CONTOURS
OF A
WORLD VIEW

by

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STUDIES IN A CHRISTIAN WORLD VIEW
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CHAPTER 7

PERSONS IN CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

The contrast between naturalistic and Christian views of the person focuses on two essentials: whether our unique freedom is to be understood most basically in relation to nature or to God, and how we can be held responsible for our failures. This chapter will enlarge on these two points from a Christian perspective, presenting a way of speaking about human persons that is both biblical and pertinent to the humanities and behavioral science.

We must bear in mind that the Bible speaks about humankind both in explicit assertions and in its history and its realistic portrayal of individuals. Moreover, it presents Jesus Christ as the Ideal Man, Son of Man as well as Son of God, both fully human and fully divine. In him we see what the Creator intended us to be like. Humankind was made in God's image, but, among all the daughters and sons of Adam, only Jesus Christ fully embodies the image of the living God. A Christian view of the human person should therefore be explicitly Christocentric.

First we shall look at persons as relational beings, then as responsible beings, and finally at the effect of sin and grace on both relationships and responsibilities. It is a three-layered approach, the second layer being an overlay on the first, and the third an overlay on the other two.

PERSONS ARE RELATIONAL BEINGS

Human beings exist within a vast and complex system of interrelationships. No individual, nor all of us together, can exist in iso-
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We symbolize his presence in the way we combine the spiritual with the physical in this earthly life.¹

The New Testament points in a similar direction, for there it is the Son of Man who is the image of the invisible God. He is the eternal spirit incarnated and active physically, fully God and fully man, reaffirming thereby not only the value of creation in general but also that of human persons in particular. The value of being human is thus ultimately in bearing God’s image in this world, an astounding calling indeed.²

Some theologians have been more specific. Origen and Clement of Alexandria took the image to be humanity’s distinguishing characteristic, and in Greek fashion called it reason. Thomas Aquinas and many of the Scholastics agreed, distinguishing it from Adam’s likeness to God, which they identified as an original righteousness that sin destroyed. The Reformers, on the other hand, viewed original righteousness as part of the image, all of which is now terribly marred by sin. So the Westminster Shorter Catechism says “God created man male and female, after his own image, in knowledge, righteousness and holiness, with dominion over the creatures.” Luther, however, confined the image to human power over other creatures. More recently Karl Barth has maintained that God’s image is in the male and female relationship itself (Gen. 1:27).

Whichever way one goes in these specifics, however, a human being’s relationship to God, seen both in dependency on God and in bearing God’s image in this world, makes us all at heart religious beings. Our highest end, our all-inclusive supreme good, is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. As Dooxweerd has emphasized, this religious heart of the matter lies at the root of both human action and theoretical thought: out of the heart are all the issues of life. As dependant, we must seek God in all we are and do. As responsible image-bearers, we represent the Creator in all of it, too.

2. E.g., Gen. 9:6; James 3:9; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10; Heb. 1:1–3.
This makes religion far more basic and inclusive than it sometimes appears. Civil religion is a fringe benefit that blesses the political status quo without either grounding or challenging it. Mystical religion can remove us from involvement in this world. Much popular religion is a romanticized experience of peace with ourselves, and too much piety is compartmentalized from “secular” life. But if in the very essence of our humanity and its very expression we depend on God and represent him, too, then no compartmentalization of life is possible, and religion is far more foundational than any veneer or heartwarming experience. Human persons are by nature God-seekers created to worship and serve the living God with their whole being. This is first and basic in what it means to be a human person.

(2) We therefore do not exist in relation to God apart from but rather within our other relationships. We exist before God in relation to nature, for we are made of the dust of the earth, our origin and potentialities rooted in the physical, and our present duties there. Genetic identity, established at conception, is physical. The nourishment necessary, if not sufficient, for bodily and emotional and mental development is physical. The work of our hands and mind take and deploy the physical. Arts and crafts give it pleasing and enriching form. Science and technology explore and employ it. Even our eternal destiny involves a resurrected body. Implicit in this relation to nature, we find a mandate for physical and behavioral science, for work and play and art.

