covenant with creation, as this is exercised under the vice-regency of humankind. The orderly and lawful character of what is usually referred to as the natural order of creation is not something that functions within an autonomous creation made in a deistic-style beginning. It is a consequence of the ways in which God faithfully continues to be faithful in carrying the rich and variegated purposes of his sovereign will. In the specifically human realm – involving the exercise of our cultural formative power, analysing the world and our place in it, the shaping of the symbols of language, the fair exchange of good and services, the shaping of works of art, our ethical and juridical actions, as well as the public exercise of our religious convictions and beliefs, we respond to the basic normative content by God’s will. Our task, in this respect, is to positivise or give concrete form to this normative character within our specific cultural and social circumstances. In the case of scientific theories, the ordering the world that we seek to analyse is real enough – it is ordered and sustained by the, generally regular, lawful activity that He continues to faithfully carry out. The

theories themselves, in their claims to lawfulness, need to allow for different dimensions of lawfulness – physical, biotic, psychological, logical (analytic) – that may be said to be independent of human action. In addition, in the realms of human creative formative activity – in political/legal life, economic life, social life, artistic life, scientific and philosophical life – we ourselves exercise our freedom in ways that are subject to lawfulness as normativity – justice, sagacity, frugality, love of neighbour, spouse or child. Our theories in these dimensions of reality, as well, are attempts to articulate, amongst other features, the normative content in the human and social sciences.

In our exploration of the way the law of God - fulfilling the Word of God revealed in the overall thrust of Psalm 147 – there is much to reflect upon regarding the nature of lawfulness. However, when we bow before God in acts of worship, we may set aside any concern with the difficult and complex questions of its precise character and the way it functions in God’s creative and redemptive purposes – at least for the moment. Suffice it to say, that the concern for precision in such matters should not be allowed to prohibit us from appreciating the wonder of it all! In that light, let us continue in our reading and reflection upon Psalm 147.

Psalm 147: 6-20

*The LORD lifts up the downtrodden,
He casts the wicked to the ground.
Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; make melody to our God upon the lyre!*

*He covers the heavens with clouds; he prepares rain for the earth,
He makes grass grow upon the hills.
He gives to the beasts their food, and to the young ravens which cry.*

*His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor his pleasure in the legs of a man;
But the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him,
In those who hope in his steadfast love.*

*Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem! Praise your God, O Zion!
For he strengthens the bars of your gates; he blesses your sons within you.
He makes peace in your borders; he fills you with the finest of the wheat.*

*He sends forth his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly.
He gives snow like wool; he scatters hoarfrost like ashes.
He casts forth his ice like morsels; who can stand before his cold?
He sends forth his word and melts them; he makes his wind blow, and the waters flow.*

*He declares his word to Jacob; his statutes and ordinances to Israel.
He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know his ordinances.*

Praise the LORD!

7. A Provisional Summary

We began this booklet with a reference to John 3.16. It is perhaps appropriate that we return to it as we contemplate our final summing up. We will do this by anticipating some possible objections that some readers of the Bible might want to bring to what we have outlined.

This, you see, is how much God loved the world: enough to give his only, special son, so that everyone who believes in him should not be lost but share in the life of God's new age.⁴⁷

Now, no doubt some might respond in a somewhat different way to our suggestion that it should apply to possible human action in the world today. They might say, for example, that it is Jesus Christ who has redeemed the world, not we humans. We Christians need to be careful that we do not reproduce all the problems by which people in the past have sought to live in the hope of some kind of realised millennium rule which we lead.

While the latter comment is all too true, the broader implication of this kind of stance neglects the central point at issue. We humans were made in the image of God, called to care for, manage and develop its potential for good. While we may want to claim that we humans, in the modern world – with its over-extended use and application of science and technology – have already done far too much damage to its natural systems, we cannot escape from the fact that it remains part of our God-given calling and destiny – to rule the earth under God.

⁴⁷ John 3.16. N.T. Wright, *The Kingdom New Testament: A Contemporary Translation*, Harper Row, 2011.

This may not be explicit in the teaching of John 3: 16-17. However, that this meaning is implicit to its overall meaning is clear once we look to the way the author of the book of Hebrews develops the themes of the human place in the scheme of things referred to in Genesis 1 and in Psalm 8.

Hebrews 2: 6-13

“You see, God didn't place the world to come (which is what I'm writing about) under the control of angels. Someone has spoken of it somewhere in these terms:”

*What are humans, that you should remember them?
What is the son of man, that you should take thought for him?
You made him a little lower than the angels,
You crowned him with glory and honour,
And you placed everything under his feet.⁴⁸*

“When it speaks of everything being subjected to him, it leaves nothing that is not subjected to him. As things are at present, we don't see everything subjected to him. What we do see is the one who was, for a little while, made lower than the angels—that is, Jesus—crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death, so that by God's grace he might taste death on behalf of everyone.

