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DEISM AND THE ABSENCE OF CHRISTIAN SOCIOLOGY

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This article encourages a reconsideration of Christian sociology. It explains how deism makes a decisive impact in the theoretical foundations of the discipline. Dutch neo-calvinistic philosophy in its North American immigrant setting after World War II issued a challenge which drew attention to the dogmas of deism implicit in sociology, but this challenge has not been met. Christian sociology, however, still retains its God-given vocation to find ways to encourage people everywhere to positively form complex differentiated social settings in the Spirit of the Suffering and Glorified Messiah.

1. *Introduction: Mounting an Open Challenge to Deism*

This essay takes up the challenge from Roy Clouser[2] and calls for renewed reflection on reformational sociology. The serious self-criticism of the myth of religious neutrality among those seeking a reformational sociology needs to identify how an uncritical acceptance of this myth continues to make an impact upon our scientific work. In seeking to reverse the dominant trend, we may raise the issue of the hidden role of religious belief in sociology, but any progress toward authentic and self-critical theoretical discourse must mean a greater understanding as to how this myth exerts an influence upon our *own* efforts to develop Christian sociology than has hitherto been achieved.

Recently, the editor of a leading sociological journal raised the possibility that deism might be a hidden influence within sociology. In a brief, albeit cryptic, reference to deism, Craig Calhoun called for discussion of religion's impact upon sociological theory.[3] Yet despite any brevity, the word "deistic" portends important issues. But subsequently he had to conclude that the discussion he wanted to promote seemed to hold little interest to all but a few scattered theorists.[4] So why refer to deism at all?[5] Was this Calhoun's intuitive

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[2] Roy A. Clouser, *The Myth of Religious Neutrality,* Notre Dame, 1991. Some years ago I was told by the book review editor of a sociology of religion journal that another of Clouser's book *Knowing with the Heart,* Downers Grove, 1998, was unsuitable for review. When asked why, he replied that it was sectarian, referring to its Christian publisher. That same journal extols the sentiments of William James as a basis for the sociology of religion. Clouser's "variety" of philosophical perspective, and its implications for the sociology of religion, must remain on the outside as long as that policy prevails.

[3] Craig Calhoun, 'Editor's Comment and Call for Papers', *Sociological Theory,* 15:1 (March 1997): 1-2.

[4] Craig Calhoun, 'Symposium on Religion', *Sociological Theory,* 17:3 (Nov. 1999): 237-9.

[5] 5 contributions were published in *Sociological Theory,* 17:3 (Nov 1999), Charles Lemert,

attempt to extend the decades-long criticism that has been directed at the so-called "enlightenment project"? Was he not indicating that contemporary sociological theory showed a lack of critical concern about its own religiosity? Maybe Calhoun was wanting to discuss whether deism is still alive and well in contemporary post-modern sociology and if so, following Clouser, we would want to investigate how it maintains a neutralising influence, even if, in its own terms, it *must* remain unidentified. Still, the fact that Calhoun referred to deism as a mode of religiosity at all is significant in itself. Could it not indicate the view that "post-modern incredulity"[6] is the latest form, rather than a denial, of the deistic meta-narrative which has framed enlightenment thinking? And any close attention to deism within American sociology will also have to note its presence in the world-view of some of America's founding fathers. Calhoun's call will be examined further below and this introductory paragraph simply explains the background to why the term "deism" is in this essay's title. For a brief self-critical moment, deism appeared on sociology's agenda; that fact should provoke reformational sociological reflection. In positive terms this essay discusses how such a sociology develops its own self-critical approach, rejecting any dogmatic appeal to Christian presuppositions which can all too easily mask an allegiance to the myth of religious neutrality and thereby an accommodation with deism.

2. *So Whatever Happened to Reformational Sociology?*

When Dooyeweerd expounded his transcendental critique of theoretical thought, philosophical sociology had an important place within it. The critical assessment of the sociological discipline's place in the encyclopaedia, although part of the new critical approach to science, was in turn a contribution to the reformation of sociology itself[7]. This is to say that sociology is not somehow outside the realm of "pure critique" as one of philosophy's applications, but is also integral to the critique itself. But if that is to be granted, then those working in this new critical tradition still have to explain why theoretical and empirical progress in reformational sociology has been minimal. The special scientific analysis of the "societal aspect", of social forms and manners, has not developed, and as yet there is no distinctive reformational genre for ethnography or community studies.

'The Might Have Been and Could Be of Religion in Social Theory', 240-263; Rodney Stark, 'Micro Foundations of Religion: A Revised Theory', 264-289; Michelle Dillon, 'The Authority of the Holy Revisited: Habermas, Religion and Emancipatory Possibilities', 290-306; Richard L. Wood, 'Religious Culture and Political Action', 307-332; .Jeffrey K. Olick, 'Collective Memory: The Two Cultures', 333-348. These articles can be said to broach deism in sociology only indirectly, if at all.

[6] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Post-Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,* Minneapolis, 1984, XXIV

[7] Herman Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* [4 vols]. Philadelphia. 1969 (Volume III Part II *Structures of Individuality of Temporal Human Society*); *A Christian Theory of Social Institutions* (Translation of *Grondproblemen der Wijsgerige Sociologie* 1962by M. Verbrugge) Edited & with an Introduction by John Witte, La Jolla, 1986, 31-44.

One explanation may be that reformational academics are more committed to the "myth of religious neutrality" than they realise. A reconsideration of the basis of our commitment to reformed curriculae and reformational traditions may be in order. Have we perhaps imbibed deistic insights about science from these sources? The reformation which Dooyeweerd's *New Critique* announced does not make much sense as a reform of philosophical thinking apart from science. And since Dooyeweerd's reformation is directed at how scientific disciplines are structured, it is surprising that so little consideration has been given to critically examining deism, particularly in the way deism has influenced the "tectonic plates" of sociological theory.

Part of Clouser's argument when he uncovers the "myth of religious neutrality", is that this myth makes its decisive impact upon scientific work across the *entire* encyclopaedia. So, in extending Clouser's discussion to sociology, we must confront the internal disciplinary problems that serve to hinder the examination of any underlying religious, and in this case deistic, viewpoint.

Since the publication of Dooyeweerd's *New Critique*, there have been sociological studies of reformed communities,[8] some indicating distinctly reformational insights,[9] and there are various papers, theses, books and collections, some published as a result of academic conferences and from various Christian associations, all showing a commitment to a reformed type of "Christian sociology". As well, there have been applications of reformational sociological insight to the field of economics,[10] input for over a quarter-century from the UK Ilkley Group of Christians in sociology[11] closely allied work in the discipline of economics.[12] The e-list of the North American Association for Christians Teaching Sociology occasionally features discussion about "Christian Sociology."[13] The Center for Public Justice in Washington applies reformational insight to what might be termed a reformed Christian political sociology,[14] and there has been work in the theory of technology.[15] Despite an ever-expanding

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[8] See the International Society for the Study of Reformed Communities, established during the 1990s, from co-operation between scholars at Hope College, Calvin College, the Free University and elsewhere. Its web-site is www.hope.edu/affiliations/ issrc .

[9] See Harry van Belle, 'The Impact of WW II on the Reformed Dutch in the Netherlands and Canada: A Comparison' *Pro Rege* , June 1991, 27-33; Hillie J. van de Streek 'Gender Politics Based on Christian Political Thinking', Social Science History Association paper, November 7th, Baltimore 1993.

[10] See Bob Goudzwaard, *Capitalism and Progress: A Diagnosis of Western Society,* Grand Rapids & Toronto, 1979; *Globalization and the Kingdom of God* Washington, Grand Rapids, 2001.

[11] Alan Storkey, *A Christian Social Perspective*, Leicester, 1979; *Transforming Economics: A Christian Way to Employment*, London, 1986; *Foundational Epistemologies in Consumption Theory,* Amsterdam, 1993 and the publications of the Association of Christian Economists (UK). Website:users.aber.ac.uk/arh/ace.html

[12] Alan Storkey, *op cit;* David Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times,* Cambridge, 2000. See www.xalt.co.uk/webspace/ilkley/main/, maintained by Greg Smith, for information of the Christian Sociologist list.