We are both dependent on nature and responsible for it, and some have taken the image of God to refer specifically to this responsibility (Gen. 1:26-30). Adam’s sin, like ours, disrupted nature’s balance (Gen. 3:17-19). Yet Isaiah’s hope for redemption includes nature’s restoration, and Jesus reminds us of God’s concern even for lilies and sparrows. C. F. D. Moule accordingly speaks of “a Biblical ecology” in which we play a part.

We can be both dependent on nature and responsible for what we are physical beings, in us spirit is present and active, too. This is evident in biblical terminology, which lacks the Greek dichotomy we often superimpose on it. “Soul” (OT nesheth, NT psyche) is used of a living being, not of an immaterial, eternal entity imprisoned in a body, despite the fact that we have a destiny beyond death. “Spirit” (OT ruach, NT pneuma) conveys the idea of life-giving breath, God-given, but it also comes to refer to the religious life of a person and to the living God himself, the unseen but life-giving Spirit. The human spirit also is active, life-directing, not all reducible to physical energy. Both soul and spirit, however, refer primarily to phenomena in human life as a whole. Biblical language is prephilosophical, without the metaphysical distinctions that Greek philosophy introduced.

Sometimes “spirit” contrasts with “flesh” (sarx). The latter term is used in two different senses: it may simply refer to the physical body, or it may speak of the person as a sinner. Corporeality is not sin, and our tie to nature is not the cause of evil: if it were, the purpose of human existence in terms of spiritual activity within the physical would be denied. Human responsibility would dwindle, asceticism would result, and a disembodied state would be our only salvation.

A Christian understanding allows no such other-worldliness, whether Manichean or Platonistic. Manichean dualism took matter to be eternal and our bodies to be the cause of evil. Plato thought matter by itself to be chaotic, a handicap to ordered existence, rational understanding, and moral virtue. But at the creation God called our participation in nature “good.” The Old Testament writers rejoice in physical beauty and are awed by its grandeur. They delight in food, drink, sight, sound, sexuality. In Christ, moreover, God incarnated himself in the physical, and the ideal Man clearly enjoyed the world of nature and readily took his place in it. He even became a craftsman, an artist.

But a Christian view also cannot harbor this-worldliness, because it would reduce humankind to a mere part and product of nature, and deny humanity’s spiritual nature. Naturalism is disallowed because, while we are indeed a part and product of this world, we are not just that, and our being cannot be wholly explained by causal laws alone. To be sure, we can be studied biologically and behaviorally, as objects of scientific inquiry, but there is more to us than natural objects. We are subjects, too, with an inwardness that transcends the world around us in relationship not only to God but to other persons as well.

The contrast with the naturalisms of the last chapter is plain. In the Christian view, persons are subject to the physical influences
to which naturalism points, but they are more than that alone allows. Human hopes, values, and ideas, our frustrations, our freedom, and our foolishness—subjects of much literature and art—say something important, too. We formulate theories and criticize them; we even come up with mistaken views and judge them to be right or wrong. In pursuit of values, we rise above the predictable. If naturalism has problems accounting for all this, it is because of the claim that freedom and hope and worth and rationality all depend on our place in nature alone.

At the other extreme, when our relationship to nature is ignored, people are taken to be more free and more fully responsible than in fact they are. When environmental limitations are not seriously regarded, the victim and the criminal are told they can do and be anything they choose. But even the American frontier individualist faced the stark facts of barren deserts, impassable mountains, and psychological limitations. We are not completely free. Genetic conditions afford the ground and establish parameters for what we become. Environment provides both possibilities and limitations. In these regards, biological and behavioral science do illuminate the humane scene.