This is how it works out. Everything exists for the sake of God and because of him; and it was appropriate that, in bringing many children to glory, he should make perfect, through suffering, the one who leads the way to salvation. For the one who makes others holy, and the ones who are made holy, all belong to a single family.

This is why he isn't ashamed to call them his brothers and sisters, when he says,”

*I will announce your name to my brothers and sisters;
I will sing your praise in the middle of the assembly,⁴⁹*

“and again,

I will place my trust in him,

“and again,

⁴⁸ Psalm 8: 4-6.

⁴⁹ Psalm 22.22

*Look, here I am, with the children God has given me.*⁵⁰

Our future hope lies in the coming of the new heavens and the new earth, in the completion of the redemptive work of Jesus, Messiah. Our hope is in the sharing of his resurrection from the dead. We therefore suggest that we look at it this way. In our modern world, we all continue to have responsibilities – through the various offices we occupy – as parents, spouses, children, citizens, plumbers, electricians, lawyers, politicians, farmers, business people, engineers, musicians, artists, actors, scientists, students, scholars, teachers and many more.

We exercise these responsibilities not primarily to our superiors, but to God as we participate in the human calling to care for and manage the earth. These offices are not primarily the way in which ‘we make a living’ so that can enjoy our weekends and our retirement. We need to become aware of the richness and dignity of all of these responsibilities. Our Christian discipleship is not confined to the ethical side of our personal lives. If we take both the cultural heritage of science, philosophy, theology, the arts, technology, and the Bible seriously, as we have endeavoured to do in this booklet, then it is very much more than that.

We, in setting up the *Reformational Christian Studies Trust*, view our humble calling as one that will try, through our meagre resources, to serve God through writing, publishing and working together with others in an endeavour to assist both the Body of Christ and the wider world, to live out the spiritual riches of the gospel in the spectrum of the callings of modern life while, at the same time, remembering that we ourselves are not exempt from the conflict between good and evil that strikes at the root of all human hearts, including our own.

The traditions that we seek to learn from are many and various. We look to the Anglo-Saxon evangelical movements that were central to the reformational programmes to eliminate slavery in both Britain and the United States. We look to the way in which the Pope Leo XIII’s Papal Encyclical of 1891, known as *Rerum Novarum*, set the stage for much of the Catholic Social Teaching of the Twentieth century, both before and after Vatican II. We look to the novels of both Dostoevsky and Solzenitsyn, as they reflect the hopes of Eastern Orthodoxy to deal with the tragedy of the ways in which Russia found itself in the grip of a communist regime that reigned through the ever present reality of terror. We look also to the New Zealand Maori heritage exemplified by Wiremu Tamihana in the courageous and far-reaching vision of the Maori King Movement in the Waikato in the 1850s, the 1860s

⁵⁰ Isaiah 8: 17-18

and after. Again we look to the good work of Archaeology and Biblical Studies that has done so much to bring the Bible to life for us, in recent years. Then we have the heritage of the fantasy-realism of the literature genres of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien. Finally, but certainly not least, we look to the Dutch heritage of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, led by Abraham Kuyper. This involved far reaching attempts to engage with the national life of that country leading to, amongst other things, the movement known as *Reformational Philosophy*⁵¹, initially associated with the names of Hermann Dooyeweerd and Dirk Vollenhoven, but now with representatives in the Netherlands, England, Canada, the USA, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Latin America and Asia.

8. Our Vision

We are very much aware that one of the symptoms of the malaise of our contemporary world is to be found in the way that a scientific and more general scholarly elitism tends to have a serious effect upon both the spiritual depth and general level at which the more important issues of our time are discussed. This is tragically true – without seeking to lay blame upon anyone in particular - for example, for much of the discourse within our churches.

We do not want to promote a Christian scholarly exercise for a community of intellectuals. We wish to foster a genuine community of persons in which it is a matter of ease and habit to engage in serious conversation with regard to a wide spectrum of concerns. This does not mean that everyone would be expected to be able to debate the latest nuclear particle physics of the Higgs particle, the latest contribution to New Testament scholarship by N.T Wright, the philosophy ideas of the French phenomenologist Paul Ricoeur, or the details of the scholarship on the vicissitudes of the Treaty of Waitangi since the work of Ruth Ross and Claudia Orange. It would mean, however, that it would not be out of place for the significance of some of these matters to be of common interest and concern – particularly as they have an impact upon the concrete public and private decision-making that affects us all.