[13] "Association of Christians Teaching Sociology". To subscribe send message "Subscribe ACTS-L First Name Surname" to LISTSERV@lists.Messiah.edu.

[14] James W. Skillen, *Recharging the American Experiment : Principled Pluralism for Genuine Civic Community*, Grand Rapids, 1994.

[15] Egbert Schuurman, *Technology and the Future: A Philosophical Challenge* (translated by H. D. Morton) Toronto, 1980.

literature any actual progress is not easy to specify. The application of a reformational philosophical perspective to conventional debates in sociology is not extensive.[16] And distinctive disciplinary contours for reformational sociology have not, as yet, emerged.

Here is a problem for a reformational sociology of science to investigate. Looking back over half a century, why, after significant intellectual development in the 1950s, did reformational sociology falter? The calls of the 1950s and '60s, from "émigré" writers Remkes Kooistra[17] and Maarten Vrieze[18], as well as Hendrik van Riessen,[19] were indeed a challenge to the "main-line" discipline with a reformational alternative in view. Yet within the reformational movement other concerns have taken precedence. Might this neglect be because the task itself is simply too complex?[20]

One possible explanation is that there has been a reformational "turning away" from the reformational task in sociology. After all, those trained in academic sociology know Max Weber's account of the emergence of modern capitalism and how it emerged from an inner transformation within the Calvinistic world-view. Could the story of reformational sociology be the latest chapter in the "Prozess der Entzauberung"[21] brilliantly described in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*?[22] For Weber, Calvinism was the historical seedbed of capitalism and the primary source for the modern empirical outlook. For him the commitment to rationality within the Calvinist world-view enabled science to become an autonomous cultural sphere and that is why Calvinism, despite itself, promoted its own secularisation.

Weber's interpretation needs to be carefully explored. We might want to deny that it facilitated the domination of the "myth of religious neutrality" in the "techtonic plates"[23] of science and sociology, but we must do more than confront deism. Any exposé must critically assess this view, sociology's conventional view, of its own religious origins. Such a critique may help current

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[16] Christian social science groups are undecided whether they are to be groups convened to study a special set of (Christian) data, sometimes neglected by mainline disciplines, or associations to promote a Christian approach to the (history, economics, sociology) discipline.

[17] Remkes Kooistra, *Facts and Values: A Christian Approach to Sociology,* Hamilton Ont., 1963.

[18] Maarten Vrieze, *The Community Idea in Canada,* Hamilton Ont., 1966; *Introduction to Sociology – 121* Class Syllabus, Trinity Christian College, 1967; *Nadenken over de Samenleving,* 24, Amsterdam, 1977.

[19] Hendrik van Riessen, *The Society of the Future,* Philadelphia, translated and edited under the supervision of D. H. Freeman, 1952 (the original was *De Maatschappij der Toekomst,* Franeker, 1952).

[20] John Witte 'Introduction' (in Dooyeweerd, 1986, *op cit* pp. 11-30) makes no connection between Dooyeweerd's theory of social institutions and the approach of contemporary American sociology.

[21] Translated as: "the disenchantment process". Some scholars prefer a literal "demagicification" to avoid Marxist "disillusionment" or the existentialist "loss of real meaning".

[22] For one reformed thinker's accommodation to Weberian insights see Nicholas Wolterstorff, *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief,* Cambridge, 1996, 227-246. Locke's proposal may not solve political and epistemological problems, yet this author stops short of advocating a biblically-directed Christian sociology over against, and in critique of, Weber's view of the protestant reformation.

[23] Clouser, 1991, *op cit,* 1ff.

students of sociology interpret their experiences of the modern and post-modern university curriculum but this critical approach also implies a *hypothesis for ongoing research in Christian sociology itself,* in which Weber's sociological impact upon reformational thinking needs to be disclosed. Any reformational alternative must understand deism's impact upon its own tradition. And that means it is all the more urgent to develop a critical explanation of reformational sociology's lack of development.

Rather than alleging any "deistic conspiracy" against Christian sociology, we should be looking at whether "reformational sociology" has undermined itself by nurturing deistic beliefs in its own world-view, by developing its ongoing scientific work by a process of scholarly accommodation to such beliefs. To become self-critical in this way is to entertain the possibility that it is "our" deism that has been an implicit part of "our" "biblically-directed" reflections all along and thereby denying the "radically biblical approach" we say we wish to develop. Besides, what validity can there be for assuming, in dogmatic style, that embarrassment in science is solely or primarily reserved for so-called non-religious scholars who avoid the deism hidden within their scientific analysis?

Any approach to science undertaken within deism's mythic horizon will ascribe religious neutrality to the order of creation, laying down subtle prescriptions for "good manners" in science. At times these can hardly be discussed.[24] Such is their impact that these rules should not be thought of as something enforced exclusively by a nondescript category of deists. Christian scholars also live in the secularised scientific domain where these morés prevail and thus also develop their "polite" contributions in accordance with them.

3. *Reformational Critique of Deism*

Explicit reformational criticism of deism's impact upon science is not extensive. Yet a scientific challenge to any such deeply embedded and false way of understanding (2 Cor 10:5)[25] must aim to foster a truly critical attitude which comes to expression within social science. To gain a better understanding of the absence of reformational sociology we can also consider how the "presence" of this alternative religious vision has been subjected to one significant reformational critique.[26] John VanderStelt's analysis of Old Princeton and

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[24] This observation from personal experience is reminiscent of B. B. Warfield's phrase, used by H. Evan Runner to discuss "sphere sovereignty" (H. Evan Runner 'Sphere sovereignty' in *The Relation of the Bible to Learning,* Toronto, 1970, 130-166 at 151). The deistic rule of polite scientific discourse is not so much heard as regularly "over-heard" when scholarly discussion broaches the question of how religion is related to learning.

[25] "Bringing every thought captive to Christ" is often quoted. Reformational sociology will be aware that deism will quote 2 Cor 10:5 in its own way. See the December 1953 'Conversation with Martin Heidegger recorded by Herman Noack' in Martin Heidegger, *The Piety of Thinking* (Trans J. G. Hart and J. C. Maraldo), Bloomington, 1976, 59-71, 182-4.

[26] Although not part of this discussion, contemporary Christian criticism of natural theology is an important and related issue. See David N. Livingstone 'Geography and the Natural Theology Imperative' in H. Aay & S. Griffioen (eds), *Geography and Worldview,* Lanham, 1-17. The sociology of science, as represented by the journal *Social Studies of Science,* must figure in any reformational reconsideration of sociology.

Westminster theology focuses upon the way Holy Scripture's relation to philosophy was construed when:

> [In] opposition to the deistic idea that God is impersonal, Presbyterian theology advocated the theistic idea of a personal God.[27]

North American Presbyterians were seeking an orthodox account of ultimate truth and reliable knowledge,[28] building on a Scottish theological inheritance which was critical of deism. VanderStelt identifies an underlying philosophical dualism — "that colossal iceberg of divided thoughts"[29] — as the inner weakness of this renewal; his argument is in fact a criticism of that critique of deism. He agrees that any biblically-directed response cannot simply add a factor of God's "personal relationship" to any deistic doctrine of God. But he appeals beyond theology to scriptural authority over the entire horizon of scientific thinking *per se*, by asking: how should Christian thinking understand the entire intellectual tradition *in the light of the scriptural revelation?* For VanderStelt, *all* scientific disciplines, severally and together, are implicated. This is also why his alternative critical approach to deism manifests itself as an alternative to that other North American reformational critique of deism represented by Cornelius Van Til's apologetics. Apologetics for VanderStelt is incapable of overcoming deism in scientific thinking.[30]

Elsewhere VanderStelt has argued for a redefinition from "theology" to "pistology." A reformational scientific approach is not merely the application of reformational insights to what has been received as conventional academic wisdom about, say, a particular tradition of theological reflection. A reformational critique has structural implications for the division of labour in science. VanderStelt's theoretical critique also assumes an encyclopaedic impact.[31]

In this view the Creator-creation relationship as basis for *all* scientific work should not be referred to in any one science as if that science has no inner philosophical inter-connection with all other sciences. To confess that God is our Creator is to acknowledge that He, by His Word, encourages us personally to reflect upon His relationship with us in all scientific fields. This alone makes all scientific investigations — in whatever discipline — possible and meaningful.

