

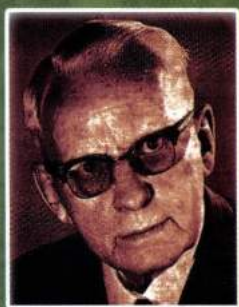
# AT THE CRADLE OF A CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY



**CALVIN**



**VOLLENHOVEN • STOKER • DOOYEWEERD**



**B.J. van der Walt**







**At the cradle of a  
Christian  
philosophy**

**in  
Calvin  
Vollenhoven  
Stoker  
Dooyeweerd**

**B.J. van der Walt  
Potchefstroom**

2014

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## Preface

We live in practicalist times: Issues, entities and practices that do not have what is seen as practical value will be ignored. This is also true of universities: Disciplines that ostensibly do not have practical value are increasingly sidelined. In fact, many university lecturers pride themselves on the claim that they offer students a practical training as if this is the ultimate test of value. The decisive question is of course about the content of what is called 'practical'. For most people this means obtaining and having as much money as possible in order to maintain the consumerist lifestyle demanded by our age.

This practicalist outlook makes it very difficult for a subject like philosophy to uphold the central position it once occupied at universities. Ironically however, if 'practical' is the important objective that gives meaning to life, it should be noted that it is only subjects like philosophy that are able to give a thoroughgoing analysis and critique of what the 'practical' is. Put differently, what can be more practical than to review philosophically what we see as the meaning of life? When a next generation looks back at our civilization, they might conclude that ostracising the ability in our students to look beyond, underneath and through that which presents itself as 'practical', was the most impractical historical act we committed.

It is therefore extremely important to keep alternatives alive and create the space for these alternatives to grow. The idea of a Christian philosophy is such an alternative. This is even truer of a Christian philosophy that is truthfully serious about thinking about the implications of living a 'secular' Christian life - that is a life on *this* earth of which the question 'how would Christ have done it', is asked about everything we do.

The latter also summarises in one sentence the philosophical life of Bennie van der Walt. If we want to make the case for a practical Christian philosophy fit for this earth and life on it, this is the approach that he excels in. His many writings and actions testify to the fact that he was never merely interested in purely abstract philosophical issues and debates for the sake of having these arguments but that he also emphasised the application of Reformational philosophy to local South African and African problems.

Bennie van der Walt, however, is first and foremost a philosopher. For more than thirty years (since being a first-year student in his class on the history of philosophy) I have known and admired him for his immense knowledge of, zealous inquiry into and enlightening articulation of Reformational philosophy as well as the broader philosophical context relevant to this philosophy. It is not far-fetched to state that he is internationally one of the leading figures in this mode of "doing philosophy". Unavoidably therefore, he

had to get to the point of reflecting on the sources that gave direction to his own thinking about life in God's creation. This book most likely articulates these sources best because it focuses on the four 'fathers' for a Christian-Reformational philosophy from a South African point of view.

This is the broader background for the book that you have before you. Maybe a last piece of context and recommendation. This book represents the backbone of a post-graduate lecture series in Christian and Reformational philosophy offered at the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University. This lecture series (along with an undergraduate module on ontology and epistemology) intends to give our students a thorough grounding in an integral Christian, non-reductionist and truly biblical way of thinking. I had the opportunity to attend the lectures given by Bennie van der Walt during 2011 and 2012. In many instances they gave rise to questions about and excursions into the issues raised by the content of this book. The discussions that follow were staggering experiences in terms of the depth and breadth of philosophy and the Christian tradition. About the influence of these lectures I cannot put it better than one of the students of the class of 2013 who remarked: "In these lectures I learned the most about philosophy". It is my hope that reading this book will give the reader a taste of this privileged experience our students have.

Michael Heyns  
Director  
School of Philosophy  
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## Introduction

Chapter 1 is a revised version of a lecture delivered (in Afrikaans) on August 11, 2009 on the joint commemoration of John Calvin's birth 500 years ago at a "Stoker Lecture" of the School of Philosophy, Potchefstroom Campus, North-West University and the Reformed Theological Association (Gereformeerde Teologiese Vereniging) of South Africa. In 2010 it was published in the *Journal of Christian Scholarship*. This first chapter on Calvin's Christian worldview is important since the three fathers of a renewed Christian Philosophy in the twentieth century highly respected Calvin's *Philosophia Christiana* and endeavoured to continue his heritage in new, creative ways.

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 were originally written (in 2012) in Afrikaans for a post-graduate course on Christian philosophy, offered by the School of Philosophy at the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University in South Africa. They were then published (during 2013) in the Reformed theological journal, *In die Skriflig/In luce Verbi*. Afterwards (in 2014) they were reworked, expanded and translated into English to be accessible also to Anglophone students.

Now that the four articles are being published for an even wider audience, my request is that the reader should please keep the following in mind:

Firstly, the original audiences were not well-versed in philosophy, neither did they have much prior knowledge of these four fathers of a Christian-Reformational worldview and philosophy. Therefore a high academic approach was not feasible. A popular, accessible style, in the form of an introductory overview or reconnaissance, was required. It was therefore also not possible to discuss any facet of any one of these four thinkers in detail.

Secondly, one of the aims of the original lectures (published as chapters 2,3 and 4) was to make students aware of the vast amount of available literature (in Afrikaans, Dutch and English) to encourage them, when writing their assignments on various aspects of this tradition in philosophy, to consult at least what was available in South Africa.

Thirdly, since the contents of this volume was originally presented as separate lectures and also published separately, they may also be read independently of each other. (Therefore every overlapping between the chapters was not removed.) However, since they all deal with the same tradition, the four chapters are also complementing each other. To assist the reader each chapter is also provided with an overview.

Fourthly, as will be evident especially from chapters 3 and 4 on Stoker and Dooyeweerd, my analysis of their thinking is done from a Vollenhovian perspective, in particular Vollenhoven's consistent problem-historical method of philosophical historiography. This was done since it is my conviction that one cannot do otherwise than to start with an own, albeit preliminary, philosophical viewpoint to be able to read any philosopher. (Most probably, however, Stokerians and Dooyeweerdians will not agree with my analysis of the thinking of their philosophical grandfathers.) It may therefore be advisable to start by reading chapter 2 on Vollenhoven first.

My fifth and last remark is a request: Critical responses to my analysis – not only on Calvin, Stoker and Dooyeweerd, but also on Vollenhoven – will be most welcome. The debate on the contribution of Calvin's worldview, nearly 450 years ago, and that of the triumvirate at the cradle of this unique philosophy more than seventy-five years ago, has to be continued. *A philosophia reformata* becomes a *philosophia deformata* if it does not stay faithful to the norm of *semper reformanda!*

12 April 2014

**Bennie van der Walt**

## Chapter 1

### THE UNIQUENESS OF JOHN CALVIN'S (1509-1564) *PHILOSOPHIA CHRISTIANA*

#### How it was developed afterwards and how it could be renewed today<sup>1</sup>

*This chapter is an introduction to the Christian philosophy or rather the worldview of John Calvin (1509-1564), indicating briefly how it was further developed in the Reformed world (especially in the philosophy of Vollenhoven, Dooyeweerd, Stoker and their followers), and also how it could be applied today.*

*The introductory section explains the method according to which Calvin's thought will be analysed. It will employ the distinction between context (the cultural), direction (the religious) and structure (the ontological). The first main section gives a brief sketch of the cultural (socio-economic-political) context within which Calvin lived and worked. The second section investigates, in comparison with the general developments in Western thinking and in particular in comparison with contemporary currents, the religious direction, trend or normative perspective of Calvin's worldview. In this section also his emphasis on the need for a continuous reformation is dealt with in more detail. The third main section contains a critical evaluation of the ontological type of philosophy underlying his writings. The following aspects are investigated: his idea about God, his creational ordinances, the cosmos, man, his philosophy of society, how he viewed the relationship between reason and faith, and finally what he had in mind with a philosophia Christiana (a Christian philosophy). The last main section applies the insights gained in the preceding sections as to how, in a contemporary secular context, reformed people and churches in South Africa should think and live in a genuinely reformational way. The essay is concluded with a brief review and preview.*

<sup>1</sup> Revised version of a lecture delivered at Potchefstroom on 11 August 2009 on the occasion of the joint commemoration of Calvin's birth at the annual Stoker Lecture of the School of Philosophy, Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University and the Reformed Theological Association (Gereformeerde Teologiese Vereniging – GTV).

## **1. Introduction: The nature of and approach to Calvin's thought and the structure of this chapter**

Very few people are still remembered after the fourth generation, but after twenty generations Calvin has still not been forgotten. Even fewer people's births are still commemorated after five centuries – not only locally but internationally. John Calvin falls within the category of this singular, highly-favoured people. In what is his greatness located? Today it is the privileged task of the author (but not necessarily a task to be envied!) during this combined Stoker and GTV lecture to help find the unique quality of his thought.

In trying to deal with Calvin's worldview in the space of an hour, however, might seem like trying to force a whale into a sardine can. Or, in terms of an African proverb, to try and encircle the trunk of a baobab tree with your arms.

An additional problem is that I have to try and provide sustenance to both theologians and philosophers. In any event, Calvin did succeed today in bringing together Christian theologians and Christian philosophers. The issue of a reformational worldview is, in the mind of the author, the point where we as theologians and philosophers can start co-operating. Should we want to try and stem the flood of secularism, it would have to begin at the level of worldview. Stated in a lighter vein: Do theologians not anyway have all the answers to the questions, and the philosophers all the questions for the answers?

By way of introduction, it is important to note the following: (1) the nature of this investigation of Calvin's thought, (2) the two ways in which his intellectual legacy can be approached, and (3) the approach and structure of this chapter.

### **1.1 The nature of the investigation**

Three remarks about the nature of this chapter need to be made at the outset.

#### *1.1.1 A worldview-based philosophical investigation*

This study of Calvin is not in the first place of a *theological nature*, but has a *worldview* character. It is therefore rather a Christian-philosophical approach. (Philosophy is, in simple terms, the scientific reflection about somebody's pre-scientific worldview.) Such Christian worldview-philosophical approaches to Calvin are rare. (Klapwijk, 1991 and 1993, is one of the few Reformational philosophers to

have given attention to Calvin.) This is quite ironical, because Calvin himself called his *Institutes of Christian Religion* (hereafter abbreviated as ICR) a “Christian philosophy” (cf. sections below). The extent to which Calvin – even at the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth – is still declared to be a theologian emerges clearly from the recent catalogue (July 2009) of a Dutch publisher that announces 27 new books about Calvin – all theological works!

This investigation is aimed at Calvin's main work (ICR) and where he is quoted – unless otherwise stated – it is the author's own translation from the original Latin of his *Opera Selecta* (cf. Calvini, 1967, 1968, 1962). For a reliable English translation (by Battles) see Calvin (1960), and for an Afrikaans translation of the whole of the *Institutes* (by Simpson), see *Calvin, (1984-1992)*.

### 1.1.2 Popular-scientific

In the second place a deliberate effort was made, in uncovering the philosophical points of departure of Calvin's thought, to keep it accessible for those not initiates of philosophy. Unnecessary technical terms and literary references are avoided.

### 1.1.3 A broader orientation

In the third place there is a deliberate effort, instead of detailed studies that often typify Calvin research, to give in this chapter a broader overview of Calvin's Christian worldview. It is not intended for those who have already done a philosophical study of Calvin's thought, but rather a first orientation to the field. An African proverb is once again apposite: “I am not intending to feed the giraffes, who graze the tops of the trees, but rather the tiny steenbok, that graze the grass below”

## 1.2 **Two ways in which Calvin's intellectual legacy could be evaluated**

A subsequent issue that needs to be attended to is how one could today – at the commemoration of his birth centuries ago – evaluate and adjudicate Calvin's legacy.

From the mass of material about Calvin's spiritual legacy it becomes clear that he can be read in two divergent ways, and that it is even possible to create caricatures of him. He can be elevated isolated from his own time, conditions and intellectual climate, with the result that what he wrote can easily be over-estimated and canonized and even put on a level with the Word of God. Or he could – at the other extreme – simply be regarded as a child of his time and his worldview can be

reduced to the current thought patterns of his time. Then, for example, he would be a simple humanist or Platonist and more. In this way Calvin's contribution, however, is under-estimated. He did not stand in the intellectual milieu of his own time as a mere pupil without his own critical originality.

In the author's own humble contributions to the Calvin Commemorations (cf. Van der Walt, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c and 2010d) I have so far – in order to prevent the first mistake, viz. the "sanctification" of Calvin – mainly put the emphasis on the fact that he cannot be understood correctly if one does not read him against the background of the general cultural and specific intellectual décor of his own time which definitely influenced him – not always positively.

Against the second misinterpretation this contribution wants to argue that Calvin should be honoured of being "the father of the Reformational tradition". In the present contribution the accent therefore does not primarily fall on how the Reformer of Geneva was still caught up in his own contemporary intellectual milieu, but rather on how he rose *above* it. The concern is therefore with the *uniqueness* of his Christian worldview, its enduring element, that which was worthwhile building upon, and as will be pointed out briefly, what has been built on further in the Reformational tradition.

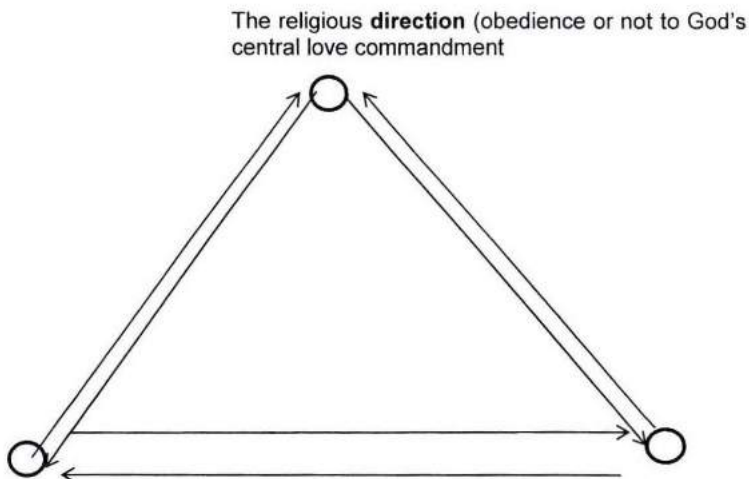
### **1.3 The approach and structure**

The three most important questions that any philosopher worth his salt should answer are the following: (1) what does my life *context* look like? (Because die "Umwelt" influences one's thinking as well); (2) what does *reality* look like? (The question as to what exists and how it exists); and (3) how *should I live*. (The question about what should be done). In summary (1) the cultural or contextual, (2) the structural or ontic, and (3) the directional or religious trend (the normative).

Mouw and Griffioen (1933:17ff) and Griffioen (2003:13, 98 and 171) indicate that, although these three should be clearly distinguished, they are also closely linked, influencing each other reciprocally, and can therefore never be regarded in isolation from each other. The structural diversity (of, for example, societal structures) is an expression of a human being's deepest religious convictions. Different religions are also the "heart" of different cultures. The combination of the religious and the structural elements lead to a unique cultural configuration.



In a simplified diagram, this looks as follows:



The **structural**, for example:  
Marriage, family, school, church,  
state, industry, arts, organisation

The **contextual**, for example  
the difference between the cultural  
context of France (1509) and South  
Africa (2009)

A rather simple example to illustrate the intertwining of direction, structure and context is a traffic robot. It consists of a certain *structure* made of metal, glass and electrical materials. It indicates a specific normative or *directional* behaviour to be followed, viz. stop and red and go at green. It operates in a specific *context*, the regulation of traffic in a modern especially urban environment.

### Summarised

Direction → Context → Structure

Direction ← Context ← Structure

In order to make these abstract concepts clearer, one could ask the following questions and use the metaphor of a tree to explain how a worldview fits in the overall picture.

### Basic worldview issues

The following types of questions are of a worldviewish character:

Who is God? (A religious question.)

What does this reality look like? (A structural, ontological question.)

What has become of it (A cultural/contextual question.)

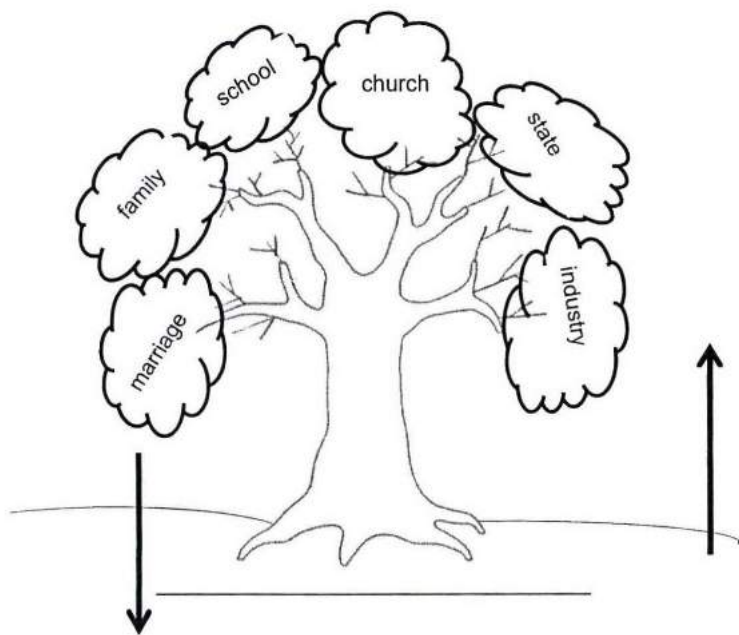
What should it look like? (A normative issue.)

Who/what am I? (An anthropological question.)

Why am I here and how should I live? (The cultural mandate and/or the injunction to missionary work.)

What should the broad society – marriage, family, state, etc. look like? (One's philosophy of society.)

How these basic worldview questions fit into the overall picture can be explained by the image of a tree:



#### EXPLANATION OF THE METAPHOR OF A TREE

From above to below:

- **Carbon dioxide in the air:** the *cultural context* which we breathe daily and which influences our worldview, but which should simultaneously be transformed.
- **Branches and fruit of the tree:** the different *societal relationships* and other structures, as well as their (good or bad) fruit.

- **The tree trunk:** encompassing, prescientific *worldview* that enables people to give their faith real shape in this world. This includes especially two sides:

*Descriptive:* what reality *is* like

*Prescriptive:* what reality *should be* like (the normative as derived from the ordinances of God – giving direction)

- **The roots:** Fundamental *religious choice* of one's heart for or against obedient service to God (including: rebirth, conversion and renewal).
- **Nutrients in the soil:** God's threefold *revelation or a pseudo-revelation* (for example, science) from which man derives the necessary nutrition for the whole process outlined above.

The two-way vertical arrows indicate that one can approach the picture from two directions by either starting with its foundation (revelation), moving upwards, or by beginning somewhere at the top (e.g. the cultural context or the different social structures) moving downwards. These two directions influence each other reciprocally.

We can now proceed to explain the first facet of Calvin's worldview: the context in which it was developed.

## **2 The religious, social, political and economic context within which Calvin lived and thought**

With only a few flashes an explanation is provided of what the context looked like within which Calvin lived and thought. From his many writings it emerged that he himself was keenly aware of the many problems of his own age – he did not live as an intellectual hermit in the past or simply dreamt about the future – and he responded continually to the challenges of his time. He was also involved, in many concrete, practical ways, in providing aid to thousands of refugees in Geneva. One could distinguish two sides to the time before and during the time of Calvin – decadence and renewal. Both these kinds of change could cause enormous disruption and uncertainty.

The period from about 1350-1550 saw crises in many fields. Not to use too much space on this, the following events are only outlined very briefly (for more details, cf. for example Bouwsma, 1988; Graham, 1978; Klapwijk, 1991; Reid, 1982).

## **2.1 Fundamental problems and decadence in many spheres of life**

Some events were the following:

- In the *field of religion* it had become clear that mankind in Europe had become deeply dissatisfied with the conditions of Medieval corrupt and decadent religious, church life. As will emerge below, among many people this was not only dissatisfaction with the church, but gradually a radical break with the Christian faith had also developed. The Christian faith and the church began to lose its grip on Western society, and this paved the way for secularisation.
- In the *field of health* repeated epidemics of the Black Death often decimated up to a third of the population, which had devastating effects in many other fields.
- A *crisis in agriculture* led to uprisings among farmers and this led to large-scale *famine* and *urbanisation*, which in turn had radical implications, such as the uprooting of people, uncertainty and a struggle for survival in unfamiliar surroundings.
- Apart from all these, *wars*, with their concomitant disruptions, between groups and nations occurred often.
- In the *economic field* inflation took its toll and in the *political sphere* there was unrest, because ordinary citizens were not protected by the law, did not have access to the guilds and also did not have representation in the governments of their countries.

## **2.2 Simultaneously an extension of horizons**

But apart from the fact that during these two centuries there were big crises, and people were plagued by continual uncertainties, the centuries were also characterised by many renewals and widening of horizons. Only some examples will be quoted here.

- It did take long to catch up on the loss of life during the outbreaks of the Black Death. This did, however, happen gradually and banks and new industries (such as clothing and arms factories as well as coal mines) were established and commerce improved. An influential middle class came into being and an early-capitalist economy developed.

- The rediscovery of the (Greek and Roman) classics in important trends like humanism and the Renaissance stimulated education, art and science. Compare for example the discoveries in the field of the natural sciences.
- Different explorers "discovered", with the aid of an old Chinese invention (the compass) new worlds and cultures, and in so doing broadened the horizons of the time.
- Books had up to then been copied laboriously by hand on parchment. Early on in the fifteenth century wooden blocks were used, but this was a slow and expensive process. In about 1450 Johannes Gutenberg (from Mainz) discovered an alloy that made a more rapid printing process possible. Paper also made the printing process less expensive. By 1500 printing was a familiar process. (It is calculated that between 1450 and 1500 about 15 to 20 million copies of about 10 to 15,000 texts had been printed!) Ordinary people could therefore now afford and read books – especially because books were not only printed in Latin but also in the vernaculars. The art of printing at the time occasioned a revolution comparable with the contemporary electronic mass communication. New ideas spread rapidly, so that one author (Reid, 1982:34) could remark that "by 1500 Europe was a changed continent with a radically altered society".
- Perhaps the most important issue of Calvin's time has not been mentioned. This is the fact that the incredible number of intellectual trends competed to indicate the direction for the new epoch that had dawned for the Western world. (In contemporary language one could say that a pluralist society had come into being.) Apart from Roman Catholicism, there were, in the field of religion, among the new Protestant streams, the more temperate ones (Lutherans and Reformational), but also the more radical ones, such as the Anabaptists and the Libertines. This is quite apart from humanism and the Renaissance, which also led to the revival of a whole number of philosophies of antiquity (Platonism, Neo-Platonism, Stoicism, etc.) and which would point out the direction for a new age.

### **2.3 A comparison with the contemporary context**

One could – wrongly – exaggerate the parallels between the age of Calvin and today by stating that today we have to contend with the same, or at least similar problems. One could then easily come to the conclusion that Calvin's responses to the contextual challenges of his time could be repeated verbatim for 2009. (For example,

by simply sticking to the confessions and the ecclesiastical customs of the sixteenth century.)

The correct lesson that one should learn, however, is that Calvin knew the context of his own day and wanted to offer a contemporary, contextually relevant theoretical and practical Scriptural response (cf. below). This is, in the view of the author, the reason why the ICR (from the first edition already) was a best seller. Calvin had a message for his own age, and indicated a way in a time of crisis. Calvin, however, lived and wrote on the border between the autumn of a medieval *corpus Christianum* culture and the first signs of a new, secularised world. We live in a different epoch – a complete secularised world.

One could narrow down the broad cultural context even further by looking at the *personal* context of Calvin. In generalisation, one could say that with Luther the reformer awoke in a monastic cell; with Zwingli in a soldier's uniform; and with Calvin in the full regalia of humanist learning, but shortly afterwards also in the garb of a religious refugee.

No person may, therefore, deny the influence of context on his thought or try to ignore it should he/she want to think or do anything of relevance for his/her own epoch. However, never may the context be regarded as normative.

#### **2.4 Further expansion after Calvin**

Reformational philosophy from Vollenhoven onwards initially only stressed direction and structure. The younger generation, including Griffioen (2003) and Klapwijk (1995) broadened this vision (cf. sub-section 1.3 above) by also directing attention to the importance of the cultural context.

To what extent would this already have penetrated the awareness of reformed churches and theology world-wide? To bring the context into play does not necessarily mean relativistic contextualism. As the two-way arrows to the top and the bottom indicate (cf. again the diagram and the metaphor of a tree under sub-section 1.3 above), the religious direction and worldview do not only determine the context, but conversely the context also has an influence on what one's religious- and worldview direction looks like.

This brings the investigation to the other two facets of Calvin's thought: the directional (the religious-worldviewish-normative) and the structural (how reality and

society are regarded). One could also call the two aspects (cf. Vollenhoven, 2005a:93 ff) the *spiritual current* (which responds to the normative question as to what should be done) and the *type of thought* (which deals with the ontic question about how things are structured). Together with his contextual awareness, these two facets constitute Calvin's Christian worldview or *philosophia Christiana* (especially as outlined in his ICR). They contained his response to the many problems of a disrupted, stormy time and context.

### **3 The religious direction of Calvin's thought**

In order to understand the truly unique nature of Calvin's thought, it should be viewed against the background of the development of the whole of Western thought.

#### **3.1 Three main periods in Western thought**

From a Christian-religious perspective, one can divide the history of the whole of Western thought into the following three main periods (cf. Vollenhoven 2005a:157-159): (1) the pre-synthesis thought of pre-Christian antiquity (Greeks and Romans), to about 50 AD, (2) the synthesis thinking of the period after Christ to about 1400 (Church Fathers and medievalists), (3) the anti-synthesis thinking of the New Epoch from about 1400 (which started with the Renaissance and the Reformation) up to today.

#### **3.2 The roads diverge**

During the pre-synthesis epoch the Bible was still unknown outside Israel. During the second period efforts were made in different ways (for example, by means of the methods of exegesis and eisegesis, paradox and nature-grace) to effect a accommodation between pagan Graeco-Roman thought and the Gospel (which had by now spread across Europe). This mixing of iron and clay, however, did not last, as emerged very clearly during the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, when this type of compromise thinking began to crumble.

There were, however, different reasons for the disintegration and the coming into being of this anti-synthesis mentality, which also gave rise to two different directions. The movement to the left ("left" used here not in the political but the religious sense), as represented by the humanist and Renaissance thinkers, rejected the mingling of the Gospel and Ancient philosophies, because they wanted to get rid of the Biblical element in this kind of philosophy. They therefore completed the circle that pagan

Greek thought began, and which would arrive at contemporary secularism via the Middle Ages.

