

The Problem of Time and Eternity in its Relation to the Nature-Grace Ground-motive

PETER J. STEEN

Few thinkers in Western history have penetrated to the depths of the motive power of synthesis or accommodation to non-Christian life which has characterized Christendom from its beginning to the extent that the Dutch thinker Herman Dooyeweerd has done. There are, however, some features of this ground-motive which Dooyeweerd has neglected throughout his work but which are of great importance for the understanding of this ground-motive.¹ I would like to summarize some of the results of other thinkers within the school of Calvinistic philosophy and make some suggestions of my own as to a clear path to follow with respect to these neglected features.

As Dooyeweerd (11) has pointed out so clearly, the accommodation of the Christian ground-motive to the form-matter motive of Greek thinking resulted in a misconceiving of the nature of the law order and the temporal order.² Dooyeweerd points out the effect of this accommodation on the notion of creation (*11*: 8, 85-9; 9, 28-9,34-40; *10*, 25-48; cf. *12*: 35, 358-81, 490) and, to some extent, on the scholastic notion of the eternity of God, the eternity of man, and the interrelation of these two to time (*10*: 2-4; *12*: 399-406; cf. *30*: 126, 145). Dooyeweerd has also laid bare the connection of the teleological, eschatological, beatific vision (*visio Dei*) of nature-grace to Aristotle's entelechy and the neo-Platonic hierarchy of being; An interesting hiatus in his treatment of the Christian synthesis scholastic ground-motive is his neglect of many of the aspects of eschatology. Consideration of this neglect of eschatology also involves the need for a more thorough investigation of the questions of time and eternity in relation to eschatology. Of great help in this regard is the impressive work of Okke Jager (*20*; cf. 45), and especially the work of K. J. Popma.

¹ Reasons for this neglect and the influence of the nature-grace motive upon Dooyeweerd's own thinking are discussed in *18*, *19*, *46*, *50*.

² For the background of this terminology and a discussion of Dooyeweerd's thought on these points, see *19*: 89.

The unity of [136] conception on these issues in nature-grace thinkers is the point that struck me as I surveyed particularly Jager's work.

A general description of these points of consensus in nature-grace thinkers will be given under three related points: (1) the eternity of God, (2) the so-called "eternity" of heaven before Judgment Day, and (3) the cessation of time or "eternity" after Judgment Day.

First, and all-controlling, is the *theo-ontological*³ speculation concerning God's eternity (33; 39: 98-122, 143-6; 47; 20; 21: 85) in which God's eternity is conceived of as an eternal now or eternal present. The formulation of Boethius, at the conclusion of his *Consolation of Philosophy*, has played an important part in this speculation. Almost without exception, this formulation has been taken over into scholastic thinking. Reformed scholastic theology operated almost exclusively with this conception. One finds this definition in Kuyper (39: 122-30), Schilder, Bavinck (*I*: 11, 153-4), Geerhardus Vos (*57*: I, 11, 74, 75, 79-100), and Louis Berkhof (*3*: 60, 63, 104). This definition, however, is not the exclusive property of conservative Protestant and Roman Catholic thinkers. It occurs uniformly in old Protestant liberalism, as well as in neo-orthodox thinkers like Barth and Brunner and in neo-liberals like Bultmann. Okke Jager, K.J. Popma, and H. M. Kuitert have pointed out how, via nature-grace thinking, this formulation of God's eternity influenced early rationalists such as Kant and Hegel and even an irrationalistic thinker like Kierkegaard.

³ For the meaning of the term *theo-ontology* see 38: VII, 408. The need for a reformational perspective concerning the relationship of theological theory to confession and for clarity as to the limits of philosophical and theological theory concerning God are of great importance to the Christian community. For the lack of such clarity among members of the Calvinistic School of Philosophy. see Begemann (2). For an interesting critique of the traditional idea of the spirituality of God, see 21: 6ff. For a general survey of the influence of Greek thinking in traditional formulations of the nature of God regarding His unity and simplicity see 27: 11, 119-88. The Reformed community needs a definitive treatment of the history of this *theo-ontological* speculation particularly with respect to: the will or counsel of God as composed of *apriori* ideas or universals in God; the use of the pagan theme of *macromicrocosm* in elaborating a so-called analogy between God and creation; the theme of covenant added to nature as found in the Westminster Confession (ch. VII, art. 1); and all of these themes in relation to the supposed autonomy of theory.