(3) In a natural world devoid of other persons, a man or woman would be alone, with no fitting life-helper; but “it is not good for man to be alone,” said the Creator. This again underscores the uniqueness of humankind: the person is qualitatively different to such an extent that he has none but his own kind to identify with. More than herd instinct is involved, for what persons need is friends, both to give and to receive love. A person is no Robinson Crusoe, alone on an island with his goats and his God. The kind of individualism Defoe’s Enlightenment philosophy portrays, which sees human relationships as something added to what a rational being already is by nature, is alien to the essential nature of persons and unknown in Scripture. I am what I am, I gain self-awareness and identity, I discover my own inwardness in relationship and not in isolation. A woman bore me, parents named and nurtured me, family and friends filled my early years with experiences that shaped me, teachers and employers played their part, and for many years now my own wife and family and associates have contributed to what I have become. I exist, necessarily, in relation to other persons.

No one is completely independent, but complete and unilateral dependence is not the picture, either. Rather, interdependence prevails. The male-female relationship, biblically and experientially, is the paradigm case. God made each to complement the other, interdependent individuals in a fully personal relationship with each other. Marriage expresses a kind of biological, psychological, economic, moral, and religious unity that is possible only between persons.

Existential thinkers have seen the difference that a personal quality to relationships can make. If I relate to my wife as to an object, I to it, then I dominate her and use and repress her, and remain closed to what she could be to herself. But if we relate to each other as persons, subject to subject with trust and openness and mutuality, then communication develops, as does friendship. This is egalitarian, equal persons equally respected and equally responsible. It evokes love, not the eros that desires for oneself, often selfishly, but the agape that gives of oneself in serving the other. Such relationships to other persons are the matrix where freedom and responsibility come alive. I become my brother’s keeper, and he becomes mine.

Relations with other persons, like relationships to God and to nature, reveal both dependence and responsibility. The life of Jesus, the Ideal Man, also reveals biological dependency, for he, too, was conceived and nurtured by a woman. Like any child, he depended for years, physically and economically, on others. He chose disciples to share his life and work; he called them friends. In his dying he depended on others for a sip and a grave. In his living and dying alike, then, the dependence was plain. But he also accepted responsibility for family and friends, for the sick, sad, hungry, and guilt-ridden. Where marriage was formerly the paradigm for relationships between persons, the life and death of Jesus now became the prime example of love.

Pure religion and undifeiled, said James, is like that. By the time James wrote, the church had become a visible image on earth, born and nurtured by God’s love, composed of interdependent people serving one another responsibly in love. And we shall see later that this informs the Christian ethic.

Much of this interpersonal emphasis is evident in other than Christian thought. This is to be expected if interpersonal dependency is indeed rooted in human nature; although the Christian is likely to ascribe to divine providence its resurgence in a world struggling with dehumanization. It is also to be expected in view of the
historical influence of the Judeo-Christian heritage. The equal worth of all human persons, implicit in the image of God doctrine, was unknown in Plato and Aristotle, and the self-giving, agapē love that Jesus taught and exemplified is entirely lacking in Plato’s discussions of love and Aristotle’s extended account of friendship.

The modern mind acknowledges this historical influence of Christian values. The crucial issue is whether it can continue to sustain them either intellectually or on naturalistic presuppositions, or in practice. For even the Christian ethic is likely to be ineffective without the operation of divine grace.

(4) How, then, is the individual to be viewed, and what is a person’s relationship to herself? Recent years have produced a surge of narcissism, obsessed with individual well-being and fulfillment as if this were the supreme good for all of one’s life; and the ragged individualism fabled in American lore is preached as the only alternative to totalitarian and collectivist extremes, and sometimes even labelled “Christian.”

There are two extremes: on the one hand, the repression of individuality and freedom in oppressive systems of politics or economics and even in the family; on the other hand, the exaltation of freedom as savior and lord in narcissism and other individualistic extremes. Of course, individuals are important and so are the individual rights we have learned to cherish. But the value of a person stems from the image of God, from being God’s creature capable of knowing God, not primarily from our individual differences; we are told that each snowflake is unique, too, but we don’t value snowflakes like people. It is the person created in God’s image that has worth; and a person divinely endowed with the capacity for self-direction should be free to exercise that gift. But, contrary to Sartre, human freedom is not itself absolute and unqualified; contrary to Mill, it is not to be limited by society only when one person harms another; contrary to Locke, social institutions do not rest ultimately on individuals contracting together, but on our native interdependence and (as the marriage ceremony puts it) on God’s ordinance.