The movement to the "right" (once again intended in the religious sense), as represented by the different sixteenth century reformers, wanted to break with medieval synthetic thinking for exactly the opposite reason: they noticed the threat of pagan (pre-Christian) elements in it and wanted to listen solely to the Word of God again – *sola Scriptura*.

### **3.3 Calvin as anti-synthetic thinker**

Although he could not always succeed in freeing his philosophy from the foreign, extra-biblical influences (no human being can), Calvin's deepest desire was to think anti-synthetically *Christian*. He therefore not only rejected the preceding synthetic thinking, but also the contemporary *secular* anti-synthetic thinking of, for example, the Renaissance and humanism.

This religious direction of the reformer's thinking can be illustrated in two ways: (1) his attitude towards the Church Fathers' synthetic mindedness, and (2) his own ideas about renewal or reformation.

He not only learnt a great deal from the early Church Fathers (for example, Augustine and Chrysostome), but he was often critical of their use of pagan philosophy. When his contemporary, Bucer, during a discussion with Calvin took recourse to the Church Fathers, Calvin asked him quite simply whether he did not, by simply mentioning the Church Fathers, already give them due honour. And in his *Institutes* (II, 2, 4) Calvin blamed the Fathers that they "came closer to the heathen philosophers than is appropriate ... they strove to reconcile the doctrine of Scripture halfway with the doctrine of the philosophers".

This brings us to a second way to explain the anti-synthetic religious direction of Calvin's thought: His ideas about renewal or reformation.

### **3.4 Different ideas about renewal and reformation prior to and contemporary with Calvin**

Calvin, however, was not the first person in the long Christian tradition to emphasise renewal and reformation. How did his predecessors see it? And how did he link up with them?



### 3.4.1 Ideas about renewal by the Church Fathers and during the Middle Ages

Ladner (1965) and also Van der Walt (2009a and 2009b, the latter for a more systematic overview of the idea of the reformation) indicate how the idea of reformation is already present in the Eastern (Greek) and Western (Latin) Church Fathers – and how it gradually developed into a more encompassing concept.

For all of them the most profound starting point of reformation – tying up with Biblical revelation – was the reformation of the heart (rebirth, conversion, confession of guilt, sanctification). In other words, regeneration, the religious change of a heart that wants, once more, to obey God (cf. “renewal texts” such as Romans 12:2, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Ephesians 4:22-24, Colossians 3:9, 10 and Titus 3:5). For that reason, they put great emphasis on reformation as the recovery of the image of God as imaged for us in Christ.

Reformation therefore did have a “temporal” meaning, in the sense that man had to be returned to the image of God that he had *originally* been. But mostly not temporal in the sense of a return to the past. The concern was not with a change at the *horizontal* level, but with a *vertical* turnaround deep in the heart of man in terms of his relationship with God and his commandments.

The Eastern Church Fathers unfortunately still regarded the image of God as a mystical, individualistic oneness (assimilation) with God. The Western Church Fathers, however, already noted the following: (1) the social implications of reformation, (2) that reformation is something more than just a looking back, or the reinstatement of the time of paradise. The looking forward emerged more strongly. Tradition is no longer the criterion – reformation must also bring about something new!

During the Middle Ages too the idea of reformation gradually developed more fully: from (1) the individual Christian, (2) to the monasteries and other Christian communities, (3) the church and (4) socio-political economic life, that is, the whole of society.

Calvin, who knew the history of Christian thought preceding him very well, shared in these ideas. To bring his thoughts about reformation into even sharper relief, it will subsequently be compared with three streams of thought closer to his own time.

### 3.4.2 *A comparison with three other ideas closer to Calvin's own time*

These three ideas about renewal are especially mentioned to make it clear where the *norm* for reformation is *not* to be found: not at the *horizontal level of time* (past, present or future).

- *Pre-Reformation and Christian humanism*

The early reformers, such as Bradwardine (died 1349), Wycliffe (died 1384) and Huss (died 1415) wanted to return to the past (the Biblical element in the thought of the Church Fathers). The early (also called Christian) humanists such as Petrarch (died 1374) wanted to have the Greek elements in the Fathers to be resuscitated. Although their religious directions differed, both these streams of thought made the same mistake. They did not only try the impossible (turning back the clock of history), but their striving was also in conflict with what the essence of reformation should really be: it could never be a return to the past, because the contexts had changed completely.

- *The Renaissance*

This tendency of repristination soon proved to be a failure, so that among the thinkers of the Renaissance (for example Kepler, Bruno, Copernicus, Valla) the attention was no longer directed at the past, but rather on the present. The word *renaissance* means rebirth, radical renewal. Although this was initially a biblical concept, this leftist stream used it in a secular meaning: rebirth not through the Spirit of God, but here and now out of the strength of one's own intellect.

- *The so-called Radical Reformation*

Apart from using the *past* or the *present* as an inspiration on the way to the future, there were also those who expected their salvation from a utopian *future*. Examples of this would be Anabaptism and other revolutionary movements that wanted to see the fullness of the kingdom of God already realized in the here and now.

By way of a concluding view, the three solutions for the direction that the new time had to take were the following: (1) going into the future while looking back to the past, (2) building the future here and now (the present) from one's own strength and insight; and (3) forcing a new future through revolutionary fervour. The question is whether people who now want to live in the past, who wanted to pull themselves up

by their own bootstraps, or wanted to be revolutionary arsonists, can be real torch-bearers on the way to a new era in history.

### **3.5 Calvin's special notion of reformation**

Calvin rejected all the aforementioned efforts at renewal. He refused to swear by the words of the past; he did not believe in idea that man, fallen in sin, could arise by himself in the present; he also inveighed against the fanaticism and utopian dreams about the future.

#### *3.5.1 What reformation really involves*

The reason for this is that all the foregoing efforts sought solutions at the *horizontal, human* levels. Vollenhoven (2005a:71, cf. also p. 74) puts it very clearly:

Reformation does not mean a return to (Christian) people and (ecclesiastical) situations, but rather conversion to God. In other words, not a change on the horizontal plane of time, but in the relationship to God and his law which bears a vertical character.

As opposed to those looking backward, the self-rescuers for the present and the dreamers of the future, such an idea of renewal means that one could really be a torch-bearer in times where there is no clarity.

#### *3.5.2 The heart of reformation is reformation of the heart*

From his *Institutes*, it emerges very clearly that Calvin's reformational idea involved the deeply religious meaning of a fundamental conversion, a radical change of heart and fundamental renewal towards God's image. This emerges clearly from how he uses concepts in his main work such as *reformatio, renovatio, reparatio, regeneratio* (or their verbs). (Cf. for example ICR I, 15, 4; II 3,1; II, 3, 7; II, 5, 15, III, 3, 9; III, 11, 6; III, 17, 5 and IV, 15. 5). For translations into English consult Battles (in Calvin, 1960) and for Afrikaans, consult Simpson (in Calvyn, 1984-1992.)

In systematic point wise fashion, one could summarize Calvin's ideas of reformation as follows:

- Deep regret, confession of guilt, conversion,
- Renewal of the intellect and will through the Holy Spirit,

- A life in line with God's fundamental love commandment, so that man could once again reveal the image of God as embodied in Christ,
- The above is a process that can never be regarded as complete – *semper reformanda!* Should succeeding generations fail to adhere to this to ensure ongoing reformation, deformation will inevitably occur as a result of sinfulness, both in man and the structures created by him. Resting on one's laurels – for example by clinging determinedly to the past or to sanction the status quo – can only bring about regression and decadence.
- A final characteristic of Calvin's view of reformation (which especially emerged from his actions in Geneva) is that reformation may not be allowed to be restricted to the church (cf. Graham, 1978). Religion therefore for him does not have a narrow, cultic (church) meaning, but a more encompassing meaning. The religious direction has to change a whole cultural context and all its structures. (For more detail on this, consult Van der Walt, 2010c and 2010d.)

Towards the end of this chapter (cf. section 7.3 below) we will indicate how, through the shaping of a genuine reformational worldview, true reformation can be achieved in our own times.

Up to here the cultural context and the religious direction of Calvin's Christian philosophy have been investigated. This brings us to the third fundamental question (cf. 1.3 above again), about how Calvin's worldview regarded reality (all that exists), that is, the ontological and anthropological side of his worldview.

#### **4 Calvin's view of reality**

Here too the focus is on the uniqueness of Calvin's thought within the context of his time. Seeing that it has already been pointed out in detail elsewhere (cf. Van der Walt, 2010a and 2010b), it will only be mentioned in passing how, in spite of his Biblical-religious orientation, Calvin at some points could not achieve a true vision on reality.

In sequence, the following will briefly be given attention: (1) his concept of God, (2) his idea of the law, (3) his view of earthly creation, (4) his anthropology or concept of man, (5) his view of the relationship between knowing and believing, and his (7) view of Christian philosophy.

## **4.1 Calvin's concept of God**

What follows here is something about (1) how Calvin's concept of God differs from that of his predecessors and his contemporaries, (2) what it involved, and (3) how it was further developed after his own time.

### *4.1.1 Differences from predecessors and contemporaries*

To Medieval thinkers (such as Thomas of Aquinas) the existence of God (in the case of their natural theology) was the product of human reasoning, starting from creation (the so-called proofs of God's existence). Calvin, however, was against all such speculations about God. God's existence to him was a matter of faith, and not a reasonable conclusion – he simply accepted it in faith.

Most probably in reaction against the theo-ontological speculations about the nature of God, Calvin also did not use the word "theology" to typify his own thought. "Theology" literally means "science about God". (It is the view of the author that the field of study of theology rather should be the human life of faith and the church viewed within the light of the Scriptures.)

Calvin also differed from the more secular or left-leaning ideas of, for example, the Renaissance – and then especially their later followers – who did not regard God as important for their view of reality. For Calvin God was a Reality and knowledge about Him indispensable for his Christian philosophy.

### *4.1.2 Some characteristics*

For that reason Calvin already from the beginning of his *Institutes* stressed that true knowledge of creation and of man/woman would not be possible without knowledge of God. God was for him the sovereign Creator and the Sustainer of *all* that existed. This implied that He should not only be obeyed and served in the personal life of faith and church life.

For Calvin God is also not a hidden God, but reveals Himself and his will for our lives. Of great importance is the fact that Calvin acknowledged God's creational revelation (without in this way falling in the trap of a natural theology). Apart from his systematic main oeuvre (the ICR) one could also study what he wrote in his Commentary on Romans (1:18-20) (cf. Calvin, 1979:29-34): God's majesty shines through all the works of his hands (the whole of creation). The world is a mirror in

which we see reflected his divinity. This includes his eternity, wisdom, goodness, justice, mercy and truth. The reason why people do not see this is not to be found in the revelation of God, but in man's partial blindness. He is not so blind, however, that he can be exonerated on the basis of ignorance.

In his grace God reveals Himself and his will Scripturally once more in clear language, and even for a third time in a human being like ourselves, viz. in Jesus Christ. Calvin therefore distinguishes a three-fold revelation of God: creational revelation, Scriptural revelation and revelation incarnate. He stresses that one cannot understand God's creational revelation and Scriptural revelation if one does not understand his final incarnate revelation in Christ (this insight is very important for purposes of sub-sections 7.3.4, 7.3.6 and 7.3.7 below).

#### 4.1.3 *Continuation of the tradition*

Calvin's views about God and religion have become key building blocks of the later Reformed, Calvinist or reformational theological and especially philosophical traditions.

Seen in general, the idea of God's absolute sovereignty over all fields of life and the concomitant idea that God has to be served in all spheres of life – not only in the "spiritual" sphere – took root among theologians and very clearly among philosophers in the context of this tradition.

Unfortunately in reformational theology God's creational revelation – up to this day and age – remained largely an article in the reformed confessions of faith and it has seldom been worked out in more detail and concretely applied. This also emerges clearly from a strongly Biblicist trend according to which almost all norms should be deduced only from Scripture (a wrong interpretation of the *Sola Scriptura*). In this way God's creational revelation is neglected. Instead of studying reality (also the church and the life of faith) in the light of God's word, in the case of Biblicism one looks right into the light, and is blinded and thence unable to see the creational words of God. (More will be said about this in section 7 below.)

Subsequently, it is of importance to look at

## 4.2 Calvin's concept of the law

As already stated, the deepest motif in Calvin (the religious slant of his thought) was to be obedient to God's will – the norm for the whole of life. In this respect Calvin also rejected two contemporary unbiblical ideas about God's laws. The first was the Thomistic idea, teaching that (since God and his laws are not clearly distinguished) God is subjected to his own laws or decrees. The second, Ockhamist view, was the doctrine of an arbitrary, capricious God of whose will/laws one can never be sure. In opposition to both these viewpoints Calvin taught that God is *above* his law but also *faithful* to what He commands (*Deus legibus solitus est*).

### 4.2.1 Natural laws in Calvin

Calvin devoted quite a lot of attention to what he called the *lex naturalis* inscribed in the conscience of each human being. A careful study of these natural laws (something different from what we understand by them today) helps us to see clearly that on this point Calvin tried to Christianise the Stoic *logos* doctrine.

God is the Logos (Reason) who inserts seeds of reason (*logoi spermatikoi*) in the human reason or brain (as well as other creatures, though to a lesser extent than in man). With his reason or logos man can discern these divine seeds or laws and live in accordance with them, as norms.

In this way God's creational ordinances are not clearly distinguished from either God or the creatures. Furthermore, this Stoic concept also implies that God's creational order is strongly intellectualistically coloured. In conclusion: the creational ordinances tended to become *logical things* rather than *valid and applicable laws*.

### 4.2.2 Still an element of the truth

Even though Calvin's concept of a *lex naturalis* is distorted as a result of the Stoic influence, it still does contain an important truth. Calvin rightly maintains in his commentary on Romans (2:14-16) that even in people who do not know the Bible there is a certain measure of natural knowledge of God's laws. This is not a complete knowledge, but rather just traces or seeds:

This is proved by the fact that pagans have religious rites, make laws to punish adultery, theft and murder and can have appreciation for integrity in business transactions and compliance with contracts. In this way they do

indicate that God has to be worshipped, adultery, theft and murder are bad and that honesty is a virtue (Calvin, 1979:48 – translation BJvdW).

#### *4.2.3 Further expansion of the tradition*

Although Kuyper's, Bavinck's, Woltjer's and Geesink's ideas of the law are still strongly influenced by the logos speculations (cf Klapwijk, 1980:529 ff), these reformational thinkers did keep firmly to God's creational order. Vollenhoven, Dooyeweerd and their followers did later rid themselves of the Stoic influence, although probably not completely of the intellectualistic trend.

Because the notion of the creational order was wrongly interpreted by some scholars – as if it were something static – the idea was subject to strong criticism during the past few decades. The solution, however, is not to throw out the baby with the bath water, but to have a correct view of it. Christian scholars remain obliged to deduce from the regular functioning of creation something about God's creational order (cf. further sub-section 7.3.8 below about the normative crisis in the reformed world).

After having dealt with Calvin's ideas about God and law, let us have a look at how he looked at created reality.

### **4.3 Calvin's view of creation**

In the outline of Calvin's concept of the law it already emerged that he did not make a sharp distinction between God's creational order (or his will for created things) from the things for which this order was valid. The author's own research (cf. Van der Walt, 2010a) also led to the conclusion that Calvin held a dualistic view of reality.

#### *4.3.1 Ontological dualism*

Two visions on reality have tended to emerge over the ages: monism and dualism (cf. Bril, 2005:39-40).

Monistic thinkers work from the presupposition that reality was originally a unity. The diversity is secondary and is explained as a divergence from the primal unity. Monism, however, can only be accepted if one does not accept the radical ontological distinction (note: this does not imply a religious separation) between God and his creation.

Most probably a dualistic vision was more acceptable to Calvin, because it distinguished between a transcendent (divine) and a non-transcendent (creational)



part of reality. However, because a dualistic perspective presupposes two original "parts" of reality (while Scripture teaches God as the only Origin of all) such a viewpoint is not more acceptable than the monistic one.

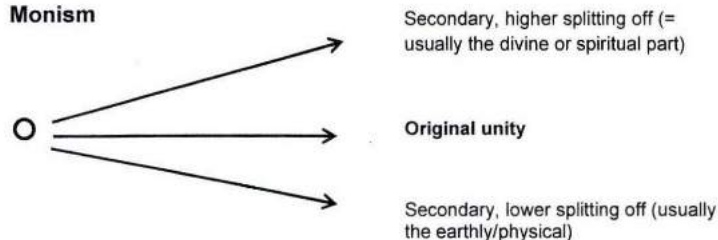
A monistic vision further holds the danger of pantheism (all is divine), while dualism can easily lead to deism (God is far away from his creation).

#### 4.3.2 Further correction and effect

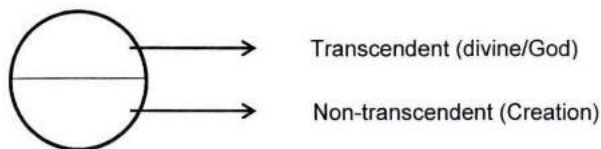
Calvin's spiritual brethren, as among others Vollenhoven (2005b:14-16) improved his view on reality by making a clear distinction between (1) God, (2) his creation, and (3) his laws that apply to all created things. Such as "three-factor" ontology holds more promise than Calvin's "two-factor" (dualist) ontology. The following diagrams visualize the foregoing:

### Ontological visions of reality

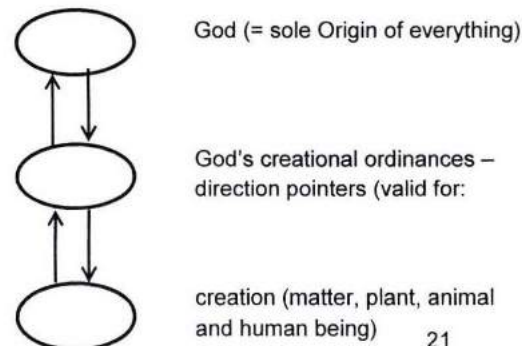
#### Monism



#### Dualism



#### Biblical vision



### *4.3.3 Creation, fall, redemption and the fullness of time*

In the light of Scripture Calvin emphasises the following “acts” in the history of earthly reality: (1) creation, (2) fall, (3) redemption and (4) the fullness of time (complete renewal of creation). These core ideas figure strongly in the reformational worldview and philosophy that had been developing since the previous century (cf. for example Wolters, 1985). Without bringing all four of these possible “facts” into consideration, one would not be able to establish a correct view on reality. It offers an indispensable Scriptural light on the condition and religious direction of creation (cf. Bartholomew & Goheen, 2004).

Of great importance is the following aspect of Calvin’s thought:

### **4.4 Calvin’s anthropology or view of man/woman**

The implications of Calvin’s dualist ontology emerge most clearly in his view of man. While Calvin could in other aspects of his worldview make strides ahead, in his anthropology he was unfortunately firmly stuck in age-old traditions (for details and references to the ICR, cf. Van der Walt, 2010b).

#### *4.4.1 A dichotomist vision*

According to Calvin, under the influence of Plato, man is a kind of interim being between God (the spiritual and transcendent) and creation (the material, non-transcendent). Man/woman is, as regards his/her soul not only related to the transcendent but also participates in God (for more on this semi-mystic idea, cf. Canlis, 2010). His body, however, is of a non-transcendent nature. The body is mortal, while soul, the most important part, the image of God, is immortal. For that reason the body is the prison of the soul, and the human being has to long for the day of his death, because then the soul is freed from its physical prison and can return to its original divine (transcendent) home.

#### *4.4.2 Contempt for the earthly and a longing for the heavenly*

There are biblical elements in Calvin’s “ethics” of self-denial, bearing the cross, the careful involvement with the present life and meditation about the future, eternal life. But his view of being human also leads to an unbiblical longing for heaven and contempt for earthly life. Listen to what Calvin has to say:

...either the earth has to become of no value to us, or it should grasp us in unconditional love. Thus, if we have any care for eternity, we have to commit ourselves to freeing ourselves from earthly manacles (ICR, III, 9, 2. According to III, 9, 5 one should even long for the day of one's death with joyous anticipation!).

#### 4.4.3 Insoluble problems

Calvin's semi-mystical, Platonising concept of man leads to all sorts of problems – because this is the least biblical part of his worldview. Calvin himself is aware of some of these:

- He asks himself whether the soul that is *in* the body is not something spatial and should therefore be visible.
- He tries to defend his contempt for the world and his longing for heaven by saying that it is not ingratitude towards God, who created all earthly things to be good.

One could, however, pose far more questions to Calvin:

- Where does the soul come from? There can be little doubt that Calvin adheres to a creatianist anthropology: God (the transcendent) himself creates this transcendent part of man. (The traducianists, on the other hand, believed that the soul came from the father or from both parents.)
- When does God create a new soul? Upon conception, or only at birth? If the latter, abortion prior to birth could be acceptable.
- If God also provide a soul in the event of an illegitimate child, does He not then contravene his own commandment?
- How does Calvin reconcile his creatianism with the doctrine of original sin? Does God create sinful souls, or does sin only emanate from the physical, the body (the parents)? Should one opt for the latter notion, is this not in conflict with what the Bible teaches, viz. that the origin of evil lies deep in the heart (Calvin's soul)?
- At this juncture the author has not even mentioned that Calvin's view of man also left open the door that for generations after him there has been a lot of speculation about the so-called *interim condition* (the on-going existence of the immortal soul between death and resurrection) – and that this still happens today,

especially at funerals. In this way the central Biblical idea of the resurrection of man (not only his body) has faded.

#### 4.4.4 *An immortal soul?*

With regard to immortality Calvin did not interpret the Bible correctly. According to the Bible only God is immortal. The believing *human being* (not only the soul) only receives immortality *after resurrection*, while unbelievers then die a second death. Man is a fully earthly being, and will continue to be so (after resurrection) on the new earth.

#### 4.4.5 *Man as image of God*

In line with his dualistic ontology man as the image of God is understood by Calvin that man to some extent *ontologically* resembles God or participates in his essence. However, the Bible sees God's image in man as the correct *relationship* (obedience to the laws of God). It is therefore possible that man can either not at all or to a greater or lesser extent reveal the image of God.

In Calvin, however, we find a mixture of Platonising and Scriptural ideas. The soul (*facultas anima*) is regarded as God's natural image (*dona naturalis*), and the supernatural image (*dona supernaturalis*) he understands, in the Biblical sense, as true knowledge, justice and holiness. The former image has only become *spoilt*, but the latter image was *lost* at the Fall.

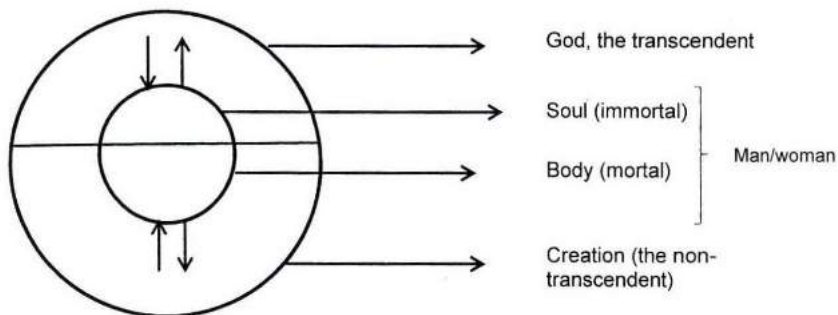
One could reason here that Calvin, with this distinction, only wanted to direct attention to the fact that, although the religious *direction* in man changed after the Fall (directed away from God), the human *structure* did not change – man remained human. His distinction between *naturalia-supernaturalia*, however, has far-reaching implications. As will emerge below, it leads to a dualism in Calvin's view of society. (Unfortunately this notion of an ontological dual image can still today be found in reformed theological circles.)

#### 4.4.6 *Outcomes*

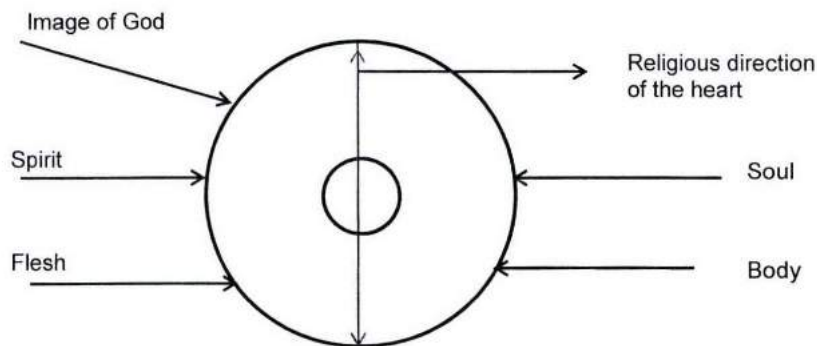
This most contentious section of Calvin's worldview – his view of man, or his anthropology – has unfortunately also been one of the most enduring influences on the generations after him. During the previous century it took great persistence from people such as A Janse (1934), D.H. Th. Vollenhoven (1933), K.J. Popma (1958-

1965) and other to replace the dichotomist legacy of Calvin and the Reformed scholasticism after Calvin with a more integral Biblical vision. The following diagrams visualize Calvin's dichotomist and the integral views of man according to the Bible:

### Anthropological dualism (Calvin)



### A more biblical vision



In the above more biblical view of the human being, concepts like soul, body, flesh, spirit, etc. do not indicate *parts* of the human being, but they indicate the *total* human being viewed from a *specific, different perspective*. For example, "soul" simply means living being, "flesh" indicates either how fragile or sinful the entire human being is, and so on also in the case of the other concepts.

#### 4.4.7 *Still some light*

Seeing that the intention has been to focus on the uniqueness of Calvin one has to, with regard to his anthropology, also direct attention to the fact that he did not want (as already outlined above) to analyse man in isolation from his relationship to God. The fact that he regarded man as being a religious being in all that he does, was adopted and expanded by later reformational philosophers. However, in Calvin's case his dichotomist anthropology was a stumbling block in the consistent application of this vision that the whole of life – and not only the part of it dealing with one's soul and the church – should be commitment, service to God.

One's view of who man is, is of determining importance for how one regards society. This brings us to a subsequent facet of Calvin's thought:

### 4.5 ***Calvin's societal philosophy***

In agreement with his dualist ontology and dichotomist anthropology, Calvin distinguishes between earthly and heavenly things and between two realms.