Popma has traced at great length the formulation of God's eternity in which past, present and future are conceived of as compressed into an eternal present (*nunc eternum*) back beyond Boethius to the pre-Socratics. Without a doubt, this notion is present in many Greek thinkers, e.g. in the pre-Socratics generally and Parmenides specifically, and in Plato and Aristotle. Although not all Greek thinkers maintained this view of God's eternity, there is an amazing conformity.⁴ The fact that the uniformity is not entirely total comes out clearly and with great importance for reformational thinking in the conception of Oscar Cullmann (9). The wave of influence that this book, published in 1948, had and still has for modern theology and philosophy (cf. 22, 25) can only appear when we see that Cullmann's conception of God's eternity as linear was in stark opposition to the power which the traditional view of God's eternity, as *nunc eternum*, had exercised on thinkers until that time. The view of God's eternity as a long line was not, however, a reformational, Biblical conception. It has, as Popma points out, a scholastic background (38: 11, 313, 316, 331; VI, 59)⁵ and can also be traced to Greek thinking.

Cullmann's alternative, which seemed to leave much more room for the redemptive historical interaction of God with Israel, brought about serious revision in many quarters. This influence can be seen in the work of G. C. Berkouwer and especially in H. M. Kuitert. Both views of the eter[137]nity of God are used by scholastic nature-grace thinkers, and both are rooted deeply and intrinsically in the theo-ontological pagan tradition. But the formulation of Boethius ruled Western thinking up until the epoch-making appearance of Cullmann's *Christus und die Zeit*, when the other line started to gain ascendancy.⁶

Second, correlated with this idea of God's eternity is another idea which has exercised tremendous power on Western thinking as a whole: the idea of a heaven having the

⁴ For the theme of incorruptibility or eternity of the divine and its problematics in Greek thought, see P. Meyer (23).

⁵ In 39: 110-15 there is an interesting comparison with Cullmann in Popma's comments on the Remonstrant theologian Philippus aLimborgh. See also Mekkes (24), who plumbs the depths of the problematics of the autonomy of theory in its relation to "origin" and to the divine in Greek thought.

⁶ For the general influence of Cullmann on Berkouwer and the current scene in philosophy and theology, see 20, *passim*

characteristic of eternity as opposed to the earth with its temporality. This speculation attributes the characteristic of successionless “eternal present” to heaven: i.e. heaven in the sense in which Scripture refers to it when it speaks of Christ in His glorified nature. This heaven is the place of the angels and departed saints, as distinguished from what Scripture calls the cloudy heavens, the starry heavens, etc.⁷ It is the heaven where believers go after death when they are said in some totally mysterious way to be “with Christ” or “dead in Christ” as distinguished from their being in their graves waiting for the resurrection. Heaven in this sense can be distinguished from heaven after Judgment Day. Heaven after Judgment Day is, in some scholastic conceptions, distinguished from heaven as the place of the departed believers, the angels and Christ before Judgment Day. In this speculative position, heaven before Judgment Day is held to be eternal, i.e. non-temporal.

From this notion- tied in very closely by analogy with the idea of God’s eternity as an eternal now-derive all sorts of speculation. For example, Kuyper held that dead believers with Christ have no awareness of time but have a heavenly, eternal perspective on the nearness of the *parousia* (38: I, 248ff; III, 36,98-9; VII, 236ff; 39: 122-31, 278; 20: 199-207). From this scholastic perspective, the so-called heavenly eternal perspective of God and the saints serves as a hermeneutic for interpreting all the New Testament statements about the consciousness of the Christian in respect to the nearness of the *parousia*. This speculative thinking denies the time consciousness of angels and demons (fallen angels), although Scriptural confession of the Kingdom appears to involve the opposite conclusion (39: 228ff; 38: VII, 236). Since angels and demons are supposed to have inhabited the so-called eternal supra-natural heavenly world, they are thought to possess the view of eternity or what, speculatively, is often called “God’s point of view.” God’s point of view is the point of view of His eternal present in which there is no succession from future to past, and this point of view is in an analogous fashion applied to angels, demons and departed saints (Kuyper), always, of course, in a creaturely mode (47: *passim*).⁸

⁷ For the various senses of the word *heaven* in the Bible and for a study of all the facets which have played a part in the history of scholastic theology, see 38: VII, entries “hemel: “hemel tegenover aarde, “ “hemels,” “hemelse dingen.” See also 43.