> At the basis of the subject of scientific truth and scriptural truth lies the issue of the Creator-creation relationship. Without resorting to mysticism … the relationship between God and the world that He made can never be understood or

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[27] John C. VanderStelt, *Philosophy and Scripture: a Study in Old Princeton and Westminster Theology*, Marlton NJ, 1978, 303.

[28] *ibid*, 314.

[29] *ibid*, 315.

[30] *ibid*, 221-270, 304-314 noting the paragraph at the bottom of p. 305. Compare this with C. Van Til 'Prof. Vollenhoven's Significance for Reformed Apologetics', *Wetenschappelijke Bijdragen door Leerlingen van Dr D. H. Th. Vollenhoven* (collected by S. U. Zuidema; dedication by K. J. Popma), Franeker & Potchefstroom, 1951, 68-71.

[31] John C. VanderStelt, 'Theology or Pistology?' *Issues*, No.2, February 1985, (ACS NZ), 6-12 (first published in James A. DeJong and Louis Y. Van Dyk, *Building the House*, Sioux Center, 1981, 115-135).

> defined in a theoretic way. This relationship is incomparable … determined by no other relationship and, in turn, is conditional for all other relationships that exist within created reality … Rather than demanding a scientific definition … this unique relationship presupposes an obedient heart-commitment and requires confessional acknowledgment.[32]

Such ambiguities as VanderStelt exposes within North American Presbyterian orthodoxy can only be overcome when *theology*, as one special science, leaves behind any dogmatic self-definition in which it is the ultimate counter-point to deism. Instead, a *philosophy* that bows before God in His ongoing relationship with His creation will encourage a scientific reformation in *all* special sciences by scientists learning the "heart obedience" of the Christian scholar. The Creator-creation relationship can neither be captured by any philosophical concept nor by one or other science, but true respect for the Creator-creation relationship acknowledges it as the precondition for each and every creature. And so the work called science in *each and every* discipline is opened up as humble service.

That is why philosophical critique should not be limited to theology, or one or other "sector" of science. To limit the critique, by failing to apply it in any special science, is to undermine critical insight about theoretical reflection within the Creation order. For the critique to have its true impact within theology requires critical understanding of how scientific endeavour *per se* is possible. VanderStelt's reformation from "theology" to "pistology" is wholly consistent with transformations needed in all the non-pistological scientific specialties[33], and that must include a new critical Christian sociology.

VanderStelt's critique may have received strong assent from reformational theologians, and reformational philosophers oriented to theology. Yet VanderStelt's critique may also give us a clue as to why reformational sociology has faltered. Having emphasized the call for scientific "heart obedience" in *all* disciplines, VanderStelt's analysis of one scholarly movement (Princeton/ Westminster) also implies that any movement which overlooks, ignores or diminishes the need for scientific development in some or other special science, stands, at best, on the brink of an inner secularisation of scientific thinking. It is a principle based in creation that the findings of science should deepen our lives, but secularisation undermines the blessedness of ordinary life by promoting an over-emphasis in which ordinary life experiences are diminished, all acclamations of piety notwithstanding.

We can say this in another way. To assume that the spiritual power of deism has been overcome by "our" theorising is to domesticate the critique of the myth of religious neutrality. Such science will adopt a style of ironclad apologetical combat, rather than the light cloak of theoretical investigative service[34].

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[32] VanderStelt, 1978, *op cit*, 315.

[33] VanderStelt's attempted redefinition of the special science pertaining to the "pistic" aspect reminds us that all sciences have to be named. The possibility of "societology" is thus raised, emphasizing that the coherence that pertains between sciences is also a theoretical problem of *critical* importance.

[34] Brad Breems, 'The Service of Sociology: Providing a lighter cloak or a sturdier iron cage?' in John H. Kok (ed), *Marginal Resistance: Essays Dedicated to John C VanderStelt,* Sioux

"Our" philosophical or scientific apologetic will assume that it is philosophical affirmation which "brings every thought captive to Christ," thereby subverting authentic science. Dooyeweerd's criticism of theological scholasticism explained how the notion that theological knowledge is the essence of non-neutrality in science becomes the harbinger of secularisation. Theological or philosophical theorising may style itself as "theistic" but when it defines its own contribution as the major force against the myth of religious neutrality it has already imputed an encyclopaedic order in which the other special sciences have to find their subsidiary function. In this way a "deistic" design is imputed to the scientific task. It is the simple and mythic assumption that "our" Christian approach overcomes deism by dint of its theoretical effort. Alternatively, a reformational sociology will build on VanderStelt's critique and develop a new, critical understanding of how deism's beliefs function in social science, seeking to foster the full implications of an authentically Christian critique of theoretical thought and point in another direction, the direction of religious self-criticism.[35]

4. *Sociological Theory and the Critique of Deism*

In the wake of the post-modern "incredulity to all meta-narratives", discussion of religion's relation to sociological theory is still highly ambiguous. In his creative and critical call as editor of *Sociological Theory,* Craig Calhoun noted that all kinds of questions are debated in sociology's self-criticism, but, the time has come to ask whether different theories are more or less compatible with *deistic* assumptions or more specific faiths[36]. This call seeks to reassess how religion relates to sociology, focusing upon the taken-for-granted *religious* attitudes shaping sociological theory's place in the American academy. Calhoun's editorial should attract the attention of those promoting reformational sociology because sociology's long-held assumption of its own religious neutrality should be part of that critical re-examination.

Initially it seemed that Calhoun had intuitively grasped that a non-specific deism was the basis for sociology's inclusivism. He wanted sociological theorists to examine this carefully, aiming to sharpen disciplinary self-understanding. All other kinds of data about race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, class and social status, have made a reflexive and positive impact upon sociological theory. Why not religion? He notes:

Center, 2001, 253-272 creatively respondes to a passage in Max Weber's essay *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (translated by Talcott Parsons), LosAngeles 1996, 181, by comparing the Faustian iron cage of modernity with Richard Baxter's puritan "light cloak" in *Saints Everlasting Rest, 1650.*

[35] This is not to suggest that a cultivation of reformed "humility" will overcome deism. A critical examination of the principles guiding the respected Templeton Foundation, will note how spirituality and values form part of the "Humility theology" which is promoted as a bridge between science and religion.

[36] Calhoun, 1997, *op cit,* 2. He is now President of the Social Science Research Council, USA.

