2

Point 1: Before the Rebellion

If you were to ask a boy who travels to school by bus every day whether he counts the change the bus driver gives him, no doubt he would answer, 'Of course.' If you asked him why, you would quickly learn that this youngster has made some very sophisticated observations about life. He believes that people may try to cheat him, and that they make mistakes. Indeed, he may tell you he even finds himself doing these things. He also knows that some people are honest and kind whereas others are not. Sometimes, he will tell you, the same person will act in both ways; he does so himself.

All this can be very puzzling to a young man, to say nothing of the adults who live around him in the same world. From their experience they could supply many examples of even deeper and more hurtful complexities in life.

This boy has rightly seen that there are inconsistencies in the people around him as well as in himself. But if God made them, why are they like that? Rational people can practise kindness and also be very damaging. Why does God allow this? Such questions can take on a more personal thrust: Why am I the way I am? Why do I decide what is good and then

not do it? If I act this way, am I whole? Am I acting as I was meant to act? We need answers to such deep questions.

To enable us to find a personally satisfying understanding of the way the world is, God has graciously provided a revelation. It is recorded in the first three chapters of Genesis. It is a 'revelation' because in it God brings us insight from outside our situation—insight which, without His help, we could never gain.

PAST THINGS MATTER

Chapters 1 to 3 of Genesis reveal information about the situation which prevailed in God's creation at its beginning. We never personally lived at that place and time; yet the way God made things to be, and the events which took place at the creation, profoundly affect both the current condition of the world and the sort of people we are now.

Because human beings live on earth for such a short time, we both forget and are ignorant of things which happened before 'our time'. Yet God has always been there. He knows and remembers. He knows not only everything that has taken place but also the important things we must be aware of if we are to live faithfully with Him right now.

Genesis 1—3 records some of these important matters. It gives us an understanding of how things once were; and in telling us how they once were, it clearly shows they are no longer that way now.

CHANGED CIRCUMSTANCES: SAME GOD

Point 1 in our diagram takes us back behind the Fall (Point 2). We have never known the place described in Genesis 1—2 in our personal experience, yet in our life now many situations are continuous with it. This continuity is solely a work of God. He remains our God, and we, although different because of our rebellion, remain His creatures.

When I speak of 'continuity' I mean there is a carry-over from the time of the creation. The Fall means we are no longer

in the mint condition Adam and Eve were in before they rebelled. It does not mean, however, that everything God did in creation has been obliterated. Our basic humanity carries over, though we are marred and changed. Our relationships are still there, though they are affected. And although they bear the mark of the Fall, they still have the substance of what God first made.

This is why we need to consider the material recorded in Genesis 1—3 as true history. It actually happened. It is not only recorded in a style which suggests this; it loses all meaning for our lives if it is not a true record of history, because we live in continuity with it.

This continuity is important, but it can be hard. The difficulty arises because Genesis 1—3 also powerfully tells us, 'Your life is now very far gone from what God intended it to be.' This is not easy to hear—unless we have beside us a gracious God who still holds on to us, as we are, in our fallen state.

It is only because God *does* hold on to us in this way that there is continuity between our life and His original creation. The continuity is His gracious gift. He grants it to both the child of God and the rebel, but it has different results for each.

For God's covenant people, the sober yet realistic information of Genesis 1—3 can be faced with the security of knowing that God is there 'for us'. He loves us and has rescued us by the Saviour from a position of judgement. For rebels, Genesis 1—3 is undeniably the key to understanding why life is as it is now. But it is usually received with fear and a corresponding defensive reaction, because it calls them to account.

ACTION

1 You will notice that often people display a great deal of anger at God because of this information. Understand their reaction: it is because Genesis is laying bare the basic rebellion at the heart of every person.

2 If you can learn the lessons of Genesis 1—3 in security and love, give thanks to God. Thank Him now!

3 Something to ponder: fundamentally, history has a theological interpretation. This is so because God is there and He is speaking about its meaning—in fact, His relation to His creation *is* the meaning of history. As someone has rather quaintly put it, when we study history, we are really studying His-story.

This continuity arising from God's care for us reinforces one of the basic insights of Genesis 1—2: that we are to think in a *relational* way. We will investigate this later in the chapter; suffice it to say here that although Genesis 1—3 tells us the present conditions under which we live were not always so, all is not lost. God may still be obeyed in the midst of a fallen world. He is still there. He was the central focus in the Garden of Eden, and He still is. Man lived by His Word then, and he does so now. In that sense nothing has changed.