⁸ On p. 116 the idea of analogy between God and man’s eternity is criticised. Stellingwerff’s article is a good summary of the subject as a whole, and the footnotes introduce one to the labyrinth of questions involved.

In this conception, the important relation of heaven and earth in Scripture is radically misconstrued. In this way the Christian groundmotive of Word-revelation with respect to the whole of the creation as [138] temporal is restricted drastically to only the earth as being temporal. The cosmic law order is not seen as enforcing, conditioning and holding for all the created-both heavenly and earthly-creatures.⁹ The idea of a so-called *eternal* heaven in contradistinction to a *temporal* earth implies the acceptance of two world orders, generally also called “natural” and “supra-natural.”

This conception of two orders or laws or word-ideas is completely foreign to the ground-motive of Word-revelation in regard to creation. In the Scriptural revelation concerning creation, the creative world-ordering Word of God, with its ordinances, commands and laws, embraces both the heavens and the earth, which brings with it that in creation there is a subjected, relative temporal order for all created beings (19: 37ff). Heaven, in Genesis 1: 1, embraces all possible senses of the word heaven as it is further explicated and revealed in Scripture. In all of Scripture, heaven and earth and their interrelations are seen as directed by and subjected to one Word of God which orders, directs and holds as law for all that is created.¹⁰ The creation account points to this central ground-motive of creation and gives direction and content to the theoretical ground-idea of law, which is the central hypothesis for theoretical thought. This cosmic scope of the ordinances of God can never be restricted to holding only for the temporal earthly cosmos. The Scriptural ground-motive of creation directs our thinking to see heaven and earth as involved in an all-embracing cosmic temporality, with one cosmic genetic unfolding process, (*het grote wordingsproces*- Dooyeweerd) having one history.¹¹

The influence of nature-grace thinking, in which heaven is conceived of as eternal in contrast to earthly temporal existence, is found in many places. The word *spiritual*

⁹ This important stress in Vollenhoven has been in contradistinction to Dooyeweerd from the beginning. See 54: 15-16, 88-90; 20: esp. 455-578; 43 *passim*; 19: 84ff.

¹⁰ For Popma's fascinating speculation about the fall of the angels not resulting in abandonment of the work of creation, see 40: 10ff; 41: 7 -20.

¹¹ For this emphasis, see 38: VII, “tijd,” “paradijs,” “geschiedenis,” “hemel tegenover aarde”; see also 29: *passim*.

quite often has the idea of eternity with this heavenly sense involved in it.¹² Consequently, a spiritual body came to be conceived of as a non-fleshly, heavenly-adapted eternal body,¹³ sexless and unable to eat (47: 111; 32: 507), “like the angels,”¹⁴ that is, eternal, supranatural. The most important single consequence of this view of heaven as eternal is the all-controlling direction that was exercised by this nature-grace ground-motive on the reformational ground-motive of the Word of God with respect to the Kingdom of God, the hope and joy of believers, and in eschatology or last things. Eschatology and the Kingdom of God were verticalized and supra-naturalized.¹⁵ The constant law order and cosmic temporality with its future

¹² Dooyeweerd makes frequent use of this term, thereby showing his closeness to Kuyper. For a usage of the term *spiritual* as equal to *organic* or *logical*, see Vander Stelt (50: 183) and Fernhout (16). *Spiritual* is often used as synonymous with the pistical or confessional (aspect). It is used also as a synonym for *religious* where the latter has been reduced to the pistical (liturgical or confessional) aspect. The richness of the term *spiritual*, especially in the Dutch language, allows it to be used as referring also to the centrally religious, or that which moves-particularly the idea of movement. motivation orientated to the idea of “breath” or “breeze,” or animal motion vs. plant. Recently a usage of *spiritual* meaning *directional, normative* is surfacing. The ambiguity and richness of such usage should be the topic of a monograph.