> Theorists have written quite a lot about secularisation, but rather less about faith. Certainly there is a lot of good sociology of religion, much of it theoretically serious and indeed innovative. But amid our attempts to reconcile action and structure, to grapple with embodiment, to rethink culture and social organization in the light of gender, to trace networks of power and to conceptualise the rise and transformation of the capitalist world system, have we done enough to make sense of religious faith and practise?… Are we able to clarify the implications of religious faith as a starting point for theory, or the different strategies open to religious social theorists for relating faith to theory? … Directly theoretical questions need to be debated — like whether different theories are more or less compatible with deistic assumptions or more specific faiths. We also need attention to how to theorize the relation of religion to other dimensions of society… [37]

But some time later, as Editor of the resultant volume, he observed:

> Religion figures more prominently in social life than in sociology. Indeed, there is perhaps no greater disproportion between the concerns of sociologists and those of the rest of the members of contemporary society.[38]

By such a comment Calhoun implies that deism's presence is no longer the main issue. Maybe it can be explained in general, non-specific terms, by the data that measures religious sentiment. That it could be viewed as a religious orientation guiding theory is no longer part of the picture. This might help explain his initial caution when he issued the call, in terms of a desire to avoid an incipient potential for religious dogmatism. But does not the later avoidance of the connection between deism and theory indicate a premature abandonment of what had formerly been suggested as a potential line of critical thinking? We are reminded here of the note Dooyeweerd appended to his critique of the dogma of the pretended autonomy of theoretical thought:

> We do not demand that the adherents of this dogma abandon it by anticipation. We only ask them to abstain from the dogmatical assertion that it is a necessary condition of any true philosophy and to subject this assertion to the test of a transcendental critique of theoretical thought itself.[39]

Dooyeweerd's "we do not demand" implies that genuine self-critical understanding is not a dogmatic anticipation about the non-viability of any position, even if it were an "other" position which one seeks to avoid. The critique of the dogma must be self-critical, as theoretical reflection returns, as it must, to the theorist who thought it. The adherent of this dogma is not the "other fellow" but first and foremost the thinker engaged in critical self-reflection, the philosophical thinker arguing a case with her/himself.[40] This dogma hinders the disclosure of such reflection in authentically theoretical ways, and its presence pushes thinking away from the *truly self-critical direction* implied in our God-given vocation. Dooyeweerd and Calhoun may not advocate the same philosophy but they can be read to advocate something similar. Where

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[37] Calhoun 1997 *op cit*, 1-2.
[38] Calhoun, 1999, *op cit*, 1
[39] Herman Dooyeweerd, *In the Twilight of Western Thought*, Nutley NJ, 1972, 6
[40] Dooyeweerd, 1969, *op cit* Vol I, VIII "The detailed criticism of [humanism] must be understood self-critically, as a case which the Christian thinker pleads with himself."

Calhoun wanted debate about whether different theories are more or less compatible with deistic assumptions or more specific faiths, Dooyeweerd poses his classic question: *is the supposed religious neutrality of theoretical thought demanded by the structure of such thought itself?*

We should listen carefully to Calhoun's call, particularly if we consider the critical issue to be about the way thinkers should distinguish between the religious basis of their theorising, on the one hand, and their account of theory's "distinctive integrity",[41] in its confrontation with creation's ordered diversity, on the other. We should not assume that such attempts that imply criticism of sociology's presumed religious neutrality are simply part of the advancing tide of post-modernism. Academic fashion may have a power, but it is no explanation for how the myth of religious neutrality remains central to sociology, nor does it explain how it is possible to develop a critical attitude toward it.

In my estimation, Calhoun's use of the term "deistic" still has paradigm-changing potential if it is heard within the discipline as a challenge to sociology to get serious about its own *religious* character. Even if that only means a discussion about how an appeal to deistic assumptions allows a theorist to avoid any specific religious assumptions, it would be an advance. But we are left with the suspicion that the dogmatic denial of its own (deistic) religiosity is the peculiar shape of contemporary sociology. We might even see this possibility in Calhoun's report on the response to his call:

> I received relatively few submissions in response to my call for papers. I did receive several compliments and several complaints — both often driven by the assumption that calling for sociological theory to take religion seriously meant calling for theorists to be guided by religious beliefs.[42]

Clearly, the possibility that sociological theory could have ever been guided by an undisclosed religiosity is no longer in view. Somehow the foundational possibility of connecting deism with theory has receded. Calhoun defers to Lemert's emphasis upon human finitude, and it is this which is the link with the critical viewpoint he had in mind.[43] But, if an undisclosed deism is indeed the established confession of sociology, then an investigation of this masked basis, and of the bases for dissent from this *de facto* established faith of sociological theory, should be the appropriate response. Instead, we see "deism" confirmed by what appears to be a dogmatic lurch toward pious humility in the face of human finitude. Of course, the possibility should not be ruled out that Calhoun's call intended all along to promote a kind of self-examination within sociology which, if heeded, would eventually return again to the deistic monopoly it wanted to examine. Yet, even if this were so, there is a sense in which Calhoun, in renewing the deistic viewpoint of human finitude, can still be heard calling for something similar to Dooyeweerd, as a necessary step toward *any* critical sociology.

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[41] A synonym for "sphere sovereignty" chosen by the editors of van Riessen's *The University and its Basis* Wantirna, Australia, 1997, 6 ftn.4

[42] Calhoun, 1999, *op cit,* 238.

[43] Calhoun, 1999, *op cit,* 239; Lemert, 1999, *op cit.*

> A sharp distinction between theoretical judgments and supra-theoretical pre-judgments, which alone make the former possible, is a primary requisite of critical thought.[44]

Yes, such a renewal of deism within sociology might want the distinction to be made for the purpose of strengthening the *separation* between religion and sociological theory. Reformational sociology, on the other hand, will have to make its (analytical) "distinction" without reifying it into a "separation", which, logically, can never provide a legitimate *religious* basis for work of any kind, work in science included. Such deistic separation – by Calhoun's definition a non-specific belief in God — cannot be accepted by reformational sociology. It implies a set of supra-theoretical pre-judgments which are an invalid basis for scientific sociology, or any science.

But what legitimacy is there to the suggestion that deism has formed the basis for sociology? It needs to be demonstrated, and by so doing reformational sociology can help promote a renewed self-critical route for modern and post-modern sociology. To understand how deism has made its decisive impact within the discipline, we must first acknowledge the failure of reformational sociological thinking to hitherto criticise the deistic assumptions of the discipline. Those accepting this challenge will test this *hypothesis* as a first step towards a historical re-definition, a reformation in the way sociology is understood. MacDonald's consumerism may be traced to the Protestant ethic, but Calhoun's comment indicates the time is ripe to examine "The Deistic Ethic and the Spirit of American Sociology" in its full cultural meaning,[45] and that will include the re-writing of the history of sociology which will be no small matter.[46]

Calhoun notes that class, race, gender and sexuality have had their de-centring and deconstructive effects[47] upon recent sociology. Yet when deism is lined up with these as a "religious factor" does it not bring into view the possibility that its muted pre-theoretical voice has been active in sociological theory all along? For that kind of insight to take hold, the cultural power of the deistic world-view will have to be broken, with a significant turning away from

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[44] Dooyeweerd, 1969, *op cit,* Vol I, 70.

[45] Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity,* Princeton, 1996 explains the "success" of Christianity's universalism by its "faith choices" which in time were seen as wise investments based upon a supply-side world-view. Critical examination will relate this view to assumptions of religious neutrality in American sociology. Stark, 1999, *op cit* (see ftn 4 above) is a further development of this thesis.

[46] For perceptive discussion of the history of Christian sociology see David Lyon, 'The Idea of a Christian sociology : Some Historical Precedents and Current Concerns', *Sociological Analysis,* 44:3, 227-242. "Christian sociology" may also be seen as a sociological accommodation to fundamentalism, but critical analysis of fundamentalism will also test whether it requires a *religious* accommodation to deism.

[47] Does Jane Flax draw on the tradition of Christian dissent in 'Postmodernism and gender relations in feminist theory', *Signs,* 12:4, 1987, 21-43? See for example "Feminist theories, like other forms of post-modernism, should encourage us to tolerate and interpret ambivalence, ambiguity and multiplicity as well as to expose the roots of our needs for imposing order and structure no matter how arbitrary and oppressive these needs may be… 'reality' will appear even more unstable, complex, and disorderly … (with) women as the enemies of civilization" (43).

the inner ambiguities of religiously neutrality. That is why Calhoun's call can prompt "lightly cloaked" reformational sociology to return again and again to the every-day academic neighbourhood and assist fellow sociologists, Christian and non-Christian, who do not easily engage in this kind of self-criticism. There is an immanent potential here to challenge the discipline's self-understanding which may open the way to a new interpretation of "*Wertfreiheit*". We should not forget that "value freedom" was often experienced by students of good conscience as a requirement that they be dishonest, that they mask their beliefs. The uncritical, *confessional* monopoly maintained by the discipline's leading academics, was often experienced as a mere ploy, a façade of fake scientific rigour.[48]

5. *Why Sociology Has Difficulty Rediscovering its Deistic Spirituality*

When Calhoun inserts the word "deistic" into his call for a re-examination of sociology's non-specific faith, the context implies that he assumes that the discipline is deeply rooted in America's democratic culture. Thus "deism" must also touch upon the analysis of the civil religion of the world's last remaining super-power.[49] Deistic sociology in America might, logically speaking, be viewed as an academic expression of that sentiment which De Tocqueville identified.

