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Interaction and antithesis in reformational scholarship

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This article explores the themes of interaction and antithesis between Christian and non-Christian scholarship, as developed within Christian-reformational circles since the 1930s. It presents the "classical" models of the Dooyeweerdian and Vollenhovan schools, as well as the suggestions by Jacob Klapwijk and Nicholas Wolterstorff. It is argued that the Dooyeweerdian approach is similar to the Vollenhovan one but more explicit on the possibility of cooperation with non-Christian scholarship. The proposals by Klapwijk and Wolterstorff contain acceptable elements and some ideas that should be clarified and refined further.

Interaksie en antitese in reformatoriese wetenskapsbeoefening

Hierdie artikel verken die temas van interaksie en antitese tussen Christelike en nie-Christelike wetenskapsbeoefening soos dit ontwikkel is in Christelik-reformatoriese kringe sedert die 1930s. Die artikel bied die "klassieke" modelle van die Dooyeweerdiaanse en Vollenhovianaanse skole aan, asook die suggesties van Jacob Klapwijk en Nicholas Wolterstorff. Dit word beredeneer dat die Dooyeweerdiaanse benadering ooreenstem met dié van Vollenhoven, maar meer uitgesproke is ten gunste van samewerking met nie-Christelike wetenskap. Die voorstelle van Klapwijk en Wolterstorff bevat aanvaarbare elemente, asook idees wat verder verhelder en verfyn moet word.

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I have dedicated a recent article to the theme of scientific communication within humanist philosophy of science (Coletto 2008). The present article shifts the focus to recent Christian philosophy of science and scholarship by exploring certain approaches to non-Christian scholarship which developed within reformational circles since the 1930s. Instead of comparing the contributions provided by Christian and humanist circles, this article will compare some “models” proposed within reformational circles.¹

There is another difference: the previous article deals especially with the possibility of communication and discusses issues such as incommensurability and incomparability. The present article has a wider scope as it deals with different levels of interaction and antithesis. Interaction is an overarching term that includes different levels (including recognition, communication, dialogue, cooperation, acceptance/incorporation of ideas). It is clear that interaction may start from the basic level of (positive) evaluation and gradually intensify in the subsequent levels of dialogue, cooperation and so on. Antithesis is also an overarching term traditionally used in reformational circles since Kuyper. It refers to the “negative” counterpart of interaction and also implies several “steps” or levels (dissension, refutation, proposal of alternative theories, and so on).²

A few questions may help in indicating the main directions of the present research. How did different reformational authors/circles contribute to the discussion on interaction and antithesis in scholarship? How should one evaluate those contributions? Did the focus of the discussion shift over the decades and how should the shift be evaluated?

- 1 One of the best (reformational) explorations of different Christian approaches to non-Christian philosophy is Klapwijk *et al* (eds) 1991. This collection of essays introduces the strategies adopted by Clement, Origen, Augustine, Bonaventura, Aquinas, Calvin, Tillich, Pannenberg, Gutierrez as well as a few neo-Calvinist authors.
- 2 Admittedly, antithesis is a form of interaction and may have a positive function. After all, opposition to ideas which are regarded as inadequate cannot be considered totally negative. Nevertheless, it may be useful to keep both terms (interaction and antithesis) at least for didactical purposes, even though the limits of the distinction have been indicated.

With these questions in mind, the article will explore the Dooyeweerdian approach, the Vollenhovan³ one, and the contributions of Klapwijk and Wolterstorff. The first two models constitute the “standard” (and older) approaches of reformational philosophy. The two other authors have offered several suggestions (in Klapwijk’s case these amount to a distinct approach) aimed at improving the “classical” positions. It will be argued that the Dooyeweerdian model is similar to the Vollenhovan approach except that it is more forthcoming on the issue of cooperation with non-Christian scholarship. The contributions of Klapwijk and Wolterstorff contain acceptable suggestions as well as some problematic elements that should be clarified and refined further.

1. Interaction and antithesis in Dooyeweerdian circles

1.1 The anchorage of Dooyeweerd’s epistemology

As far as Dooyeweerd and his school are concerned, the antithesis never represented an obstacle to dialogue and cooperation between scholars of different persuasions (Dooyeweerd 1959: 70-2). There is an equilibrium in Dooyeweerd’s position which, I believe, is the result of a double anchorage in his epistemology. On the one hand, he acknowledges the importance of religious ground motives, which indeed create differences in the interpretation of creational data. This is true for philosophy as well as for the special sciences. On the other hand, Dooyeweerd acknowledges creation itself. There are created structures and conditions “out there” that are not simply a construction of the knower (Dooyeweerd 1959: 72-3; cf Hart 1984: 1-83, Botha 1986: 85-6, Stafleu 1987: 238).