Hold this comforting idea uppermost in your mind as you read on. It will bring you strength.

ADDRESSED, NOT ANSWERED

We have said that the message contained in Genesis 1—3 is a revelation coming from beyond Man. One of the disconcerting facts about any revelation is that it tends to *announce* what it says. It is not a discussion. It does not answer the questions its hearers want to ask but those which the Giver of the revelation considers significant.

Genesis 1—2 shows us how things were before the Fall. But we must remember that it addresses this revelation to sinful human beings: creatures of God who have never known anything except a natural state of rebellion against Him.

This has an important implication: it means that we read the revelation with a twisted, egocentric and rebellious mind. Many of our thought-patterns and questions arise out of this

state. So we need to be careful not to demand that Genesis deal with *our* questions. Although it was written for rebels, it does not accept the legitimacy of the rebellious position. We are hearing the Creator address His creatures, telling us what He thinks we need to hear. We are not receiving answers to questions which, by the very nature of the thought underlying them, reflect our desperate and fallen state.

Large numbers of people, including many Christians, are confused and irritated when they read Genesis. This is because they come to it with their own agendas about what it should say, and find instead material which goes back beyond their experience and actually calls their whole way of thinking into question. This will always be, to say the least, a little threatening and different. The main issue we have to face is that Genesis 1—2 does not deal with our questions or agendas but with *us*. If we stay with our questions and agendas, we grow quite frustrated. (In fact, this frustration, produced by the text, is part of its message.) It does not follow that we cannot ask our questions; we can. But we must save them until we have heard God address us.

This is especially true of questions which attempt to understand the sciences in the light of Genesis. We must hear what Genesis 1—3 says to us about our own rebellion and the state of our relation with God, one another and the earth *before* we can consider, with a humble and careful heart, the observations of biology, geology and other scientific disciplines. This will give us the right attitude to approach such sacred revelation—something which is crucial, because the attitude of our heart affects our thinking and perceptions. If we come to Genesis in this way, we may find that we ourselves are changed and that as a result many of our questions no longer arise, or we ask different questions.

ACTION

1 Resolve to read the Bible carefully with an attitude of submission to God, and therefore to what He is saying. Such

submission is the primary requirement if you want to know the truth. If it seems strange that the attitude of your heart (a personal relation) should matter in reading a book, wait for the explanation in the next chapter.

2 The most effective way to read submissively is to sit under the authority of the Bible and let God question you through it. Express to God your willingness to do this.

3 This does not mean you turn your mind off. It is not a call to stop thinking, but an encouragement to have a disciplined mind. A person living under a Master thinks about what the Master is saying; he is not constantly waiting to intrude his own questions.

Because Genesis 1—3 deals with the relations between God, man and the universe, it does, after we have heard ourselves addressed, have impact on the sciences.

A scientist is a person who observes the world in which he lives, then attempts to accurately describe what he sees. He starts with the world because he can do nothing else. It is the place of his data, and he himself is part of it.

But Genesis 1—3 awakens us to the truth that the world is no longer as it first came from God's hand. The nature of things has changed; in its natural state, the world is now fallen. Consequently, whenever the scientist describes something, that thing is no longer in its original, God-created condition. Moreover, this is true of the scientist himself.

So for descriptive sciences such as biology, zoology, botany and geology, the Genesis narrative compels us to ask two underlying questions before we even begin to look at the world, let alone describe it. The first question has to do with the nature of things as they are now: If the world is distorted by rebellion against God, will our observations of it necessarily reflect His truth? The second question concerns the scientist himself: If he is a fallen man, are his perceptions and descriptions accurate? The fact that both the world and the

scientist are affected by the Fall has far-reaching implications for all sciences—in particular those descriptive sciences (such as psychology) which have Man himself as their main 'object' of study.

THE RELATIONAL WAY OF THINKING

As fallen human beings, we tend to describe ourselves in ways which presume we are the centre of the universe. But Genesis does not direct us to think this way. Rather, it asks us to focus our attention on a series of 'relations' in which God has set us. These relations are the basic 'givens' of life. If we fail to understand them and act within them, we cannot act faithfully.

It is just like our normal family relations. We cannot do very much about who our relatives are—we have no choice about the families into which we are born. It is not our business to decide whether we will have an Auntie Nell or an Uncle Jack. But once we are in the family, those relations are the 'basics' from which we begin.

ACTION

If you have ever argued with God about your family, or rejected your parents and relations by blaming God for setting you among them, then repent, ask His forgiveness and renounce this attitude firmly.