#### 4.5.1 *Earthy and heavenly things*

Earthy things (*res terreras*) I call those things which do not impinge on God and his realm, true justice and blessedness of the life to come, but which have to do with the present life and stand in relation to this life, and which in a certain sense remain within that life. Heavenly things (*res caelestes*) I call the pure knowledge of God, true justice and the secrets of the heavenly kingdom. To the first kind would belong the government, the management of the family, the techniques of handcraft and the *artes liberales*. To the second belongs the knowledge of God, the divine will and the rule that life should be lived in accordance with that (ICR, II, 2, 13).

#### 4.5.2 *Two realms*

In man, according to Calvin, there is a dual regimen (*duplex regimen*): a spiritual (*spiritualis*) which is linked to service to God, and civil one (*politicus*) which is the sphere where one has to carry out one's civil duties. The first has to do with the life of the soul and the second with the present, bodily life (such as feeding, clothing and legislation); the first with the inner (life of the soul) and second only with external morals (cf. ICR, III, 19,15). Calvin then continues:

And these two realms, as I divided them, should each be regarded within its own context. When the one is regarded, the idea of the other should be disregarded, because there are, in man, as it were two worlds (*mundi duo*) where different kings and different laws prevail.

A final statement says:

But he who distinguishes between body and soul, between the present, mortal and the future, eternal life, will have no trouble understanding that the spiritual realm of Christ and the civil government are things that differ greatly from each other (ICR, IV, 20, 1).

#### 4.5.3 *In defence of Calvin*

Some followers of Calvin (especially theologians) held the view – and is still holding to it – that in this context he was thinking biblically. Some reformational philosophers who explicitly rejected the Roman two-spheres doctrine (of nature and supernature) and the Lutheran two-kingdom doctrine (of an earthly and a heavenly realm), also tried to defend Calvin by saying that he held to neither of these viewpoints.

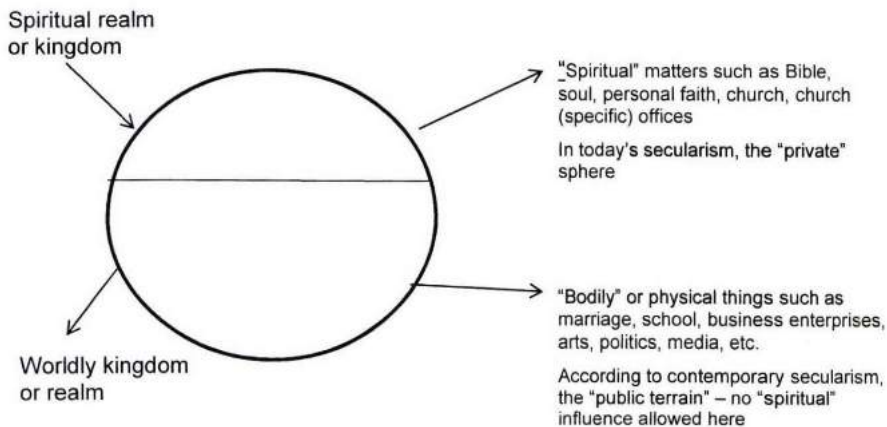
However, it is the view of the author that Calvin cannot on this point be followed or vindicated. He clearly thinks in terms of a dual government (*regimen*), jurisdiction (*jurisdictio*), kingdom (*regnum*) or world (*mundus*). And this implies a kind of schizophrenic existence for believers.

#### 4.5.4 *Implications*

Should we be of the conviction that God calls us to serve Him at every level of life, Calvin's view of a mere modification of the two-spheres, -realms or -kingdoms doctrine is inadequate. The correct response is to deviate from it radically. Should this not happen, Calvin's own deepest intention, viz. to be obedient to God, to serve and honour him in *everything* is affected or at least limited to the personal and churchly life, while the greater part of life is surrendered to secularisation (cf. further sub-section 6.1 to 6.3 below).

The following diagram explains the foregoing:

## Calvin's doctrine of the two realms



### 4.5.5 The reformational alternative

The two-realm doctrine *as such* is *rejected* (not simply *changed*), and *replaced* by a Christian philosophy of society (based on structural and confessional pluralism), which enables Christians to serve God and fellowman in love at *all levels* of life.

### 4.5.6 Yet some light

It has to be said, however, that in Calvin's distinction between two kinds of government or regimen there is also an element of the truth. Already during the Middle Ages there had been an on-going battle between the pope and the emperor with the prize being the highest power and authority. Both wanted to dominate the whole of society in a totalitarian fashion. The council of the small city state of Geneva also wanted to dominate the consistory (church council) of Geneva.

Calvin, however, fought for the independence of church and state. Each had to have its own offices, authority, power and responsibility. At the founding of the Academy of Geneva he therefore did not ask for the approval of either the ecclesiastical or the political authorities, pope or emperor.

Various authors therefore point out (cf. Spykman, 1976) that (if only present in seminal form) we already find in Calvin something of a pluralist instead of a totalitarian societal ideal. In the later developed reformational tradition this idea was



called by Kuyper (cf. Kuyper, 1998:461-490) the principle of sphere sovereignty. (Later on replaced by the idea of the differentiated or distributed responsibility of different societal relationships.) During the further expansion of Calvin's ideas (especially since Althusius in the seventeenth century) the dualist two-spheres doctrine of Calvin was also abandoned: God calls man to service in *every* societal relationship.

What was still lacking in Calvin, however, was the principle of *confessional* pluralism. This means that different faiths are given the freedom and should have the right to give public structural shape to their beliefs in, for example, schools and other institutions. Calvin's time was not yet ready for the recognition of the freedom of religion – just think of the case of Michael Servet, who had to die at the stake with the approval of both Roman and Protestant (Calvin included) authorities. Here too the later developed reformational philosophy effected an improvement (for more details about a reformational societal philosophy, cf. Van der Walt, 2010e:411-470).

After this explanation of how Calvin represented reality (God, his laws and creation), let us look at how he arrived at this knowledge.

#### **4.6 Knowing and believing in Calvin**

During the preceding Medieval thought, knowing by reason usually preceded faith: *intellego ut credam*. In this way, supernatural theology was preceded or supported by a philosophical (natural) theology that had to "prove" various things (for example, that God existed, that the Bible was his Word) before such things could be accepted in faith.

##### **4.6.1 Calvin's view**

Over against this Thomistic vision, Calvin chose the much earlier Augustinian view: *credo ut intellegam*, meaning that I first have to believe to be able to know. In this regard Calvin made a unique contribution.

Calvin therefore clearly rejected the intellectualism of, for example, Thomas Aquinas. This does not mean, however, that he fell into the trap of a kind of fideism, because he also emphasised that faith, apart from absolute trust, also involves knowledge and insight – for that reason he emphasised the urgent need for a *philosophia Christiana*.

#### 4.6.2 Further developed

In the later reformational tradition this central, fundamental role of faith was further expanded. With this insight reason was in principle robbed of its autonomy. This enabled reformational philosophers such as Stoker, Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd and their followers to unmask (negatively) the notion of neutral scholarship and (positively) to give shape to a Christian philosophy and scholarship in general.

### 5 Calvin on a Christian philosophy

We now reach something of a climax: almost 450 years ago we find Calvin defending a Christian philosophy! We will therefore pause at this point a little longer than at the previous sections, and will in succession deal with the following issues: (1) the purpose, name and character of his "Christian philosophy"; (2) the tradition to which Calvin links up; (3) the big breakthrough that he makes, and (4) some features of his Christian philosophy (for more details, cf. the articles by Klapwijk, 1991 and 1993).

#### 5.1 Purpose, name and character

For Calvin in his *Institutes* the concern is with true wisdom. For that reason it is understandable that he never refers to his main oeuvre – in spite of the fact that his Calvinist descendants have declared it to be a "theology" – as a *Summa Theologiae* or something similar, but rather calls it a *philosophia nostra* (our philosophy) or a *philosophia Christiana* (Christian philosophy).

Naturally Calvin did not by "philosophy" understand the scholarly discipline that we today know. Researchers agree that the concept in Calvin's context needs to be understood in a wide sense as an indication of a pre-scientific, Christian, Scripturally-based worldview. This emerges clearly from the long tradition that Calvin joins.

#### 5.2 A long tradition

*Philosophia* had, throughout Antiquity (Greek and Roman) an *encompassing* meaning: the whole of the range of knowledge about the gods, the world and man's place in this configuration. The concern was therefore with all the *most important* life issues. Finding answers to these questions, meant *sophia* (wisdom), and the intellectual activity which led to these answers was called the quest for or love of

wisdom (*philosophia*). Ultimately these philosophical answers had to lead to a good, happy, *ideal* life.

The Church Fathers tied in with this ancient meaning, and regarded their own Christian worldview or “Christian philosophy” as the crown of all wisdom. We find the term already in Tatianus who – ironically – was allergic to the (pagan) philosophies. Calvin probably took over this term from Augustine, a philosopher for whom he had the greatest admiration.

### **5.3 A breakthrough**

The fact that he could speak of a *Christian* philosophy indicates that the two-spheres doctrine did not completely determine Calvin’s thought. Should he have applied this viewpoint consistently, there would have been, in his thinking (as for example in that of Thomas Aquinas), only a place for a Christian theology and no recognition of a Christian philosophy.

Even more important are the features or traits of Calvin’s Christian philosophy.

### **5.4 Some features or characteristics**

Calvin names the following as traits or requirements for his *philosophia Christiana*:

- *Autonomous reason dethroned*

A part of a much longer statement reads as follows (for ICR, III, 7, 1):

The first step is that you should disregard yourself, so that you can direct the whole of the power of your intellect to obedience to the Lord ... through which the intellect of man, divested of his fleshly feeling, wants to convert himself to the will of the Spirit of God ... this change (which Paul in Ephesians 4:23 calls the renewal or the intellect) ... was not known by any philosopher. Because they appointed reason as the capacity to steer man, they feel that reason has to be listened to ... but Christian philosophy makes reason vacate its place and instructs it to subject itself and to be subservient to the Holy Spirit ...

- *Practised in the light of the Scriptures*

Elsewhere Calvin states that “Our wisdom may not be anything other than to embrace with humble instructiveness all, without exception, that Scripture teaches”

(ICR, I, 18, 4). Even more striking (in III, 20, 1) is that it “is not a philosophy that can be reached via syllogisms, but a fundamental knowledge of those whose eyes God had been opened so that they can see in his light (Psalm 36:10)”.

As will still emerge, this view of Calvin about “in Thy light” is of cardinal importance. By that he does not mean that this reality that we have to study is not important (cf. again the beginning of section 2 – Calvin knew his own context). Also not that only the Bible should biblicistically be studied on its own, because it is imputed to contain all the answers. He only meant that one should look at this reality *by* or *in* the light of God’s revelation in order to be able to truly understand it.

- *With a renewed intellect*

A third trait of Calvin’s Christian philosophy already emerged above, viz. that through the Holy Spirit it demands total renewal of one’s thinking (he quotes texts such as Romans 12:2 and Ephesians 4:23).

- *It requires threefold humility*

Calvin finally refers, in his Institutes (II, 2, 11) to two of his favourite Church Fathers, Augustine and Chrysostome. The latter taught that the foundation of our philosophy should be humility. For Calvin this condition is so important, however, that he (like Augustine) says by way of conclusion that the first, second and third requirement for a Christian philosophy is *humilitas*, that is, humility.

Most probably we have here found the answer to the question posed at the beginning: in what exactly is Calvin’s greatness located? His greatness is located in his smallness, in his humility towards God and his revelation.

### 5.5 *An application*

Calvin teaches all philosophers - including reformational thinkers - an important lesson as they sometimes tend to think quite arrogantly that they command all wisdom. Even Christian philosophers, who may enjoy the privilege of doing their work in the infallible light of God’s revelation in creation, Scripture and Christ, must always keep in mind that they will never put the final word in writing.

It is not without reason that Calvin pleads for on-going reformation. This is also true for today: *philosophia reformata semper reformanda est!*

## 6 The uniqueness of Calvin's worldview

When one looks back about how Calvin links up the three main questions about (1) the cultural *context*, (2) the religious *direction* and (3) the ontic and social *structures*, one once again discovers the uniqueness, but also the core of his reformational worldview. In order to see this clearly, however, it is necessary to compare his view again with those of his predecessors and his contemporaries.

### 6.1 *An age-old dualism*

During Calvin's lifetime, Christendom had already for about 1500 years been caught up in a dualism about nature and grace. This unbiblical idea came into being when the Church Fathers took over from pagan thinking the distinction between a sacral (holy) and profane (secular) sphere/domain/realm. The sacral area of life had to do with the gods and cultic life, as opposed to his profane, everyday life.

Instead of rejecting the idea in its entirety, the early Christians simply supplemented this pagan dualism with a Christian version. The sacral area became the "spiritual" area of God's *grace* (faith and church) and the profane the rest of life or the field of the *natural*. The former is regarded as naturally good while the latter is viewed as of less value, even sinful. The religious *direction* (either good or bad) is thus located *structurally* (for example, the church cannot be something sinful, but politics as such is sinful or at least neutral). Stated differently: Salvation in Christ (God's *grace*) is detached from earthly reality. It was no longer clear that God's salvation was intended for *this* creation, the *whole* of creation. Redemption consequently became something personal and intended for eternity, instead of having been directed at the whole of present reality.

As stated by Spykman (1992:67): Dualism involves a confusion between structure and direction. (According to 1.3 above entailing a serious mistake.) The *religious* antithesis obtains an *ontological* place in the *structures* of creation, and in this way sin, an intruder in creation, obtains an ontological place.

### 6.2 *Also present in Calvin's contemporaries*

In the three most important religious trends of the time of Calvin – Catholicism, Lutheranism and Anabaptism – this dualistic mode of thought is continued, each in his own way.

- According to a Thomist worldview, the Roman Church saw grace (as something additional) to be set *above* creation (nature). God's redemption is considered as a supernatural *additive* to earthly life.
- In the Lutheran church grace was located *alongside* nature (creation). God's redemption runs *parallel* with earthly reality. Redemption and creation are two separate spheres of life that would have no link with each other.
- Among the Anabaptists there is tension between the two poles of this dualism – godly grace stands *in opposition* to the earthly reality. God's redemption is something completely "unworldly".

Dualisms such as these of course hold serious implications for each sphere of a Christian's life. There is no space here to embroider on this. It is adequate simply to state that not one of these worldviews can take God's creation seriously or make possible an integral Christian life on earth. According to Spykman (1992:68) such dualisms also lead to a double normativity, a legitimization of sinful things, a breach of the unity of creation and a limitation of the cosmic reach of redemption in Christ.

### **6.3 Calvin's breakthrough**

Even though Calvin did not succeed in breaking through this dualism (cf. for example his view of man and his idea of the two realms as outlined above), he did at times open up a narrow pathway through the confusing welter of dualism which is worth following up. After 1500 years of Christendom he offered something unique. According to him God's grace in Christ does not stand *above*, *next to* or *in opposition* to creation, as God's grace is specifically intended for this earthly creation – his own creation. Redemption should *renew* creation *itself!* Redemption and creation are *indissolubly* linked. Redemption does not hang in the air (Roman), run along a separate path (Lutheran) or only has to do with eternity (Anabaptism).

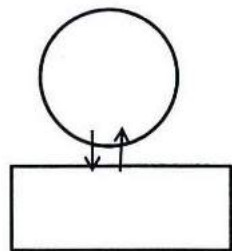
God so loved his creation that He allowed his only Son to die to redeem it. And in order to do this, Christ had to become a part of creation Himself, become human. *Any dualism therefore denies the all-encompassing, full redemption in Christ.*

Through his redemption – of cosmic meaning – God did not place something supernatural above, next to or in opposition to his creation, but regained all of creation for his service (cf. the title of Wolters, 1985: *Creation regained*). And

Christians have been entrusted with the calling to work out the implications of this liberating Gospel in God's all-encompassing kingdom.

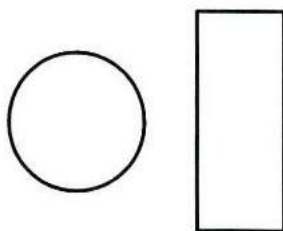
The following simple diagrams visualize the four different viewpoints:

#### Thomism



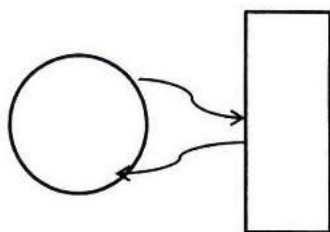
Grace *above* nature

#### Lutheranism



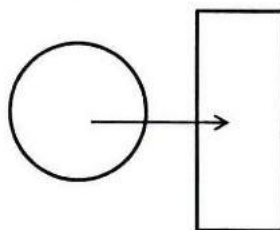
Grace *next to* nature

#### Anabaptism



Grace as *opposed to* nature

#### Calvin



Grace *renews* nature

#### 6.4 *Falling back into dualism after Calvin*

Unfortunately, after Calvin, dualism again emerged strongly in reformed orthodoxy. Apart from the theologians who wanted to maintain some kind or other of balance between nature and grace – of course not a solution for a fundamentally wrong view – there were those who wanted to put all emphasis on grace (*sola gratia*) (cf. for example, Karl Barth in the previous century), while others accentuated nature, and so prepared the way for contemporary secularism. Today grace has been re-baptized as the so-called private sphere and nature as the so-called public sphere.

This emphasis on God's creation – a redeemed creation – which Calvin unfortunately did not employ consistently, to my mind, constitutes the unique part of

his worldview and of reformational worldviews and philosophies that came into being after him. How important this is can be deduced when we leave Calvin for the moment and reflect on the current reformed world in the light of the foregoing.

## **7 An application to the contemporary Reformed world**

As a Calvinist or Reformational descendant of Calvin one should not occupy oneself with Calvin's worldview as if it were a historical curiosity. What a worldview effects is the appeal that emanates from his worldview in terms of the reformed world of today? The appeal is that we should once again consider our own identity very seriously. To do so is high on the agenda of reformed churches worldwide, because the answer to that is not all that clear any more.

By the way: Without a clear Christian worldview one could also die redeemed. But without one it is not easy to broaden one's deepest religious convictions and to concretize them within the reality within which one lives (for more about this, cf. Van der Walt, 2008).

What one's worldview really looks like should be derived from one's way of life. A good outlook on life without the actual deeds is useless. What a worldview effects in everyday life is therefore an important test for the genuineness of a worldview.

Please note that what follows here is (1) the author's own personal hypothetical diagnosis, and (2) that it should not be interpreted as disloyal nit-picking. He does this out of his heart, out of loyalty, in an effort to make a modest contribution to this important debate about a reformed identity.

### **7.1 Start with the name**

The name given to something does not say everything, but also not nothing. It can, for example, create a wrong impression among outsiders. Is "Reformed" therefore still the best word? Does it not denote something that has been finally completed, been taken care of – perhaps already at the time of Calvin? "Calvinism", too, might not be that helpful, because Calvin himself would not have approved of it that his worldview should be put on a par with God's revelation.

In the light of the foregoing, "Reformational" is more appropriate. The dynamics of Calvin's *semper reformanda* can be embodied in it. At the same time it echoes Calvin's notion that the whole of life should be religion, service to God or to an idol.



The term "reformational" is also far more encompassing than the limited cultic or confessional life in the church alone – it gives *direction* to the whole of man's *contextual* and *structural* existence.

Because the "-re" in "reformational" points to a reference back, it might create the impression that it simply wishes to repeat the past. One should therefore not have a problem (as long as is not used in the anti-normative sense) to use the term "transformation"/"transformational" (cf. Klapwijk, 1995). The "trans" indicates more clearly that such a Christian worldview wants to deal with that which was wrong in the past by changing, improving, transforming it in the present.

But, as already indicated, a name is not the most important thing. Of more importance is the content of our reformational worldview as it can be seen today.

## **7.2 A hypothesis about the crisis in the Reformed world**

The author's hypothesis, which he puts up for discussion here and will explain subsequently, is the following: the crisis in the reformed world, especially in the ecclesiastical field, is at heart a *crisis of worldview*. More specifically: it is crisis of *direction*, or a *normative* crisis. A possible cause of this is that believers (including some theologians) hold a Biblicist view, which expects too much of God's Scriptural revelation alone, and does not allow his creational revelation to have enough of an impact.

Before this presupposition is explained, we need to make the comment that different tests can be applied for the truth of a worldview. Van der Walt (2008:70-72) distinguishes, for example, between (1) internal tests (whether a worldview is coherent and encompassing), (2) external tests (openness, alignment with the way things stand, correct normativity and liveability, in other words, whether the adherents really feel that they can live consistently according to the worldview), and (3) a transcendent test in which one can fall back on one's faith-based point of departure. In this investigation, the emphasis is clearly on (2), or the external criteria.

## **7.3 The contemporary context, direction and structure and their reciprocal influence on each other**

The reader is referred back to sub-section 1.3 above: the triangular diagram and the metaphor of the tree according to which Calvin's worldview was analysed and

according to how one should shape one's own worldview. The three main categories were: (1) the cultural, or the contextual, (2) the religious direction, and (3) the ontological or societal structures. In a genuine reformational worldview these three must not only receive the necessary emphasis separately, but their mutual interlinking and reciprocal influencing (as in the case of Calvin's thought) must also be recognised and acknowledged. What this entails will now briefly be explained.

### *7.3.1 The contemporary secular cultural context*

The cultural context or spiritual climate in which reformationally-inclined people live today, is definitely dominated by secularism (cf. Van der Walt, 2007). This means, in very simple terms, that people think and live as if God and his commandments do not have meaning – at least not in the so-called public sphere of life.

It is precisely in this “private-public” dualism that the tempting and blinding character of contemporary secularism finds its existence. Because it is not openly hostile to the existence of God and his service – as long as these remain securely within the “private sphere of life” – many Christians do not realise how dangerous secularism really is.

They often do not realize that secularism is an alternative, all-encompassing religion, which with its artificial distinction between private and public demands the whole domain of public life for its own idols. (Just think of how Mammon is nowadays claiming the whole of life through crass commercialisation.)

Should Christians succumb to this new worldview - a blinding, tempting, forceful *ideology* - they are of necessity forced into a split, schizophrenic existence. Then the religious direction of their lives (obedience and service to the true God) becomes limited to the small space of a personal life of faith and the church.

### *7.3.2 The structural environment*

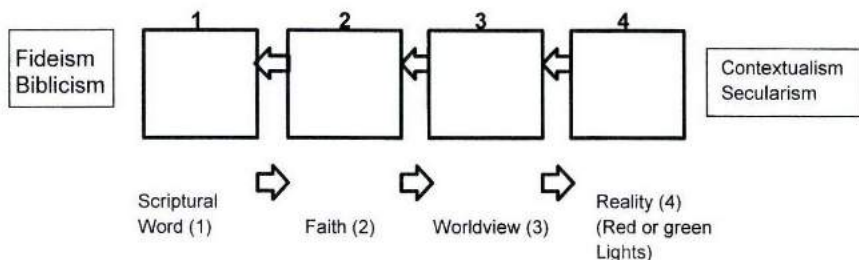
It is unnecessary to say that the structures (in, for example, societal institutions like the school, state and the economy) within which Christians live today is also mostly secularised. This secularised society not only influences people's daily worldview and lifestyle, but also has a tremendous influence on the “private” spheres of, for example, marriage, family and church – the latter can also begin to act and think in a secular manner.

This secularised environment does not even leave untouched the deepest religious core of Christians – their hearts. Stated differently – the context and structures of contemporary society does not call people to conversion and reformation, but rather to self-centredness, greed, hedonism and other things which are in direct conflict with God's basic guidelines for life. How do we respond to this secular context?

### 7.3.3 Two threats: fideism and secularism

For the sake of simplicity, the contextual and the structural elements can be grouped together and called "reality", the reality within which each person lives and in which God also reveals his will (creational revelation). The following sketch explains this.

#### **Essential reciprocation necessary for a reformational worldview**



According to the arrows (left-directed), the secular reality, context and structure (4), influences our worldview (3), and ultimately this also affects our faith (2). But at the same time (cf. the bottom arrows directed to the right) reformational Christians also have the calling to give their faith (2) concrete expression via their worldview (3) and so to reform reality (4). Let us have a look at both directions.

#### **From reality back to faith**

Do note that the influence of reality (4) on one's worldview (3) and faith (2) is an inescapable fact. Christians should therefore keep cognisance of it seriously, should they wish to understand anything of their own time, want to be relevant for their own time and want to reform their own time. Naturally the reality of the context (4) can be over-emphasised (resulting in contextualism and secularism), and the religious direction of faith (2) can be under-emphasised. This is the one big danger which, to my mind, one has to be aware of.

## ***From faith to reality***

The other danger, which is perhaps not noted so clearly in the reformed world, is that of fideism or Biblicism (at the left side of the diagram). In this case an effort is made to think solely from the Bible (1), and the direction of faith (2), and biblicistically with random Bible verses rather than a full worldview (3) to try to influence (4) reality (culture and its structures).

What would the solution now be?

### *7.3.4 The importance of God's revelation in concrete reality*

Our reformational worldview, theology and philosophy may not ignore the concrete realities of our everyday lives, but should keep account of them seriously. Why is this so important?

The reason is that God's revelation is not limited to Scripture. Before the Bible had been there, God revealed Himself and how we should live through his creation (this reality). Christ (God's final revelation) even became incarnated to make it clear to us how God wants us to live.

This fact naturally calls up the question as to how we can correctly "read" this revelation of God in reality (culture and history). (Those who think reformationally already know that one's interpretation may not clash with what God reveals in his Scriptural Word.) A very simple way of reading it could be compared with the metaphor of green and red lights. Should people experience peace, happiness, health, respect (drawn together under the word *shalom*) in reality (4), it can be an indication that God's commandments are being obeyed, and that most probably their worldview and normative course of life are right (3). These are the green lights. Red warning lights, however, begin to flash when people experience the opposite of *shalom* in real life (4): humiliation, violence, oppression, disease, etc. Such things, which impinge on people's human dignity, indicate that God's will for their lives is not being correctly positivised in their worldview (3), because God gives his commandments so that man can have a good life.

When the red warning lights (4) begin to flash one should begin to examine one's worldview (3), rooted in faith (2) in obedience to God's Scriptural revelation (1). The reality (4) can even begin to "shout" so loudly that we are forced to change our

worldview (3), our faith (2) and even our interpretation of Scripture (1). It can even make one undergo a deep religious change of heart.

An example of such a correction from reality on the erstwhile Christian-national worldview is what happened in the course of the gradual rejection of apartheid. Because of human suffering (red lights), the voices of protest from reality (4) ultimately became so strong as a result of the injustices of the system that we gradually changed our worldview or ideology (3), our faith (2) and finally corrected our reading of the Bible (1) so that even (some) hearts were redirected. In the same way a confrontation with the glaring suffering of poor people can shock a wealthy person and open up his/her closed worldview, dead faith, capitalist reading of God's Word and heart of stone.