Irrespective of his convictions, the scientist will have to deal with laws, structures, “states of affairs” that are not dependent on his views. By referring to “states of affairs”, Dooyeweerd did not simply indicate a reality disconnected from mankind, a reality that could, as

3 The term is an abbreviation of “Vollenhoven-ian”, which I would like to avoid, for stylistic reasons.

such, provide the basis for scientific communication. His doctrine of naive experience does not wish to imply a realistic conception of reality (Dooyeweerd 1984, 3: 34). This is even more so with theoretical thought. Nevertheless, Dooyeweerd (1959: 74) believed that when the creational data are neglected or interpreted incorrectly, theoretical thought itself will entail all kinds of antinomies and contradictions (cf Strauss 2009: 188). The views of different schools, both in philosophy and in the special sciences, are not considered “incommensurable” (Stafleu 1987: 26-9). The structural order for the temporal horizon of experience, with all the states of affairs which are based thereon, is the judge of our theories and it will continue to remain a normative source for all knowers, Christians or not (Dooyeweerd 1959: 72).

Dooyeweerd (1959: 73) believed the biblical ground motive to be preferable to all the others. He denied, however, that Christians are always in a better position to interpret reality scientifically. The antithesis, which is an undeniable fact of life, does not magically divide Christian and non-Christian scientists into two well-delimited groups. This antithesis also crosses the life of the Christian scientist and of the Christian scientific community (Dooyeweerd 1984, 1: 524).

The antithesis is not at all simple to determine. Scientists who are Christians sometimes adhere to unbiblical ground motives as far as science is concerned, while they are still influenced by the Fall. Non-Christians, on the other hand, can be right on many issues because the religious ground motive is not the only reference point for scientific knowledge (Dooyeweerd 1959: 69). The “states of affairs” can be discovered by all. The only radical kind of antithesis is the religious one (Dooyeweerd 1984, 1: 123). Theoretical antithesis can only be relative.

Dooyeweerd believed in the possibility of genuine dialogue, and his transcendental critique was intended to promote this dialogue, not to suffocate it.⁴ He contended that the humanist “dogma” of the autonomy of theoretical thought hampers “real dialogue”

4 Of course there are, on this point, different evaluations of Dooyeweerd's endeavour. Cf for example Conradie's (1960) doctoral thesis and the more recent one by Choi (1999).

(Dooyeweerd 1980: 5-6). The different schools, in his opinion, are not usually aware of the deep causes of their disagreement, which are often related to religious ground motives. Once these motives have been uncovered, it should be easier to come to a more open discussion of ideas and theories (Dooyeweerd 1959: 71).

Dooyeweerd (1959: 73) speaks very clearly about the possibility of cooperation, about a “healthy and noble emulation” between philosophical schools. He takes for granted that Christians should be able to learn from their non-Christian colleagues. He takes it for granted that Christian scholarship is not bound to an oppositional attitude. The challenge for all schools of thought is to provide a reliable account of creational data, rather than to jealously defend their own views.

There is, for Dooyeweerd, a common call directed to all scholars and scientific traditions, Christians and non-Christians alike. This common task imposes the necessity of humility and dialogue. It is not difficult to guess that this position was a consequence of his reformed belief. Notwithstanding the apostasy of mankind, God’s cultural mandate to humanity is not cancelled. From this point of view, the parable of the talents acquires a special significance (Marcel 1983: 49-54).⁵ The Lord gives talents and tasks to all his servants, to be productive in his service until his return. It is true and unfortunate that not all the servants respond positively to the call. But ultimately even apostate thought contributes to the “fulfilment of the Divine plan” (Dooyeweerd 1984, 1: 119). As the antithesis finds its ultimate ground in the opposition between the “two cities” described by Augustine, the interaction finds its foundation in common grace, a theme of crucial importance in the thoughts of Calvin and Kuyper.

Finally, it appears that Dooyeweerd was not obsessed by the necessity to provide the evidence of a “difference” between Christian and non-Christian scholarship, as Wolterstorff (1989: 70 & 2004: 78)

5 The reference to Pierre Marcel in this context is not casual: he is one of the few French theologians who endorsed reformational thinking. He dedicated two theses to Dooyeweerd’s philosophy and published several of his articles in French as editor of *La revue réformée*. For many years he was also a correspondent for *Philosophia reformata*.

argues. True, Christian scholars see things differently, but Dooyeweerd (1959: 73) argues that all academic schools and currents receive the common task of accounting for structural facts. Dooyeweerd's classical example centres on the proposition $2 + 2 = 4$.

Although Dooyeweerd (1959: 72) uses this example to show that there are indeed different views and schools in mathematics, the argument implies the recognition that, ontologically, there is a common ground for all schools of thought. Once they are discovered, the structural conditions "impose themselves on everybody and it would make no sense to try to deny them" (Dooyeweerd 1959: 73). Only when one has recognised this, can one proceed further and acknowledge that even $2 + 2 = 4$ is interpreted differently in different mathematical schools. Dooyeweerd never argued, however, that cultivating "differences" is among the aims of scholarship, Christian or otherwise.