¹³ For a critique of this view and a Biblical perspective, see L. Boliek, 7: cf. 38; 52: 45:

¹⁴ Matthew 22:30 has been the source of all manner of speculation in which man was viewed as being like an angel at the resurrection, rather than in the precise respect mentioned by our Lord. Nature-grace thinkers regard angels as created eternal spirits without bodies, and therefore man’s body must become angel-like, “spiritual,” non-fleshly at the resurrection. Cf. 38: 11, 304-8; 36: 14, 19.

¹⁵ Compare H. Hart (19: 41). The problem of what may be variously named “spiritualization,” “verticalization,” “supra-naturalization,” or “confessionalization” springs from this theo-ontological speculation about divinity so characteristic of archaic pagan cultures. In this tendency the Biblical idea of office is annulled, and the force of the Biblical images and figures concerning the royal sabbath enthronement, priestly service, and prophetic praise and witness with their everlasting temporal earthly focus are overlooked. The picture of God’s throne in a city on a mountain on the renewed earth after having come down from heaven after all of God’s enemies are destroyed, reminiscent of God’s house on earth only after David’s victory over the nations in the land of Canaan, shows clearly the focus of the revelation of God; God and man on the same throne in everlasting official sabbath delight and enjoyment from the work done. In Reformed circles, election is often out of temporality and office to eternity, so that election does not serve the revelation of God as a wise, sovereign, faithful Creator. The same trouble is present in Dooyeweerd’s stress on the “fullness of meaning” as a supra-temporal fullness. Dooyeweerd’s idea of the “opening process” is so vitally related to this that it needs correction. On this point see 19: 41, where Hart applies his arguments against Dooyeweerd’s idea of unity and totality as supra-temporal to the idea of the fullness of creation. See also my thesis (46: *passim*).

perspective of an everlasting new earth and new heaven were relativized, restricted, and transcended in an otherworldly, heavenly, eternal direction.

The second heavenly supra-natural world-order also transformed the Biblical ground-motive of redemption as restoration and renewal of creation. In this second unbiblical world-order, eschatology culminated in the beatific vision of God in a heavenly eternal sense. This vision could be [139] attained immediately at death when man was to become eternal. Since eternity was reached immediately at death, this meant that the perspective of the resurrection of believers at judgment Day tended to be regarded as an unnecessary addition to this state and thus it became secondary. The meaning and ground-motive of Word-revelation for the restorative, renewing cosmic significance of Christ's resurrection for man, the earth and heaven was lost (34; 31; cf. 44; 17). For example, the problem which the Thomistic thinker has in relating the resurrection of the body to the beatific vision (which problem in no way eluded Protestant scholasticism) betrays this verticalizing of eschatology.

Popma has shown most convincingly how this view of creaturely eternity, as applied to the realm of heaven, filtered into the life of Christendom (e.g. in hymnology, and in cherished expressions of Christians: "He died and went to his eternal abode," or: "He died and went to eternity").¹⁶

Popma also points out in great detail how this view of eternity, always involves a depreciation of the temporality of creation. This view, in one way or another, identifies time with corruptibility and imperfection, and contrasts it with the incorruptible, angelic, changeless, and perfect eternity of heaven before judgment Day. In this way, heaven before judgment Day is given attributes which in no way allow for the perspective of Word revelation in its ground-motive of redemption and restoration of the earthly creation. Eschatology is super-naturalized, spiritualized, and eternalized. Scriptural vision concerning the Kingdom, resurrection, judgment, new earth, and new heaven is reinterpreted in an almost higher critical fashion; it is mythologized, spiritualized, veiled, and made ineffective. This tendency to depreciate

¹⁶ Cf. *II*, where Dooyeweerd says: "In the midst of his work God took him away at the age of 76, without a sickbed, without a death struggle, in an almost imperceptible movement (*overgliding*) from temporal life to eternal life."

time and to bring it to an end in one way or another is rooted deeply in pagan antiquity.