> The people reign over the American political world as God rules over the universe. It is the cause and end of all things; everything rises out of it and is absorbed back into it.[50]

The comparable sentiment found in Durkheim's foundational statement for the sociology of religion does not, however, leave sociology in the grip of one national ideology, as would result if De Tocqueville's vision, stated above, is taken as normative for sociology.

> In the world of experience I know of only one being that possesses a richer and more complex moral reality than our own, and that is the collective being. I am mistaken; there is another being which could play the same part and that is the divinity. Between God and society lies the choice. I shall not examine here the reasons that may be advanced in favour of either solution, both of which are coherent. I can only add that I myself am quite indifferent to this choice, since I see in the divinity only society transfigured and symbolically expressed.[51]

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[48] Arnold Brecht, *Political Theory: the Foundations of Twentieth-Century Political Thought,* Princeton, 1959, "Modern science … rest[s] on the stubborn faith that facts are facts … this faith cannot be accounted for by scientific method; it is an 'immanent methodological a priori' … " (508).

[49] An exposition of which is found in Rockne McCarthy, 'American Civil Religion', in James W. Skillen (ed) *Confessing Christ and Doing Politics,* Washington 1982, 63-87.

[50] Alexis deTocqueville, *Democracy in America,* edited by J P Mayer & Max Lerner (new translation by George Lawrence in two Volumes), London, 1966, 71 (Volume 1).

[51] Émile Durkheim, *Selected Writings,* (edited by Anthony Giddens), Cambridge, 1972, 246 quoted by Remkes Kooistra, *Facts and Values: A Christian Approach to Sociology,* Hamilton, 1963, 24.

Durkheim's scientific study of society not only seems to avoid an American ideology, it rules out any empirical consideration of God, because sentiments are inherent to social life. Logically this view may be accepted by atheistic sociology, but Durkheim's formulation is still highly compatible with deistic assumptions of a "remote deity".

Interpretative problems become very complex at this point. Our brief examination of what Calhoun might have meant by "deistic" leads us to the possibility that Durkheimian sociology in the American academy may involve what Alexander identifies as that strong tendency in sociological theory for "camouflage" and ambivalence.[52] American sociological theory may reject the idea that it is an expression of majoritarian religious ideology in the Tocquevillian sense, but how could we ever know without a critical investigation in the line Calhoun suggests?

If sociology requires its deism to be masked, this might explain why so many trained in the discipline experience no problem at all with the secularised viewpoints of Durkheim, let alone his various contemporary commentators (Robert Bellah[53], Jeffrey Alexander, Bryan Turner, Wolfgang Schluchter, Anthony Giddens, Robert Alun Jones). It is a sociological viewpoint which allows for a link to be made, albeit in an undefined and still *personal* way, to whatever lies "beyond". The logic implies however that full professional participation in public life is only possible on a secularised basis, and for this the concept of a (religiously neutral) moral order is crucial. In Durkheimian *social* science the concept of moral order functions like the concept of "*natural order*" in *natural* science. Beliefs about the origin of this moral law are viewed as legitimate for any scientist's personal reflections, but it is supposed that any scientific appropriation of such data (about people's beliefs) must not get embroiled with the rightness or wrongness of judgments about which sentiments are true and which false. Durkheim saw himself to be quite indifferent to the choice but for him any scientist with *specific* beliefs about the deity who rules nature still has to engage in science according to the "rules of the game". Those who are not indifferent to the choice retain their place in sociology as long as they refuse to be ruled by religious sentiment. The spokesperson for divine authority has no role in the non-sentimental realm of science. The involvement of religious persons in science implies that they have excused themselves from such duty.[54] The focus of science is upon social facts and that includes the facts of religious sentiment.

The "religious" sociologist is left to think about how the work done in common with others (subject to the order given by some non-specific deity) relates to beliefs held in a personal sphere (in which decrees from *any* personal deity are admissible). This is a personal-moral (rather than a strict

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[52] Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Theoretical Logic in Sociology – Volume Two : The Antinomies of Classical Thought: Marx and Durkheim,* London, 1982, 6-7, 374-376.

[53] See also Lemert, 1999, *op cit* for discussion of Durkheim and Bellah's Durkheim.

[54] By contrast, Weber's wistful point, in the closing paragraphs of *Wissenschaft als Beruf,* is that such believers are excluded by "the fate of our times". The English version is found in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (editors H. H. Gerth and C W Mills), New York, 1946, 130-156 at 155-156.

public-legal) "wall of separation" between public faith and private creed. To work from inside the limits of this wall becomes a mark of civic piety, albeit with considerable tension.[55]

That is not all. Any scientist's (personal) god has to be made (or kept) subject to this same logical structure and stay on the side of the wall reserved for all deities. Any deity who does not has impolitely violated the self-imposed limitations of science. In this way it can be said, in a manner of speaking, that the Logic which separates science from religion, fact from sentiment, and even belief from deity, itself partakes of the divine nature. That is why the recognition of any deity within science is dependent upon a sentiment that views the deity as subject to rules devised for scientific work. The deity will keep out of the scientific realm in any *specific and personal* sense. And so, religion's connection to science as a non-specific "*blur*" is not only paradigmatic; it is a fated decree.

Any reformational confrontation with sociology must confront this "blurry deism", which will be difficult not least because those holding to such a view will usually assume that such discussion must be driven by a commitment to an intelligent or intelligible divine origin similar to the historical "god of nature" standing behind the "natural order". As well it is often assumed that to even study sociology means a student is well on the way to intellectual secularisation anyway, sometimes viewed as a transition from "blurry" deism to atheism. That is why reformational sociology needs to better understand its own approach and not develop its sociology on the basis of an *a priori* distinction between "nature" and "society". The investigation of the social order, as an investigation of aspects of God's creation, will indeed lead us to a better understanding of how we have been created so that in our social life we depend utterly upon creation's Creator. Biblical revelation in telling us about creation's revelation reminds us of the social order which also speaks to us in natural tones about its divine origin: "out of the mouths of babes and sucklings" (Psalm 8). This voice indeed echoes throughout creation and as human actors, made in God's image, we are called to fully love Him and to love our neighbours as ourselves. The creaturely character of God's revelation of his divine attributes remains a definitive personal insight, which must determine the foundations of any Christian sociology.

A reformational explanation of the place of faith in scientific activity must also challenge the notion of committed non-specificity in religious belief, showing that this presupposition directs theoretical reflection in a particular (rather than non-specific) way, the way of the myth of religious neutrality. We might note here that VanderStelt's critique of Princeton/ Westminster theological apologetics is also an implicit challenge to civil religion. When deism's *specific confessional character* is unmasked then its specific and secularising

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[55] Mark A. Noll 'The Evangelical Mind in America', in David W. Gill (ed), *Should God Get Tenure? Essays on Religion and Higher Education,* Grand Rapids, 1997, 195-211, at 208-209, agrees with Robert Wuthnow that, in any under-graduate Christian's higher educational experience, Marx, Durkheim and Weber are taken-for-granted pillars of the curriculum. Certainly, this is also the way in which the myth of religious neutrality tries to safeguard its contribution within academic sociology.

contribution in all scientific disciplines is also disclosed, as is its power to constrain and exclude in public life. But then a cultural task beckons which helps to specify its non-specificity and neuter its neutrality. Thus it will be in this way that the conventional understanding of "value free" can be challenged when the religious basis of deistic sociology is exposed.