The limited nature of our freedom and the limited value of individuality are evident in our relational existence. I am a creature of God, subject to God’s laws and purposes. I depend on nature, which supplied my genetic materials and much of my environment. Other persons and the society of which I am a part shape me, too. Together, all of these relationships provide possibilities and parameters for what as an individual I can become. To that extent I am a product of relationships; my freedom is limited; I cannot do or be whatever I might want.

Yet I am not a product of these relationships alone. I am what I am, the individual I am, by virtue of the possibilities I have actualized out of many that existed. It depends on how by the grace of God I have put it all together, interiorizing experiences, accepting, rejecting, sifting, reshaping. Human individuality is real, because God’s image in man makes it possible for spirit to shape a life, and so I am in measure under God’s own doing.

The key to individuality, in biblical terminology, is the “heart.” This is not the seat of emotion as in common English parlance, but rather the integrating core of a person’s life and character. Out of the heart are the issues of life; as a man thinks in his heart so he is, and with the heart he believes or not. While the terms “soul” and “spirit” are extended biblically at times to animals, though with somewhat different associations, the term “heart” is so used only once to my knowledge, and then in a markedly different sense. The human individual has self-conscious inwardness, with intentions, attitudes, and values of his own, and as such he has distinctive possibilities and responsibility, too. He stands back, he thinks and chooses, he examines his own life, and then he examines that self-examination. By reflecting on his life he transcends it, and by evaluating that reflection he transcends it again. He transcends in thought and purpose what he already is, and in acting on that purpose he becomes different. By virtue of this inner freedom of the human spirit, God has given us the possibility of shaping our individuality as well as our societies. Individuality is then to be appreciated. I can accept my individual possibilities and limitations as God’s good gift, or I can resent what is given and either try to be what I cannot or should not, or else listlessly drift.

Naturalistic world views, however, lack this standpoint, and according to Reinhold Niebuhr, they destroy individuality. Any monism, where everything is of one sort and subject to one kind of


causal process, struggles to make room for individuality. But without 
the vitality of the human spirit, any self-transcendence and free-
dom, physical processes alone cannot give rise to freedom and mean-
ingful individuality. For Marx, therefore, the individual is 
subordinated to the socioeconomic conditions of history. For 
Nietzsche, even the difference between strong and weak wills is 
biologically grounded. The result for naturalism is that individual 
too easily become objects, replaceable, and not valued for them-
selves. Sexual partners become interchangeable commodities with-
out distinctively individual worth. In extreme individualism and 
collectivism alike, workers (and customers, too) become replaceable 
parts in an economic machine, rather than remaining human indi-
viduals of worth in themselves and valued as such by others. A 
Christian view of persons, mediating between extremes, leads to an 
ethic of love that is far different from this.

Another aspect of the person’s relationship to self concerns 
temporality. I am the individual I am through past, present, and 
future. Identity continues, though its character changes. As Shakes-
peare said, one man in his time plays many parts; yet to be human 
embraces them all—their foibles, anxieties, triumphs, and fail-
ures—and I must live with all this in relating to myself. To accept 
this self may not be easy; guilt cannot always be repressed; self-
worth inflates and the self can suffer.

The realization of “being unto death,” in Heidegger’s words, 
adds to life’s anxieties. It grows with advancing years and is under-
scored by an annoying litany in biblical genealogies: he lived so 
many years, “and he died.” This realization affects my present, and 
how I interiorize it contributes to making me the individual I am. 
Death shapes life, and my view of death shapes my view of myself. 
Here the contrast with naturalistic humanism could not be greater. 
Is this life terminal or not? And what does that say of my value?