1.2 Between interaction and antithesis: the idea of inner reformation

Ideas and theories that are born under the influence of a non-biblical ground motive should not, for Dooyeweerd (1984, 1: 119), be incorporated into a Christian system of thought (cf Clouser 2005: 98). Historically, in his view, the tendency to synthesis⁶ has produced many questionable results. Calvin, on the contrary, rejected the attitude of accommodation and compromise with unbiblical ideas (Dooyeweerd 1984, 1: 516). The biblical religious ground motive is not compatible with, for instance, the ground motive informing Greek culture (Strauss & Bos 1999) or with other dualist starting points. In addition, it is not possible to advocate a simply "formal" use of philosophical ideas and categories. The operation always implies a contact with the content itself of a philosophy.

6 The "fathers" of reformational philosophy used the term "synthesis" to indicate a mixture of ideas or "themes" (Vollenhoven) stemming from incompatible religious ground motives or from opposite poles of the same ground motive. This procedure was followed especially during the Middle Ages (Vollenhoven's "synthetic period") and well into modernity. The term has therefore rather negative connotations (cf Dooyeweerd 1980: 111-47, Vollenhoven 1933).

All operations of synthesis are, according to this model, dangerous, and history is called to testify to this fact. When it comes to Christian philosophy and scholarship, the best way to proceed is therefore “inner reformation” (Bos 1987, Geertsema 1995). Christian philosophy, for example, can learn from non-Christian philosophies and cooperate with them. But the elaboration of a Christian philosophy should not proceed following an eclectic attitude.

Is this not a contradiction? How is it possible to be involved in a cooperation with all schools of thought, even to “learn” from them, and yet to develop an alternative approach? Is not philosophy always bound to its own historical situation and to its own interlocutors? Dooyeweerd (1984, 1: 118) answers:

whoever takes the pains to penetrate into the philosophic system developed in this work, will soon discover, how it is wedded to the historical development of philosophic and scientific thought with a thousand ties, so far as its immanent philosophic content is concerned, even though we can nowhere *follow* the immanence-philosophy. The philosophical elaboration in this book of the basic principle of sphere sovereignty, for example, would not have been possible without the entire preceding development of modern philosophy and of the different branches of modern science. Nevertheless it is just with the philosophic idea of sphere-sovereignty that we turn on principle against the humanistic view of science. In like manner it can be said that our transcendental critique of theoretical thought has an inner historical connection with Kant's critique of pure reason, notwithstanding the fact that our critique was turned to a great extent against the theoretical dogmatism in Kant's epistemology.

In Dooyeweerd's opinion, cooperation and antithesis proceed hand in hand (cf Choi 1999). He neither denies the historical situatedness of his philosophy nor the fact that “insight into the wealth of meaning of the cosmic order may grow even through the work of schools of thought against which our own starting point is set” (Dooyeweerd 1984, 1: 119). He insists that “no single serious current of thought, however apostate in its starting-point, makes its appearance in the history of the world without a task of its own, by which, even in spite of itself, it must contribute to the fulfilment of the Divine plan” (Dooyeweerd 1984, 1: 119). But there remains a crucial difference between cooperating and borrowing, between debating

the same problems (or even learning from others) and importing the presuppositions or theories of immanence-philosophy.

This is the crux of the Dooyeweerdian position and (as was shown with the above references) it was endorsed without notable changes by the following generations of his “followers”. Did its strategies succeed in practice? Did they result in improved communication? Geertsema (1995: 16) explains that in some cases the Dooyeweerdian approach did achieve positive results, although, of course, more could have been achieved.

2. Interaction and antithesis in Vollenhovian circles

2.1 Synthesis and reformation

The authors in this tradition are probably more antithetical than Dooyeweerd in their approach. Or at least, they insist less on the possibility of cooperation or communication between Christian and non-Christian schools of thought. They rather tend to emphasise more often the need for Christian scholars to provide original solutions and avoid synthetic thought (Vollenhoven 1953: 7). On this topic, a famous pronouncement by Vollenhoven has often caused some perplexity: “synthesis between christian belief on the one hand and current philosophy on the other is impossible” (Vollenhoven 1933: 16). What did he mean by “impossible”? Was not medieval philosophy to a large extent constituted by a synthesis of Christian and ancient Greek philosophy? In addition, why would this school of thought oppose something which is in fact impossible to achieve? I believe Vollenhoven meant to say that the results of a synthesis are never satisfactory. It is like mixing iron and clay: impossible to obtain a consistent amalgam. The result is “a mixture that doesn’t do justice to either of the elements” (Vollenhoven 1932: 58) and is therefore “artificial” (Vollenhoven 1933: 306).

Along those lines, Taljaard (1976) insists that only the Bible can enable people to look properly, without distortions, at the world around them. Even Dooyeweerd, according to Taljaard, in many instances relied on some disputable ideas (often inherited from Thomism) and

did not promote “radical biblical thinking”. The adjective “radical” in Taljaard means especially “without compromise”.⁷

A similar approach is found in Runner (1970: 85) who explains to the Dutch immigrants in Canada that Dutch Calvinism is preferable to other Christian traditions exactly because it was not born from a spirit of compromise and synthesis. This is the reason why it could offer real Christian alternatives. Runner can therefore boldly quote the motto: “in our isolation is our strength”.