Since succession and change, in this scholastic view, are identified with corruption and imperfection, the earth, because of its so-called temporality, is not conceived of as man's everlasting, final home. Rather, true spirituality and piety are to be seen only in desiring one's eternal incorruptible home. In this sense, all the references in Scripture with respect to these matters are made ineffective and are not re-forming in their direction-e.g. "laying your treasures in heaven," "citizenship in heaven" (cf. Popma, 28). This revamping and redirecting of the Biblical ground-motive concerning the Kingdom of God and the future is of great importance for Christian philosophy and especially relates to Dooyeweerd's view of the direction of cosmic time. This leads us into a third point of the consensus which can be found in nature-grace thinking regarding eternity and time.

This third point is directly related to the eternity of God and the eternity of heaven, but it functions in different ways for different thinkers. It deals with the idea that "time is for a time," the idea that time and history [140] will cease at the Judgment. In this view, eternity is thought to begin immediately after the Judgment. This is found almost uniformly in all nature-grace thinkers and is correlated immediately with eternity as heaven. Nature-grace accommodating thinking is here trying to reinterpret, minimize, and even do away with the ground-motive of Word revelation which points to the present and future restoration and renewal of the whole cosmos-the earth (including the kingdoms of animals, plants, things, and man) and heaven, in all its senses. In this nature-grace thinking, the state of eternity immediately succeeding the parousia is identified with the state of eternity which believers have at death in heaven. After Judgment Day, all temporality has disappeared and only eternity exists. An exception to the view that time and history cease at Judgment Day is the view that time goes on endlessly as a place of torment. This view occurs infrequently but is defended by Boethius. Boethius, in semimystical fashion, sees man as able to transcend time through intellectualistic contemplation to the heavens which are above the controlling bands of fate that endlessly rule time on earth. Here eschatology is

completely verticalized; time is the realm of soul-less bodies in hell-like punishment.¹⁷ This Boethian view to the effect that time goes on endlessly as a kind of hell is apparently tied to his purely cosmological, dualistic thinking, in which he seems to think of time as without beginning, as well as without end. But this conception of Boethius is not at all the view of most nature-grace thinkers. For the vast majority of them, time and history cease with Judgment Day, and created eternity continues or begins.

The eternity that is thought to begin at Judgment Day for man is often without duration and is always a successionless, eternal present. The notion of change as in the second viewpoint is here also identified with corruptibility and is therefore eliminated.¹⁸ All historical development or unfolding of any kind is denied.¹⁹ A world-order which is eternal in character and radically discontinuous with the present temporal world replaces the constant law order and abiding temporality of the creation. The reformational ground-motive of God's faithfulness to His creation expressed by His holding to His Word or law in the process of redemption and re-creation, despite the fall of man, is suppressed. The new earth, as in the fashion of seventeenth and eighteenth century Lutheran scholasticism, is not a restored, renewed

¹⁷ Popma (39: 116-22, 125-6); Boethius (6: 1-114). Vollenhoven describes Boethius as an adherent of the subsistence theory, but in *Consolation* he seems semi-mystical. This may indicate two distinct phases in the development of Boethius' thought.

¹⁸ Popma gives a survey of various Reformed scholastics who held this view (34; 38: 11, S09-44; 17: 69, 241-83; 39: 134). Also found in Jager (20: *passim*).

¹⁹ This view is present in Geerhardus Vos. For the influence of the later Aristotle on Vos, see 56: ch. 6, "Heavenly Mindedness," 133-55. Here his use of the word *transcendent* shows dualistic, purely cosmological thinking. For his use of eternity and time, see 58: 40-1, 71, ch. 12, "The Eternal State," 288-316. On p. 290 there is a good emphasis of allowing for duration and divisibility of time units, but Vos consistently eliminates all change and development from the eternal state and so runs into problems with his own good emphasis. Cf. again p. 11111. In the *ISBE* (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*), 11, p. 990, Vos' view of heaven is tied too much with his idea of the supra-natural and transcendental, and so the perspective of the new earth suffers. The tension is manifest when *heaven* primarily means *changelessness*, while he is forced to recognize eternal life as involving endless time and the new earth. The tension between nature-grace and the reformational line comes out when he says: "The central abode of the redeemed will be in heaven, although the renewed earth will remain accessible to them as a part of the inheritance" (p. 991). In 55: 259, the supra-natural heavenly is definitely regarded as another world-order- a sure sign of nature-grace influence:

"To raise the religion of time to the plane of eternity"

For a discussion of this, see Berkouwer (5: 266-99).