Genesis insists that God is responsible for placing us in certain basic relations. Once we have understood these, it directs our attention to the business of how we will then act within them. It is the 'action' of life to which Genesis points us; yet this action is to be performed only when we know how we are first set 'in relation'. (The two major themes which recur throughout this book will be *relation* and *action*.)

So our basic concern is to understand where, how, and when God has 'set' us. We must do this before we act because, if we are wrong about the relations He has set us in, we will be

wrong about our starting position for living, and consequently will not be able to act faithfully. We will be 'positionally' confused. Wherever God has set men and women—whether it be in respect to their neighbour and the world or in respect to their location in time (at one of the points of the framework diagram)—it is the relations He has set that determine the starting position for their 'faithful' action. Their action is faithful when it is obedient to God and consistent with the relations in which He has put them. It is faithless when it is either ignorant of those relations or knowingly disobedient to them.

Let's examine Genesis 1—2 to see how these relations are described.

In these chapters we have a description of creatures who are made by God, put by Him in a particular place, and told they must occupy that place in relation to Himself and their fellow creatures.

Notice how this is true in Genesis 1, which deals with the creation of the earth. The creation begins at verse 2 with something which is 'formless and empty'. After this report of the making of basic matter, the rest of the chapter describes the formation of each part of creation as it is set in its place with respect to the other parts.

Three major actions of God recur for each separate part of creation. First, there is mention of the *creation* of something, usually in the form, 'let there be...'. Then that thing is *set in relation* to something else, taking its part in the whole. In this way the 'emptiness' takes form. Finally, it is *named*; it receives a designation from God. (Usually the naming makes it clear to the post-Fall world what the text is talking about.) This creating-relating-naming sequence appears consistently, for example, in regard to light (vv 3–5), sky (vv 6–8), land and sea (vv 9, 10), vegetation (vv 11, 12), the planets (vv 14–18), birds and animals (vv 20–25), and man (v 26–2:24).

When we come to the making of Man, we are told that he is made after God's likeness (1:26–27) and that he will have

dominion (an authority with power) over the rest of the creatures.

> Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.'
>
> So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.
>
> God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground' (Genesis 1:26–28).

The man and the woman are placed among the rest of the creatures in both a 'spatial' relation and an 'authority' relation. That is, they are set *within* the created world and also *over* it. Being created last in the sequence conveys the very clear impression that they are granted the world—it is there for them.

(Notice, in passing, that we have here the starting point for our thinking about necessity and freedom. In his spatial relation, man is surrounded by objective and fixed situations. About these he has no choice. It is necessary for him to accept that he is a creature and is not free to be otherwise, that he is set in a garden and in a world, that he has a neighbour, and so on. Yet within these objective necessities he exercises a *relational* freedom, typified here by the authority relation. This relational freedom exists in his subjective interaction with God, with his neighbours and with the rest of creation. Within this freedom he may exercise his will. This is the situation in which all human beings live—constantly finding themselves presented with objective positions which they must occupy of necessity, and at the same time experiencing

personal choice and the freedom to exercise their will within those set relations.)

Here in Genesis we see a basis for the ongoing human enterprise of describing the world. The created world is set in relation to man and woman as the ones for whom it was made; therefore it can be validly described by them. Man is truly set over the created things and he 'names' them. They are 'called' as he describes them. Yet notice that such an ability can be exercised truly only if the man first understands his relation to God. The man who 'names' by God's gift is the same man who in turn is a creature of God.

The danger arises when Man describes *himself*, as if he may be treated as one of the animals. Such descriptions will often yield accurate observations when they describe Man's body, which has affinity with the animals. When confining themselves to 'what' Man is made of, there is continuity with what the world is actually like. But if the relation of man and woman to God as Creator is omitted, such descriptions will always fail to grasp the totality of 'who' Man is. This is what we would expect.

Genesis 2:4–24 explains more of the relation in which God has placed Man.

> This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created.
>
> When the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, no shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth and no plant of the field had yet sprung up; the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no man to work the ground, but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground. And the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.
>
> Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. And

> the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (Genesis 2:4–9).

If we ask 'What is Man made of?' we learn it is the same stuff as the rest of the universe. In his body, and its chemical structure, he has a relation of continuity to the rest of the world. He is made of the dust of the ground (v 7). On the other hand, if we ask 'Who is Man?' then Genesis tells us of a 'living being' who has received the breath of life from God Himself. This difference between the 'what' and the 'who' has some implications to which we will return.