To even remotely think of achieving such a goal, we are very much dependent upon the cooperation and empathy of community leaders and supporters in other kinds of

⁵¹ G.E. Langemeijer, a Dutch jurist and scholar, contemporary with Dooyeweerd, but living out of quite a different worldview, wrote that ‘Without any exaggeration Dooyeweerd can be called the most original philosopher Holland has produced, even Spinoza included.’ See the quote from Langemeijer’s piece in the tribute to Dooyeweerd, on the occasion of his seventieth birthday, published in the magazine *Trouw*, in *The Contours of a Christian Philosophy*, by L. Kalsbeek, Toronto: Wedge, 1973, pp9-13.

organisations, not the least amongst church related groups. It is our hope to conduct seminars for University students and the general public who have some sympathy – or even antipathy – to our concerns. These will be assisted by our publication programme.

Our discussions regarding the promotion of our vision and program have been active only over the past year. During that time we have published only two short monographs, including the present monograph:

The other is a joint publication with The Tamihana Foundation - Submission to the Waitangi Tribunal, on its Recent Report entitled *He Whakaputanga me te Tiriti – The Declaration of Independence and the Treaty*, and the current *Reformational Manifesto*. Plans are already on the drawing board for us to support the publication (i) of Duncan Roper's book that will amplify the scholarship underlying the scholarship of the Submission to the Waitangi Tribunal, (ii) his redrafting of a book of some thirty-five years ago, to be retitled as *Biblical Foundations for Reformational Christian Discipleship* and a book on *The Idea of the University* that will take as its task the recasting of Cardinal Newman's influential nineteenth century book of the same name in a modern setting that is consonant with our own vision and the beliefs underlying it.

We trust that sufficient support and interest regarding our vision may be forthcoming so as to enable us to set up a study centre in a rural setting that would enable a small student community to live/board in the homes of some local people who are sympathetic to the fostering of the community that we aspire to.

In the longer term, such a centre would have a library that – at least initially - would be donated from the existing extensive libraries of the founding Trustees.

10. The Beliefs Guiding our Communal Vision.

In the course of writing this manifesto, we have sought to show how we believe that the Scriptures should be read so as to nurture both the spiritual and cultural fruitfulness of the vision we seek to espouse.

As the words 'spiritual' and 'religious' are commonly understood, it is arguable whether or not the Bible is 'a spiritual or religious book'. To give some idea as to just what this might mean, we shall take a brief look at the way some of the Maori in the mid-nineteenth century were fascinated by the Old Testament or Jewish Tanakh, in particular.

Some ten or more years ago, some of us were active in the formation of the organisation entitled *The Tamihana Foundation*. Indeed, it is from our ongoing links with the members of this organisation that we cooperated with our joint submission to the Waitangi Tribunal in our first publication that has already been mentioned. The initial conference of *The Tamihana Foundation* had, as its major theme *Christianity and Colonialism*, with essays by Bishop Muru Walters, Dr Duncan Roper, Dr John Lepper and Mr (later Dr) Peter Simons.⁵² In this conference it was argued that Wiremu Tamihana should be understood as a Christian transformist (reformational) thinker who read his Bible in a way that was not indebted to the heritage of Western civilization, and was able to lead an important section of the Maori King Movement in the attempt to unite the warring tribes of the region into a cohesive Maori nation that resisted the onslaught of Governor George Grey's Imperial colonialist war against them in the Waikato of 1863. In his very significant book entitled *The Maori King*, the youthful John Gorst, then a magistrate in the Waikato under the direction of the Governor, had a great deal to do with Wiremu Tamihana during the early period of the 1860s, and wrote his book in an attempt to explain to the 'folks back home' just why they hoped for new colony in New Zealand – in opposition to the many failures that had been publically acknowledged as a consequence of the Report of Parliamentary Committee of 1837 concerning other failures of British colonial polices elsewhere, had yet resulted in such a terrible war in New Zealand.

Our main point here concerns Gorst's report on the way Wiremu Tamihana read the Scriptures. He writes in *The Maori King* that

Having embraced Christianity from conviction, and not from hereditary custom, and being in the habit of constantly reading the Bible as almost his only literature, he argues on religious maxims, and intersperses his writings with Biblical quotations, in what appears to us an unusual degree. It would be a mistake to suppose this the result of cant or hypocrisy. Most of the Maori are exceedingly fond of reading the books of the Old Testament, in which they find described a state of civilization not unlike their own; and though not possessed of the same critical powers as the Zulu Kafirs, they have sufficient intelligence to deduce maxims from both Old and New Testaments, which it is inconvenient to have to reconcile with the theories of our modern civilization.⁵³

The significance of these remarks for our purposes here is to point out that the Maori

⁵² These essays were subsequently published under the title of *Colonialism and Christianity* and made available under the auspices of The Tamihana Foundation, in 2003.