We know that sociologists already experience difficulties when challenged to specify which faith their theorising is based upon. Those adhering to the myth of religious neutrality not only avoid viewing their own approach as *religious*, they have learned to see themselves in this way, trained to avoid this central characteristic of their own thinking. We should not underestimate the spiritually difficult process of "outing" deism. It will challenge learnéd understanding. If the experience of self-evidence is to be recognised as religious, as Clouser emphasizes, this will mean a scientific reformation. Calhoun's editorial was not a call for such a reformation even though it draws our attention to the dogmatic masking process in sociology's professed religious neutrality.

Yet, what would result if we were to ask, "Can all deists in sociology please identify themselves?" Is it not conceivable that few, if any, would respond? This non-specific faith encourages its believers to avoid identifying themselves in specific terms. The deistic mask may be an objective "view from nowhere",[56] viewing its professed neutrality as its logical opposition to entrenched privileges in academic culture.[57] Still, to name "non-specific deism" as a *religious* commitment begins to identify the goal of scientific discourse when it is oriented to protecting its own *absence*. Calhoun's cryptic challenge still implies a significant research project to identify the processes by which such a spirit is maintained *in sociology itself*. In times past sociology aligned itself with an exposé of that "Christian ethos" which masked a hypocritical and entrenched privilege,[58] but now reformational sociology needs to chart a new direction for *sociological* research via such disciplinary self-criticism.

And maybe we will come to the conclusion that our Christian failure was an important facet of sociology's inability to understand its own pre-theoretical basis. Is not the lack of a biblically-directed Christian alternative part of sociology's inability to be truthful about itself, despite its currently professed postmodern incredulity to all meta-narratives?

Still, as Calhoun implies, something akin to Durkheim's anonymous "collective" still defines inclusion and exclusion within main-line sociology.[59] Religiously neutral deism may claim to embody tolerance but the possibility of its exclusivism needs to be tested. We should note that non-specific deism *specifically* and dogmatically closes out the possibility that "more specific"

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[56] Thomas Nagel, *The View From Nowhere,* New York, 1986.

[57] As with Immanuel Wallerstein *et al, Open the Social Sciences: Report of the Gulbenkian Commission on the Restructuring of the Social Sciences,* Stanford, 1996.

[58] Dorothy Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science,* Cambridge, 1991, links the social gospel with "American exceptionalism".

[59] Could the "spiritual families" concept (McCarthy, 1982, *op cit*, 83) give shape to an alternative framework for intra-disciplinary discourse? A worthwhile conference would be to explore deistic belief in sociology with the authors of the 5 articles and former editor of *Sociological Theory* noted in footnote 4 above.

religious faith can ever provide a better scientific welcome to sociologists of "other faith."

6. *Sociology's Religious Self-Criticism*

Calhoun's call can also be interpreted as consistent with Max Weber's view that within science, science must be accepted as its own "god", even if this is not "our" personal god. Weber's approach has been widely followed,[60] and many in sociology define the distinctive integrity of the discipline by reference to his work.

The spiritually exhausting (re-)examination implicit in Max Weber's approach was carried forward when Talcott Parsons launched the *Society for the Scientific Study of Religion* in 1961. Then in response to William Kolb, Parsons noted that it was not just a matter of the "Judaeo Christian tradition" providing "a human image", but about the possibility of engaging in scientific reflection, whatever the religious background. Parsons reminded Kolb that the pagan Greek origins of modern philosophy are a common heritage, even if Christians like Kolb may want to claim sociology for a biblical view. The sociology of religion, for Parsons, developed in the midst of contending world-views. Its possibility is found through the rational analysis of religion rather than in any religious world-view itself. But Parsons asked: in which religious tradition has this view of rationality emerged?[61] That for him, and for sociology, has been the critical question.

For Parsons, Weber's thesis about Calvinism, capitalism and modern science provided the answer, and ever since it has defined the framework for sociology's reflection on religion. The turn to modernity came with the emergence of the modern scientific attitude within the culture of post-reformation Europe. The crucial moment was when Calvinistic rationality grasped its own economic "good fortune".

Scholars with spiritual roots in the Protestant reformation can hardly avoid Weber's claim about the pre-eminence of Calvinism in developments which were crucial to the dominance of capitalism via its this-worldly, materialistic outlook. But as much as Weber's thesis also explained the declension of Calvinism, and the rise of capitalism, it helped a discipline define its own character, aided and abetted by Parsons' critical sociological reflexivity. Hence, when sociologists of Calvinistic background, now interpret their background in terms of Weber's version of Calvin and Calvinism, they are standing on a precipice, faced with Weber's implicit account of their latter-day contribution

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[60] David Lee and Howard Newby, *The Problem of Sociology,* London, 1983, "Sociology is a difficult, stringent discipline… The problem for the would-be sociologist lies… [in the fact that] …our taken-for-granted beliefs …provide a comfortable, convenient and necessarily simplified picture of the social world. The effort required to place them under critical review and to keep them there, is almost superhuman" (345).

[61] William Kolb, 'Images of Man and the Sociology of Religion', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion,* 1961, 1:1, 5-22; Talcott Parsons, 'Comment' *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion,* 1961, 1:1, 22-29 (this is his reply to Kolb). Kolb, 'Rejoinder', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* , 1962, 2:2, 14-17.

to the rationalization process that has overtaken their own religious faith. For it needs emphasis that Weber's account can also be read as a treatise explaining how it is possible for the spiritual descendents of Calvinism, at that point in time (i.e. the early decades of the 20th century), to be studying sociology itself. Let no reformational sociologist underestimate the significance of this problematic. In Weber's view the materialistic motif of this scientific involvement, must be inextricably linked to the same form of rationality that has led the way in the "Prozesses der Entzauberung" (disenchantment).

Weber may not have intended his essay to be a direct contribution to Calvinistic self-criticism as I have just outlined it, and, unlike some Weberians, he does not seem to have assumed his work to be the final word on the history and historiography of Calvinism. But how many Christians within the sociological discipline, also of reformed background, receive *The Protestant Ethic* as if it is, at least for this life, the penultimate word on that history?[62] Any reformational counter-interpretation has not been particularly strong.

If reformational sociologists define themselves by how they see their world-view through Weber's glasses, they are implicitly adopting an attitude of sociological ambivalence. If they thereby learn, for whatever reason, to "hear, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest"[63] Weber's account of their own religion without giving an alternative sociological interpretation of their own religion, then they simply have little alternative but to find themselves described appropriately by his account. This is another good reason why reformational sociology needs to clearly distinguish a Calvinistic world-view from deism. It is not simply to set the historical record straight, but to develop a distinctive alternative analysis of the cultural processes Weber too sought to explain.

Can such post-Calvinistic reformational sociologists re-read Calvin without imputing to him the deism that Weber injects into his historical reconstruction? Do they try, perhaps, to put a limit on their sociology, and for a pious moment, perhaps on a Sunday morning, put on "biblical world-view glasses" as they seek edification from the counter-point to Weber in Calvin's *Institutes*, or even Kuyper's *Lectures on Calvinism?* And on Monday will they not pick up Weber again, and once more resume seeing themselves as Weber has seen them? Ironically, any such epistemological ambivalence is also part of what Weber sought to explain and if this view is accepted it must have a decisive impact upon any "reformational sociology." Ambivalence must be the result and confirm any Weberian claim that the roots of modern ambivalence are also to be found in Calvinism.[64]

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[62] See Wolterstorff, 1996, *op cit* 227-246 (ftn 21); Lee and Newby, 1983, *op cit*, (ftn 59), and Noll, 1997, *op cit*, 208-9 (ftn 54). A sociology which turns away from the spirituality implicit in the theories of these "founding fathers", should still encourage the development of a critical secondary literature on these same thinkers.