### *7.3.5 Degeneration or deformation into an ideology*

While a religiously correctly directed worldview can illuminate one's vision and calling in God's world, widen and nourish it, an ideology leads to the darkening, narrowing and distortion of reality. The fruits of a correct worldview (cf. once again the metaphor of the tree) are sweet and nourishing, while that of an ideology is bitter and poisonous.

It is not impossible for a Christian worldview also to degenerate into an ideology (a narrowed, frozen, blinding worldview). Then the reality (4) is forced at all costs into one's ideology (3) and violated. One of the great South African poets rightly wrote in a poem: "Save us from the ideologies, Lord, so that we might again see the world".

This happens easily when one biblicistically regards only the Bible as the source of one's worldview. Then the well-known hermeneutic circle between the following two directions is applicable. You try to construct a worldview (2) in the light of Scripture (1), but at the same time you interpret Scripture (1) in the light of your worldview (2). From this vicious circle you find it difficult to escape, should you be unable or unwilling to reform your worldview on a continuous basis. The great danger is that one regards one's own presuppositions as being equal to God's revelation in Scripture, instead of continually testing these presuppositions in the light of God's three-fold revelation.

Even though this might sound very strange to reformed readers, even the Bible can be wrongly used and turned into an idol. As in the case of all idolatry, however, the result is also humiliation, oppression, dehumanisation and the destruction of true life.

#### 7.3.6 *Mutual control*

In summary, the reformational viewpoint boils down to the fact that the believer should not only "read" creation (4) in the light of Scripture (1), but the reverse is equally true. The Scriptural revelation (1) should also be studied in the light of God's creational revelation in reality (4). The intention is not that the two forms of *God's revelation* should correct each other – they are equally true and authoritative – but that *man's interpretation* of creation should be checked by Scripture, and his *interpretation* of Scripture should be checked by God's creational revelation and corrected where needed.

To read Scripture in the light of God's creational revelation (this reality within which we live) – (1) in the light of (4) in the diagram above – should not create the impression that the Bible (meaning our interpretation of the Bible) be made dependent on something outside Scripture and therefore be relativised (cf. the danger of contextualism mentioned above). It is, however, a simple fact that one cannot understand Scripture in isolation from oneself and the world around oneself. Scripture, for example, uses everyday words (such as man, woman, children, slaves, princes) which can only be understood in the light of an ordered creational reality. Our understanding of creation shapes our understanding of the Scriptures and – as a result of sin – it can also deform our understanding of the Scriptures.

It is therefore totally wrong to understand *sola Scriptura* in such a way that one should only listen to the Bible. This was not the original meaning of this password coined by the sixteenth-century reformers. *Sola Scriptura*, in the ablative case, actually means "by Scripture alone". That is, by the light of the Bible alone can we judge all things and hold onto what is good (cf. Spykman, 1992:77).

#### 7.3.7 *The correct use of the Bible*

When the reality (in which God reveals Himself) once again finds its rightful place in our reformed world, it would not be necessary to expect *too much* of Scripture (solutions for all problems). We will no longer make *excessive demands* on Scripture. At the same time emphasis on God's creational revelation does not mean

that we should ask *too little* of the Bible. It simply means that the Bible is now being used correctly – as only one part of God's three-fold revelation.

A simple image by way of explanation is the following. A miner cannot do his difficult work underground in the dark mine passages without a light on his head. He does not, however, look *into* the light – then he would not be able to see what he has to do. He does his work *by* (or *in*) the light offered by his headlamp. In the same way one should use the Bible: *in* the light of the Bible this reality needs to be investigated (see again Calvin in 5.4 above). Biblicists, however, try to look *into* the light and are then blinded, so that they are unable to see reality truly.

A Biblical example is Isaiah 28:23-29. From this passage it is clear that even knowledge of farming comes from one's experience of the creational revelation of God. It is not derived solely from Scripture.

Biblicism, therefore, does not offer a clear perspective on the real nature of Scripture. It is a *book of faith*, which deals with the religious *direction* of life, and not a *textbook* which prescribes what a specific *culture* or specific *structures* should look like.

#### 7.3.8 *How the normative crisis can be resolved*

Finally a brief word on how (apart from the broadly worldviewish) the specific normative crisis (of direction) in the reformed world can be resolved (cf. the author's hypothesis under sub-section 7.2 above). In line with the foregoing (cf. again the triangular diagram under 1.3 as well as the one under 7.3.3 above) the solution for the normative crisis cannot be found either biblicistically only in Scripture or contextually only in a particular culture. Real Christian, direction-giving norms have to build a bridge between the correct religious *direction*, human *structures* and the cultural *context*. This can be explained as follows:

## How norms (= human, time-bound, fallible pointers) should be formulated

They create a bridge between:

- 1 God's fundamental, eternally valid **direction pointer**, viz. love of God and love of the neighbour  
↓ ↑
- 2 The human **structures**, which have to be obedient to God's creational order, e.g.  
Reciprocal truth (in marriage)  
Brotherly/sisterly love (in the church)  
Justice for all (in the state)  
↓ ↑
- 3 The cultural **context** (of a particular time and conditions) in which God also reveals his will

A simple example: *John 13:1-17*

Should we also today – as some Christians maintain – follow Christ's directive to wash each other's feet? Not to the mind of the author, as a result of the vast difference in cultural context and structures. Today's shoes, tarred roads and motor cars, when compared with yesteryear's sandals and dusty roads, should serve as a reminder. Love of and service to the neighbour should therefore be newly conceptualised and positivised for our own times.

### 7.3.9 *Summa summarum*

Possibly not everybody will want to act as *imprimatur* and put his/her *nihil obstat* on the preceding. But do allow the author to summarise the foregoing by way of three statements, in other words, a view of what a reformational identity would in essence involve. (After each statement a brief explanation follows.)

- **This world is God's world.** He not only created it, but loved it so much that after the Fall He allowed his Son to die for it. He still reveals Himself in creation.
- **As earthly beings our home is this world and we have a calling IN this world.** The word *world* is here used as it is in the Bible: God redeems us from the *sinfulness* of the world, but at the same time returns us to his *creation*. In what we



do in this world, we therefore show our love for and service to God. In our reciprocal love of each other we also love God. We do not love each other – in all our different ways – and *over and above that also love God*. This would be a dualistic way of thinking. We can only love and serve God *in and through* his creation – the reality here and now.

- **The nearer to God's world, the nearer to God Himself.** The reverse is also, of course, true – the closer to God, the closer to his world. The negative is equally true – the further from God, the further from his broken world, or: the further from the sighing world, the further we live from God. This implies that one can sometimes feel closer to God when you move among hungry people at a soup kitchen, or when you help an AIDS sufferer in a squatter camp, than when you might be sitting in a church that is alien to the world.

In a nutshell: I have tried to indicate that mere *conversion* and *revival* remain necessary, but cannot be enough. Our reformed world needs a *transformation*. And that can only be achieved when we are equipped with a genuine *reformational* worldview as outlined. What Calvin had started was admirable, but it has to be corrected, expanded and completed.

## **8 In conclusion**

Finally – a looking back and a looking forward

### **8.1 Looking back**

In the preceding discussion attention was particularly focused on those aspects of Calvin's Christian worldview in which he took a few steps forward and opened up new avenues of thought. Although space did not allow for doing this in detail, it was also mentioned how later on reformational philosophy could build on that and improve it.

One of these philosophers was Hendrik Gerhardus Stoker, in whose honour this lecture series of the School of Philosophy has been named. In humble gratitude to God we acknowledge him, and the other giants on whose shoulders we are privileged to stand in order to be able to see further.

## 8.2 Looking forward

During his youth Calvin experienced stormy times. He was even a persecuted fugitive after his conversion. This, however, did not cause him to give up. Difficult life circumstances made him read Scripture with even more fervour in order to experience more of God's salvational grace – so that in the rest of his relatively short life he could make the same liberating gospel resound in all spheres of life.

It was indicated how Calvin lit a small beacon of light of a nascent reformational worldview, relevant for his own time, at the bright light of God's three-fold revelation. And also how this light was carried forward by a younger generation during the twentieth century to become ever brighter. It is now, in anno Domini 2014, being handed over to a new generation of torchbearers in God's eternal and immortal kingdom.

If it is not realised now, it will become clearer in future that Calvin and the reformational philosophers who followed in his footsteps can be called "thinkers for all ages". The author therefore concludes with an eye on the younger generation: May the younger generation anew, in the uncertain times in which we live, discover these *patres philosophiae Christianae*.

## Chapter 2

### THE CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY OF D.H.Th. VOLLENHOVEN

(1892-1978)

#### **Its inception and further development<sup>1</sup>**

*This chapter is the first in a series of three dealing with the emergence of a Reformational–Christian philosophy in the work of D.H.Th. Vollenhoven (1892-1978), H. Dooyeweerd (1894-1977) of the Netherlands and H.G. Stoker (1899–1993) of South Africa. As a general introduction the question of how a tradition, the Reformational philosophical tradition in particular, can today – 75 years after its inception – be kept alive and relevant.*

*In this second chapter, focusing on Vollenhoven's contribution, the following are dealt with: As introduction, something is said briefly about his personality. Since especially epistemological issues were key problems at this cradle of Reformational philosophy during the first part of the previous century, a brief historical background (up to the present postmodern situation) is provided. The third main section investigates the possible influences on Vollenhoven's thought, firstly from "outside" (the philosophical environment of his times) and, secondly, from "inside" (preceding congenial thinkers). Next, attention is directed at Vollenhoven's pioneering contribution to both systematic philosophy and the historiography of philosophy. The subsequent part deals with how the work of the triumvirate (Vollenhoven, Dooyeweerd and Stoker) was received by next generations and how the Reformational philosophical tradition became divided into Vollenhovians, Dooyeweerdians and Stokerians. The reconnaissance is concluded with an indication of the close contacts between Vollenhoven as a person and his philosophy and South Africa, especially Potchefstroom.*

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<sup>1</sup> Dedicated with appreciation to Dr. K.A. Bril (The Netherlands) on his eightieth birthday – from him I learned a lot about Vollenhoven – and Dr. A Tol, for his valuable studies on this giant in the history of Christian philosophy.

## **1 Introduction: motivation, a philosophical tradition and how we should deal with it, limitations and set-up**

Christian philosophy also belongs to the wider Reformational tradition. It is a rich tradition which came into being during the thirties of the previous century. At the birth of this philosophy the names of three "fathers" are usually mentioned: D.H.Th. Vollenhoven (1892-1978) and H. Dooyeweerd (1894-1977) in the Netherlands and H.G. Stoker (1999-1993) in South Africa. This philosophical tradition today still exists and after three-quarters of a century it has numerous exponents across the world (cf. Van der Walt, 2010a:127-151).

### **1.1 Motivation**

For various reasons (which we will explore in a subsequent chapter) this important trend in the world of philosophical thought is no longer as well-known to the younger generations of today as it was to the author of this contribution – who is almost as old as the tradition itself. Therefore one important motivation for writing this chapter and the two subsequent ones is to convey something of this tradition to the younger generations. (This chapter begins with the contribution made by Vollenhoven and will be followed by the philosophy of Stoker and Dooyeweerd.)

By way of an introduction we first give a reflection on what a tradition entails and how one should deal with it to keep it alive and relevant.

### **1.2 Important elements of a tradition**

On the grounds of insights gained by Wolterstorff (1987) the following four elements can be distinguished in any tradition.

In the first instance it is a life-viewish, directional interpretation of one's surrounding reality. By means of this one attempts to understand what *is* (or exists) but also how it *should* be. In the case of a philosophical tradition this prescientific tradition over time grows into more scientific reflection.

In the second instance a tradition is expressed in practice in numerous ways in everyday life – the view becomes reality, it does not remain a mere abstraction.

In the third instance a tradition cannot live without its own narrative – it has to be told. What was its history like? For instance, a philosophical tradition may not forget the founders of the specific school.

In the fourth instance it should be kept in mind that every tradition – even a Christian one – includes both good and less good and even wrong things - the simple reason is that tradition is created by sinful people. Therefore one should never swear by a tradition which is fallible human work. Simultaneously it is not of necessity one hundred per cent wrong, so that it may be simply ignored or rejected. The realisation of this brings us to the next important point:

### **1.3 How to deal with a tradition so that it can remain a living tradition**

Pelikan (1984:20) writes the following: "Tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism is the dead faith of the living". Since this statement contains some truth, the urgent question is how a *living* tradition can be ensured for the present and future generations. We here mention only three almost obvious matters.

In the first instance one should be open-minded so that a certain tradition can nurture or teach one. This is the first condition even for some-one who will eventually reject the tradition.

The second step is critique – loving critique, but critique nevertheless. In the light of what was said above on tradition, one could for instance raise the following three critical questions: Does the tradition offer a valid interpretation of reality and does it still point a clear direction for today? Is it expressed in a lifestyle of one's own or (in this case) in a particular philosophy? Is the narrative of the tradition indeed being told and does it happen in such a way that it appeals to, inspires and motivates believing thinkers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

The third step is building on this tradition in a creative manner. It should not only be widened and extended but usually also corrected in the light of the fact that any tradition is the fallible human work of a certain era. In the Reformational tradition in general the notion of *on-going reformation* (*semper reformanda*) is well known. As is evident from the title of the scientific journal of the Society for Christian Philosophy (which in 2010 had already existed for 75 years) – it is called *Philosophia Reformata* – this clearly is the intention of this tradition.

Vollenhoven himself applied this thetic-critical method. Kok (1998:19) explains it briefly:

We can maintain what is viable in our position by critically investigating the results reached previously not only by others, but also in the course of one's

own life, and by daring to draw conclusions. Christians can make progress through struggle and attain a double profit: a reinforced *position*, articulated in deed and word, and more definite and accountable *rejection* of that which is inconsistent with it.

#### **1.4 A limited objective**

In the light of the above something will be told about the Reformational philosophical tradition in this book. However, a self-imposed limit on the length of a chapter does not permit all the facets of this tradition to be thoroughly considered. It simply is impossible to describe in full the different philosophies of the three founders – the *contents* of the whole tradition. In order to fill this gap, as many references to sources as possible are given so that students who are not fully conversant with all available literature (often hard to find) can study these themselves. General histories of this reformational Christian philosophy in the Netherlands are those of Klapwijk (1980) and Woldring (2013).

In what follows the main focus, therefore, will be on how this tradition originated and developed in the work of these three philosophers – not the *contents* but the *narrative* is foregrounded. This can have the value of the necessary openness to the tradition. Further it will be made clear that the tradition – from its very beginning – was not uncritical by nature. Even its founders did not all keep the same philosophical tune but criticised one another. The second and subsequent generations within the tradition ask even more probing questions. In this way a further requirement for a living tradition has been met, namely extending it in a creative manner.

Although a philosophical tradition does not follow the same phases as the biological development of a human being, the latter can well be used as a metaphor for the former (cf. Wolterstorff, 1987:33). As soon as a certain philosophical tradition reaches maturity, a more difficult phase sets in. The fresh enthusiasm of childhood and puberty is past, and likewise the excitement of discoveries during adolescence. In maturity the dreams and promises of youth have to be made good.

However, the Reformational philosophical tradition has already passed the age of 75. Does this inevitably mean a philosophical Alzheimer phase? It would not be surprising since philosophical schools usually do not survive so many decades.

From the following few recent examples it is evident, however, that this Christian tradition is not an ephemeral butterfly. Just compare (apart from numerous articles) the encompassing writings of Strauss (2009) and Chaplin (2011) on Dooyeweerd, the doctoral thesis of Tol (2010) on Vollenhoven and that of Ive (2012) on Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven as well as the work by Glas (2011). On Stoker Van der Walt (2009) wrote a mini-thesis (as yet unpublished).

After this general introductory reflection on how to deal with a tradition we can now focus on the tradition in the case of Vollenhoven. The following will be dealt with in succession: (1) His personality; (2) the philosophical scene (especially the epistemological) at the time of the inception of Reformational philosophy; (3) possible influences of Vollenhoven's philosophy (both from the secular environment of his time and from his own tradition); (4) Vollenhoven's pioneering work in systematic and historical philosophy; (5) the further development of Reformational philosophy by subsequent generations in different schools (Vollenhovian, Dooyeweerdian and Stokerian); and. (6) the contacts between Vollenhoven's philosophy and Potchefstroom, South Africa.

## **2 Personality and philosophy**

Although it would be riveting to read, we lack the space to go into a full biography of Vollenhoven. For this the interested reader is referred to the brief article by Stellingwerff (2001), his biography of Vollenhoven (Stellingwerff, 1992) as well as the articles by Bril (1978) and Tol (1978 and 2013).

Although one's philosophy does not necessarily reflect one's personality it cannot be denied that there is some connection. How is Vollenhoven described by people who knew him well?

Klapwijk (1987), who knew Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven personally, did posterity a favour by writing short sketches about their personalities and philosophies (as well as about those of their first generation followers). We are mainly concerned with Vollenhoven here but a comparison with Dooyeweerd brings out the profile of the former all the more compellingly.

### **2.1 Different personalities**

To Klapwijk Dooyeweerd was the aristocrat. Vollenhoven was a giant among thinkers but simultaneously more than that:

Numerous people looked up to Vollenhoven as a giant, a giant among thinkers ... but Vollenhoven the giant also had something childlike. He was a professor, and yet simplicity itself, unaffected and uncomplicated. He stood very near his people, his students, his soulmates. He followed the people who could not follow him ... (Klapwijk, 1987:99.) [My translation from the Dutch.]

Tol (2013) writes:

Vollenhoven was a person who combined direct clarity with deep insight. He had an analytical mind that mastered many distinctions. He was piously modest, obliging and dedicated in the pursuit of his many tasks ... Vollenhoven was exacting but also exploratory and eager to pursue new avenues. Towards his students he was pastorally mild and sympathetic, which won him popularity and respect.

Many others who knew him (e.g. Taljaard, 1978:4) mention Vollenhoven's modesty.

From where this humility? Klapwijk (1987:601) explains further:

Not to philosophy but to the Word had this philosopher given his heart. The Word is lasting ... Therefore philosophy has no lease on wisdom. Philosophy is the love-of-wisdom, nothing less, and nothing more. No philosopher can satisfy this love from his own stores. ... The Word alone gives the answer. ... I begin to understand to some extent why Vollenhoven, the great scholar, remained a child at heart. [My translation from the Dutch]

As early as 14/12/1935, at the founding meeting of the Society for Calvinist Philosophy, Vollenhoven in the chair said that it was not philosophy that had brought together the people of the society, but something much more significant:

It is not philosophy, for that is not first in our lives. Much more it is the ties with God's Word, since we have learned through grace to desire to live only by Christ, and religion as a matter of the heart has become the essence of our whole existence; since we have learned that only in the law of the Lord there is peace and life to be found, not only for the individual, but naturally also for all relations in life in which we find ourselves. Therefore Philosophy is not number one. It never has been, in our circle. ... We want to take



seriously the most important matter, in Philosophy too (quoted by Van Dijk & Stellingwerff, 1961:94). [My translation from the Dutch.]

In this regard Vollenhoven embodied Augustine's and Calvin's famous words that the deepest secret of a *philosophia Christiana* is *humilitas*, the second *humilitas* and the third again *humilitas* (humility).

Vollenhoven, therefore, was not only a great Christian philosopher – perhaps the greatest of the great – but also a pious Christian.

## **2.2 Different philosophies**

The above to an extent also explains the difference between the two philosophies. Once more we give the word to Klapwijk (in Puchinger, 1980:220).

It was Dooyeweerd's intention to philosophise while departing from a Christian, Reformational inspiration, from the so-called Christian religious ground motif of creation, the fall and redemption. Vollenhoven, on the other hand, wants to philosophise departing from two sources of knowledge: nature (the empirical world) and the Scriptures (the Bible). ... Dooyeweerd stresses the religious inspiration, Vollenhoven the biblical information. [My translation from the Dutch.] (Cf. also Klapwijk, 1980:559.)

Tol writes more or less the same:

While Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd worked in close cooperation, each retained his independence. Dooyeweerd defended Reformational philosophy from the standpoint of a transcendental critique. This critique sought to expose the dependence of thought, particularly theoretical thought, on religion. Vollenhoven was keener on setting out the viable religious predispositions of any understanding of reality.

According to Klapwijk both ways of philosophising also give evidence of weak facets. Dooyeweerd – being afraid of the possible accusation of a camouflaged theology or the fusion of philosophy and theology – gradually laid less of a claim to biblical statements. Contrary to this Klapwijk is of the opinion that Vollenhoven may have mixed empirical-scientific statements with his reflection on the message of the Bible. (So the serious question of exactly how the Bible may be used in a Christian philosophy emerges here. Cf. Vollenhoven, s.a. (c).)

I would like to add that Dooyeweerd mostly drew broad systematic lines, while Vollenhoven was the “Kleinforscher” of the history of philosophy. Put by way of an image: Dooyeweerd looked at reality through a wide-angle lens, while Vollenhoven, especially in his later years, was looking at the history of Western philosophy through his (philosophical) microscope.

Tol (2013) would agree:

Vollenhoven, with his analytical disposition, was the organizer, systematic thinker and man of detailed historical overviews. Dooyeweerd, with his musical talent (he was a fine pianist), was a jurist by training, who sought the grand design.

### **2.3 More profound differences**

Vollenhoven was not, as some may still think, a student, follower or mere collaborator (cf. Chaplin 2011:330 footnote 16) of the (internationally better known) Dooyeweerd. Actually Dooyeweerd who had no formal training in philosophy (he did a PhD in Law) at least initially learned from Vollenhoven’s philosophy (cf. Tol, 2011:199-201). Afterwards, however, their philosophical development diverged.

These differences were not made public, however. Vollenhoven was fully conscious of their differences – even though he only articulated this later (approximately 1953) and even then regarded it as confidential (as for internal discussion). The text that spells out these differences is called the “Divergence report” and can be found in Vollenhoven (1992:107-117).

I mention just two of the most important differences. The first is that Vollenhoven distinguishes between God, law and cosmos, while Dooyeweerd merely distinguishes God and cosmos and under the latter differentiates between the law side and the subject side. The second is that Vollenhoven cannot accept Dooyeweerd’s idea of supratemporality of the human heart. These two fundamental differences had huge implications for the philosophy of both Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven. It would also lead to disagreement later on among the followers of these two ‘fathers’ (cf. section 6 below).

In the next paragraph, however, we take a look at the common philosophical climate in which both these philosophers worked. Then we will go into the philosophical influences that could have played a role specifically in Vollenhoven’s work.

### **3 The philosophical (epistemological) scene at the time of the inception of Reformational philosophy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century**

The time during which Vollenhoven, Dooyeweerd and Stoker lived and reflected was a transitional period between the last phase of late rationalism (called neo-idealism) and the rise of irrationalism (in particular "Lebensphilosophie", the first school within irrationalism).

In rationalist philosophy (emphasising an absolutised reason) epistemology was the main focus of interest. In the three earlier rationalist schools particular emphasis was laid on the *content* of scientific knowledge, while the late rationalists focused on the *methods* of acquiring knowledge and therefore on the knowing "subject". In the case of the threesome one clearly sees how they joined up with this methodological emphasis in their theories about knowledge. We find it in the work of Vollenhoven in both his systematic philosophy and his philosophical historiography. Dooyeweerd's transcendental methods are well-known. And Stoker even writes a separate work on methods (cf. Stoker, 1961).

We will now have a historical intermezzo to place the whole epistemological problem in a broader perspective (for Vollenhoven's struggle for clarity on this issue, cf. Vollenhoven, 2013a).

#### **3.1 Different arguments against neutral philosophy**

Irrationalism, which was on the rise in the time of the three fathers, today dominates the scene in the form of so-called postmodernism. That which Stoker, Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd already emphasised in the thirties of the previous century, namely that neutral philosophy is impossible, is today accepted universally (on Vollenhoven see, for example, Tol, 2012). Formulated differently: the rationalist idea that the "subject" (scholar) in his study of the "objects" (reality) can and must be unbiased and objective is rejected.

However, please note that the *reasons* why the Reformational fathers and postmodernists reject neutrality differ widely. The three Reformational philosophers were able to expose and oppose the doctrine of neutrality held by rationalism by departing from their Christian faith because they were convinced that the belief of one's heart (that is, whether one obeys God or not) also determines one's whole life – even theological thought included. On the other hand postmodernists – whether

they admit it or not – still adhere to the age-old tradition of faith in the autonomy of the human being and his intellect. Therefore the human being is regarded as his own law-giver – which is an internal contradiction since one cannot simultaneously be law-giver and subject, or the master and the servant.

### **3.2 A bird's-eye view of the historical development**

For the sake of simplicity I here take the following distinction as point of departure: (1) the scholar (traditionally called the "subject") directs (2) his exploring activity according to (3) specific methods at (4) something knowable (traditionally called the "object") and comes to (5) a result of his investigation (called "knowledge"). However, during the course of history the emphasis was alternately placed on either the scholar or the knowable. In the late rationalist climate in which the philosophies of the triumvirate originated all the attention was mostly fixed on the exploring reason and its methods of acquiring knowledge.

#### **3.2.1 Knowledge of the law**

The much more serious question behind this debate is exactly *what* it is that is (scientifically) known or can be regarded as the truth. This was the regularity or normativity underlying everything. Therefore we will not discuss the epistemological problem in full now but merely indicate briefly how – for the past 2500 years – there has been a quest for knowledge of the laws or norms that are to give direction to philosophy and practical activity.

#### **3.2.2 The beginning of subjectivism**

The ancient Greek philosopher, Plato, still regarded the laws as independent "ideas", separate from reality and attempted to know them (e.g. the idea of the truth for science). However, soon after him Greek philosophy lapsed into subjectivism. By this is meant that no longer were the laws or norms for philosophy credited with a *peculiar, separate, valid* existence. They were sought *in the things themselves*. The whole of Western philosophy after them reflects such a subjectivist way of thinking. The only difference is where (in which things) they attempt to find normative guidelines.

### 3.2.3 *Reason as the lodestar*

After classical Greek philosophy, already in Hellenistic philosophy, a second step followed: normativity was placed (in an aprioristic way) in man's intellect. Now epistemology became even more crucial. Centuries later rationalism (1600-1900) turned it into Reason (an absolutised intellect). By means of scientific knowledge Reason would show in a neutral, unbiased, objective way the right direction to a wonderful future. Divine, revelational power was ascribed to Reason.