Like Spykman (1985: 79) and Vollenhoven (1953), Runner does not deny that there are moments of truth in paganism. But these moments cannot be separated from their context and “transported” into a Christian system of thought. His beautiful exposition of the development of an ontology of the law in ancient Greek thought is a fitting illustration (Runner 1970: 53-60). In this development, according to Runner, the Greek philosophers struggled with God’s reality, not with some imaginary problem. It is indeed difficult to try to understand the nature and function of laws, norms or conditions in our world. The Greek proposed the best ideas that could be forged, and tried to explore all the possible solutions. But they did not have the Word-revelation at their disposal, so they could not interpret the Law in a proper way.

Their views are often absolutisations and distortions. Yet the development of their thought is interesting for many reasons, and should be studied thoroughly. For example, their philosophy reveals the different options available and the implications of each option. It also shows that these attempts do not constitute a real answer. It makes one aware of theories and views that have already been offered and should not be re-proposed in a Christian context. In this approach one feels the influence of Vollenhoven.

7 It should be borne in mind, however, that on the issue of synthesis there was agreement between the two approaches. Article 2 of the statute of the Association for Calvinist Philosophy declares that reformational philosophy should exclude all syntheses with any thought that does not place itself under the direct sovereignty of God over all creatures.

Vollenhoven (1953) was also of the opinion that Christian scholars should consider non-Christian thought as very important and study it carefully. But often its value seems to be rather “negative” or indirect. Such philosophy shows especially the pitfalls of a kind of thought that is not informed by the biblical revelation. Dooyeweerd’s ideas of “common task” or “inter-dependence” are not equally prominent in this instance.

The two schools agreed, however, that the best way to proceed in scholarship remains “inner reformation” on the basis of the biblical insight (Vollenhoven 1953: 8, Spykman 1985: 6-10). Sometimes the threats of non-Christian theories and ideas are subtle and difficult to detect. Playing with such ideas is in any case dangerous. They can enter the Christian reflection and bear their bitter fruits. This happened even with very popular Christian authors, according to Runner. It happened with Jonathan Edwards, whom many consider “a great Calvinist” (Runner 1970: 81). It happened with New England Puritanism (Runner 1970: 80). The problem, in each case, was the synthetic attitude.

In Edward’s case, the synthesis was ignited by a misplaced sympathy for the Cambridge Platonists (Runner 1970: 80). In other cases, it was a synthesis with Scottish realism. In all cases, the consequences for the Presbyterian theology in North America were rather negative, in particular for its more “synthetic” wing. Concerning the latter, even William James in his *Pragmatism* could state: “It is eclectic, a thing of compromise, that seeks a *modus vivendi* above all things [...] It lacks the victorious and aggressive note. It lacks prestige, in consequence” (Runner 1970: 84).

Runner’s point is that there is often a process of deterioration at work in the synthetic attitude of Christians:

Lacking the truth, the synthesis mind occupies itself with seeking moments of truth in the Lie. Sooner or later, lacking divine intervention, it will find itself *in the grip of the Lie* (Runner 1970: 85).

2.2 Is cooperation excluded?

Why are Vollenhovan philosophers slightly more inclined to be “integralist”? (Spykman 1985: 9 whose term is intended to have positive connotations). Is it because of a certain “candor” that Klapwijk (1987: 107) detects in this school of thought? Have they been more affected than others by what Wolterstorff (1989: 65) calls “religious totalism”? Or is Vollenhoven’s influence the main reason for a more oppositional tendency? One is tempted to remember, in this regard, the fundamental structure of Vollenhoven’s method for the study of the history of philosophy. The three main periods of Western philosophy are a pre-synthetic period (ancient philosophy) a synthetic one (medieval) and an anti-synthetic period (modern), respectively. If this is true, we now live in the era of antithesis!

John Kok, a great admirer of Vollenhoven’s philosophy, finds Vollenhoven’s attitude to be rather antithetical. Nevertheless, at the end of his inquiry, Kok (1988: 138) states: “I do not think it would be amiss to conclude that in spite of Vollenhoven’s antithetical attitude towards unscriptural philosophy, he also realises that it is at least a catalyst for Scriptural philosophizing.”

One might add that Vollenhoven never intended to establish his philosophy on a purely oppositional stance: his attitude was more positive. He would not, for example, start arguing about some opposite trends in humanist philosophy and then just come up with an alternative that would oppose those trends. His method was rather *thetical* and *critical* (Vollenhoven 1948: 18-9), also critical of Christian philosophizing. Ultimately, the thetical and the critical postures converge in a *reformational* approach. He writes: “Our own philosophical thought [...] will time and again have to experience a substantial reformation, both in its premises and its terminology” (Vollenhoven 1933: 16-7).