[63] These words are from the Collect for the Second Sunday in Advent, *1662 Book of Common Prayer*.

[64] The stimulating 1997 ASA Presidential address was all about "ambivalence" Neil J. Smelser, 'The Rational and the Ambivalent in the Social Sciences', *American Sociological Review,* 63:1, Feb, 1-15.

Weber divined the development of a dual rationality in Calvinism — this involved an ethic of ultimate ends and an ethic of proximate (pragmatic) rationality for this life. Calvinist piety was caught out when the reformed investor gives thanks to God for what has been provided. The humble prayer of thanks to God is made, but, in fact, it has already been subverted by a fateful historical harvest of inevitability via the interest payments entered sequentially onto the monthly bank statement. The materialistic outlook of capitalism emerges from out of the realm of religious ideals.

Contemporary students find no *neo-Calvinist* sociological interpretation among the variant characterizations of Weber's thesis in sociology textbooks. There is thus no alternative to the stern and distant "father in heaven" as depicted in Weber's Calvinist, the Unmoved Mover of scholastic theology, as far from Calvin himself as Wall Street's stock options are to the assembly line worker. For Weber it was simply un*think*able that God could be personally close to the Calvinist scholar, informing, directing and encouraging any *sociological* understanding. It is in the examination of that dogmatic prejudice where a reformational sociological critique of Weber should begin.

Indeed the source of Weber's prejudice is found in his attempt to sympathetically understand Calvinism's view of God. His exposition hinges upon a construction of Calvin's *inner feelings* in which the reformer is construed to be so utterly self-absorbed that he was oblivious to any cognitive dissonance that might later afflict his followers[65]. Leaning on Troeltsch, and possibly Nietzsche, Weber has Calvin lined up with Paul, as another single-minded dogmatic theologian who wants to obey a remote, impersonal Divinity[66]. But also ironically, the inner piety Weber ascribes to his *ideal-type* construction of Calvin has a spirit of remote inwardness, similar to what we noted earlier as a characteristic of value-free deistic sociology. Despite the fact that Weber has resorted to the scholastic interpretation of the Westminster Confession of Faith in his ideal-type of Calvinist belief, his discussion of God involves a divergence from historical documents altogether. Avoiding quotation from Calvin, Weber summarises with breath-taking unscientific license:

> The Father in heaven of the New Testament, so human and understanding, who rejoices over the repentance of a sinner as a woman over the lost piece of silver she has found, is gone. His place has been taken by a transcendental being, beyond the reach of human understanding, who with His quite incomprehensible decrees has decided the fate of every individual and regulated the tiniest details of the cosmos from eternity.[67]

But this is not a summary of Calvin's account of God at all. There is no reference to God making himself known to us in his works. It is an account of

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[65] Weber, 1930, *op cit,* 110. Talcott Parsons continued this psychological stereotyping in 'Jean Calvin', *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences,* 1930, Vol. 2, 151-2.(reprinted in Talcott Parsons, *The Early Essays* (edited by Charles Camic), Chicago, 1991, 41-43).

[66] Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion,* (translated by Ephraim Fischoff; introduction by Talcott Parsons) Boston, 1964, stated "The neo-Calvinism of Kuyper no longer dared to maintain the pure doctrine of predestined grace" (205), which implies that Kuyper diverged from Calvinism to give it a humane face.

[67] Weber, 1930, *op cit,* 103-104.

Weber's view of a Calvinist stereotype, dependent upon a construction not unlike Bacon's "skied deity" (Willey 1986:34). The Creator of Genesis chapter one, as Calvin's commentary refers to him, is ignored. Calvin's sermon on Job 13:11-15 is simply out of the picture. Weber's sympathetic reconstruction has the Calvinist believer bowing to an inexorable *fate*. It is more in line with Aristotle's "unmoved mover" or Adam Smith's invisible deity who gives a helping hand to investors somewhere behind the scenes of all the wealth of nations. It is all about a fate-filled providence, a cold and forbidding invention, the alleged spiritual ancestor of Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson.

This will need to be kept in view when reformational sociologists examine how Willem Hennis links Max Weber to Abraham Kuyper (1830-1927)[68]. Hennis alleges that Kuyper's political achievements in Dutch higher education did not go unnoticed by Weber, and even suggests that the "free university" is part of the story of Weber's decisive doctrine of "value freedom". And indeed Weber's footnotes indicate that he knew about Dutch neo-Calvinism and reckoned with the *bona fides* of its scholarship[69]. This is not particularly compatible with the conventional behavioristic interpretation of value-free sociology which was in vogue when Weber started to appear in English .[70] And it is now widely understood that the Weberian doctrine was referring to political dimensions of theorising to which one should not be blind in one's theorising. Still, it is no longer mandated on spurious psychological grounds that the scientist work in denial of such political values.

We do have some beginnings of a Christian historical account of Christian sociology's contribution to the discipline,[71] but the conspicuous absence must also be addressed to increase critical and historical understanding within this erstwhile "reflexive" discipline itself. The absence of any Calvinist sociological interpretation of its own world-view should not be accepted as *fait accompli*; it is an absence that needs an explanation in its own terms. Textbooks also hint that "non-Eurocentric" world-views may be possible foundations for scientific and sociological reflection. Post-modern and "new age" openness considers Buddhist and Eastern cosmologies,[72] yet such "openness" regularly ignores the anomaly presented by the absence of dissenting Christian sociological perspectives in the "main-line" sociology of Europe and North America.[73] Such

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[68] Wilhelm Hennis, 'The Meaning of *Wertfreiheit*: On the Background and Motives of Max Weber's 'Postulate'', *Sociological Theory,* 12:2, July 1994, 113-126 at 123.

[69] Weber, 1946, *op cit* 316, 452-3 ftn8, 453 ftn9, 455 ftn19. Abraham Kuyper, *The Problem of Poverty,* (translated & edited by James W. Skillen), Grand Rapids, 1993; *Lectures on Calvinism,* (Stone Lectures, 1898) , Grand Rapids, 1931; James D. Bratt (ed), *Abraham Kuyper : A Centennial Reader,* Grand Rapids, 1998; Peter Heslam, *Creating a Christian world-view :Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism,* Grand Rapids, 1998.

[70] For a useful comparison on how they distinguish theoretical judgments and supra-theoretical pre-judgments see Dooyeweerd, *op cit,* 1969, Vol. I, 70 and Max Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences, (*translated and edited by E. A. Shils and H. A. Finch), New York, 1948, 1-2, 50ff.

[71] Lyon, 1983, *op cit*; Margaret Poloma, 'Toward a Christian Sociological Perspective: Religious Values, Theory and Methodology', *Sociological Analysis,* 43, 1982, 95-108; Kolb, 1961, *op cit*; 1962 *op cit.*

[72] Wallerstein *et al,* 1996, *op cit.*

[73] One Roman Catholic exception is Nicholas Timasheff, *The Sociology of Luigi Sturzo,*

"big power" secularist provincialism is a further reason why a reformational response to Calhoun's call is urgently needed.

Latin American or African "liberation" theology may not be reformational sociology, but such Christian stimuli do provide a fresh influence that needs to be appreciated. Islamic social thought[74] as well as renewed reflection by Jewish scholars about faith and social theory[75] is also relevant in this context. Deism as an implicit religious orientation undergirding social formation deserves critical attention in the sociology of religion. It should also be part of the discussion when sociology tries to explain secularisation.[76]

7. *Conclusion: Re-Specifying the Religious Character of Theoretical Communication*

So what needs to be done? This analysis of Christian sociology's absence might be read to suggest that reformational sociology return to the 1960s resuming work on a task that didn't get very far when sociology's academic star was in the ascendant. That was when the sociological canon of Weber and Durkheim, with the indispensable "minor prophets" of Marx and/or Freud, was cemented into the basement of the discipline. Such a return is not in view but reformational sociology still needs its own cumulative tradition of critical studies of the leading thinkers of the sociological tradition.[77]

The critical attitude toward deism suggested here, requires scholarship that will historically retrace the impact of this non-specific religiosity, its assumptions and world-view, over two centuries of theoretical development. The impact of deism upon 19th and 20th century social thought needs to be understood, and its presence in the social currents that have given rise to contemporary reformational scholarship acknowledged. Such historical research does *not* preclude the task of developing distinctly Christian sociological perspectives today. Clouser and Dooyeweerd do not provide a complete *historical* analysis of the disclosure of deism within scientific thought nor even of its impact upon Christian scientific thought. But such philosophical critique

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Helicon, 1962.