As the account of the man's creation flows on, we are introduced to more of the relations in which God has put him. These relations are always meant to provide a basis for *action*. They are set positions which are meant to be lived out in practice. The Word of God always asks obedience of the creature. This obedience is a personal act of will to do something consistent with the relation in which God has placed us.

Man is set within a garden planted for him by God (v 8), and is assigned some work—he is to work the garden and take care of it (v 15). In other words, he is to do the work which is consistent with his relation to the garden. It is not because the man works that the garden yields him food, for its basic fruitfulness is God's gift to him. It is rather that in his work of tilling and reaping, he maintains his God-given position of dominion with respect to the garden. Before the Fall, then, work is not done in order to eat. It is primarily to carry out what God says, and it is within the wisdom of God's provision for the man that the garden yields him food.

In this respect we learn that all the things Man does can properly be called his 'works'. To the extent that he performs actions obediently, they may be called 'good' works—that is,

they are done in keeping with the relation in which God has set him and in the way God wants.

So Man is placed under God's gracious promise that the fruit of the garden will yield food, which he is permitted to eat (v 16). However, he also has a prohibition placed on him—he may *not* eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (v 17).

Here we learn of a 'possibility' for action which the man is forbidden to take. The knowledge the tree contains is not 'data', in the sense of information. No; it is the actual *act of eating* from it which constitutes the 'knowledge'. In performing the prohibited action, Man disobeys God and thus adopts a stance contrary to Him, and a change of relational position occurs. (We will explore this further in Chapter 4.)

This pre-Fall prohibition also shows us that Man is not to understand himself as an individual programmed (or even permitted) to do everything he *can* do. Man is not just a 'doer'; he is also called to refrain from doing. He is not a 'possibility' person, doing everything that lies within his potential among all the possible arrangements of the created world. It is not the possible arrangements which govern him—it is always the relational action commanded by God within those arrangements. What governs him is the Word of God.

Notice that this Word deals with *action*. It is action which God requires—action for which the man, and the woman with him, will be held responsible. The presence in the garden of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil reminds Man that he is a responsible person who can be held to account. This responsibility is a predominant theme of Genesis 1—3. It arises out of the relation with God which the man and woman personally exercise.

Here lies the basic critique of the predominantly humanist view of education which prevails today—a view which maintains that education consists simply in bringing people to their 'full potential'. The presupposition underlying such an enter-

prise is that a person should be enabled to do everything it is possible for him to do. As a reaction to seeing children deprived of learning, this has merit (though such a reactive response hardly constitutes a basis for education). But it begs a massive moral question: In a fallen world, should we be open to doing everything it is possible to do? Through such openness, it is said, a human being can arrive at his 'full potential'. But the consequence is that advocates of the 'full life' usually end up subordinating responsibility to the selfish desire not to be 'held back' from anything that they can possibly accomplish.

The Christian life, on the other hand, has godliness as its major concern. This implies obedience to what Another wants of us, often in the midst of many possibilities, including a number which would constitute disobedience.

This exposes a great difficulty for all Christian decision-making. A statement of the possible options before us is not necessarily the best guide to what we should do. The decisive thing is what the Word of God asks us to do with respect to those options in the particular moment of faithfulness. This observation also puts restrictions on how we understand 'circumstantial guidance'.

ACTION

1 Make it a settled matter in your mind that God has never intended you to simply focus on possible options when deciding action. The fact that you *can* do something does not mean you *ought* to do it.

2 Be careful of the places in your life where you think you have ability—consciously bring them to God. Do not assume that doing what you are able or trained to do is necessarily what God always wants. It is not your talents which are significant but your *calling*. Where God wants you is the central matter of your life with Him.

3 Beware of considering the circumstances around you (that

is, the possibilities open to you) as the sole basis for what you ought to do. As we will see later, circumstantial guidance 'in relation' can be helpful in deciding what we should do—but we will have to learn how to test it.

TWO CONTRASTS TO RELATIONAL THOUGHT

Throughout Genesis 1 and 2 (and as we will see in our discussion of Point 2, in Genesis 3 as well) there is a consistent presentation of creation: first man and woman, the animals, and the various other features of the universe are related to God; then, when this primary relation is clear, they are related to one another by Him. This relational way of thinking deeply affects how we think about God and Man—in fact, everything. Let's investigate how it compares with two common modern alternatives.