### 3.2.4 *Irrationalist schools*

When by about 1900 this high ideal proved to be a mirage, an irrationalist reaction occurred. This did not mean that rationality was entirely rejected – then the irrationalists would have to stop philosophising and publishing heavy volumes – but only that reason was now downgraded (cf. Kok, 1998:171). (Amongst other things this is the reason why many philosophers today are of the opinion that postmodernism is not a radical breach with modernist rationalism but merely a different continuation.) So the unbiblical pursuit of human autonomy by means of the human intellect still lives on, and God's norms for life are still disclaimed. The only difference is that irrationalism sets practice above theory (without rejecting the latter). So now norms are sought in so-called practical life – once more in a subjectivist way. In the "Lebensphilosophie" it is the *power* of life; in pragmatism it is (practical) *usefulness* and in existentialism it is human, autonomous *freedom*.

However, history has already proved that these types of "norms" can have catastrophic consequences, like two world wars and the collapse of Western culture. Therefore, today they are written off as oppressive great narratives, but then other norms have to be looked for to take their place, for without guidelines no human being can think or live.

### 3.2.5 *Postmodernism*

Postmodernism, therefore, embodies a resolute desire to dethrone rationalism by celebrating other routes to knowledge, while at the same time not giving up on reason. Here I can only mention a few examples of how postmodern philosophy is once more looking for normative security (for a brief overview cf. Kok, 1998:164-172, and for more particulars cf. Middleton & Walsh, 1995 and Van der Walt, 2008b:128-166.)

Gadamer (cf. Derksen, 1983) seeks it in the meaning of language, assuming that behind it lurks objective universal norms. However, with his deconstructionist theory Derrida has destroyed the idea that a text can have only one fixed meaning. According to him it has as many meanings as there are readers. Foucault (cf. Bertels, 1972) follows this "language game" down to its final consequences of the disintegration of the self. The neopragmatist, Rorty, tries anew to find normative ground in a human being's own culture and society or "web of representations". Taylor (cf. Heyns, 2002) in many respects harks back to the Christian elements of his Catholic faith, most probably because he intuitively realises that it still affords a firm ground. It seems as if in his case the words of Augustine came true: The human heart (and therefore also the mind) never finds rest unless it finds certainty in God.

Summed up: neither reason, nor language, neither human society, nor neoscholasticism – nothing in this reality – can offer the secular philosophy of today any lasting normative direction. As far as the future is concerned, it can only be expected that new facets of creation will be absolutised into vague "values" (cf. Van der Walt, 2010e and 2010f).

### **3.3 Conclusion**

I agree with the words of Kok (1998:172) on both modernism (rationalism) and postmodernism (irrationalism):

Reason enthroned or dethroned will not save us. The choice is not between modernism and postmodernism, between rationalism and irrationalism. Just as Christians must radically reject the modernist move towards the self-reflective, self-determining, autonomous subject who stands outside any tradition or community and is subject to no one, so also they must reject the postmodernist celebration of construction, collage, and juxtaposed practice.

The issue today – in epistemology also – is still at bottom the place, nature and authority of the law or the normative guidelines for the whole of life. Since there no longer is clarity on this, Western culture (and philosophy) has lost its way. In my opinion this also includes life in the church which often no longer offers normative direction for everyday life to its members. The writer has attempted (cf. Van der Walt, 2008b) to trace the background of this postmodern crisis and a possible Christian answer to it (cf. further also Van der Walt, 2010g).

## **4 Possible influences on Vollenhoven's philosophy**

After this historical excursion the next focal point is the possible, more specific, influences on the philosophy of Vollenhoven. Linking up with what has just been said about the philosophical atmosphere of his times, we will first deal with possible external influences and subsequently probable internal influences (from the preceding Christian tradition in which Vollenhoven stood).

### **4.1 Possible influences from "outside"**

The studies of Kok (1992) and Tol (2010 and 2011) clearly show how Vollenhoven's Christian philosophy did not come into being in a quick and easy way. It took a hard mental struggle of years and a critical appraisal of the views of numerous philosophers. His own thetic-critical method implies that he did regard an own opinion as point of departure as essential, but this does not imply that, as a Christian philosopher, he was of the opinion that he had nothing to learn (in both the positive and the negative sense) from others. As early as in his doctoral thesis (cf. Vollenhoven, 1918) he derived his ideas of a fourfold intuition, for example, from the philosophy of Bergson. Tol (2010) also showed how Vollenhoven initially adhered to a semi-scholastic, semi-realistic philosophy.

Puchinger (in Van Dijk & Stellingwerff, 1961:89) mentions quite a few other philosophers whom Vollenhoven, after completing his doctoral thesis studied later as a minister. During the time of his ministry in his first parish in Oostkapelle he read, amongst others, the works of Poincaré, Rickert, Einstein, Driesch and the Neo-Kantians from Marburg. With the aid of a bursary he was able to attend the classes of F. Krüger in Leipzig in 1920. There he had the opportunity of getting acquainted with the method of Wundt. Even after accepting a call as minister to The Hague in 1920 he still continued his study of philosophy.

Vollenhoven himself admitted that Calvinist philosophy had "passed through" the work of the 'Marburgers' and Husserl (i.e. neo-idealism) and that "here and there vestiges (were) left in their philosophy" (Vollenhoven, 1992:112).

To pinpoint the "vestiges ... left here and there" within the limited scope of one chapter is impossible and would take much more research than the already-mentioned work done by Kok and Tol. Besides, the influence of the above-mentioned philosophers varied (the influence of, for example, Poincaré and Bergson

was much greater than that of Krüger in Leipzig of whom not a trace is to be found later in Vollenhoven's work).

#### **4.2 Possible influences from "within" his own circle**

The reader's attention is drawn to the importance of the word *possible* here as well as the fact that the tradition in which Vollenhoven, Dooyeweerd and Stoker stood goes back a long way in history up to the sixteenth-century Reformation. They liked to claim that they linked up with the thinking of Calvin.

Shortly after Calvin (already with his successor, Beza) Reformational philosophy unfortunately lapsed into scholastic orthodoxy. Only three hundred years later, during the eighteenth and nineteenth century did another revival occur, called the Réveil. This school contributed to a remarkable Christian renewal, first with Kuyper and later also in the philosophy of Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd.

##### *4.2.1 The Réveil*

This movement (cf. Kluit, 1960:627-629 and also 1970) was a spiritual revival during the late eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century in Western and Middle Europe. It was a reaction to deistic rationalism, theological dogmatism and a fossilized, run-down church life. Not barren, scholastic dogmatics, but genuine conversion was the first condition for a revival. Serious Bible study had to be the point of departure for a truly devout life. The Bible was studied in the family and in groups and opened the eyes of Christians to their neighbour and society in the wider sense. A brief but excellent overview of this movement and its most important representatives is provided by Van Dyke (2001 and 2013).

Three leaders of this movement in the Netherlands were Bilderdijk (1756-1831), Da Costa (1798-1860) and Groen van Prinsterer (1801-1876). Although the movement had spread over the whole of Western Europe, we limit ourselves here to the Netherlands (cf. Kluit, 1970:125 et seq.) and to the poet-philosopher, Bilderdijk, and the statesman, Groen van Prinsterer as two of its representatives (for particulars on Da Costa, cf. Overduin, 1957 and Van Dyke, 2013:20-11).

##### *Bilderdijk*

For Bilderdijk's background, life and work one can refer to Smilde (1956) and Van Dyke who provide some more literature on this thinker-poet. Bosch (1961:228-229)



shows how closely Bavinck (cf. 1906), but in particular Kuyper, linked up with the fundamental religious concepts of Bilderdijk. In Bilderdijk's work he sees germinating the comprehensive vision of a Calvinist worldview and even philosophy. However, different influences can be traced in Bilderdijk's philosophy. Apart from that of Augustine, Calvin, Pascal, also the view of nature held by German romanticism, Leibnitz, Schelling and others. Therefore, he was critical of rationalism's rigid way of thinking, but on the other hand absolutised (according to Bosch) the human being's consciousness of self.

Nevertheless Bosch (1961:233-234) mentions the following similarities to what would follow later: (1) Bilderdijk's emphasis on the human heart as the core of human personality, in which the call of God is heard; (2) his reverence for God's laws or ordinations; (3) the self-sufficiency of the Creator and the in-self-sufficiency of creation; (4) faith as an innate function in all people; (5) the fact that his philosophy accepts God as the Origin; (6) his rejection of the autonomy of a human being's intellect, will and emotion – only the Holy Spirit imparts true knowledge – and (7) rationalistic abstractions. (8) He rejected the separation of physical sciences and the humanities; and (9) he accepted Christ as the Source and Centre of true knowledge and wisdom – outside Him there is no true knowledge. (10) His recognition of Christ's reign on earth also formed the essence of Bilderdijk's view of history.

#### *Groen van Prinsterer*

Much more has been written about Groen van Prinsterer. For a brief overview of his background, biography and work, one can refer to Scholten (1958) and for more detail Schutte (1977) and Van Dyke (1989). He carried on Bilderdijk's work by reminding Christians that they have to recognise God's Word and thus fight the deepening cultural crisis in Europe resulting from increasing secularisation. A full year before Marx's well-known *Communist Manifest* Groen van Prinsterer in 1847 published his work *Ongeloof en revolutie (Disbelief and revolution)* (cf. Groen van Prinsterer, 1951, 1973 and 1975 and for an English translation cf. Van Dyke, 1989). In this he shows how the disbelief of the West gives rise to revolution, while the Christian faith pursues reformation. He started Christian schools and a Christian political party. His passion for being a full-time follower of Christ in every field of life he also imparted to Kuyper who was to continue his work on an even bigger scale (cf. Van Dyke, 2013:22-26).

### *Five steps*

Van Dyke (2001) and Bratt (2013:15-16, 27, 70-71, 73-75 and 195) therefore show how Kuyper did not start from the beginning but in his theology could join a tradition that was already a century old. The first two important foundations had already been laid, with emphasis in the first instance on radical *conversion*. In the second place *revival* or growing in the faith by a large section of the populace was needed, and in the third instance a peculiar Christian worldview was beginning to take shape on which Kuyper (1899) could later build (cf. Heslam, 1998). This made possible the fourth step in the time of Kuyper, namely *reformation*. Runner (1982, back cover) describes this last step as follows:

A reformation is a revival so radical and widespread that it affects the direction of the culture and the structuration of society ... the redeeming power of the gospel is brought to bear on the entire life of the people of God.

Stoker, Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd could build on these four foundations and reach a fifth rung of the ladder, namely the *scientific* level. Unlike Kuyper, they worked out the implications of a prescientific, Christian lifeview in their philosophy. It would also form the foundation for reform in the other sciences.

This brings us to the possible influence of individuals nearer to the time of Vollenhoven.

#### *4.2.2 Influence of Kuyper (1837-1920)?*

For the readers who don't know Kuyper I want to recommend the biographies of Van den Berg (1978) and Bratt (2013) and on his theology Heslam (1998), Bishop and Kok (2013) and of course, Kuyper himself (1899).

Vollenhoven definitely also read Kuyper (cf. Vollenhoven, 2013b) and learned from him, although he stated explicitly that in Kuyper's philosophy there were aspects that did not tally with the Word of God (cf. Van Dijk & Stellingwerff, 1961:95.) One example of this difference with Kuyper was that he strongly rejected the two-realm theory of nature and supernature (grace) as well as his theory of common grace which still influenced Kuyper's thinking (see Zuidema, 1972).

Although Vollenhoven finished his doctorate under Geesink in 1918 because of Woltjer's death (in 1917) his actual tutor was J. Woltjer. Woltjer was known in particular for his logos speculation (cf. Van der Laan, 2000 and Kok, 2007).

#### 4.2.3 *Influence of Woltjer (1849-1917)?*

Nijhoff (2011a and 2011b) first points out that Vollenhoven criticised Woltjer:

Vollenhoven ... criticised his logocentric correlation of ontological and epistemological notions. In this speculation he perceives a crossing of the boundary between Creator and creation. Vollenhoven himself proposed an epistemology in which both the knower and the known object are subject to norms that hold for the 'knowledge relation' between them (Nijhoff, 2011a).

Nijhoff, however, believes that Vollenhoven did not do full justice to Woltjer. Where Vollenhoven saw a huge difference between his own philosophy and that of his tutor, Nijhoff rather chooses for a greater degree of continuity (cf. (Nijhoff, 2011b)). The problem could possibly be solved by distinguishing two phases in Woltjer's philosophy (cf. Vollenhoven, 2005b:441-442). Vollenhoven was critical of his earlier conception but not so much of his second, in which Woltjer crossed over to a pneumatological theory of interaction (cf. 5.2.5 below).

#### 4.2.4 *Influence of Geesink (1854-1929)?*

Klapwijk (1980:545 en 456) further remarks that Geesink had already made the distinction between God-law-cosmos in which Vollenhoven would later follow him, so it was not such an original discovery by the latter as is often thought. Tol (2010), however, was to query this.

#### 4.2.5 *Influence of Janse (1890-1960)*

While there is still uncertainty about the influence of Woltjer and Geesink on Vollenhoven, there no longer is any need to wonder about the influence of A. Janse van Biggekerke. Brill already pointed this out in 1982 (cf. Vollenhoven, 1982:110-116). Van der Walt (2008a) writes about this (originally in 1989 already) and Tol (2010:224-262 and 2011:203-205) proved the influence of Janse in detail.

It is said that Geesink (Vollenhoven's supervisor) could not understand much of Vollenhoven's doctoral thesis (1918). But from an ordinary teacher from a remote little village (Biggekerke) Vollenhoven shortly after his promotion received probing

comment on his thesis no less than 25 pages long! Janse's more biblical view of being human instead of the age-old dichotomist one (of soul and body) or trichotomist one (of soul, body and spirit) was accepted by Vollenhoven with huge implications for his whole philosophy.

Vollenhoven explained that the soul, as is usually understood, is rather the psyche as a function of the human being, which operates as an aspect (or "law-sphere") of reality. He took the soul itself to be the central unity or the heart of the human being (Tol, 2013).

But Janse's influence on Vollenhoven should not be overrated either.

#### 4.2.6 *Vollenhoven's development 1918-1926*

The radical Christian philosophy of Vollenhoven was not clearly conceived in one night. It took about a decade to emerge in definite form. Vollenhoven's basic idea was to get rid of both scholasticism and (rationalistic) humanism, but the struggle to do so was intense.

One way to trace this development is to compare his earlier views in his doctoral dissertation of 1918 (discussed by Kok, 1992) with his inaugural address as professor at the Free University of 1926 (cf. Vollenhoven, 2013a, especially the introduction by Tol). The turning point between his older and revised views was 1922.

At the time of his promotion to doctor in philosophy he was still influenced by the long tradition of reformed or orthodox scholasticism which relied heavily on a thomistic tradition and was represented in the logos speculation or realism of Vollenhoven's mentor, Jan Woltjer.

Briefly explained, realism entails a specific view about laws or norms. The term "realism" is derived from the Latin *res* = things, and implies that the law or creation order is also regarded as a real thing.

The Greek philosopher, Plato, had already been a realist. His ideas were modified in Stoic *logos*-speculation and baptised in later synthetic Christian philosophy. God was then regarded as the supreme Law-giver or *Logos*, which (in his mind or council) contained all the ideas, thoughts or *logoi*. As Creator He implanted these essences into everything in creation, determining their identity and destiny.

According to the *a priori* theory (developed during Stoic philosophy) these ideas, essences or *logoi* were also implanted by the *Logos* in the human mind or intellectual soul, a separate substance of the human being. When the essences or ideas are abstracted from the concrete created things, they become intelligible because of the supposed harmony between the knower (or subject) and the knowable (or object), guaranteed by the divine origin of both in the *Logos* (God).

This earlier phase in Vollenhoven's philosophy he, however, indicated as critical or transcendental realism, since he already did not fully agree with the traditional scholastic realism. For instance, in his dissertation (1918) he already incorporated intuition (à la Bergson) in his epistemology.

Inter alia because of the influence of A. Janse's more biblically orientated anthropology, from 1922 Vollenhoven's epistemology began to change, clearly evident in his inaugural address of 1926. Vollenhoven now accepts a new kind of "realism", the reality of law-spheres or modalities. The world is now knowable, not because of divinely implanted *logoi* or essences, but is inherently knowable since it contains, amongst others, a logical aspect or function. Vollenhoven could therefore also drop the age-old distinction between subject and object and the scholastic theory of *adequatio rei et intellectus* (the agreement between the knower and the knowable). This new viewpoint was elaborated later on but basically it remained constant in the different editions (starting from 1930) of his *Isagôgè philosophiae*.

## **5 Vollenhoven as pioneer of a Reformational philosophy**

All the aforementioned thoughts and schools in the end merge into the one Vollenhovanian stream. However, it did not become an unclear mixture – Vollenhoven was opposed to any synthesis philosophy – but emerged as something clear, new and original.

Instead of expounding Vollenhoven's philosophy (cf. the various sources for this in the Bibliography at the end of this book) the focus is on the new contributions – ground-breaking work – he made regarding both systematic philosophy and the history of philosophy.

One preliminary remark is needed. Vollenhoven is often regarded as incomprehensible, but once one has grasped the basic lines of Vollenhoven's philosophy it is no longer difficult to follow. Its intricacy is more to be attributed to

Vollenhoven's compact style (he uses no unnecessary word) and his own terminology which he uses to describe accurately the complex history of Western philosophy.

For a brief (four pages) but excellent summary of Vollenhoven's philosophy, I would like to recommend to those who are not acquainted with his thinking Tol (2013) on Vollenhoven's life and work as well as Tol (2014) in which he describes Vollenhoven's Reformed standpoint, dynamic ontology, philosophical anthropology, theory of knowledge and history of philosophy. Readers will also find useful the *All of life redeemed* Website for a Christian worldview (<http://www.allofliferedeemed.co.uk/vollenhoven.htm>).

### **5.1 A new systematic philosophy**

Vollenhoven not only wished to practise philosophy *as a Christian*. He wanted to establish a *Christian philosophy*. His *Isagôgè philosophiae (Introduction to Philosophy)* of 1930 was the first document to summarize this new Reformational philosophy. "Christian philosophy" was to him not a contradiction in terms. Neither does "Christian" spell "sinless" but leads, acknowledging the Lordship of Christ and his Word, the way and also marks the human product (philosophy). Therefore also a Christian philosophy implies no more than *human* wisdom, which may never have the *last* word – at most a *just* word. It is God and his Word that – on everything – has the last word. The beginning of real wisdom is to honour Him and his revelation.

New perspectives in his systematic philosophy were, amongst other things, the following (for particulars cf. Vollenhoven, 2005c and 2010):

- Vollenhoven – long before irrationalism and contemporary postmodernism – rejected (negatively) the idea of a neutral practice of science and points (positively) in a clear Christian direction.
- He also queried the scholastic synthesis thinking which in his time was still having a hey-day in church and theology and therefore rejected the dualism of nature and grace, knowledge and faith and its numerous other implications.
- He also criticised the age-old dualist and monistic philosophies (the former of which eventually leads to deism and the latter often to pantheism) and replaced them with a radical ontological distinction – but at the same time close religious connection – between God, his creation and his laws for creation. He therefore rejected

Aristotelian and later on Scholastic concepts of being that encompassed God, cosmos and the human being. Vollenhoven's primary distinction was between God, Who *is*, the law for the cosmos that *holds*, and the created cosmos, which is *sustained* by God and *subjected* to his laws (Tol, 2013).

- In Vollenhoven's view of God's laws, a threefold meaning is distinguished: The law, which in a generic sense forms a boundary limitation of created reality, involves a threefold specification: (1) there is the *creation command* (the 'let there be" of Genesis 1) relevant to the origination and structure of creation whereby is implicit its modal diversity (of law spheres) and the internal development of each kingdom; (2) the *love command*, which concerns the direction of human life in its relation to God and fellow human beings; and (3) the *positive laws*, which bridge the love command and the concrete situation in need of regulation in the light of society's purposes, historical phase and geographical location (Tol, 2013).

- In his anthropology Vollenhoven broke (as mentioned already) with a tradition of more than two thousand years according to which a human being allegedly consists of a lower body and higher soul (a dichotomy), or body, soul and spirit (a trichotomy). He replaced it with an inner-outer distinction and relationship between the human heart and its various functions. This opened up new perspectives on numerous problems as, for instance, on what it means to bear God's image and God's commandment of love, lost in the course of history, was again granted its central position.

- Vollenhoven's theory of different facets, functions or modalities (developed together with Dooyeweerd and Stoker) has proved to be one of the most productive, practical parts of his systematic philosophy and anthropology.

- His new anthropological point of departure also resulted in a new philosophy of society with differentiated human responsibilities in different kinds of relationships as well as a sharper delineation of concepts like office, vocation, authority, power and responsibility.

- Further he advanced an alternative epistemology which did not lay one-sided emphasis on either the knower or the knowable, but which pointed out the distinction and relationship between knower, knowing activity, methods of knowing, knowable and the result of knowing.

- Furthermore Vollenhoven did not wish to philosophise in an *antithetic* way (meaning that he would summarily reject everything taught by others in disagreement with him) but in an *antisynthetic way* (i.e. against all efforts of blending biblical revelation with unbiblical thoughts). As stated already (cf. again 1.3 above) he applied his own thetic-critical method. In short this means that one cannot philosophise or study the centuries-long history of philosophy without a preliminary view of one's own, but simultaneously one should constantly measure this own (systematic) point of departure against a thorough study of what the history of Western philosophy has produced in order to either reject negatively the views one comes up against or to employ them in a positive way for further clarification of one's own view.

This brings us to a second major contribution by Vollenhoven:

## **5.2 An original philosophical historiography**

Apart from a Christian systematic philosophy, Vollenhoven also developed a distinct Christian approach to the historiography of philosophy, rejecting the idea of neutrality. Kok (1998:23) explains:

... there cannot be an "objective" – neutral – description of the history of philosophy (or of psychology or physics). Every historian carries his beliefs and assumptions into the task of investigating, interpreting and assessing the past. Even those who believe in a presumably neutral and unbiased evaluation of supposed "facts" cannot escape the very same situation. For they, too, begin with a belief in neutrality and objectivity and must make choices at every turn.

Taljaard (1978:3) regards as Vollenhoven's most original, important and pioneering contribution to be his historiography of philosophy. Since Vollenhoven's own writings on his historiographical method are available (cf. Vollenhoven, 2000, 2005a and 2005b), and those of Seerveld (1960, 1973 and 1993) and I myself have given an elementary introduction (cf. Van der Walt, 2010c, 2012, 2013a and 2013b) it needs no further explanation here. In any science method(s) play(s) an important part. Methods are not neutral but determine one's results (cf. Venter, 1981:501 et seq. for a thorough reflection on what is entailed and assumed by scientific methods).



In my opinion Vollenhoven succeeded with his problem-historical method in designing a method which is philosophical by nature and simultaneously takes into account God's Scriptural revelation. (Since he wanted a *philosophical* historiography, he was critical of methods which attempted to convey the history of philosophy for instance, *geographically* or *chronologically* only – cf. Vollenhoven, 2011:23-24.)

### 5.2.1 *Something on the method itself*

Vollenhoven's historiographic method is briefly summarised by Tol (2013):

In his method the personalities of the historical figures are not central, but rather their insights concerning ontological and anthropological problems. Vollenhoven distinguishes types and currents to demonstrate the interconnections of these problems: *types* focus on constant and (more or less) recurring patterns and traditions, *currents* on changing and time-bound renewal and succession. His overall aim was to make visible the lay-out of basic problems of thought through the whole history of philosophy, from Mousaios to Martin Heidegger.

According to his method one can therefore *inter alia* determine: (1) what the relationship between the ideas of a certain philosopher and the Word of God was/is. On this base Vollenhoven distinguished three *periods* (before, during and anti- or after the synthesis philosophy) in Western philosophy; (2) how this philosophy is connected with the environment formed by the spirit of the age (the specific philosophical *current* or *school*); and (3) what its relationship with the past is/was (a particular ontological-anthropological *type* of philosophy).

The philosophical currents (normative views) are constantly changing (as early as 1963 Vollenhoven discerned sixty different ones). The reason is that subjectivist ideas of law (which attempt to turn things or subjects into norms) can never really provide the required certainty of direction (cf. 3.2.2 et seq. above). These varying philosophical trends therefore were responsible for the dynamics in the history of Western philosophy.

However, the different types of philosophy (on how reality is structured) are limited and recur again and again from one generation to the next (are therefore more consistent), although a new school may also transform an old type to some extent.

According to these three main distinctions one could speak in the first place of (1) a religious relationship *of opposites* (of e.g. pagan Greek philosophy which did not know the Bible and a Christian philosophy which attempts to obey the Scriptures, or the contrast between the secular and Christian anti-synthetic thinking since Renaissance and Reformation. (2) Secondly, one can speak of a relationship *towards one another* (of the successive normative directions propagated by trends, currents or schools), and (3) thirdly, of a relationship *alongside* one another (of different types of philosophy on the structure of reality).

### 5.2.2 *The value of the method*

Let me mention only a few advantages of this method.

- A first value of this kind of historiography is that it not only affords a *global outline* of the development of Western intellectual history, but simultaneously gives a *deeper insight* into it.
- But much more can be learned from it. Like, for instance, from (1) that any philosophy has deep religious roots. Human beings can pledge their hearts to reason, will, emotion, power, utility, freedom – anything in creation. From this absolutised something one then expects (2) to point a normative direction to your thinking and acting. And in the light of (1) and (2) one also (3) looks at reality around one in a specific way. Augustine already said that people (1) serve idols; (2) begin to resemble them, (3) attempt to re-create the world around them according to their own image (which is a reflection of their gods).
- As mentioned already, Vollenhoven once again discovers in the light of the Scriptures the heart of human beings which during the course of history had been turned in for all kinds of surrogates (e.g. the intellect or reason, the will or emotions). For this reason his historiography – apart from being philosophically sound – also appeals to the heart of the philosopher who believes in the Scriptures. It inspires one to a profound critique of one's own and other people's views in the light of God's revelation.
- So, for instance, Christian philosophers have to make a clear distinction between *contemporary* and *acceptable*, instead of blending the two concepts and for instance simply accepting as a Christian philosopher current postmodernism. However, nowadays we see how Christians in all disciplines, even in Christian

theology, sometimes go with the flow of contemporary irrationalist-postmodernist trends without uttering any criticism.

- Another advantage of this historiographical method is that (with the necessary adaptations) it can be used much more widely than only in philosophy, in other disciplines too. Some examples are theology, especially dogmatic studies and its history, but also hermeneutics – it is easy for a person to read his/her own philosophy into a text (eisegesis) and to extract it from the text again (exegesis), now with biblical sanction; sciences having Western cultural history as their study field (e.g. general cultural history, history of aesthetics and arts, history of the natural sciences, economy, etc.); sciences substantially determined by different anthropological views (e.g. anthropology, psychological subjects, social sciences, et cetera). A recent example in psychology is the book by Van Belle (2014).