[74] 'Ali Shari'ati, *On the sociology of Islam,* (translated by Hamid Algar), Berkeley, 1979; *Marxism and other Western Fallacies:: an Islamic critique,* (translated by R. Campbell), Berkeley, 1980. Shari'ati's work deserves close examination in these times not least because some associate his sociology with 'Al Qaeda.

[75] Jurgen Habermas, *Philosophical-Political Profiles,* Cambridge, 1983, 21-42 discusses idealist Jewish thinkers, Simmel, Bloch and Benjamin. 20th century sociology is also about the contributions made by those of Jewish background. Yet "Christian sociology" may already be viewed, pro- and anti-, as a covert means of developing racist and anti-Semitic propaganda. A Christian profession in sociology must, without qualification, reject all such perversions as anti-Christian.

[76] This must also include the political sociology of "God" in constitutions and national symbols.

[77] H. E. S. Woldring, *Het Struktuurbegrip in de Sociologie van H Dooyeweerd – een systematische en kentheoreticische uiteenzetting,* Doctoraalscriptie, Free University of Amsterdam, 1971, critically explores Dooyeweerd's concept of structure and thereby prepares the ground for a comparison with that found in the "structural functionalism" of Merton and Parsons. See also Vrieze, 1977, *op cit.*

does provide a perspective, a way to sharpen hypotheses, as we seek a Christian path for the sciences of human culture.

A critical examination of deism in the "main-line" of sociological theory will also have to address the question of alternative *religious* interpretations of sociology, of its history, and of the structure of sociological theory itself. If the myth of religious neutrality, safeguarded by deistic superstition, is challenged, then sociology's history, internal differentiation and dominant ideas, become open to re-interpretation. But when the strong man is cast out, a Holy Spirited resident is still needed to take his place (Matthew 12:29, 43-45). This means that the assertion that deism is basic to sociology's professed "neutrality" is more than a call for an alternative Christian sociology.[78] If sociology *as an academic discipline* has been built upon a deistic basis, an explanation is needed for why it consistently avoids explaining itself in these terms. Further, Christian sociologists are not outside this problematic but have allowed the absence of Christian sociology to contribute to this lack of authentic disciplinary self-understanding. To repeat: the "Christian absence" is not shaped solely by the non-Christian basis of the discipline. It is a result of the failure of Christian thinkers like ourselves to self-critically understand our own theoretical contributions. The theoretical hurdles we continue to confront as we try to develop a reformational critique are partly of our own making. We have not always understood deism and deistic tendencies as a *religious* challenge to the basis of our scientific work. Could we have too readily assumed that the deism consistent with Weber and Durkheim is an inherent and legitimate part of sociological reflection *per se*? These are some of the questions we need to ask with increased scientific vigour as an authentic Christian sociology is developed.

These concluding paragraphs are formulated to specify the limits of the present argument, as much for the writer as the reader. This must be a case of philosophical self-criticism in the domain of principles that the Christian thinker argues with her/himself.[79] Besides, this argument here is no root and branch critique of sociology, nor can it presume to lay the foundation for a Christian sociology. It merely develops a rationale for philosophical discussion about problems that need to be addressed before we can say that we have begun to renew reformational sociology.

Sociology in its "classic" phase may have harnessed religion as part of the onward march of secularisation. But now, despite the meta-narrative of universal incredulity, we still wonder if "religious self-reflection" by those reared in deistic neutrality, is about to go underground again as deistic piety finds post-modern ways to "sky God" and advertise its humility. Basil Willey, in relation to the world-views of the 17th century has written:

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[78] Other complex issues (eg sociology's place in the curriculum) cannot be discussed here. Critical issues about the history and historiography of sociology emerge very early in introductory textbooks. Further exploration should consider Jan D. Dengerink, 'Summary', *Critisch-Historisch Onderzoek naar de Sociologische Ontwikkeling van het Beginsel der "Souvereniteit in Eigen Kring" in de 19e en 20e Eeuw*, Academisch Proefschrift, Vrije Universiteit, Kampen, 1948, 264-276; Vrieze, 1977, *op cit* and Breems, 2001, *op cit*.

[79] Dooyeweerd, 1969, *op cit* Vol. 1, VIII

> Religious truth, then, must be 'skied', elevated far out of reach, not in order that it may be more devoutly approached, but in order to keep it out of mischief. But having secured his main object, namely, to clear the universe for science, Bacon can afford to be quite orthodox ... [80]

Deistic renderings of "Christian charity" will claim that they express *the* Christian academic way. Yet, if that is granted, a life ruled publicly and privately by "speaking the truth in love" or "thou shalt not bear false witness"[81] finds itself emeritised. To give ground to the view that it is probably un-Christian to express any public, explicit adherence to biblical religion, *particularly in the details of theoretical and empirical analysis*, is to live by a tradition of pseudo-self-denial with a long and eminent history.[82]

Dooyeweerd noted that the critique of the dogma of the autonomy of theoretical thought has to be seen as integral to the theorist's task, *Coram Deo*. When we consider any theoretical task, a counter-dogmatic *rejection* of theory's autonomy is insufficient because it does not disclose the structure of theoretical thought *per se*.[83] In deism, the autonomy postulate is arbitrarily affixed to a neutral, piously "skied", and well out of the way, deity. That "highest being", accommodating (it)self to the concocted myth of religious neutrality, led Weber to misread Calvin's part in the "skying process" and thus also in the disclosure of "disenchantment" in the modern age. But by arguing in his brilliant style Weber still developed a powerful characterisation of how the Glory of God ended up in the historical rubbish bin, after the steely ethics of utilitarianism had done their worst. Reformational thinkers will reject that line of argument, but Weber's analysis reminds us of our inherited tendency toward duplicitous thinking and double-minded religion.[84]

To confess Christ's accommodation to our humanity is to know that God Himself makes sure that our scientific labour remains meaningful. The exposé of deistic belief remains high on the agenda of reformational sociology so that we can gain a better idea of how false ways of understanding have given a false shape to the warp and woof of our scholarship. God is not subject to such tyrannous walls of separation, and since He reveals us to ourselves in His Son, we can get to work knowing that though many self-serving mythologies continue to exert a gravitational pull upon our science, this is not the end of the story. In admitting that our thinking has also been influenced by the fake nostrums of deism, we are not without reminder that God, who is greater than our hearts, comes to us as the One who knows everything, inviting us to take a breather and realise afresh the wonder of the scientific task with which He honours us.

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[80] Basil Willey, *The Seventeenth Century Background : studies in the thought of the age in relation to poetry and religion,* London, 1986, (reprint from 1934), 34.

[81] Harry Blamires, *The Christian Mind,* London, 1963, 39-40.

[82] Bruce C. Wearne, 'Samuel Eliot Morison's Tercentenary Lament: Harvard Adrift on the High Seas of Secularist Scholarship', *Lucas* 16 December 1993, 43-51; Samuel E. Morison, 'Harvard's Past' (speech delivered Sept 18, 1936) ,*The Tercentenary of Harvard College: A Chronicle of the Tercentenary Year,* Cambridge, 1937, 47-62.

[83] Dooyeweerd, 1972, *op cit,* 6.

[84] Weber, 1930, *op cit,* 109.