A Christian view of persons deals realistically with each aspect 
of temporality. It knows no escapist solutions, but it encourages 
acceptance of youth, old age, and even dying, not a fatalistic ac-
ceptance but one filled with hope and purpose because of God’s 
providence and grace. Christ’s relationships with people reveal the 
value he placed on them at all stages in life. His own life and death 
reveal purpose, too. He died young. But he extended to others the 
purpose and hope he knew in living and in dying. He knew that 
what matters most in being human is not temporary but everlasting.
responsibility are inseparable, for as creatures of God we are never completely autonomous or independent, never absolutely or unqualifiably free. We exist always in relation to God, with God-given freedom and with responsibility to him.

Responsibility is unique to persons. Persons act intentionally, with purpose and thought. Natural events are not intentional and self-conscious, but are caused. Persons can often act otherwise than they do, but things have no choice in the matter. Events simply occur, but actions are performed. Not everything a person "does" is an action in this sense, deliberate and with reasons, for man is a biological and emotional being, too, outwardly as well as inwardly oriented, a creature of habit responding to stimuli as well as a creature of choice initiating actions. Yet we do, rather than remaining spectators or going with the tide of events. How we act makes a difference, and in a world of relationships we are properly responsible to people other than ourselves alone.6

Responsible action requires conscious thought and moral decision. As a responsible agent, a person is both a reflective and a valuing being. The old label "rational being," at least as sometimes understood, is too narrow. To many, it connotes the Greek or Enlightenment rule of reason that we declined to endorse before, and the incessant demand for logically certain knowledge. But "reflection" includes various sorts of mental activity with reference to myself, my relationships, and my responsibilities. It may include belief as well as knowledge, passionate involvement as well as detached inquiry, practical concerns as well as theoretical contemplation. Creative imagination is present, too, in the artist, the planner, the thinker who explores possibilities he has sensed but not known. Weighing of ends and means, the choice of words and materials, pondering problems, evaluating options, perceiving, intending, arguing, interpreting, remembering, questioning the meaning of life—all of this and more I include in reflection. The human person is in this broad sense a reflective being.

Yet it is not reflective capacity alone, any more than it was the old-style "reason" alone, that makes the person a responsible agent.

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A variety of philosophical alternatives has been used in articulating a Christian point of view on these matters. A Platonic sort of position influential in the early church was that the soul is an immaterial entity, physically indestructible and therefore immortal. But physical indestructibility merely shows the possibility of surviving bodily destruction, not complete indestructibility for whatever cause; every created thing, the soul included, remains contingent on God's creative power and is therefore destructible still. Descartes' view, which has held attention now for several centuries, is that body and soul are two separate entities with different properties, each causing events to occur in the other but the soul is endowed with free will. His problem was twofold: to explain how two so qualitatively different things could interact, and to account for the essential unity of a personality. The preferable view here was the Aristotelian, that soul and body are organically united, each being essential now to the proper functioning and development of the other, while the soul actualizes in this life the capacity both for rational deliberation and free decision. Some have preferred idealist solutions, such as the gradualist proposal that everything in existence is a manifestation of underlying spiritual reality, of which the human soul emerges as the fullest actualization we know in this world. Some even suggest a naturalistic view of the human person (though not of God) and think our distinctively human functions are entirely supported by highly complex physical processes, yet allow for a future life simply by virtue of a resurrected body.

The biblical components for an acceptable view of persons are relatively simple, if we remember that the scriptural notions of "soul" and "spirit" are not metaphysical concepts but more descriptive of functions. Our creaturely dependence on God for every aspect of our existence is the first. The uniqueness of persons in God's image is also crucial, along with the fact that we are ourselves agents whom God holds responsible for character and choices, thoughts and actions. Human beings, too, are capable of a kind of community that is unique in creation. As far as a future life is concerned, relatively little is said in Scripture about disembodied existence (between death and resurrection) beyond Paul's statement that absence from the body means being in the presence of God. The larger emphases and fuller statements refer to a fully orbed life following the resurrection of the dead. In this, an essential unity of personality, functionally at least, is clear.