In the long run, this attitude did not fail to produce at least some fruits, some openness to cooperation. Calvin Seerveld, one of the best representatives of this school, observed that the reformation under the auspices of Vollenhoven includes “listening intently to the

(checkmated) contributions of non-christian philosophies to our (faulty) christian understanding of reality” (Seerveld 1973: 136).⁸

3. Jakob Klapwijk: transformational philosophy

3.1 The re-appropriation of Christian ideas

Jacob Klapwijk has for a long time been Vollenhoven’s student and assistant. In his opinion the founding fathers of reformational thinking placed too much emphasis on the difference in the starting points (world views), thus jeopardising the possibility of genuine dialogue and interaction with non-Christian philosophical schools (Klapwijk 1986: 138-43).⁹ On the other hand, there is the danger of synthesis, which Klapwijk also recognises. To avoid both dangers, he suggests the idea of “transformation”. According to him, the process of transformation is a very common phenomenon in philosophy. It is the re-elaboration of themes and concepts that are borrowed from other philosophies and then introduced into one’s own philosophy.

In a philosophical world where the possibility of dialogue has been challenged by increasing skepticism and by the threat of incommensurability, Klapwijk’s proposals sound rather refreshing. He supports not only the possibility of communication but also its necessity and desirability. More than this: he encourages, in particular in philosophy, a mutual transformation and appropriation of ideas.

8 As another example, Runner (1970: 118-21) welcomes as a kind of blessing a few trends in modern (humanist) science that recognise the importance of pre-scientific knowledge and therefore oppose the attitude of “scientism”. Apparently, although non-Christian scholarship has many faults, some trends are more acceptable than others.

9 Before holding this position, however, Klapwijk (1987a) wrote that Dooyeweerd’s idea of antithesis was not simply oppositional. On the contrary, it was a matter of “critical solidarity” for a “philosopher of the dialogue” who “wanted no closed fronts” and “was devoted to breaking through old battle lines” (1987b: 92). The article was written originally in 1977. It is not easy to see why a few years later Klapwijk (1986: 142) implicitly attributes to (Kuyper and) Dooyeweerd an “exclusively antithetical stand”.

Klapwijk's idea of transformation is related, first, to the re-appropriation of Christian ideas by the Christian community. In a world that has been heavily influenced by Christianity, many philosophical schools have adopted and transformed for themselves ideas that originally belonged to the Christian tradition. For example:

What we presently understand by 'modern secularization' is in fact nothing other than a process of transformation – I call it 'inverse transformation' – that originated in the Renaissance and Enlightenment and entails the wilful or unconscious categorical bending and systematic transformation of the Christian spiritual and intellectual heritage in the spirit of humanism. I would even defend the thesis that practically the whole of modern humanistic philosophy derives from a transformation of the Christian inheritance (Klapwijk 1987: 105-6).

It is time to claim back these intellectual treasures. For example, by looking deeply into the Marxist idea of alienation one can glimpse its Christian origin. It must then be possible "to dissect this Marxist notion until sin is disclosed at the foundation of all human and societal alienation: man, estranged from God" (Klapwijk 1986: 146-7). To support his project, Klapwijk (1986: 145-6) re-visits the famous biblical theme of the *Spoliatio Aegyptiorum*.¹⁰ Was not the gold taken from the Egyptians later utilised in the temple to the glory of God? The project, however, raises a few questions.¹¹

3.2 Critical questions

One should not forget that when talking about "property" of ideas (terms such as possession, appropriation, exchange are frequently used by Klapwijk) one is using just an image. The metaphor of spoliation may give the impression that when golden objects (ideas) are "borrowed" by someone and introduced into a new system they are no longer in possession of the original owners. This is certainly the case when one deals with metals. But ideas can continue to be present in two different systems of thought at the same time.

10 Latin: the spoliation of the Egyptians. Klapwijk's spelling (*Aegyptorum*) of this plural genitive, should be corrected (*Aegyptiorum*).

11 Augustine already regards the idea of *Spoliatio* (and others) as a result of allegorical exegesis in *De doctrina christiana*, II, XI, 60 (also referring to II, XVIII, 28).

If this is true, do people really need to re-appropriate the ideas they have “lent” to someone else? Take the Christian community for an example. One must admit that in every epoch there may be ideas that are “lost” by Christians, forgotten for a while. It may also happen that those ideas are borrowed, transformed and developed by other (philosophical) traditions. Such ideas often need to be revived and re-shaped by the Christian community for every new historical context. But why is it necessary to recover these ideas from non-Christian philosophies? They are always available in their original (Christian) form. The same is true, of course, for the non-Christian philosophical traditions which “lend” ideas to others.

After all, in the transformation process ideas are adapted to the system in which they have been introduced. This transformation implies a certain alteration. Why then, should it be necessary (for the Christian community, for instance) to recover such ideas in their altered version, and work on them instead of on the original idea itself? It is not suggested, of course, that every type of interaction with the “transformed version” of the idea should be avoided. Why does Klapwijk recommend to the Christian academic community the recovery of the “altered” version of an idea rather than the recovery of the original version.