### 5.2.3 *What motivated Vollenhoven*

According to the people who knew Vollenhoven he was tremendously hard-working, a man who after retiring at seventy (in 1962) still spent sixteen hours per day in his study. After his retirement (until 1975) he still gave private lessons (called *privatissima*) for local and foreign students and lecturers. Merely to be able to typify the hundreds of philosophers noted in his *Schematische Kaarten* (*Schematic Charts*) he must have consulted several thousands of books. What could have driven him?

Bril and others are of the opinion that the driving force in Vollenhoven's life – that which he considered his vocation and duty – was that (both in his systematic philosophy and in his historiography) he wished to act in a reformatory way by exposing and fighting synthesis philosophy within Christianity:

He was convinced that synthesis with non-Christian themes was the cause of many problems, even in the history of the church. By on-going ... study of the history of philosophy a clarification could be reached (Bril, 1978:4, translated from the Dutch).

At this point we have returned to the beginning (cf. 1.3 above) of this chapter: Vollenhoven replaced synthetic thinking with a thetic-critical approach. Kok (1998:18) clearly understood what Vollenhoven had in mind:

[The] thetic and critical approaches are not isolated from one another, but related. Their relationship is as follows: On the one hand every critical

activity implies that one takes a thetical stance; and, in turn, a Christian thetical stance that leaves no room for listening to, thinking about and communicating with others will result in uncritical parochial dogmatism.

Further on, he again stresses the practical implications of maintaining this unity:

When the relationship between being thetical and being critical is forgotten, Christians lose a real sense of what being different means practically. When the rubber hits the road of business, politics, home life and entertainment, Christians often lack a sense of direction. A tempting alternative is to become a mindless eclectic, picking and choosing at random what appears to be best. But the undertow of (postmodern) eclecticism is not more gentle ... And yet, millions of "born again" Christians show little or no sign of having a perspective on the everyday issues different from their nonchristian companions. Unequipped to discern the spirits of their time, they simply support thoughts and fashions from here or there ...

#### 5.2.4 Shortcomings in Vollenhoven's work

To prevent the reader from thinking that the author wants to canonise Vollenhoven as *the* Reformational philosopher beyond any critique, note the following. First two remarks:

Vollenhoven himself would definitely have disapproved of such an attitude. One of his well-known expressions was: "Never swear by the words of a human being."

As we have shown he also described himself as a child of his times and the accepted philosophies of that age.

Now three possible shortcomings:

- Vollenhoven still approached matters from a Western perspective and in studying history limited himself to Western philosophy, but then deliberately.
- In his study of history there are still more gaps. For instance, in his anthropological reflection in my opinion he paid too little attention to human sexuality and the different views of the relationship between the two sexes (for instance sexual polarity, unity and complementarity between men and women (cf. the books by Allen, 1985 and 2002). However, his problem-historical method was not meant to give an exhaustive description of any philosophy/philosophies (Van der Walt, 2010c: 176–

177). Van der Walt (2014a and 2014b) has also indicated how Vollenhoven's distinctions between different Western ontologies and anthropologies can be an immense aid in understanding the various views on sexuality, gender and the resulting relationship between men and women.

- Unfortunately – understandably, since he already passed away in 1978 – his problem-historical method does not cover the important, more recent philosophers in Western philosophy.

### 5.2.5 *Vollenhoven's characterisation of his own more final philosophical viewpoint*

After 1945 Vollenhoven did not work any further on his own systematic philosophy (cf. Vollenhoven 2010). For the next approximately twenty years of his life he gave all his attention to the study of the history of the Western philosophies. The question could therefore be raised how Vollenhoven would later (after 1945) have typified his own philosophy according to his problem-historical method.

Unfortunately Vollenhoven never clearly articulated his own viewpoint according to his problem-historical method. It is only in the sense that he did say that, when comparing his own work with the different types of philosophy he had come across in Western history, he felt himself *nearer* to certain patterns of thinking because they did better justice to the state of affairs in reality. But this was said without being a *supporter* of such a viewpoint (cf. Van der Walt, 2010b).

For example, he felt himself more related to the cosmogono-cosmological philosophy (than to the purely cosmological) because it meant to put more emphasis on the genesis, development or dynamics of creation. Although he was critical of both a monistic and a dualistic ontology, he would prefer the former. And as far as his anthropology was concerned he would, out of all the numerous possibilities, prefer the theory of interaction. This does not mean interaction between a higher soul and a lower body, but he meant that he was of the opinion that there is an interaction between the inner and outer life of the human being.

Out of the four kinds of interaction theories he would prefer the pneumatological which regards the centre (inner part) of a human being as the *pneuma* (breath, spirit or life spirit). If he had to refer to a specific early philosopher's anthropology it would be Gregory of Nazianze (329-390)(for more particulars, cf. Van der Walt, 2010b:302-305). This does not mean, however, that Vollenhoven would agree with the rest of

the philosophy of Gregory. This type of view of being human also corresponds substantially with Vollenhoven's acceptance of Janse's anthropology, mentioned above under 4.2.5.

## **6 The reactions of subsequent generations**

Finally, before saying something more specific about the connection between Vollenhoven's philosophy and South Africa, we first take an overall view of what happened to Vollenhoven's ground-breaking work. Since this chapter on Vollenhoven is part of a trilogy (on the three fathers of Reformational philosophy) we will at the same time also be mentioning briefly the reactions to the philosophies of Dooyeweerd and Stoker.

### **6.1 An outline of the different phases**

Klapwijk (1980) divides the then hundred-years long history of philosophy at the Free University (1880-1980) into the following three phases: (1) *Philosophical reconnaissance* (e.g. Kuyper, Woltjer, Geesink, Bavinck en Pos); (2) *philosophical systematising* (in the work of Dooyeweerd, Vollenhoven and Zuidema); (3) *philosophical expansion* (after Vollenhoven's retirement in 1963 by Van Riessen, Begeman, Van der Hoeven, Troost, Klapwijk, Bos, Smit, Griffioen and others).

Since Klapwijk's outline is limited to the Netherlands, he did not include the name of Stoker in phase 2. In this monograph which takes a broader view, Stoker is therefore added. This contribution on Vollenhoven and the next two on Dooyeweerd and Stoker are restricted to phase (2), although influences from phase (1) are also taken into account. In phase (3) one expects the new generation to reflect critically on the work of their predecessors during phase (2) and possibly become followers of one of the triumvirate (additional information on this long history is provided by Woldring, 2013).

### **6.2 Further reflection and school forming**

Van Riessen (cf. Klapwijk, 1980:571) for instance regards Dooyeweerd's transcendental critique as unconvincing and not capable of communication with secular philosophies. In addition he tries to reconcile the philosophy of Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven.

In the case of other successors of the three fathers, a clear choice is made for the philosophy of one of them within the “family” of Reformational philosophers. (It should also be borne in mind that since Klapwijk’s work of 1980 yet a fourth generation – great-grandchildren – have come on the scene.) As in the case of other philosophies the above-mentioned three philosophers thus had their followers who continued the specific “(grand)father’s” philosophy but also altered it. (The same phenomenon is found in theology, e.g. Neo-Kuyperians or Neo-Thomists, as well as in other disciplines.)

In connection with this Wolterstorff (1987:25) even writes

... as so often happens in families there was considerable quarrelling within the family. We now, looking back, are struck by the similarities... At that time, however, these figures and their associates and followers were vividly aware of the differences and were loath to admit the similarities.

However, the common characteristic of all three Reformational philosophers which should be remembered is formulated by Brill (1978:2) as follows:

... that they attempted to take seriously the (implications of the) Christian faith, also for science and philosophy. That they resisted a disunity in life: a Christian faith exclusively for an intimate part of personal life and a so-called neutrality for science and philosophy. [My translation from the Dutch].

### **6.3 Examples of followers**

Vanderstelt (1996:85) provides a list of names of Reformational thinkers in different subject fields in the Netherlands, Canada, the USA and other parts of the world. If preferred, the list of names of Reformational philosophers named by Van der Walt (2010a) could easily be divided into Dooyeweerdians, Vollenhovians and Stokerians. Dooyeweerdian philosophers in South Africa were/are for instance E.A. Venter, P. de B. Kok, D.F.M. Strauss (in Bloemfontein), M.E. Botha (later in Canada), J.L. van der Walt, M.F. Heyns and R. Coletto (in Potchefstroom). Overseas there are many more names that could be mentioned and sometimes a distinction is even made between strict (or right-wing) and moderate (left-wing) Dooyeweerdians!

The following could qualify as Vollenhovian philosophers or thus inclined in South Africa: J.A.L. Taljaard, N.T. van der Merwe, J.J. Venter en B.J. van der Walt. In the USA and Canada the same would apply to H.E. Runner, C. Seerveld, J.C. van der

Stelt, G.J. Spykman, J.H. Kok and R. Sweetman. K.A. Bril and A. Tol are important Vollenhoven experts in the Netherlands.

As far as I know, Stokerians are not found outside South Africa but in our country there are a number who leaned towards his thinking or still do so, as for instance S.P van der Walt, J.A. Heyns and B. Duvenage (already deceased), P.G.W. du Plessis, A.G.W. Raath and H.G. Stoker (Jr.).

#### **6.4 Examples of "in-fights" in the tradition**

Being exhaustive in this case is even more impossible than in the case of the three *patres*. Therefore, what follows should merely be seen as two examples of how some followers of the original tradition reacted – in some cases almost like epigones. Thus only the following two examples will be dealt with: a defender of Dooyeweerd in opposition to Stoker as well as Hart and Stoker's own defence; two campaigners for Vollenhoven in opposition to Dooyeweerd and Stoker (the exploration by Fernhout, 1978/1979 is not taken into account).

##### *6.4.1 A defender of Dooyeweerd's philosophy in opposition to Stoker's*

The example *par excellence* of this was the South African, Malan (1968) whose dissertation at the Free University blamed Stoker for much – often without convincing arguments – approaching the matter from the angle of his Dooyeweerdianism. (This is not to say that everything he wrote on Stoker was devoid of truth.) Hart (1971) came to Stoker's defence. Stoker himself also (cf. Stoker, 1970:411-433) reacted in a comprehensive answer to Malan's evaluation of his (Stoker's) philosophy.

##### *6.4.2 Defenders of Vollenhoven's thinking against Stoker and Dooyeweerd's philosophy*

Steen (cf. his work published in 1983 only) in his doctoral thesis already in 1970 offered a critical analysis of Dooyeweerd's ontology in the light of that of Vollenhoven (cf. in particular Steen, 1983:42-106).

Taljaard (1976) gives valuable, probing commentary on the philosophy of both Dooyeweerd and Stoker, mainly departing from a Vollenhovan historiographical perspective (cf. Taljaard, 1976:300,301 where all page references to Dooyeweerd and Stoker are given).



On p. 86-87 and p. 108-111 for example he criticises Stoker's idea of an idiostance, his phenomenology and idea of revelation. According to Taljaard, Stoker was part of a philosophical tradition (the subsistence theory) running from Aristotle, through Thomas Aquinas (second phase), Suarez and Bavinck. According to Taljaard, Dooyeweerd on the other hand philosophised in a monarchic philosophical tradition which links up – and this is noteworthy – even with Thomas Aquinas (in his first phase) and finally with Aristotle.

### **6.5 Representatives of the Vollenhovian line**

This part of the investigation is concluded by drawing attention to the Vollenhovian line.

Three Reformational philosophers knew Vollenhoven well (e.g. worked as his assistants and/or attended his *privatissima* after his retirement from 1963 to 1975). They are: K.A. Bril, A. Tol and J.H. Kok.

Bril did his PhD (cf. Bril, 1986) on Vollenhoven's historiographical method but also acted as editor or associate editor for the (re)publication and translation into English of several of Vollenhoven's writings (cf. Vollenhoven, 1982, 1992, 2000, 2005a, 2005b and 2011).

Tol wrote quite a number of articles on Vollenhoven (cf. e.g. Tol, 2007), eventually received his PhD on the development of his philosophy (Tol, 2010) and also acted as associate editor and/or translator on Vollenhoven's writings (cf. e.g. Vollenhoven, 1992, 2005c, 2010, 2013a).

Kok (1992) also wrote a doctoral thesis on Vollenhoven's earlier philosophy, edited a history of Western philosophy according to Vollenhoven's problem–historical method (Kok, 1998) and acted as associate editor of an English (cf. Vollenhoven, 2005c) and a bilingual edition (Dutch and English) of Vollenhoven's main systematic work (cf. Vollenhoven, 2005d).

I conclude this exploration by bringing all the foregoing closer to home.

## **7 The contacts between Vollenhoven's philosophy and South Africa, in particular Potchefstroom**

Vollenhoven research, and the republication and translation of his works in English, are still being continued. Tony Tol (cf. Vollenhoven 2013a) recently completed a

translation of Vollenhoven's inaugural address, John Kok is preparing a Vollenhoven Reader and Steve Bishop's website ([www.allofliferedeemed.co.uk](http://www.allofliferedeemed.co.uk)) and the Vollenhoven Foundation also disseminates information about Vollenhoven.

Early in the twenties (1922) of the previous century Stoker consulted Vollenhoven about furthering his doctoral studies in Europe. Together they later worked on the development of a Reformational philosophy – however much their results may have differed. (A considerable volume of correspondence between them is still lying unexplored in archives at the Free University of Amsterdam.)

J.A.L. Taljaard (1915-1994) of the then still Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education (PU for CHE or PUK) did his PhD under Vollenhoven on Brentano as a philosopher (cf. Taljaard, 1955).

N.T. van der Merwe (1932-2004), also from the Department of Philosophy at the PU for CHE, later became an assistant of Vollenhoven and saw to it (in 1962) that the first edition of Vollenhoven's *Schematische Kaarten* (*Schematic Charts*) saw the light (for a recent republication, see Vollenhoven, 2000).

At the invitation of the PU for CHE Vollenhoven gave about 25 guest lectures in 1963 at Potchefstroom and a few in Bloemfontein.

B.J. van der Walt followed Vollenhoven's private classes from 1968-1970 in Amsterdam, as did P. van Veuren (later from RAU) during 1969 and J.J. Venter during 1973-1974. (Venter also translated some of Vollenhoven's short articles in Afrikaans and English, cf. Vollenhoven s.a. (a), s.a. (b) and s.a. (c).)

Bril (1986), an expert on Vollenhoven's problem-historical method, in 1987 gave a number of lectures on it at Potchefstroom and Bloemfontein.

Various works on and by Vollenhoven, published since 1992, also found their way to Potchefstroom (cf. the Bibliography).

On 15 August 2011, at a special Vollenhoven Colloquium at the Free University of Amsterdam, the guest lectures given by Vollenhoven in 1963 at the PUK (retyped from recordings and thereafter scanned and edited) were at last published by Brill (one of the editors) and presented to various persons (cf. Vollenhoven, 2011). One of the copies was given to Prof. M.F. Heyns (Director of the School of Philosophy at the Potchefstroom Campus of the new North-West University) with the request that it

be translated into English and published (most probably in South Africa, the USA and the Netherlands).

On 24/08/2013 Prof. Sander Griffioen, in his lecture at the School of Philosophy, Potchefstroom Campus, again reminded us about the valuable contributions of Vollenhoven.

In this way the recurrent contact between Vollenhoven and South African philosophers during approximately 90 years – a long tradition – was finished for the present. May the precious heritage of Vollenhoven – a great scholar but simultaneously a very humble Christian – as well as the Reformational tradition in general for many years to come also bear fruit on our African soil. May the ideal of a living tradition, as set at the beginning of this exploration, be a reality.

## Chapter 3

### THE CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHER, H.G. STOKER (1899-1993)

#### A historical legend and icon, or a contemporary mentor?<sup>1</sup>

*A tradition, including a philosophical tradition, can only be kept alive when its story is told to younger generations. This is the motivation behind this introductory overview of the unique philosophy of the South African thinker, Henk Stoker. In comparison with the two other founders of a Reformational philosophy, Dirk H. Th. Vollenhoven (1892–1978) (discussed in the previous chapter), and especially Herman Dooyeweerd (1894–1977), to be discussed in the next chapter, Stoker's ideas are less well-known among Reformed people in South Africa and abroad. The introductory part of the chapter, therefore, investigates the possible reasons for the relatively small impact of his thinking. The next section asks attention for the South African context in which his Christian philosophy was born. This is followed by a detailed discussion of the possible internal and external theological and philosophical influences of especially Herman Bavinck (1865–1921) and Max Scheler (1874–1928) on the emergence of Stoker's philosophy of the idea of creation. Subsequently some of Stoker's original contributions to a Christian philosophy are highlighted. Next the debate between Stoker and Dooyeweerd and some of Dooyeweerd's followers is reviewed. In the light of these differences among themselves we can finally correct certain misguided beliefs such as, for instance, the one that a Reformational philosophy is a static and closed system.*

#### **1 Introduction: connection, aim, approach and set-up**

By way of introduction the following should be kept in mind:

##### **1.1 Connection**

This contribution forms the second part of a trilogy on the founders of a Christian philosophy during the twentieth century: D.H.Th. Vollenhoven (1892-1978) and H. Dooyeweerd (1894-1977) in the Netherlands and H. G. Stoker (1899-1993) in South Africa. In the previous chapter Dirk Vollenhoven's philosophy was explained to readers. In this contribution the focus first shifts to the philosophy of the South

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<sup>1</sup> May this chapter encourage Mr. M.F. (Tinus) van der Walt to continue his research on Stoker's philosophy.

African, Henk Stoker. The next chapter will provide an overview of the contribution made by Herman Dooyeweerd.

All three these philosophers were convinced that a Christian approach to scholarship in general and philosophy in particular was possible and necessary. Furthermore they also agreed that a Christian philosophy likewise was important for a Christian orientation in other sciences. For instance, such a philosophy should not only be alert to the results of other sciences – including theology – but all these disciplines can learn significant things from philosophy - which lies at their very foundations.

## 1.2 Aim

By way of introduction to the first chapter (on Vollenhoven) the question was raised what a tradition, including a philosophical tradition, entails and how it can be kept alive. This also forms the background to the present contribution on Stoker (compare the sub-title). In the previous contribution it was shown that every tradition, in order to stay alive, among other things, needs a story that should be handed down to later generations. Such a story usually also contains the history of eminent individuals (e.g. political heroes or influential philosophers) who have to inspire the present generation within a tradition.

However, in the first chapter we did not warn that such leading individuals from the past can be seen in incorrect ways. Legends can romanticise and glorify a legendary popular hero to such an extent that it no longer corresponds with historical reality. Besides, the idealised picture often is too tied up with the past so that he/she no longer has much meaning for the present. In a different way an icon, too, has little value for today because he/she is elevated to an unattainable height above us ordinary people.

Therefore, in this contribution I want to regard Stoker neither as a historical *legend* of the erstwhile Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education (cf. Van der Schyff, 2005), nor as the *icon* of a Christian philosophy on South African soil. Stoker himself would have objected if his descendants had declared him to be infallible. I would rather typify him as a *mentor*, that is, as an advisor, guide or leader on the way of Reformational philosophy (cf. Van der Merwe, 1994).

### 1.3 Approach

Of course one could raise the question as to how Stoker could still today be a mentor (he passed away twenty years ago). Most of his first students have also passed away or are already old. My answer to this question I get from the sermon by Dr. C.J. Malan delivered at Stoker's funeral (on 19/05/1993) in Potchefstroom. His text was 2 Kings 13 verses 20 and 21. Briefly it ran as follows.

Elisha, a great prophet and leader of the nation died like all human beings. The people were grieved by their master's demise: Who would lead them further? Because it seemed to them that all was lost, the Lord caused a miracle to happen. On a certain day, when some people arrived at the cemetery to lay to rest a loved one, they saw a Moabite band approaching. There was no time for a proper burial. Panic-stricken those who attended the funeral opened up the nearest sepulchre and threw the body into the grave – incidentally Elisha's. But when the deceased fell into the prophet's grave, he was revived.

Why such a miracle? During his lifetime Elisha also raised deceased people through the power of the Lord. Now, after his death, the Israelites should not think that he no longer means anything. God can let the work of a human being continue even when such a person has already died. What is more: God's work in this world even continues in spite of human beings.

Malan applied this passage from the Scriptures to the life and work of Stoker. He was an example of faith that remained alive not only in the hearts of his loved ones and numerous students but also in his many writings.

This chapter links up with this thought. By means of his written legacy Stoker can today still be a mentor, but because even someone's writings can sink into oblivion, a younger generation has to be made aware of them anew. Stoker today no longer is as well-known a name as it was forty years ago.

Thus this contribution is not aimed at discussing in depth Stoker's philosophy as a whole or some sub-division thereof. It gives a general outline, and with the aid of ample bibliographical references attempts to invite contemporary readers to read Stoker himself once again, to study his work and become inspired by it.

Regarding the approach, we have to say that the author had a choice of either sacrificing comprehensibility, giving preference to detail and accuracy or the other

way round, presenting a complicated philosophical dish to his readers – who probably are not philosophers or have no knowledge of Stoker's philosophy. I made a choice, because of the intricacy of the material discussed, rather to go for comprehensibility and thus for a simplified version – which again might in places be just too basic. (Popularised scholarliness in any case is a better option than unscholarly popularity.) For clarity on the arrangement we state the six main points according to which this overview will be presented.

#### **1.4 Setup**

(1) By way of introduction we will raise the question why Stoker's philosophy (compared to that of, for instance, Dooyeweerd) is relatively unfamiliar and less influential.

(2) This is followed by some particulars of his life story.

(3) The possible influences on the origin of his philosophy are more widely dealt with.

(4) We then point out some of his special contributions.

(5) Subsequently we will show that Stoker and Dooyeweerd in the time when Christian philosophy came into being did not merely repeat the same opinions but sometimes differed fundamentally among themselves and also criticised each other.

(6) This will enable us to close this investigation by

showing how unfounded some misrepresentations about a Christian philosophy are.

## **2 Reasons for the limited influence of Stoker's philosophy**

We have already mentioned above that it is necessary that people be once more familiarised with Stoker because his name and work can no longer lay claim to being widely known – the way they were forty or fifty years ago. Apart from the lapse of time there are, however, more factors which could have played a part. I would like to remark in advance that several of the reasons cited by Zylstra (1975:29-32) for the limited influence of a Christian approach to philosophy in general are also applicable to Stoker. These will not be repeated here.

### **2.1 International disregard**

If one keeps in mind how important the recounting of the story of a tradition is for the transmission thereof, an important reason for the relative obscurity of Stoker also becomes clear. While there already are biographies on the life and work of

Dooyeweerd (cf. Verburgh, 1989) and Vollenhoven (cf. Stellingwerff, 1992), we do not have one on Stoker except for the short essay by Raath (1994a) and something in Heyns (1967). (Could writing a Stoker biography be an important task for his son, Prof. P.H. and/or grandson, Prof. H.G. Stoker jr.?)

Even when searching for due recognition of the role Stoker had in the broader movement of a Christian philosophy, one is disappointed. The version by Van Dijk and Stellingwerff (1961) is very short and it moreover only covers the period 1935-1960 in the Netherlands. The overview by Klapwijk (1980) is valuable, but restricted to philosophy at the Free University between 1880 and 1980. The attempt made by Stellingwerff (2006) is unsatisfactory for various reasons. Only Stoker's name is mentioned in Woldring (2013), who also confined his study to the practice of philosophy at the Free University.

The disappointing aspect, however, is that the South African part of the history of Christian philosophy is not dealt with in any one of these three sources. It seems as if Stoker's philosophy was merely regarded as an "export product" from the Netherlands and not significant enough to receive at least some attention.

## **2.2 Little attention in South Africa**

While approximately fifteen doctoral theses have been published on Dooyeweerd's philosophy, we only have the less successful effort by Malan (1968) on Stoker. After a Festschrift (cf. Bingle & Du Plessis, 1971) in which international authors also took part, very little else was published on Stoker apart from a celebratory edition of the journal *Koers* (Vol. 59, Nos. 3 & 4, 1994) after his death and (as far as I know) only two publications on his philosophy: one of these by his grandson (cf. Stoker, 1983) and the other one by Van der Walt (2009). This is in spite of the annual Stoker Lectures organized by the School of Philosophy at the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University. These lectures honour Stoker by using his *name* for the series, but as far as I can remember, the speakers have never discussed his *philosophy*.

Obscurity also leads to a more limited influence. Van der Walt (2009:82-87) proposes some additional reasons for Stoker's restricted influence both locally and abroad.



### **2.3 Four possible reasons in the work of Stoker**

Considering the quality of his work Stoker had less influence than could be expected. Four reasons may be attributed to Stoker himself.

- Van der Walt first mentions that the fact that Stoker wrote mainly in his mother tongue (Afrikaans) could be a reason, although not the only or most important reason. I mention only some of his most important writings which are available in English: Stoker (1967a, 1967b, 1967c, 1971, 1976 2007 and 2008 and 2010). Today Stoker's publications are also available electronically. (Apart from the larger publications already mentioned in English, the Stoker CD, 2007 and 2008 contain quite a few articles in English in eight different local and overseas journals.)
- Stoker's long-winded style – his students called him “the philosopher-between-brackets” – could also have been a factor. However, most philosophers write in language that is not easily understood!
- As a third possible reason Van der Walt (2009:84) mentions Stoker's view of theology, namely that it limits access to the Scriptures for other scholars. Theologians had no objection that theology to Stoker was an entrance gate to the Scriptures, but Christian philosophers did not like it and regarded it as a scholastic remnant in Stoker's work. (More on this later on.)
- A last possible reason for the slight impact Stoker's philosophy had (cf. Van der Walt, 2009:86) was the fact that he had tried to condone apartheid (cf. Stoker, 1967a and Van Wyk, 2001) at a time when both in South Africa and abroad it became ever clearer that it could not be justified in the light of the Scriptures.

### **2.4 Circumstances not connected to Stoker's philosophy**

However, one should be cautious in ascribing the fact that Stoker's philosophy is currently less known exclusively to weaknesses or shortcomings in his own philosophy. It should, for instance, be kept in mind that the academic world in South Africa was also affected by our political isolation because of the apartheid policy over many years. This could have affected international interest in Stoker.

Furthermore, later institutional developments at the University at which Stoker worked for 40 years should be taken into consideration. Unfortunately it has to be stated that the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education (nicknamed

PUK) management (especially since approximately 1990) did not nurture the subject and the Department of Philosophy. (Its compulsory Christian worldview course for undergraduate students was also dropped.) Furthermore the PUK – even before its merger and change of name to the North–West University – rapidly became secularised (cf. Van Eeden, 2006 and Van der Walt, 2014), so that practising a Christian philosophy and science (which was Stoker's ideal) became less and less important. Besides, philosophy was regarded as not being a "bread-and-butter" subject.