and refined old earth but one which follows the annihilation of the old and is radically discontinuous. A good feature in some Reformed scholastics is that the term heaven in practice often involves the new earth, although subjected to a radically new world order having hardly any continuity with the creation and time., This feature is good because it is less of a spiritualization than is found in those conceptions in which heaven means eternity, as no longer on earth, as in the second viewpoint.²⁰

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Some attempts have been made by Reformed scholastics to play down the notion of a timeless, successionless, eternal existence in heaven after Judgment Day. Very recent attempts try to describe the notion of this existence as a “duration withJut succession.” Popma has subjected this description to a devastating critique in many of his works, especially with regard to Klaas Runia (39: 102-38). After pointing out that duration can never occur without succession, he points to the evidence that the notion of duration without succession is very characteristic of psychotic pathological experience as uncovered by psychotherapy. It must be said, however, that it at least holds to an endless duration, although it is immediately made meaningless by the fact that it is said to be without succession.

From certain texts in Scripture, especially Revelation 10:6, where it is said that “time shall be no more,” nature-grace thinkers of all varieties have inferred that cosmic time will cease. This text has no bearing on this point, but rather has reference to the fact that die time of postponement of the Judgment will be no more (cf. 58: 290, 291; 20: 513).

The more the futuristic dimension of the *eschaton* is emphasized, the more catastrophic is the discontinuity between history before the Judgment and existence on the new earth. The Biblical idea of sojourning and suffering is falsely emphasized, and the Kingdom with its cosmic perspective having its official inauguration day at

²⁰ The guarantee for the identity of the *old* earth and the *new* earth, the first earth and the second, or the first body and the second is not to be located in anything in creation, all of which is temporal, changing, dependent, and whose abiding character does not lie “in itself. It is, rather, to be found in the Word of God, whose power causes the earth to abide. The idea of a substance that is supposed to underlie the identity of new and old is a doctrine found in purely structural thinkers and is very characteristic of Calvinists as they battled the Lutheran theory of the annihilation of the earth. See 5: 266-99; 42: 555-67.

the resurrection and ascension of Christ, and driven during this present stage of history before Judgment Day by the powerful, redirecting, life-giving Word of God, is lost.²¹ Increasing stress is correspondingly laid on the scholastic view of the institutional church; giving rise to different types of tensions (26: 14-31). In some cases, the view of eternity as beginning on the new earth at the Judgment is put in tension with eternity as being in heaven after death, as in the second viewpoint, so that the so-called “interim” (*tussentoeestand*) is practically eliminated. B. Telder, who emphasizes endless time and the unity of man in a healthy reformational fashion, in stressing the future dimension of the *eschaton*, feels compelled to deny that there is any existence of believers in heaven with Christ after death, before the Judgment. For Telder, man is one, and therefore the whole man is said to be in the grave, sleeping in Jesus, awaiting resurrection (48; 49; cf. 38: III, 191-295). The unity of heaven and earth under one cosmic law order and in one cosmic time and history is here lost sight of somewhat. Telder in general is a refreshing breeze with his stress on the reformational ground. motive of redemption in its cosmic perspective in the midst of a literal jungle of misconception. His great value is that his work in general con. firms the thinking of Berkouwer, Popma, Jager, and Schoonhoven. I mention his unique emphasis on the interim state to underscore the increasing tension that arises as men break with the verticalized eschatology of [142] Thomistic scholasticism and stress the futuristic, more historical dimension of the *eschaton*.²²

In general, the first, second and third viewpoints have a view of eternity in common. Reformed scholasticism, which emphasized the future idea of eternity as stated in the third viewpoint, never placed as much emphasis on the second viewpoint (eternity after death) as Roman Catholic and Lutheran scholastics did. Due to the rise of Biblical theology, by which is meant exegetical theology with a redemptive historical emphasis, increasing emphasis has been placed on eschatology. With the re-examination of eschatology. and with it the developmental historical stress of Scripture, the view of eternity present in all three viewpoints has become suspect. It is generally recognized at present that the *eschaton* has a strong present and future aspect. This presents Reformed scholasticism, which in general stressed the third

²¹ Cf. Douma (14: 344-56) for a faulty limitation of sojourning.