3.3 From re-appropriations to new acquisitions

What Klapwijk proposes, of course, is not suggested only to the Christian community. Transformation, in the end, is always reciprocal and is part of the normal course of events in philosophy (Klapwijk 1986: 149-50). But at this point Klapwijk (1986: 149) presents a second and fundamental aspect of his project of transformation: the acquisition of ideas which did not originally belong to one’s own tradition.

Written in a period when many philosophers of science were still sceptical about the possibility of effective dialogue, Klapwijk’s proposal seems to open new avenues for optimism. It implies that the different systems of thought are not closed in themselves but can always borrow ideas from other systems, re-shape and adapt them, and welcome them into their own tradition.

There appears to be a wish behind such a proposal: enough with conflicts and antithesis, this is a time for cooperation. Klapwijk (1986: 143, footnote 9) states quite clearly that he dislikes Kuhn's philosophy, in which ideas are prisoners of a specific paradigm. He wants ideas to be mobile, and available to be borrowed and exchanged. World views and paradigms used to be regarded as the roots of our divergent views. But if these world views could now be made more open and incorporate new ideas, would this not change the whole situation? However, a few objections may be raised.

3.4 Critical remarks on the second aspect of Klapwijk's strategy

First, if the (re)appropriation of certain ideas was justified by the fact that they originally belonged to the Christian tradition, what legitimises the appropriation of ideas not belonging to this tradition? Furthermore, Klapwijk does not indicate the criteria that should guide the selection of the ideas to be borrowed. The question in this case is: are all ideas equally suitable to be borrowed? If the answer is negative (as one would expect) which criteria, agency or paradigm should control the process of selection and subsequent transformation and re-shaping of ideas? Wolterstorff's (1989: 76) famous discussions on the necessity of "control beliefs" comes easily to mind in this connection, and one may wonder why Klapwijk has not even mentioned it. In my opinion, the proponents of the transformational approach should pay attention to and clarify the issues concerning the selection of "foreign" ideas, the agencies controlling the process, and the compatibility with the context in which ideas are introduced.

Like physical organs, ideas cannot always be transplanted into individuals belonging to different species. On this point Geertsema (1987: 161, footnote 33) asks: will the systems (of thought) themselves survive such operations? In other words, will world views not be radically altered by the incorporation of "foreign" ideas? How is one going to avoid that this transformation may bring about a collage of conflicting ideas? These are some of the questions that Klapwijk's

proposal has prompted within reformational circles without providing, in my opinion, a fully persuasive answer.¹²

I am not trying to deny that “transformation” does occur in practice. An academic community may accept and modify ideas initially proposed by another community. But normally this is not the main or the most relevant “project” for such a community. Transformation should rather be regarded as one of the processes leading to the elaboration of important ideas in a scientific community. In my opinion, this is normally a minor process, and its occurrence *de facto* should not always and automatically be regarded as a proof of its legitimacy or effectiveness. Each case should probably be evaluated on its own merits.

To conclude this section, the question is asked whether Klapwijk’s emphasis on the transformation of ideas is properly balanced by an adequate emphasis on other aspects of the academic activity, which are equally important for a community of thought. This refers especially to the devising of new ideas or theories, which Wolterstorff emphasised throughout his *Reason within the bounds of religion* (1976). In my opinion, Klapwijk’s strategy may be too concerned with the re-shaping of “pre-owned” ideas and not enough with the “devising” of new and distinctive theories.

4. Nicholas Wolterstorff

4.1 Three positive proposals

Wolterstorff (1989) shares Klapwijk’s view that the neo-Calvinist idea of antithesis should be softened. He does not provide only critiques, however. He has new and positive proposals to offer concerning interaction and antithesis in scholarship. This section focuses on three proposals, in particular, from his essay *On Christian learning* (1989).

The first suggestion concerns the aim of Christian scholarship. The latter, according to Wolterstorff, should not attempt at being “different” but at being “faithful” to the gospel:

12 Cf the critical reactions of Bos 1987, Groenewoud 1987 and Dengerink 1988.

Why assume that the scholarship of Christians and non-Christians must always and everywhere be different except for those thin points of commonality? Why not instead let the differences fall where they may? Why should the Christian's project be defined primarily in terms of its difference from that of others? Why isn't fidelity enough? Why isn't it enough to urge that Christians be faithful in their scholarship? Why not be thankful for genuine agreement instead of being endlessly suspicious and querulous? [...] difference must be a consequence, not an aim (Wolterstorff 1989: 70).

A second suggestion, in this regard, elaborates on and explains the first proposal in more detail. Wolterstorff mentions that Christian scholarship will surely be distinctive (different) "as a whole" but not necessarily in every "segment". He adds:

... and if at some point the difference is scarcely large enough to justify calling this segment of scholarship a 'different kind of science' [...] why should that, as such, bother us? (Wolterstorff 1989: 70).