Contrast 1: 'Having' something instead of 'being' someone. Often we hear people say things such as 'Jennifer has a bad temper' or 'Brendan has a bright personality.' They use abstract nouns (such as 'temper' or 'personality') in such a way that they create the impression of people *having something* instead of *being someone*.

Take, for example, the word 'personality' and its connection with the verb 'has'. It is not until we think of another way of saying 'Brendan has a bright personality' that we recognize what is at stake. If we say 'Brendan is a bright person' we state the same intention. What is the difference? In the first sentence, 'personality' is an attribute, something which Brendan 'has'. When people make such a remark, it is normally because they have encountered Brendan and found him to be a witty, sunny person. Yet when they have reported that impression, they have given him an attribute which they say he 'has'. In speaking this way, a subtle change has occurred—they have chosen to talk in terms of what Brendan *has* rather than who Brendan *is*.

When applied to Genesis, this style of thinking leads

people to say that Man 'has' personality, rationality, morality, and so on. This inevitably leads us to understand ourselves in terms of what we 'have', and thus we focus on ourselves—on what we possess within ourselves as attributes—rather than on the relations in which we are set by Another.

This thinking raises great difficulties if we begin to understand grace and faith as things which we 'have' (and therefore possess for ourselves). Then we forget that grace and faith are relational—that they are, in fact, active and dynamic rather than static and possessed. You may exercise faith only when you are trusting someone. Faith *is* the trusting—the relational action.

Further, even if we understand that at creation a certain thing came from God, we sometimes cannot help feeling that although He granted it, we now 'have' it. It is then a short step for rebellious men to believe they may exercise what God granted independently of Him (autonomously) and thus out of relation to Him. It is easy to see where that thinking comes from; we see the shadows of the Fall cast heavily across it.

Genesis, by the way it expresses its own truths, warns us to be careful of these categories. We will search in vain for the terminology of 'having' in Genesis 1—3. In fact, Scripture calls this whole way of thinking into question. It persists in telling us that we will not understand ourselves by turning inwards to discover what we 'have'. We will understand ourselves only by looking to God to see what relations He has placed us in, and on that basis learning where we are called to act faithfully.

ACTION

1 Resolve to be especially careful with 'having' categories. Instead of saying things such as 'Brendan has a lovely personality', think and speak in terms such as 'Brendan is a lovely person.' You will be surprised what a difference it makes. You will then deal with *people*, not with what they 'have'. One of

the surest ways to fail to relate to your fellow man as God wants is to think of him as 'having' properties.

2 This is particularly true for those who advise or counsel others. Remember, if you uncritically accept a way of thinking about people which is less than Christian, you fail to live truly towards (that is, to love) your neighbours. Not only do you sin yourself in this, but you may draw them into the consequences of your wrong views. Only the truth sets a deceived person free—another deception does not.

Contrast 2: Man-made descriptions applied to persons. Another important difference between the fallen way of thinking and the thinking of Genesis 1—2 arises from the modern use of descriptive categories, particularly in ordinary speech.

Commonly, when we describe a person, we say he 'is' something—for example, 'John is a schizophrenic.' The use of the word 'schizophrenic' is actually a shorthand way of classifying John for purposes of recognition in a highly developed field of descriptive study (psychology).

This classification is devised by those who share the assumptions of this field of study, and is based on the identification of certain 'behaviour patterns' in a range of people. (That their behaviour constitutes patterns which are significant is presupposed by the classifiers.) When they come to observe a particular individual, such as John, the classifiers use these 'patterns' drawn from their observations of other people as the basis for selecting a small number of that individual's activities (out of the very large number of things he does) and grouping them together under their classification. In an important sense this classification is arbitrary—not that the 'patterns' are nonsensical, but rather that such classifications rest on no stronger basis than what the classifiers think are significant correlations of events (that is, on what they choose to link together).

So when it comes to John, we now find our classifiers are

actually making a statement which reads roughly like this: 'John is a person who sometimes behaves in a certain way. We call this way of behaving "schizophrenia". We have derived the criterion for using that term about John from a selection of actions we have observed being performed by other people. That selection was made because we believe those actions constitute a pattern which has some significance for our own classificatory purposes, and which we can, for those purposes, regard as a unit. Thus our particular common commitment to this framework of thought allows us to use a common name for this "condition" (which actually exists only in our minds as a condition). That name is "schizophrenia". However, the name classifies John's behaviour; it does not classify John.'

So far so good. No one could object to people classifying behaviour patterns according to an agreed criterion, provided they understand that this is all they are doing. The danger appears in the way such patterns are described, and particularly how they are spoken about in common life.