The following factors outside Stoker also have to be remembered: Not all people have an interest in philosophy. Specialisation causes people to read less and less outside their own field of study. Pressure within professions also means more limited time for a wider interest than that demanded by one's daily work.

Finally one should bear in mind that a *limited* influence does not mean *no* influence, and neither does it mean that the influence was not profound (cf. Raath, 1994b on Stoker's academic legacy and Heyns, 1994 for the importance of Stoker's philosophy, specifically to theology).

### **3. Glimpses of Stoker's life history**

About Stoker as a person one can today infer much from the various *in memoriam* publications after his death (cf. e.g. Duvenage, 1993; Raath, 1994a; Van der Merwe, 1993 and Van der Walt, 1993). However, here the focus is not on the *person* but rather on the *environment* within which he had to live and work.

#### **3.1 Unsettled times**

From the brief *curriculum vitae* (of only 2½ pages) in the Stoker Festschrift (cf. Bingle & Du Plessis, 1971:7-9) one could easily make the erroneous inference that Stoker had a peaceful and comfortable life – hence his impressive list of publications plus numerous post-graduate students (cf. p. 303-322 as well as Stoker, 1970:435-442). It may be concluded that it was not such an unsettled, uncertain time as the one in which the present younger generation has to survive. The birth of Christian philosophy could thus not have been difficult!

I want to emphasise the opposite: Stoker lived in turbulent, stressful times with great divisions even among the people of his own nation. Yet he was not put off but lived for an ideal. In this way he could, in spite of a huge degree of isolation at the

southernmost tip of Africa, and the slow pace of communication compared to today's e-mails and so forth become a co-founder of a Christian philosophy.

Here we give only a few glimpses from the political and social circumstances and clashing ideologies within which he was born, grew up and worked and had to hack open a path for Reformational philosophy.

### **3.2 *The Anglo-Boer War and WWI***

Stoker was still a baby during the devastating English imperialist war against South Africa (1899-1902), but in his youth he definitely experienced the consequences of this war. The First World War, too, did not leave South Africa untouched. But Stoker was determined to continue his studies abroad.

### **3.3 *How Stoker obtained his doctorate in Germany***

The Free University in Amsterdam, the Netherlands at that time was the obvious place where Calvinists from South Africa usually went for further study (cf. the long list of South Africans who studied at the FU from 1881 to 2004, supplied by Schutte, 2005:668-739). But how it came about that Stoker in the end did his doctorate not at the FU but under Max Scheler (1874-1928) in Cologne (cf. Stoker, 1925), makes an interesting story (cf. Bril in Vollenhoven, 1982:101).

During his exile in Europe President Paul Kruger came into contact with the Rev. S.O. Los who later accompanied him on his exile to Switzerland. In recognition for this, after Kruger's death, Los was given a chair in South Africa (Potchefstroom). However, he later returned to his fatherland. Stoker initially wanted to do his doctorate under H. Bavinck (1854-1921) – Kuyper (1837-1920) was already deceased – but in the meantime Bavinck too passed away. So when Stoker (23 years old) arrived in The Hague in 1922 he first sought advice from Los on further possibilities for study. Los referred him to Dr. Vollenhoven who at the time was still a minister in The Hague. After receiving his own doctorate (1918), Vollenhoven had already followed a study under F. Krüger in Leipzig (Germany) on the advice of Buytendijk. On the advice of Buytendijk Stoker then decided to study for his doctorate under Scheler in Germany. Just like Scheler, Buytendijk is known as a phenomenologist. (Cf. for instance Buytendijk, 1951. For interesting correspondence between Stoker and Buytendijk, cf. Beijik & Van der Merwe (1994).)

At that stage Scheler was one of the prominent philosophers in Germany and even in Europe. After his premature death (in 1928) his praises were sung by amongst others Heidegger and Ortega Y. Gasset as "...the strongest philosophical force in Germany, nay, in contemporary Europe and in contemporary philosophy as such". In 1954 also a previous Pope (John Paul II), at that time still Cardinal Karol Wojtyla, wrote his doctoral thesis on Scheler's ethics. (The Wikipedia website provides more information on Scheler and his works.)

In Stoker (1941a:4, 5) Stoker relates something of the dire circumstances under which the Germans lived after WWI – which rendered them an easy prey to National Socialism. This in turn led to WWII. By that time Stoker had been back in South Africa for a long time, was married, the father of three children and working at the PUK. But the second World War did not leave South Africa unaffected either.

### **3.4 *Imprisoned commandant of the Ossewa Brandwag***

Space does not allow us to go into the turbulent political situation in South Africa and also at the PUK during the thirties, WWII and the "sturm und drang" of the forties (cf. Van der Schyff, 2003:476-527). It will suffice to mention that many Afrikaners were dead set against British imperialism in South Africa and therefore also against England's call to its colonial subjects to fight against Germany. Quite a number of these Boers demonstrated their protest via an organisation known as the Ossewa Brandwag (OB). Stoker was a commandant in this movement. (Particulars on the OB are kept in an OB exhibition in the Ferdinand Postma Library of the Potchefstroom Campus of the North–West University as well as the OB collection in the archives of the same campus.)

On 21/12/1942 Stoker was imprisoned in the Koffiefontein internment camp for a year behind bars and barbed wire (as prisoner No. K2231/42). Most probably this happened as a consequence of his negative view of the Smuts government's participation in WWII. In his *Stryd om die ordes (Struggle between ideologies)* (Stoker, 1941a, e.g. p. 272, 273) Stoker, showed too much understanding for the rise of German National Socialism according to the security police of the Smuts regime. (For detail on the reasons for Stoker's arrest and his political viewpoint, cf. Van der Schyff, 2003:504-505, 520-522). The book *Agter tralies en doringdraad (Behind bars and barbed wire)* (BOGP, 1953:1-82) also offers full particulars of the circumstances

in South Africa during WWII. Stoker himself (1953:306-325) made a contribution to this volume in which he – as the typical philosopher – analyses the sociological, psychological and ethical aspects of the Koffiefontein Boer camp.

It is remarkable how the interned prisoners spent the time of their imprisonment. Stoker became the "principal" of the "Camp University" and taught the rest of the inmates. One of his students was Jan A.L Taljaard who, as a consequence of his OB activities had already become a political prisoner on 06/02/1942 and who would remain there even longer than Stoker (until Nov. 1944). Later (in 1945) Taljaard would complete his B.A. at the PUK and receive an M.A. under Stoker's supervision (in 1947), and went on to become Stoker's colleague in philosophy (cf. Kruger, 1975:230).

Looking back De Klerk (1991:323) pronounced the following judgment on the OB:

The active participation of several Potchefstroom academics in the OB and the formation of its ideology did not benefit the world-viewish direction represented by this university ... Although Calvinist philosophers helped to oppose extreme Fascist views and played a tempering role, they were too much carried away by the contemporary spirit of the times and they adapted Calvinist philosophy considerably to suit it rather than exerting a strong critical influence. [Transl. from the Afrikaans by BJvdW.]

We do not have the space to go into the role of another organisation, the Afrikaner Broederbond (currently merely Afrikanerbond) which had been founded in 1918 already. Although Smuts and the AB were also arch-enemies, he did not act against their members the way he did against the members of the OB (cf. Smith, 2009:19 et seq. for a brief history of the AB).

### **3.5 A defender of separate development**

In unsettled times Stoker therefore repeatedly had to make a choice between different ideologies and world views, justify his viewpoint like a philosopher and in this way also give guidance to his compatriots. However, these ideologies were not innocent theoretical matters: British imperialism had led to the Anglo-Boer War, German National Socialism to a clash with Anglo-American liberalism in WWII; the republican aspirations for liberty of the Afrikaner (in opposition to English colonialism) turned Stoker himself into a political activist and prisoner.

It is one of the ironies of history that later Stoker (cf. 2.3 above) defended the ideology of apartheid. When the British danger had disappeared from the scene, he felt confronted by the "black danger". By way of extenuation it has to be mentioned that Stoker was no exception – most of the other lecturers at the PUK shared his view in this regard up to a certain point in history. Only one year after his death, however, a new era dawned for his country – a country without apartheid, but not without other, new problems and therefore a country in which that which was good in his philosophical legacy should still be kept alive.

### **3.6 Recognition – and fruit even in old age**

Finally I want to mention how Stoker did receive recognition during his lifetime. For instance, in 1963 he was invited as a guest lecturer at the Free University and in 1973 to Dordt College and other Christian institutions in the USA and Canada. In 1964 he received the Stals Prize for Philosophy from the S.A. Academy for Science and Arts. In 1964, after having worked at the PUK from 1924 to 1964, he retired, but was reappointed until 1969. In 1970 he became an honorary professor at the Rand Afrikaans University (currently the University of Johannesburg). On 24 April 1971 he received the highest recognition from the PUK, namely an honorary doctorate.

The author was privileged to be an undergraduate student under Stoker and also, as the only honours student in Philosophy, to sit at his feet in his study at home. (cf. Van der Walt, 1993). In later years I was impressed to see how he – all by himself – as the editor of the *Bulletin van die Suid-Afrikaanse Vereniging vir die Bevordering van Christelike Wetenskap* (*Bulletin of the South African Society for the Promotion of Christian Scholarship*) planned each number of this journal, edited it and again and again found a sponsor for the printing costs. He did indeed still bear fruit in his old age (Psalm 92:13-15).

## **4 Possible influences on Stoker's philosophy**

Amidst all the above-mentioned political-social-cultural circumstances and his numerous activities Stoker's own philosophy was born. In this section – the main part of this contribution – the question is asked which different factors could specifically have influenced the coming into being of his philosophy.

#### 4.1 *Stoker himself lifts the veil*

Fortunately we need not guess about the formative factors on Stoker's thinking. In Stoker (1970:218, 219 and 332-336) he lifted the veil on the historical background of his own philosophy. First he mentions the names of five Calvinist theologians: A. Kuyper (snr.), J. Woltjer, W. Geesink, V. Hepp and in particular H. Bavinck. Then he mentions his supervisor in Germany, Max Ferdinand Scheler.

From what will follow, it becomes evident that the two philosophers from whom he learned most were the reformed theologian, Bavinck, and the phenomenological philosopher, Scheler. He says (cf. Stoker, 1970:334) that after his appointment as a lecturer at the Puk (1925) he initially philosophised mainly according to the direction of Bavinck but that his acquaintance with the writings of Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd brought him numerous and fundamental new insights.

The Vollenhoven Archives, housed at the Historische Documentatie Centrum voor het Nederlandsche Protestantisme at the Free University contains valuable correspondence between Stoker and Vollenhoven. Prof. Eric de Boer of the Free University of Amsterdam is doing research on this two-way interaction between these two *patres*.

Therefore one could broadly divide the influences on Stoker's philosophy between the influences from *within* his own Calvinist circle of like-minded scholars (first more theological and later more philosophical) and the influence from *outside* this circle (Scheler was not a Calvinist and in 1921 abandoned his membership of the Roman Catholic Church and even his faith in God).

Of course such a categorisation (from "within" and "outside") can be artificial. Further we should bear in mind that we are not busy with a simple puzzle here. Determining exactly which influence(s) played a role in which facet of Stoker's philosophy and how substantial or weak it was, is difficult on looking back and even impossible. It would require detailed research in which for instance the works of Bavinck and Scheler would have to be compared to Stoker's whole oeuvre – something for which a single overview like this would in any case not afford sufficient space.

What follows here, therefore, are just a few glimpses of possible influences. We first pay attention to possible influences emanating from his own circle of fellow believers and afterwards to those from especially phenomenological thinking.

## 4.2 Influences from the circle of like-minded Christian scholars

It should be kept in mind that when Stoker decided to go overseas to study, he had already been equipped with a worldview. In South Africa the Calvinist world view was known to a prominent part of the Afrikaner community at the time – even Kuyper and Bavinck were not unknown names (cf. Van der Walt, 1980).

One could say, however, that in Stoker's youth this world view had been scientifically worked out mainly in the field of theology only. The young Stoker's ideal was to find out what it would imply in the philosophical field. However, the form that South African Calvinism took on would have a lasting influence on Stoker's thinking. Therefore something more about this should be mentioned briefly.

### 4.2.1 The influence of the South African form of Calvinism

The kind of Calvinism in which Stoker grew up was that of a Christian-National ideal – an idea that can be traced back in history to our Dutch ancestors. (For instance, it found distinct expression in the idea of Christian-national education.) In his book *Die stryd om die ordes (The struggle between ideologies)*(1941a:274, 275) Stoker distinguished three different kinds of Christian-national thinking: a more liberalist and a more socialist type and then the correct type which maintained the balance between the two extremes, over-emphasising neither the individual nor the nation.

However, he does not discuss the huge problem regarding the relationship between the two poles of the Christian on the one hand and the national on the other. Most probably this interlaced relationship was taken as a matter of course by his predecessors, contemporaries and himself.

But it is exactly in linking "Christian" with "national" that the problem resides. To Stoker the solution probably once again lay in the balance or equilibrium between the two. But in Stoker (1941a:271 et seq.) he did not hesitate to foreground the national and even wrote: "... he who is of the opinion that by emphasising the nation (which is far from idolising the nation) we abandon other [Christian? BJvdW] principles and do not intend emphasising them anew, is mistaken." [Tr. from the Afrikaans]

From this it already clearly transpires that true integral Calvinism cannot be Christian-national. It is built on a dualism which in principle is irreconcilable so that the balance pursued remains a dream – the national usually determined the



Christian. Van der Walt (1995:16-21) has pointed out the irreconcilable disunity and tension between these two poles. It could be argued that it was Stoker's emphasis on the national Afrikaner pole that prevented him from understanding that an ideology of apartheid between different nations in the same country is wrong.

In any case the South African form of (a rather politically coloured) Calvinism should be regarded as the first basic feeding ground that fostered his thinking. He had already become acquainted with the Dutch (theological) Calvinism of Kuyper and Bavinck but wanted to learn more about it (cf. 3.3 above), especially regarding its philosophical implications.

#### 4.2.2 *Intermezzo: caution required*

Before going into further possible influences on Stoker's philosophy, we have to keep reminding ourselves of the following:

- First we have to remember that apart from a (mainly political and theological form of) Calvinist *world view* he did not have a Christian *philosophy* to aid him – he still had to (help) build it and this was no simple task.
- Secondly it is easier today – after more than 80 years – to pinpoint shortcomings in someone's philosophy. Therefore it should be done with caution.
- In the third instance the introductory and summary nature of this article only allows us to entertain some suspicions or put some questions on possible influences on Stoker's work. If the exact significance of different influences also had to be researched, the investigation would have to take on the format of a doctoral thesis. As we have said, this reconnaissance merely attempts to stimulate additional investigation.
- Furthermore, neither is it possible to analyse the problem of a probable evolution in Stoker's philosophy as well in an article of limited length.
- In the fifth instance the question will also have to be raised – even when the influences have been pinpointed - according to which standards they are to be regarded as good, less good or even harmful. If for instance one were of the opinion that any concept from a secular philosophy may be taken over by a Christian philosophy there would be no problem. The synthesis or accommodation would then be good. However, if – as Stoker himself wished to do – one wants to expand a truly Christian philosophy on the foundation of God's revelation, great caution should be

exercised, because religious and world-viewish convictions also substantially influence one's philosophical thinking.

- Finally it should be kept in mind – which is very important – that Stoker was not merely repeating things, but was an independent and original philosopher. For instance, he says (cf. Stoker, 1970:333) about Scheler (and his influence on his philosophy) that there were quite a number of his ideas that were implausible to his own way of thinking. Yet his insights are not resting on pure spuriousness. So Stoker first wanted to disentangle Scheler's insights from their context and unacceptable foundations. As will become clear, it is, however, not easy to ascertain on which points Stoker agreed with, for instance, Bavinck and Scheler and on which points he differed from them. We now focus on Bavinck first.

### **4.3 The possible influence of Herman Bavinck (1854-1921)**

Brief introductions about Bavinck as a philosopher are available in Klapwijk (1980:546-550) and Woldring (2013:59-68).

Stoker himself helps us in tracing possible influences from Bavinck. He says for instance (cf. Stoker, 1970:335) that he struggled with the question as to how a truly Calvinist philosophy could be possible without being disguised theology. He states that in this regard he could learn much from Vollenhoven but that he saw the task and sphere of philosophy and theology somewhat differently (more in line with Bavinck).

#### **4.3.1 What Stoker could learn from Bavinck**

I am of the opinion that exactly on this point Stoker was substantially influenced by Bavinck. In Vollenhoven (2011:212-214) – referring to Vollenhoven's lecture on theology and philosophy – we find a discussion (from 1963) between Vollenhoven and Stoker from which it becomes clear that they held completely different viewpoints on this matter.

Stoker (1970:333) himself mentions the following he could learn from Bavinck: (1) Bavinck's insight that revelation is the foundation of everything and therefore can serve as the basis for a Calvinist epistemology. (Stoker links up with Bavinck with his revelatory ("fanerotiese") method). (2) Bavinck's ontology of God, human beings and the world, or simply God and cosmos. (3) His view of the human being as the crown

of the cosmos. (4) His emphasis on principles. (5) Bavinck's view of the fields of investigation for theology and philosophy may then be added here.

#### 4.3.2 *Bavinck's positive influence*

Why Stoker would have liked to do his doctorate under Bavinck may be explained by the following positive remarks by Vander Stelt (chapter 4 from a still unpublished manuscript of 2012). As a reformer Bavinck (especially later in his life) wanted to break free from the restrictive tradition of church and theology to take a broader view. Over against the liberalism of his times he pleaded for the return to God and his Word. And opposing the pietism among his own group he called on his people to become more involved in the world around them. Amongst other things it was possible through his Calvinist emphasis of the biblical idea that religion is something central, a response from the heart to God's revelation that permeates everything. This thought must definitely have appealed to Stoker.

Thus Bavinck was of orthodox Reformed confession but, says Vander Stelt, the philosophical foundations of this theology repeatedly clipped the wings of his Reformational ideal. In his philosophy he was substantially influenced by Protestant and even Roman Catholic scholasticism.

#### 4.3.3 *Bavinck's ontology*

One's view of reality or ontology is determinative for the rest of one's philosophy, like one's anthropology and epistemology. Bavinck's basic distinction is that between God, human being, cosmos. If "human being" is regarded as part of the cosmos, Bavinck retains merely two realities, namely God and cosmos. Therefore he holds to a two-factor or dualistic ontology (cf. Bavinck, 1908:17-18 where Bavinck distinguishes between Creator and creation: God is transcendent but not detached from the cosmos, He also is immanent in creation).

Bavinck did not grant God's laws or ordinances a separate, independent existence. God's laws he calls (Bavinck, 1906:212-213) *principia* (*principles*) and distinguishes a *principium essendi* (in God's consciousness), a *principium cognoscendi externum* (in created things) and a *principium cognoscendi internum* (human reason or *logos* as the principle of knowing). According to the latter a human being should abstract the laws or *logoi* (logical seeds) created by God in other things in the cosmos

according to the principles in his own reason to reach true knowledge (cf. also Van der Walt, 1953 for more detail).

Bavinck (1922:209) interprets the Gospel of John (1:5, 9 and 19-21) in the light of this age-old logos speculation and writes:

The Logos (= Word of God) is the light of human beings in every sphere of knowledge and scholarship. Through the logos there are logoi or ideas in all created things and also in the human being. The agreement and kinship between reason in the human being and the ideas in the things is given by Him (= God) and exist in Him. It is the light of the Logos which shines in the human being and in the world, and if both of these coincide, the result is human knowledge. [Transl. from the Dutch by BJvdW].

#### 4.3.4 Thomistic influences

To someone versed in the history of Western philosophy it will immediately be clear that this kind of philosophical ontology is derived from Thomistic thinking. Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274) also distinguished only God and cosmos and he situates the laws (or what Bavinck calls "principles") *ante rem* in God, *in rebus* in created reality and *post rem* in human reason (cf. Van der Walt, 2012a, 2012b and 2013).

It is well-known that the logos speculation played an important part in the work of the individuals mentioned by Stoker (i.e. Woltjer, Hepp and Bavinck). As mentioned above, God is the highest *Logos* who creates the *logoi spermatikoi* (logical seeds) into things which are then abstracted from the things by the human *logos* to reach logical knowledge. By the divine seeds in creation God reveals Himself. This divine revelation (in things and the human reason) ensures that there is conformity between the knowable and the result of knowing in the one who knows, that true knowledge has been found. Woldring (2013:60, 64) provides a brief description of his logos doctrine in Bavinck.

If my readers – especially reformed theologians – may regard my analysis and evaluation of Bavinck as that of an overcritical philosopher, I recommend the reading of only one chapter in the excellent dissertation of the systematic theologian, Bremmer (1961:182-230). Bremmer discusses (with reference to Bavinck's own publications) Bavinck's ideas about God, the cosmos and the human being and continuously indicates that, for the construction of his own reformed dogmatics,

Bavinck relied heavily on the works of the *doctor angelicus* of the Catholic Church, Thomas Aquinas, as well as many of his Thomist followers, especially nineteenth century neo-scholasticism, in particular Matteo Liberatore (cf. Bremmer, 1961:628).

Veenhof (1968:628), too, points out the distinct Thomistic philosophical substratum to important parts of Bavinck's dogmatics. When we keep in mind that neo-Thomism entails a renewal of the philosophy of the Medieval philosopher, Thomas Aquinas, the lines going back further in history also become clearer. As a consequence of Thomas's earlier accommodation of the thinking of the pagan Greek philosopher, Aristotle, Liberatore's great love for the man from Stagira can also be explained, and if one notes the many times that Bavinck (1906) directly refers with endorsement to the writings of Thomas Aquinas (e.g. his *Summa Contra Gentiles* and *Summa Theologica*) it is not even necessary to mention Liberatore as a mediator to confirm the distinct Thomistic influence on the philosophy of Bavinck.

Vollenhoven (1982:105) also indicates that Bavinck propagated a scholastic, Platonising subsistence theory in the line of Boethius, Albertus Magnus and Suarez. Thus in his anthropology Bavinck also joins up with Thomas's subsistence theory. According to this a human being consists of two separate substances, namely a higher soul and a lower body (cf. Fernhout, 1975:10 et seq.).

In Vollenhoven (2000:257) the philosophy forming the foundation of Bavinck's theology is summarized as follows: He belongs to the final neo-idealist trend within later rationalism. His type of philosophy is described according to Vollenhoven's problem-historical method as purely cosmological, dualistic, an interpretation of Aristotle, vertical partial universalism and Platonising subsistence theory. (For explanations of these Vollenhovian terms, the reader is referred to the sources on Vollenhoven's problem-historical method, mentioned in chapter 2 of this book.)

#### 4.3.5 *The theme of nature-grace*

The Thomistic theme of nature-grace also played a key role in the work of Bavinck (cf. Bavinck, 1906:193). Like Thomas he teaches that nature is a step up to grace and that grace perfects nature (cf. Bavinck, 1906:336: *natura praecedit gratiam, gratia perfecit naturam*). According to Bavinck, the Anabapist position was grace *against* nature, whilst the Catholics elevated grace *above* nature, the Lutherans

positioned grace *next to* nature, while the (correct) Calvinist view is that grace *renews* or *restores* nature.

However, Bavinck himself struggled throughout his life with the relationship between creation and re-creation, nature and grace, general and special revelation, the image of God in a general and special sense, etcetera, but he could never really solve these problems.

This dualistic view also leads in Bavinck to a dichotomy between knowledge and faith: *ratio perfectitur a fide, fides supponit naturam*. Heideman (1959:132, 196) not only draws attention to the fact that Bavinck operates with the distinction nature-grace and knowledge-faith, but says it forms a central idea that runs through all of Bavinck's theology.

We do have to say that Bavinck tries to modify the theme of nature and grace in order to stake out more clearly his own position over against that of Thomas (or the Roman Catholic church), Anabaptism and Lutheranism (cf. Veenhof, 1968:345-356 and 1994). My own impression is that Bavinck did not hold as strongly as Thomas did to the ideal of an *ontological perfection* of nature by grace, but rather more of a *religious renewal* – therefore a more biblical view. However, in my opinion, the right solution would have been to reject the complete nature-grace and faith-knowledge dualism (cf. Van der Walt 2001:1-42, Bavinck is discussed on page 16).

#### 4.3.6 Bavinck's epistemology

This part of Bavinck's theology was already partly described under 4.3.4 above. Bavinck (as well as Hepp, cf. Stoker, 1941b: 140-149) lays great emphasis on God's overarching revelation. He says, for instance: "The whole world itself rests in revelation; revelation is the foundation, the secret of the entire creation ..." (Bavinck, 1908:23). Veenhof (1968) analysed in detail Bavinck's philosophy of revelation and pointed out important problems in connection with this. I merely want to stress here that Bavinck's dualistically oriented philosophy (described above) also leads to his distinction between a *revelatio naturalis* and *supranaturalis*. (Bavinck's epistemology was therefore determined by his preceding ontological and anthropological points of departure.)

#### 4.3.7 *Bavinck on theology and philosophy*

In conformity with the twofold revelation and his distinction between reason and faith, Bavinck also accepts two theologies: a *theologia naturalis* (in which reason provides direction) and a *theologia supernaturalis* (in which faith provides direction). The latter studies God as He revealed Himself in his Word, while the former studies creation in its relation to God. Formulated differently: the latter (called Holy Theology by Bavinck) studies the essence of God and the former studies his works.

Note how Bavinck's philosophical ontology of God and cosmos also determines his view of theology, and note how Bavinck in his *Reformed Dogmatics* repeatedly took recourse to Thomas Aquinas as the authority as well as to different theologians from 17<sup>th</sup> century Reformed Scholasticism or Orthodoxy.

Apart from the supernatural (Christian) theology (at the top) and the natural theology (below it) Bavinck also recognises the right of existence of philosophy (right at the bottom). The latter studies the nature of all cosmic things. The first (supernatural) theology originates from God and studies Him as its object. The second (natural) theology only has to do with the created things to the extent that they reveal in God's works something about Him (cf. Bavinck, 1906, vol. 2:501). Natural theology therefore deals with creation to the extent that it points to God.

#### 4.3.8 *Conclusion*

After what we have said here the (negative) evaluation of Bavinck's philosophy by Vander Stelt (cf. above) cannot be denied. Bavinck was not sufficiently aware of the dangers of the synthesis thinking of Thomism and the Thomistically coloured Reformed Orthodoxy of approximately 1550-1700 and even later. Unfortunately it seriously hampered his Reformational intentions.