The Christian scholar should not feel frustrated if his ideas are not different in every section. One should have a more global view. "Faithful scholarship will, as a whole, be *distinctive* scholarship; I have no doubt of that", says Wolterstorff (1989: 70). He also approves the view that, as a whole, "there is Christian learning and there is non-Christian learning" (Wolterstorff 1989: 58). But one should distinguish between the whole and its segments. The latter statement, of course, aims at opening a space for the interaction between dissenting scholars and schools of thought.

A third suggestion concerns the role of control beliefs. Christian scholars should "weigh" (evaluate) different theories and decide which ones are preferable according to their control beliefs. The latter are beliefs "as to what constitutes an acceptable sort of theory" (Wolterstorff 1976: 63). For example:

Christians, committed as they are to human responsibility, are thereby also committed, as I see it, to human freedom; which means they will reject purely deterministic accounts in the social sciences and search for non-deterministic accounts (Wolterstorff 1989: 76).

Control beliefs are the true links between one's commitment and one's scholarship. Wolterstorff (1976: 63) explains that the presence of control beliefs in one's theorising limits the choice of theories

that otherwise would be equally acceptable.¹³ Which beliefs should function as control beliefs? In *Reason within the bounds of religion* it is stated that “the religious beliefs of the Christian should function as control beliefs” (Wolterstorff 1976: 66). In fact, “the belief content of the Christian’s authentic commitment should be used as control beliefs” (Wolterstorff 1976: 72). This conviction is maintained in *On Christian learning* (Wolterstorff 1989: 77). On the one hand, control beliefs oppose approaches and theories which are regarded as inappropriate, insufficient, and so on. On the other hand, they allow for the devising and acceptance of theories (Wolterstorff 1976: 64).

Wolterstorff’s three proposals can be summarised as follows: do not aim at difference, just be consistent (faithful); accept segments of full agreement with non-Christian scholarship, and exercise critical discernment by referring to control beliefs.

4.3 Considerations and questions on the three proposals

Wolterstorff’s proposals constitute valuable material for reflection and, generally speaking, they have met no particular objections in reformational circles.¹⁴ Concerning the first proposal, it is doubted that a reformational obsession for difference, as alleged by Wolterstorff (1989: 65), may be proven to be real by means of a serious analysis of the literature produced by this movement.¹⁵ Dooyeweerd believed that certain aspects of Christian scholarship are not necessarily “different”. Yet let us suppose for argument’s sake that a certain anxiety for difference might have afflicted some (neo-Calvinist) scholars. It might have constituted an unresolved tension, a disturbance.

13 Control beliefs are not the only beliefs acknowledged in Wolterstorff’s (1976: 61-4) theory of theorising. He also mentions “data beliefs” and “data-background beliefs”. Data beliefs are beliefs about the entities within the scope of a theory (Wolterstorff 1976: 61). Data-background beliefs constitute the conditions for accepting certain data beliefs (Wolterstorff 1976: 63-4).

14 For example, Van der Walt (1994: 578-9) integrates in his view of Christian scholarship the suggestion that scholarship should aim at fidelity rather than diversity.

15 On this and other aspects of Wolterstorff’s critique (as expressed in *On Christian learning*) of the reformational approach to scholarship, cf my article “Wolterstorff’s critique of the reformational view of scholarship in his essay *On Christian learning*” (forthcoming: *Koers*).

Even then, once a Christian scholar has been advised not to worry about differences, s/he still needs to know whether s/he is in fact “faithful” or not. One still needs to know whether one should accept or reject certain views, whether faithfulness requires different solutions, and so on. In what concrete situation, then, is the Christian scholar left? If s/he realises that s/he is just sharing the convictions of non-Christian colleagues s/he is invited by Wolterstorff not to be concerned. Yet one’s scholarship may not be different because it is not faithful!

A sensitive scholar should continue to ask him-/herself whether his/her scholarship is really faithful. One might doubt whether one is taking into account the implications of Christianity fully and properly. Perhaps one’s Christian colleagues hold quite different views. Perhaps new issues and tensions may emerge in a certain field of study (the situation is never static). The invitation “not to worry”, therefore, could be helpful in some cases, in other cases useless or even negative. It might invite to indifference in cases where one should be on the alert. For this reason further elaboration of this proposal would be necessary.

Moving to the second suggestion, I would like to ask: how “long” can these “segments” of Christian scholarship be, without showing any distinctive Christian trait? Can they include a whole academic discipline? Even more? Can one even say that one has Christian scholarship as long as one has Christian theology and philosophy? The emphasis on scholarship “as a whole” seems to prepare the Christian scholar to indifference concerning the possible (Christian) alternatives emerging in a particular field of study.