²² For a tracing of the shifts from present to future emphasis and vice versa as they relate to the question of time and eternity, see 20: *passim*.

viewpoint and the future dimension, with the need for a great deal of reconstruction.²³ Where the first and second viewpoints have been emphasized, and correspondingly the present dimension of eschatology, redemptive historical considerations in exegesis have also necessitated reconstruction. In these views, eternity beginning with Judgment Day was generally conceived to be the natural continuation or completion of the eternity of heaven which man enjoyed after death in the beatific vision. This view in general is still the dominant one among the “plain folk” of Christendom. In this view, the future dimension of the *eschaton* is more spiritualized, supernaturalized, with the consequence that the new earth is for all practical purposes disregarded and heaven conceived of as a final, eternal, supra-natural home in the sky. Here the future dimension of endless eternal life on the new earth is reduced to the existential present of a supernaturalized eternity of heaven.²⁴ Reconstruction is

²³ The most dangerous attitude to be combatted is the skeptical one, which says that all thought about the future is futile. But the purpose of this article is not to offer a speculative roadmap about the future, eternity, heaven, and the new earth, but to liberate the Biblical vision of the new earth from the tangle of theo-ontological speculation which has led to skepticism. Our joy is the vision of a new age which has begun. There is no need for speculation; we can experience the power of that age to come in our lives already. Unless the human imagination is renewed and led by the faith vision of the new earth, and not by fear, the public witness to the scope of the Kingdom in an age of increasing persecution and deception cannot long endure, and accommodation and defeatism are sure to come.

²⁴ The importance of the new earth as the everlasting horizon for God’s people has been emphasized by various members of the school. Vollenhoven (54: 90) says: “After death, too, the soul awaits the awakening of the body, and in this respect it also differs from the angels. And the ideal of the Christian, then, is not to ‘return to the fatherland of souls’ but to inhabit the new earth on which righteousness dwells.”

Zuidema stresses that Ockham’s eschatology does not allow for the Scriptural perspective of everlasting work on the new earth (59: IllS). Van Riessen (51: SI) modifies *eeuwigheid* (eternity) to *oneindigheid* (infinity). The transcendental direction of cosmic time and of the faith function points to *oneindigheid* and not to *eeuwigheid*, as in Dooyeweerd. It is in striking contrast to this and to the work of Popma that Dooyeweerd never mentions the new earth in all of his works. The Kingdom of God is always the eternal and heaven. This, in the light of what we have seen, is an indication that he has not extricated himself from the nature-grace perspective on these points. O. Jager’s work is here definitive, especially 20: 459-57S, where many questions relating to these three areas are treated with constant and effective Scriptural analysis. K. J. Popma has dealt with the subject all his life and has been very influential. Berkouwer (5: I, ch. VII) is also confirmatory and at points quite original. Schoonhoven (4J) confirms from a somewhat different perspective. There is also a wealth of material in the old stand-by, P. Fairbairn (15: 32S-61). By surveying

being done on the future dimension of eschatology so long neglected in these views. Many questions are being raised about the view of eternity and time which lies at the basis.

In summary, we see that the idea of the Greek view of God's eternity as an eternal present penetrated the church, finding classical theo-ontological expression in Boethius' definition. It serves as a paradigm, standard and analogy from which man views his own created eternity both in heaven (second viewpoint) after death and for the final state after Judgment Day. The abiding character of the cosmos and man is therefore thought of in the time-depreciating pagan perspective of a semi-divine eternal present. In this way the law-boundary between Creator and creature is broken by theo-ontological thinking.

It is my hope that this general survey of the question of eternity and time in nature-grace thinking supplements Dooyeweerd's analysis of the nature-grace ground-motive. These supplementary considerations can only be seen in their full significance in the light of the autonomy of natural reason, its metaphysical-theo-ontological speculation concerning the being of God. its idea of the soul as a substantial, rational form, etc. The autonomy of theory as the motor behind this theo-ontological speculation and many of these latter points have been investigated thoroughly by Dooyeweerd.²⁵ This is necessary for seeing the background of the nature-grace views of eternity as they apply to God, man and the cosmos, as well as to time, eschatology and history.

these men and their writings, a staggering case can be made against the views mentioned.

²⁵ See note 2. Cf. 8: 41-65.

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