When we make shorthand statements such as 'John is a schizophrenic', we do two things. First, we run the risk of making the theological mistake of confusing who John is with what he does. Second, we use the word 'is' in an ambiguous way.

What is meant in the professional circles where such terminology is used is something along the lines we have outlined above. However, because of the ambiguity of the word 'is', it is possible for John—particularly if he is not a very thoughtful person or has not understood the presuppositions of the descriptive 'science' by which he is being classified—to read the 'is' as a statement about his 'being' rather than as a statement classifying his behaviour.

Consequently, John may begin to live his life on the basis of the description 'schizophrenic'—a description given to him, not by God, but by others. Whenever that sort of thing happens, a man's world-view has been changed; he has had an intellectual conversion. He has taken up a new philosophical

position. And it is an idolatrous position, because he lives his life on the basis of a man-made philosophy. He thinks of himself as if he truly 'is' a schizophrenic—instead of simply understanding himself as a person who behaves in particular ways which some people see as significant and have a name for.

The problem, of course, is that this is exactly what the 'therapy' which uses such classifications requires of the client. He must accept the *description* of his behaviour as a *prescription* for his being. Whether the therapist applies the classification to John or John applies it to himself makes little difference. One way or another, John must accept the 'diagnosis' for the therapist to be able to work in an agreed framework. Thus John is encouraged to think about himself (and therefore to live) in the way the classifiers think of him. This will be idolatry—unless the descriptions tally with, or bear some relation to, what God has said.

The danger of statements such as 'John is a schizophrenic' is that they slip out of their strictly limited application as descriptive terms used by people with a particular shared interest and wander into everyday speech. They cease to be regarded as the arbitrary descriptive statements they are, and instead are thought to be meaningful statements about life in general.

But in fact, it is no more significant for human beings to know their behaviour can be classified in a certain way than it is for a fern to know, if it could, that it is in the class of plant life called *Pterida*. For practical living it has absolutely no more significance than that.

This is not to say such classifications have no significance among those who use them for professional purposes, as part of their common jargon. They do. But often they go far beyond that, and affect the way people think about life. How you think about your neighbour and yourself, and whether you accept how others think about you, commits you to a philosophy of life. If you trust the descriptions other people

give of you and, worse, begin to live your life on the basis that those descriptions are true, then in the end you may accept a world-view which is at odds with what God has said. Such world-views must be submitted to Christian critique, and part of that critique begins in these chapters of Genesis about Point 1 in our diagram.

Although such classificatory statements have their value and may be used with caution, they do not unlock the way to live. All they do is describe the fallen world, using the mental attitudes and perceptions of fallen 'describers'. They also suffer from the limitations of the scientific method, which enables us only to describe the things that exist and how they operate. Scientific statements are unable to deal with the 'theological' question of 'who' a person is.

My contention is that the Genesis narrative, when read by rebellious man (to whom it is addressed), constantly challenges his central ideas about life. It even challenges the language which carries those ideas. In this way, even analysis of how we describe ourselves drives us back to the relational theme of Genesis.

Throughout this book we will assume that understanding life in terms of its relations best enables us to comprehend all the situations in which we find ourselves. This will involve us not in reflecting or turning in on ourselves, but in understanding ourselves in relation to God and to the other creatures with whom we must live. Further, it will always involve action—we will examine life only as it is to be actually lived. Thus we will avoid the divorce between theory and practice so often evident in the use of other descriptions of life. This is one of the basic lessons Genesis teaches us.

ACTION

1 Be very careful how you think about others and yourself. Do not believe you can help anyone to live truly by using less-than-Christian models of thought to diagnose or describe

their problems. Be quite convinced you can sin in your mind in this way.

2 When you go to any person for help about any matter—including professional counsellors or ministers—always ask: What basis are they working on when they say what they say? By doing this you will expose the way they think, and can then test the truth of what they say. Particularly ask them to explain jargon words.

3 At each point in life we need to ask two questions.

First, because in any situation our starting point must be the relation in which God has placed us (eg, to parents, to government, to spouse, etc), we must ask: What is the 'starting relation' in this situation? Do I understand that clearly?

When we have understood the Bible's teaching about the relation, the second question is: How shall I act faithfully here? Does Scripture instruct me how to live obediently in this relation?

Constantly practise asking these two questions in every matter which confronts you.

Before the next chapter: Study Genesis 3 carefully, trusting God to guide your thinking. Make your own notes.