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Within these parameters are various alternatives. Some options may appear better suited than others if we think, for example, that Platonic and naturalistic solutions squeeze the biblical components out of their most natural shape. Some may appear more adaptable to our knowledge of cybernetics or the like. My own preference is for a body-soul dualism in close organic unity, so that we function in many if not all regards as holistic beings rather than having separate body functions and soul functions. But this preference must stop short of claiming that no other kind of view will do. We simply do not know enough to make so strong a claim.

RELATIONSHIPS AND RESPONSIBILITIES ARE RADICALLY AFFECTED BY BOTH SIN AND GRACE

Psychologist Karl Menninger tells of a stern-faced, plainly dressed man on a street corner in the Chicago Loop, pointing an accusing finger at people and intoning one word: "Guilty!" Embarrassed, wondering how he ever knew, his victims hastily passed him by. Menninger was introducing the subject of his book Whatever Happened to Sin? which underscores the lack of a sense of responsibility in society, and claims that socially unacceptable behavior is a symptom of social or emotional conflicts, or the result of bad social conditioning, as if nobody is really to blame. President Carter once stunned and amused government employees by chiding those who were "living in sin." In a day of shifting mores, "sin" was supposedly too old-fashioned to name in such a way. Even Menninger was arguing for no more than that society should accept responsibility for doing something to offset its bad influence on individuals.

Undoubtedly society is much to blame, and changing mores do leave moral confusion. But this cannot detract, if there is any individual freedom, from individual responsibility for one's own values, intentions, thoughts, and deeds. The scientific humanist, tied to evolutionary concepts, tends rather to stress the effects of social and psychological problems that arise in a rapidly changing world still marked by conflict. The Romanticist tends to exonerate nature, human nature in general as well as one's own, and to criticize the institutions of our culture. The existentialist for his part finds an underlying cause in the dehumanization and emptiness of existence, and the Marxist points to class conflicts and counterrevolutionary
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rather than the Creator; and as we read in Genesis, the tempter first offered to Adam the prospect of being as God. Among recent theologians, Reinhold Niebuhr has turned attention to this heart of sin as the refusal to take a creaturely position, to accept our dependency and finiteness, to recognize that the center of our existence is outside ourselves, in God the Creator. Sin makes creatures the center of our being, so that a person does not worship and serve the Creator but serves herself or other finite things instead. Pride and power are her concern, the pride and power of race or sex or profession. Niebuhr suggests that sin refuses even to settle for the union of nature and spirit that makes us distinctively in God's image. Either sin exalts the physical and turns to naturalism, or it exalts the human spirit, turning optimistically to rationalistic and idealist extremes. In either case human ends replace the divine purpose, self-satisfaction displaces pleasing God, and personal fulfillment overrides the love that sacrifices as it serves. The result of life off-center is loss of virtue, meaning, inner liberty, and hope.

In the second place, then, sin cannot be confined to some segment of life but extends throughout its relationships. Our relation to God is at its heart, if sin is revolt against God. But alienation from God, we expel nature for ill-conceived ends with stringent means, and suffer the effects on ourselves. The Genesis story of man's fall significantly talks of thorns and thistles that turn work into toil, and of expulsion from the garden. The Romantically forgets this alienation from nature, yet nature's forces are not altogether benign, nor is man's domination of nature. Consider the havoc we wreak all about us!

Our relations to other persons suffer from alienation as well. We alienate our fellow human beings, thereby tearing the fabric of society and polluting the refinements of culture. We suffer from self-indulgence and from the overindulgence of others, for people are all askew. Even my relationship to myself is affected, for if my identity lies in relationships that are now distorted or destroyed, then my identity suffers, too. My self-image is deflated by isolation, or else it inflates to compensate. I mistake life's meaning in trying to relate to nature and people apart from God. My efforts fail and I find it hard to forgive myself; or I lose touch with who I am at heart. All of life suffers.

Sin, thirdly, is a pervasive condition of the inner life as well as the outer. Contrary to Pelagian and legalistic conceptions and
to the naturalistic view, it extends beyond the particulars of thought and deed to the inner core of our being. The heart, in biblical terminology, is deceitful and desperately wicked. The phenomenon of self-deception, of role-playing and wearing masks, is well known to psychologists, sociologists, and philosophers. We mask not only particular things about us, but also the evil in our hearts, perhaps by deeds that outwardly are beyond reproach. But responsible beings are responsible also for the intents of the heart, for the possibilities they imagine and the values they love but would never confess.