Bearing in mind Wolterstorff’s (1976: 104) view that Christian theology and philosophy constitute “the center” of Christian scholarship, the question is: can theology also be faithful without being different (from Islamic or Jewish theology, for instance)? And what about philosophy? It is presumed that Wolterstorff would not argue that these two disciplines can be faithful (to a Christian position) and yet not different. If this is the case, is it possible that differences on the level of theology and philosophy might not lead to some differences in the special sciences? I ask this latter question because Wolterstorff (1976: 79) argues that “low-level” theories are always

influenced by “high-level” theories. It appears that these questions also deserve some attention from the proponents of this model.

Finally, some comments on the role of control beliefs, enabling the process of weighing and devising of theories, are essential. At the end of the previous section it was suggested that Wolterstorff’s concept of “devising” (new theories) would fruitfully integrate Klapwijk’s emphasis on the utilisation of pre-existing ideas.¹⁶ In fact, on pages 59-103 of Wolterstorff’s *Reason within the bounds of religion* (the section containing a positive contribution towards an understanding of Christian scholarship) there are at least 32 instances (there could be more) in which the term “weighing” is constantly coupled with the term “devising” (of new theories) or its synonyms. None of the two terms appears without the other.

However, I must also point out something that has been puzzling me for quite a while. In the essay *On Christian learning* (1989) only the term weighing is maintained, while the term devising is no longer to be found. What is the reason behind this evident change in terminology? Does it mean that, at a certain stage, Wolterstorff has given up the search for Christian devising, and would rather advise Christian scholars to select what is acceptable or “tolerable” among existing theories or approaches? Could it be a way to achieve faithfulness without difference? Did Wolterstorff abandon the idea of “inner reformation” (which he still seemed to support in 1976: 77-8)?

Perhaps I am reading too much into a change of terminology. In an earlier quotation Wolterstorff (1989: 76) states that one should “reject purely deterministic accounts [...] and search for non-deterministic accounts”. Perhaps “searching” is the equivalent of devising, though one must admit that it is somehow a “weaker” concept.

16 In my opinion, Wolterstorff’s approach would also be improved by accepting Klapwijk’s insight that, in addition to “weighing”, concepts and ideas need at least to be “altered” or transformed before being introduced into one’s Christian world view. It would not be an ideal strategy but it would be preferable to simple weighing and endorsing. The latter strategy has already been criticised by Marshall (1985: 91) in relation to Wolterstorff (1983).

I must also admit that when one considers Wolterstorff's concrete contributions, it is clear that he has not neglected the "devising" of new and original theories. In this context one may remember his original elaborations in philosophy of education (1980), and philosophy of art (1980a). One may also remember his distinctive approach to psychology and anthropology (1985), and more. But one may also observe that those approaches were mostly devised before the publication of *On Christian learning* (1989). Perhaps I am only exaggerating the implications of a change of terminology. On this point, however, a clarification would be appropriate and appreciated.

5. Conclusion

It would be interesting to examine other reformational authors who have proposed relevant ideas in this field. In the article mentioned in footnote 15, I have paid some attention to Marinus Stafleu's approach to these themes. Stafleu's contribution deals more specifically with the theme of communication in the natural sciences, and interacts more openly with contemporary humanist philosophy. The work of other neo-Calvinist contributors should also be explored. The name of Cornelius Van Til comes to mind in this context, because the apologetic method he proposed was very original and of course very much linked to the themes discussed in this article. As usual, further research is necessary and welcome.

In this article an attempt was made to show that the most recent models dealing with interaction and antithesis are not always more consistent, better articulated or more free from difficulties than the "classical" ones. My preference remains with the Dooyeweerdian model, though I regard the other models examined above as providing helpful stimulation and necessary critical interrogations.

It should be realised, with gratitude, that all the approaches presented above agree on the possibility of dialogue and cooperation between Christian and non-Christian scholars. The time when philosophers of science debated themes such as incommensurability and un-translatability is not too far in the past. Therefore this point should not be taken for granted or underestimated. In addition, one

should also appreciate the fact that all models accept a certain degree of antithesis, although there are sometimes attempts at relativising such antithesis (especially in the more recent models).

Finally, all models support the idea that the antithesis (which is present at the level of basic commitments) is likely to have some consequence, some expression, in the field of scholarship. On this topic, the differences between models are differences of degree, though their implications are not negligible.

Apparently, in the most recent models one can recognise a broader openness towards non-Christian thought. Perhaps an excessive openness? That attitude might reflect a desire to reduce the possibility of conflict. In fact, difference means potential conflict and in a world such as ours we are tired of conflicts. I can sympathise with this feeling. As Henk Hart (1984: 290) once observed, while we are growing into a world civilisation “we are divided as never before”.

This phrase cuts like a blade. Yet, one should also have the courage to ask: why should differences necessarily create conflicts? Should one not revise this idea rather than try to hide the differences at all costs? Could we not accept our differences and interact with respect, rather than attempt an impossible blurring of all distinctive traits of our philosophies? If the era of globalisation will not be simultaneously an era of differentiation, it will be a rather appalling period of human history.

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