⁵³ John Gorst, *The Maori King*, MacMillan & Co., 1864. Republished in Hamilton and Auckland: Paul's Book Arcade, 1959, p103.

of the King Movement, under the guidance of Wiremu Tamihana - in spite of their lack of any Western-style University or Secondary education - were able to discern in some significant ways in which the Scriptures offered important starting points from which to critique the Western civilization that was going to war against them because they recognized the sovereignty of God over them as a people. For them, faithfulness to this calling of God had priority over both Governor Browne's, Governor Grey's, and the settler's, claim that the Queen's sovereignty obliged them to forsake their Maori heritage and become *one people under one law* with the settlers.

We may live in a different cultural context, but it is the heritage of both the pagan ideals of kingship (inherited by Rome from Ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia and Hellenism) that inspired both the mediaeval Byzantine caesaropapism lying behind the demise of the Russian state in 1917, and the papocaesarism of the Western Church that began its serious demise from 1789 through to the Great War of 1814-18, working in conjunction with the powerful spiritual secularist forces of the French Enlightenment as they flowered in the French and Russian Revolutions of 1789 and 1917. It is in recognition of the way that such powerful spiritual and intellectual forces can be unleashed in the course of history that we confess that Scripture reveals certain basic principles that are intensely relevant to the task that lies before us. As such it represents a fallible human attempt to formulate the Biblically directed ideas concerning lawfulness that we have already spoken of in connection with our reading of Psalm 174. As a result, we communally confess our understanding of Revelation, the Law of God in the following

Revelation: That Scripture, the Word of God written, in instructing us of the Triune God, ourselves and the created order, is that integral Word of God by which God, through His Spirit, draws us to and enlightens us in the truth, which is Christ Jesus our Lord, the Living Word of God who became flesh and lived among men and women. That the same Living Word who reveals himself in Scripture reveals himself in all that he has created, so that the revelation of God is one, yet Scripture remains indispensable and determinative for our knowledge of God, of ourselves, and of the rest of creation, and so also for the scholarly task.

The Law of God: That the whole creation is ordered by the law of God made known to us in the integral revelation of the Word of God so that his law governs the norms for the whole creation including theoretical thought, social order, ecclesiastical life, morality, and every other aspect of the creation.

Christ: That the Christ of the Scriptures, the Living Word of God incarnate, is the Redeemer and Renewer of life in its entirety, including, therefore, our learning and scholarship.

Reality: That the essence, or heart, of all created reality is the covenantal communion of humankind with God in Christ. By this covenantal communion we mean the communion established and maintained by God's covenant as that divinely willed arrangement by which humankind, united in covenant community in submission to God, is given dominion over the creation under God for its fulfilment in his eternal purpose in Christ.

Life: That human life in its entirety is religion: that is, all that men and women do is either a willing, obedient bowing before God or a turning from God in rebellion to bow before an idol, a God substitute. To this the tasks of education and scholarship are no exception and, consequently, unfold as service of the one true God or of an idol.

Knowledge: That since the religious disposition of the heart determines the direction of the whole of our life, true knowledge is made possible by true religion and arises from the knowing activity of the human heart enlightened through the Word of God by the Holy Spirit. Thus religion plays its decisive ordering role in the understanding of our everyday experience and our theoretical pursuits.

Scholarship: (a) That the diligent pursuit of learning and scholarship in a community of scholars is essential to the obedient and thankful response of God's people to the cultural mandate. The task of the scholar is to give a theoretical account of the created order and thereby to promote a more effective ordering of the everyday experience of the entire community.

(b) That because of God's gracious preservation of creation after the fall, people who reject the Word of God as the ordering principle of life may provide many valuable insights into the common structure of reality. Although we can and should profit from a diligent study of these insights, the central religious antithesis of the direction of life remains so that, as regards its foundations and religious direction, all theoretical thought should be subjected continually in radical criticism to the performing power of the Word of God. We, therefore, reject any attempts to synthesise thought which gains its basic foundations and direction from Scripture with thought that is founded in and directed by other religious principles.

Academic Freedom: That scholarly pursuits are to be undertaken in the God-given freedom of a complete and voluntary submission to the Word of God and the divine law that governs human life. The responsible freedom of the scholar must be protected against any constraint or domination of church, state, industry or any other societal structure and the scholar, in responsible freedom, must be ready to protect church, state, industry, and every other societal structure against the constraint or

domination of science and scholarship so that the freedom and authority of the societal structures under God, each in its own sphere, is preserved.

Summary: That, conscious that we have not reached the goal, but that in many things we stumble and fall short, critical reformation, conceived in hope, exercised in humility and applied also to our own thought is indispensable to believing scholarship. Yet, in continuing to pursue the goal of our divine calling in Christ Jesus, all scholarship pursued in faithful obedience to the divine mandate will heed the normative direction of God's Word, will acknowledge his law to which creation in all its spheres is subject, and will bow before Christ's kingship over all learning and scholarship.