God, we are told, desires truth in the inward parts.

This pervasiveness of sin deprives us of the ability always to think and do and intend and speak aright. It infects every area of life. It traps us in horrible moral dilemmas in which no altogether good option is possible. Life becomes a tangled mess, riddled with helplessness and guilt.

Pervasive as it is inwardly, sin is equally pervasive outwardly. It can no more be confined to individuals than to particulars; it is not just the condition of individuals, but the pervasive condition of society as well. Since relationships between people give rise to the institutions of society, relationships pervaded by sin produce institutions pervaded by sin. David's adultery with Bathsheba is a case in point. He corrupted the institutions of marriage and government, multiplied abuses of political power, and trapped servants and soldiers by implicating them, until only the word of God could awaken his conscience. But nothing could correct the social corruption and personal harm that had been done forever.

Since an institution assumes a life of its own apart from the private functions of individuals, its structures and purposes are affected by sin, along with its day-to-day operations. Sin is a social reality, not just a private affair. The Old Testament therefore recognizes corporate as well as individual responsibility. A family, a tribe, a nation can be accountable, their corporate sin judged.

This account of human sin, it should be remembered, presupposes the doctrine of creation. A law-governed creation has a moral order that is independent of human wish and historical variation. The sin that perverts relationships is a violation of that law, inwardly in the human heart, outwardly in word and deed, and societally too, for God's law also extends to institutions that arise. In refusing the creaturely position, sin is lawlessness.

Two comments are needed here. First, the idea of an objective moral order often (but not in all cases) goes against the humanist vein. Some forms of naturalism allow no objective basis for morality, but relativize it to changes in time and place, sometimes even making it wholly subjective. In Chapter Ten, therefore, we shall explore further the claim to a theistic basis for values that underlies the concepts of sin and moral responsibility.

Second, sin's broad extent does not mean that no good deeds are done. The Creator remains the living God, active in the world in spite of sin, and pursuing good purposes still. Christians speak of common grace, the goodness of God that causes the deeds of wrathful men to praise him, so that human relationships, society, and culture are in measure beneficent yet. Governments and workers, artists and teachers, parents and friends, sinful as they be, may continue to serve God's purposes whether they acknowledge it or not. Creational tasks continue.

This is not the place to elaborate the Christian doctrine of salvation, but a view of human persons would be incomplete without some comment about God's grace. Christians hold that God forgives sinners and that the new life in Christ is as pervasive as, and more powerful than, sin. This is quite coherent with what we have seen, for the basic point is that the living God acts creatively in dealing with our sin. The moral law sin violates is God's law in all its parts, so it is ultimately his prerogative to forgive. And if sin extends to every human relationship, grace can, too. Reconciliation to God is followed by reconciliation to other persons in a life of love. Barriers come down—racial barriers (neither Jew nor Greek), sexual prejudice (neither male nor female), socioeconomic aloofness (neither slave nor freeman)—for all are united in Christ. The new life in Christ, like sin, has societal dimensions in the kingdom he preached and brought. The work of grace, like that of sin, begins inwardly in the human heart and its relationship to God, but extends outwardly into every other relationship and responsibility as well.

A Christian conception of liberty now emerges. It is not the liberty of the individualist who accepts no responsibility to others except to respect their equal rights. John Stuart Mill's libertarianism, with its basic principle that liberty can be restricted only to
avoid harm to others, falls short of the kingdom of God. The rule of self-interest, from a Christian point of view, is bondage. Christian liberty is freedom from that, a freedom to obey the law of God from the heart and to serve others sacrificially in love. It is liberty limited by what creatureliness implies of interdependency and interrelatedness, and captivated by God’s purposes. It renews the person, restores relationships, and gives a present taste of what the kingdom of God was at creation intended to be, and what it will yet become.