### 4.4 *The after-effects of Bavinck's influence on Stoker*

In the light of what we have just stated on Bavinck's philosophy we unfortunately have to say about Stoker as well that his leaning towards several facets of Bavinck's philosophy could have toned down the Reformational purity and élan of his philosophy. With this brief sketch of Bavinck's philosophy the reader can easily trace parallels in Stoker's philosophy for themselves. I therefore merely give three more examples of possible influences from Bavinck's ontology, anthropology and ideas about revelation.

#### 4.4.1 Implications of his two-factor ontology for theology and philosophy

In his essay "God (Theos) and world (cosmos)" (Stoker, 1970:9 et seq.) it not only transpires that Stoker holds a similar (two-factor) ontology to that of Bavinck but on the very first page also what the implications of this are for his view on the spheres of investigation for theology and philosophy: The theologian in the first place studies the revealed truths regarding God in his Word and in nature and his relationship to the cosmos, while the philosopher in the first place investigates the cosmic reality. (Cf. later also Stoker, 1970:91,106 where he reiterates his viewpoint as well as Stoker, 1967d:84, 225 and numerous other places.)

It would seem as if the only difference between Stoker and Bavinck is that Stoker when speaking about theology no longer distinguishes between a supernatural and a natural theology the way Bavinck did. What Bavinck distinguished (God's revelation of Himself as the sphere for a supernatural theology and his relation towards the cosmos as a natural theology) is taken together by Stoker to the double sphere of one theology.

We will not go into this any further since from the circles of Reformational philosophy in the Netherlands and elsewhere probing critiques have been provided on Stoker's view of the different tasks of philosophy and theology. In particular Stoker's idea that other Christian scholars (including philosophers) may not do independent exegesis of their own of the Scriptures but that they have to borrow it from theology, has been widely and roundly condemned in this tradition. It creates the impression that Stoker wanted to build his Christian philosophy on a Christian theology, while other Reformational philosophers emphasised exactly the opposite, namely that every theology *volens volens* departs from philosophical presuppositions.

Vander Stelt (1996:82) has the following questions about Stoker's viewpoint:

- (i) Does Stoker have a secular view of philosophy?
- (ii) Why is only theology and not every science, including philosophy, concerned with God's revelation? Does theology still play a mediating role in Stoker's view, in order to Christianize scholarship?
- (iii) Is it true that in empirical sciences we go to the phenomena and, then, via theology as handmaiden, add Scripture to our knowledge? If so, how must we then deal with issues not mentioned



in Scripture? Is science neutral? (iv) Can Stoker really do justice to the influence of philosophy on theology?

#### 4.4.2 *Anthropological implications*

Just how artificial Stoker's distinction between a Christian theology and philosophy can become, becomes evident, for instance, when Stoker (1967d:84, 99) writes on the image of God in a human being and then claims that a human being as the image of GOD is a theological issue, while a human being as the IMAGE of God was supposed to be a philosophical one.

From the same essay on a human being as the image of God it is also evident how Stoker was influenced by the Thomistic doctrine of the *analogia entis*. According to him the image of God denotes a *true* analogical relationship between God and a human being (e.g. implying simultaneously difference and similarity), while the Thomistic *analogia entis* is to be rejected since it departs only from a sameness of being between God and man (cf. Stoker, 1967d:86 et seq.) However, Stoker's interpretation of Thomas was wrong. Aquinas emphasized both the difference and similarity between God and human beings in his doctrine of *analogia entis* (cf. Van der Walt, 2012b:216). Newer insights in the Scriptures also reveal that such a view of being God's image is not justifiable on biblical grounds (cf. Van der Walt, 2010a:325 et seq.).

#### 4.4.3 *The idea of revelation*

One could further trace what the influence of Bavinck's emphasis on revelation (cf. above) was on Stoker's philosophy and especially on his revelatory method, as well as how Scheler's idea of the revelatory character of the phenomena was combined with it. Here a wide field for research still lies unexplored for the interested student. The main intention with this should not merely be to criticise Stoker but – while standing on his shoulders – to take forward the duty of the constant reformation of Christian philosophy.

We can now proceed to a next section: possible influences on Stoker from outside the circle of like-minded Christian scholars. Of these the most significant probably is:

#### 4.5 Possible influence from Max Scheler (1874-1928)

The Wikipedia website provides a concise summary of Scheler's life and philosophy. (Not only ten works by Scheler himself translated into English are mentioned, but approximately sixteen secondary sources on his philosophy are given.) Since my own knowledge of Scheler's philosophy is very limited, I have to rely mainly on secondary sources on his philosophy. It will therefore not be desirable to point out important similarities and differences between the philosophy of Scheler and Stoker the way I did with Bavinck above. I hope the sources mentioned here will be an aid to the interested student in taking this brief overview further towards making a more probing comparison.

##### 4.5.1 Stoker's own testimony

According to Stoker himself (1970:333-334) he inherited especially the following two aspects from his supervisor: first, his axiology (theory of values) (cf. Scheler, 1955), which might have caused Stoker later on to recognise a separate cosmic dimension of values and, in the second place, the phenomenological method of Scheler (as well as Husserl). According to Stoker he not only wrote his doctoral thesis (1925) according to this method, but constantly used it afterwards. He is of the opinion that it should not be rejected because Scheler and Husserl departed from erroneous suppositions when using it. Stoker regards this method as one of the revelatory methods (called "diafaneries" by Stoker).

Since I have already written something on values and also Stoker's view (cf. Van der Walt, 2010b en 2010c), it will here be passed by only to say something in general on the philosophy of Scheler (and in passing on Husserl) and his phenomenology in particular.

##### 4.5.2 Scheler's philosophy in general

Vollenhoven (1982-101), who also suspects a close relationship between the philosophy of Stoker and that of Bavinck and Scheler, offers the following basic typification of Scheler's philosophy (cf. Vollenhoven, 1982:75 and 2000:245, 247.) Concerning the *normative direction* of his philosophy, Scheler first was (like Husserl) a late rationalist, more specifically a neo-idealist philosopher, but already since 1910 embraced the *Lebensphilosophie*, a first trend within irrationalism. The *type of philosophy* (on the *structure* of reality) held by Scheler, however, remained

cosmogono-cosmological and monistic. (In this respect he differs from Bavinck whose thinking was purely cosmological and dualistic.) Regarding his anthropology, he exchanged his anthropological theory of interaction between body and soul for a doctrine of the priority of the spirit or soul. The abandonment of his Christian-Catholic convictions (1921) caused him to end up plying the waters of a monistic pantheism. (It is interesting, by the way, that Vollenhoven ascribes the same type of philosophy [as that of Bavinck] to Husserl, at least during the first phase of his development.)

The implications of Scheler's shift from rationalism to irrationalism were significant for his epistemology. During the rationalistic phase the guarantee of certainty of human scientific knowledge to Scheler lay in human reason (the "subject"). As an irrationalist he devaluates reason and emphasises the "object" of knowledge, concrete reality – in the case of his *Lebensphilosophie*, the emphasis was on life and power. Besides, contact between the subject (the one who knows) and the object (reality) is brought about no longer by means of the intellect, but by a feeling of love. The essence of the object is then revealed to the knower and is supposed to be self-evident, not rationally provable (cf. the brief description by Spier, 1959:197-199).

In Stoker's case we find (perhaps in a second phase?) a similar tendency to emphasise the knowable reality versus the rational one who knows.

#### 4.5.3 *Scheler's phenomenological method*

As we have said, Stoker mentions that he wrote his doctoral thesis (of 1925) according to Scheler's phenomenological method and that he afterwards constantly used this method. Stoker's later work (1967b) on a phenomenological analysis of the conscience can be regarded as a summary of his thesis so that those who do not read German, can therefore use this chapter to understand Stoker's use of the phenomenological method. He specifically mentions that this method originated with Scheler and Husserl.

Fortunately nowadays we have, apart from the works of Scheler that we have already mentioned as having been translated into English, good secondary sources on this method available. In general on phenomenology there are for instance van Peursen (1967 and 1968) and Lauer (1965) and on the phenomenological method Boschenski (1954:22-340). More detail is offered in Bakker (1966:69 et seq. on Husserl and 109 et seq. on Scheler); Spiegelberg (1969:73 et seq. on Husserl, 228

et seq. on Scheler) and De Boer (1968 and 1977) on Husserl, as well as Husserl himself (1964). That phenomenology is not an out-dated philosophy today is evident from a recent special issue of the *South African Journal of Philosophy* (23(1), 2013), dedicated to phenomenology and its future.

#### 4.5.4 *Stoker himself on the phenomenological method*

An issue into which we cannot go here is whether what Stoker wrote round about 1933 (cf. Stoker, 1933b) is reconcilable with his phenomenological method. In 1933 he wrote that the knowable *enters* the human consciousness by means of channels of ingression and become known in this way. Such an epistemology looks more like that of Aquinas and Bavinck discussed above. (Cf. Van der Walt, 2013.) According to his phenomenological method, however, the knowable things *reveal* their essence to the one who knows. Does the phenomenological process follow that of ingression or are we dealing with two different methods, perhaps revealing two different phases in Stoker's epistemological development?

A second problem is the lack of clarity in Stoker's work between the phenomenological method in general and Stoker's own "fanerotiese" method as perhaps a sub-type of the phenomenological method. However, we let the problems be and give a brief explanation of how Stoker describes his method.

In the article mentioned, Stoker (1967b:305-308) offers the following description of his method. It searches for the essence of a certain individual phenomenon – something he admits is hard to describe. As opposed to rational observation, this method therefore has to make use of intuition. By means of it the external side of a phenomenon is stripped off to get to its inner side or essence. Stoker (1967b:308) refers to Husserl who uses the term "Einklammerung" or "place between brackets". So Stoker emphasises that, in order to use this method, all prior knowledge, theories and prejudices which one might entertain regarding the phenomenon, have to be pushed aside (placed between brackets) so that the phenomenon itself can speak. The phenomenon must be allowed to bear testimony to itself, to reveal its essence to the one who knows. The essence of this phenomenon which is revealed, Stoker says, cannot be described in any direct way. It can only be seen in an indirect manner, so that logical grounds or validity are not applicable when using this method. "The self-evidence of the characteristics thus indirectly revealed and

described, is the only proof the phenomenologist can and intends to give" (Stoker, 1967b:308).

#### 4.5.5 *Brief comments*

Quite a few questions can be put to Stoker. Van der Walt, (2009:71,72 footnote 9) has even more questions and Van der Hoeven (1963 and 1965) offers additional probing critique on the phenomenological philosophy from a Reformational perspective.

- In the first instance it is of course true that one cannot gain knowledge only in a logical manner. One can also gain various kinds of knowledge in an intuitive, ethical, technical, juridical, economic, social and religious manner. Nevertheless one always knows as a whole person, so that no single one of these ways of knowing can be isolated from the logical element of knowing.
- In the second instance one could ask Stoker whether placing between brackets one's own prescience and presuppositions does not imply a neutral approach – something that conflicts directly with Stoker's own viewpoint that a neutral practice of science is impossible.
- Thirdly: Is it correct to ascribe a peculiar revelatory power to things that have been created? Is not the biblical viewpoint that only God can reveal and that He does this *via* creation? Stoker's sympathy with Bavinck's philosophy of God's universal revelation in this regard most probably strengthened Scheler's idea that a phenomenon has a revelatory power of itself.
- My next concern about Stoker's acceptance of the phenomenological method – on the face of it I fail to see much difference between his own use of it and that of Scheler – is that, in a typically irrationalist way, it leaves one in the dark about the acceptability or truth of its results. According to Stoker it is not provable or disprovable, since it is supposed to be self-evident. What should one do if the same method should render different results that are mutually contradicting? Do we then fall back on the old conformity between thinking and the matter about which we think? But even this cannot serve as the final criterion for the truth either, since not everybody will accept its results.
- These questions are connected to the fact that Stoker (cf. above) does not clearly distinguish between his specific revelatory method and the phenomenological

one in general. For instance, he does not say exactly which elements he took over from Husserl and Scheler's phenomenology and precisely what their presuppositions were that he rejected. This renders it difficult to determine the positive or negative influence of phenomenology on his philosophy.

Therefore Van der Walt (2009:73, 74) is compelled to make only the following conclusion:

It can only be stated here that Stoker's revelatory method cannot simply be equated with the phenomenological method. Nor can it be taken in good faith that Stoker didn't incorporate some aspects of phenomenology that are irreconcilable with a Scriptural philosophy.

- Finally I also have a problem with the so-called "essence" of the things revealed by means of the phenomenological method. I suspect that the age-old logoi speculation (e.g. in Bavinck's work) surfaces here again. In Scheler's work it probably was a remnant of his earlier Thomistic background.

#### **4.6 Conclusion: two major influences on Stoker's philosophy**

Looking back on the aforesaid, one could conclude broadly that two tendencies in particular flowed together in Stoker's philosophy. The one is Bavinck's Reformed theology which was rationalistic and scholastically coloured, and the other is Scheler's irrationalist-phenomenological philosophy. It is therefore possible that Stoker (for instance regarding the idea of revelation) read Scheler through the eyes of Bavinck, or Bavinck through the ideas of Scheler.

Although these two lines of influence cannot always be separated in Stoker's philosophy, one could say that Bavinck's influence is especially distinct in Stoker's (perhaps earlier?) ontology, anthropology, and philosophy of science, while the influence of Scheler emerges strongly in Stoker's (perhaps later?) epistemology and methodology.

In spite of what was just said we should not forget that Stoker was indeed a student of Bavinck and Scheler, but did not merely echo their philosophies without exhibiting any originality himself.

## **5 Stoker's particular contribution to a Christian philosophy**

Without any claim to comprehensiveness I here briefly outline (as in the previous article on Vollenhoven) some outstanding contributions by Stoker which have struck me.

- In general Stoker played an invaluable role in giving form to the ideal of a Christian practice of scholarship at the PU for CHE of the time. He never abandoned this ideal (cf. Stoker, 1976).
- However, Stoker was not a philosopher in an ivory tower. He was intimately involved in his country and its people and tried to guide their thinking by means of numerous popular publications.
- Concerning his philosophy of the idea of creation, we must say that it is the original product of an independent philosopher. He can rightly be regarded as one of the three fathers of a Reformational philosophy and therefore merits more attention than he has received up to now. An example of his originality is his coining of new terms like "idion" and "teaal" (in Afrikaans).
- Other examples of his originality are the two new dimensions of reality that he distinguished, namely a dimension of values and of events.
- Quite possibly Stoker's most significant contribution is his profound reflection on scientific methods (cf. Stoker, 1961, 1969). With this he ventured onto a field which had not been as comprehensively treated by his contemporaries. Fortunately this contribution has in the meantime been expanded by Venter (1981:501 et seq.) and also by Van der Walt (2009). Van der Walt (2009:65, 66 and 91, 92) presents a summary of the specific contributions by Stoker in the sphere of methodology – an intellectual treasure which remains to be discovered by many.

As has been promised earlier, we can now review the debate among the founders of a Reformational philosophy during the previous century.

## **6 Mutual enrichment and debate among the three "patres philosophiae Christianae"**

As mentioned (under 4.1 above), Stoker admits (1970:334) that he was able to take over numerous and fundamental new insights from Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd. In Stoker (1935:18) he even gives the honour to these two other members of the triumvirate that they were the first to show him that a Calvinist philosophy (not merely

a theology) is possible. (One should appreciate Stoker's honesty and modesty. Dooyeweerd was inclined to regard Stoker and Vollenhoven – from whom he had also learned much in the realm of philosophy – as mere "collaborators".)

However, after Stoker had been convinced of the possibility of a Christian philosophy, he worked out the details for himself. This clearly emerges from the mutual debate among the triumvirate and their followers.

## **6.1 Limitations**

This chapter continues on what was said in the previous chapter on Vollenhoven (cf. its paragraph 6.4) on "infighting" in Reformational philosophy. There we already mentioned how Vollenhovians, Stokerians and Dooyeweerdians (i.e. followers of one of the triumvirate) levelled critique at the other two fathers with whose thinking they did *not* agree.

We restrict ourselves to criticism from the angle of fellow-believers. (Persons outside the tradition also made themselves heard – compare section 7 below.) Further we restrict ourselves to the debate between Stoker and Dooyeweerd, leaving aside Vollenhoven for the time being.

A third limitation entails the following: Since it is impossible in the limited space of this chapter to go into the full *contents* of the debates, we have to restrict ourselves to mentioning the main *issues* with the most important bibliographical *sources* so that the mutual differences can be followed up by interested readers.

## **6.2 Critique of Stoker's philosophy from a Dooyeweerdian angle**

Critique of Stoker's philosophy was given by, amongst others, Dooyeweerd himself and two of his South African followers.

### **6.2.1 Dooyeweerd's questions to Stoker**

Students who want an easy access to Dooyeweerd's evaluation of Stoker's philosophy can consult Dooyeweerd (1958:231; cf. in particular Dooyeweerd, 1957:64-76). I merely mention the points on which Dooyeweerd differed from Stoker. Dooyeweerd rejects Stoker's idea (1) of a created thing as "a substance" (which Stoker later on substituted with "idiostance"); (2) of time; (3) Stoker's dichotomist anthropology and explanation of the human being as the image of God; (4) the fact that Stoker accepts a *direct* relationship between the cosmos and God (instead of *via*



the human being as the centre of creation); he also accuses Stoker of (5) Neo-Scholastic traits and (6) irrationalist influence from Scheler.

### 6.2.2 *Critique by the Dooyeweerdians Kock and Malan*

Early on (under the leadership of E.A. Venter) a strong fortress of Dooyeweerdian philosophy was established at the University of the (Orange) Free State, which led to an intense debate with Stoker in Potchefstroom. Two examples of this are Kock (1972) and Malan (1968).

Kock discusses various viewpoints on a Christian philosophy (also critique on it by persons outside the tradition). However, he constantly does this as a convinced supporter of Dooyeweerd's philosophy. His discourse and differences with Stoker emerge in various places and are worthwhile reading (cf. Kock, 1972:14 *et seq.*, 43 *et seq.*, 157 *et seq.* and 191 *et seq.*)

Malan did his doctorate under S.U. Zuidema at the Free University. His critique of Stoker at the time drew much attention so that Stoker himself also deemed it necessary to defend himself (cf. Stoker, 1970:411-433).

### 6.3 *Critique of Dooyeweerd's philosophy by Stoker*

Stoker's critical discourse with Dooyeweerd began with Stoker (1933a), but was continued in his later works. There are many more differences with Dooyeweerd than are mentioned by Schulze (1994:473 *et seq.*) namely (1) his cosmological idea, (2) his view of the relation between theology and philosophy and (3) idealist-humanist (Kantian and neo-Kantian) remnants in Dooyeweerd's work. To this could be added Stoker's elaborate and significant critique of (4) Dooyeweerd's transcendental method (cf. Van der Walt, 2009:51-65). Further (5) he questions Dooyeweerd's idea that supposes the human heart to be supra-temporal; (6) as well his emphasis on only a human direct religious relationship with God, instead of the whole cosmos in a close ("teale") relationship to its Creator; (7) the resulting anthropocentrism of his cosmology and his supposed intra-cosmic point of concentration in the human heart; (8) his over-emphasis of the human nature of Christ (instead of a more trinitarian, theocentric perspective); (9) his great emphasis on logical thinking and (10) Dooyeweerd's limiting the biblical message to merely creation, fall and redemption.

#### **6.4 Mutual criticism essential**

To contemporary readers so many differences among one another may be confusing and discouraging. However, Stoker admitted both the differences between himself, Bavinck, Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd (cf. Stoker, 1970:218 *et seq.*) and what they all had in common (cf. Stoker, 1970:225). I presume that present-day readers will be particularly interested in what they had in common. But for a *living* tradition critique is indispensable.

In the final section of this chapter, let us look at:

### **7 Misrepresentations by insiders and outsiders of a Reformational philosophy**

I first mention some points of critique often put forward against a Christian-Reformational approach in philosophy, and will subsequently reply to this in more detail.

#### **7.1 Critique**

Here is a list of what one sometimes hears and reads:

- As a consequence of years of "inbreeding" it is supposed that Reformational philosophers simply echo one another – with them there was and is no room for mutual differences and critique.
- This fact in turn is supposed to lead to a kind of "dogmatism" or compulsory system – everybody "sings" the same old philosophical tune.
- The Reformational tradition is therefore "cast in stone", has remained static during the past 75 years and thus has undergone little change or renewal.
- As a result of an antithetical attitude, it originated and developed in isolation so that it has learned nothing and desires to learn nothing from people with a different viewpoint.
- Actually Reformational philosophy is nothing but a camouflaged theology.

Should the above-mentioned opinions be true, contemporary postmodernism has given such critics the necessary additional reasons to be still more aloof from this tradition. According to postmodernists, Reformational philosophy (as a system) can be regarded as one of the "grand narratives" which is believed to work only in a stifling and suppressing manner.

Of course postmodernists often lack the necessary self-criticism which could make them realise that their own school of thought has become a grand narrative to no less an extent – with discriminating consequences for all non-postmodernists. (For a sound critique of postmodernism, cf. e.g. Kok, 1998:164–173 and Middleton & Walsh, 1995.)

## 7.2 A reply

It is a pity that the above-mentioned kind of critique is found even among Reformed fellow-believers or insiders. But since behind such negative opinions there usually lurks a different worldview and philosophy they are hard – almost impossible – to refute. Yet we mention the following because a lack of information could also play a role here.

### 7.2.1 No parroting

The idea that Reformational philosophers are all parrots of "his master's voice" (of Vollenhoven, Stoker or Dooyeweerd) is not true. It already emerges from the critique these three founders of the Reformational tradition had among themselves, apart from the critique spoken by their followers. He/she who becomes an epigone of one of the triumvirate may therefore be viewed as being unfaithful to the central idea of *semper reformanda* – the need to continuously keep reforming even a reformational philosophy.

### 7.2.2 No closed system

The same fact of mutual criticism also refutes the accusation that it is a closed, static system. (In our modern, dynamic times such a petrified system would most probably not have been able to survive for 75 years!) However, already as early as 1956 Dooyeweerd denied such an accusation in no uncertain terms when he wrote the following about Reformational philosophy:

It is not a closed "system", it does not claim to have the monopoly on truth in the field of philosophical reflection ... or to have received a stamp of unassailability. As a Philosophy it does not demand a privileged position at all, but on the contrary attempts to create a viable basis for a philosophical discourse between the various schools who often shut themselves off to one another in spiritual isolation, which can only lead to rigidity and

overestimation of themselves (quoted in Van Dijk & Stellingwerff, 1961:67).

[Transl. from the Dutch by BJvdW]

### 7.2.3 *No isolation*

Neither is it true that Reformational philosophers did not want to learn from outsiders. Reformational philosophers indeed do approach matters in a distinctly *antisynthetic* way because they support a really biblically oriented, Christian philosophy, but certainly not in an *antithetic* way. (Stated negatively, because of the simple fact that they were children of their times, they could often not fully succeed in freeing themselves from foreign, even non-Biblical influences.)

To this we can add that Stoker lectured in the Netherlands, the USA and Canada, Vollenhoven in Canada and South Africa and Dooyeweerd as a guest lecturer all over the world, for instance at different institutions in the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Canada, the USA and South Africa (cf. Van Dijk & Stellingwerff, 1961:69). These lectures overseas were *inter alia* motivated by the need to have close contact with philosophers from other countries and schools, since the triumvirate wanted to avoid isolation and rigidity in their thinking.

The opposite is also true, namely that philosophers from different schools of thought were prepared to learn something from Reformational philosophy. This becomes evident for instance from the interest displayed by Roman Catholic philosophers in Dooyeweerd's philosophy (cf. e.g. Robbers, 1949; Marlet, 1954 and the contributions by Louet Feisser and Marlet in Van Dijk & Stellingwerff, 1961:18-35 and 36-41). Approximately a dozen doctoral theses have already been written on Dooyeweerd, not only by fellow-believers but also by scholars with different orientations (cf. Henderson, 1994:13 and 14, footnotes).

### 7.2.4 *The forming of schools not necessarily wrong*

To this we should add that forming schools (even Christian-philosophical ones) does not of necessity constitute a mortal sin, but could on the contrary be viewed as a strength. Philosophy should not be practised merely in an individualistic manner, but demands a community of thinkers. Such a like-minded group also offers the opportunity to its various participants, each in his/her own sphere, to make detailed contributions in the same spirit.

### 7.2.5 *Christian philosophy poses no threat*

It is important to emphasise here that the viewpoint held by some (even Reformed) theologians (and scholars from other disciplines) that any philosophy – even a Christian one – constitutes a threat to their subject, is not scientifically justifiable. (Of course *unbiblical* philosophies are very dangerous – ideas have feet!) In the volume edited by Van den Brink, Geertsema and Hoogland (1997) it is justly pleaded that, especially in our times where secularisation is on the increase, Christian theologians and philosophers should join hands and work together more closely. Likewise Du Plessis (2011) pleads for a joint study group of theologians, philosophers and other scientists.

Theology, for instance, can render a valuable service to a Christian philosophy by careful exegesis of the Scriptures. The other way round philosophy can (cf. Vollenhoven, 2011:201-214) amongst other things render the following two services to theology: (1) sensitise theology to the fact that it cannot work in isolation from a Christian philosophy, since it (theology) – even without realising it – departs from either Christian or non-Christian world-viewish and philosophical suppositions. (2) A Christian philosophy can also make theologians aware of the dangers of synthesis thinking, in other words efforts (even though unconsciously) to read unbiblical philosophies into the Scriptures and sanction such ideas. *Mutatis mutandis* this mutual enrichment and correction are applicable to every other academic discipline.

### 7.2.6 *No camouflaged theology*

Reformational philosophy is not a camouflaged theology either. The background to such a notion is the age-old supposition that, according to a grace-nature dualism, only theology has a Christian content and character, while philosophy and all the other disciplines by nature are regarded as neutral. (According to this view Christian *philosophers* could be possible but not a Christian *philosophy*.) The implications of such a viewpoint are *theological* economy, *theological* ecology, et cetera.

However, the philosophers in the Reformational tradition occupied themselves with real *philosophical* problems and also received recognition for it. In South Africa Stals Prizes for *Philosophy* have already been awarded by the South African Academy for Science and the Arts to four Reformational philosophers – of whom Stoker was the first.

### 7.2.7 *Not restricted to South Africa or the Netherlands*

Finally we mention that Reformational philosophy is not limited to two cities or countries (Amsterdam and Potchefstroom, the Netherlands and South Africa) but has already achieved international status (cf. Van der Walt, 2010d and 2010e and Glas, 2011a 14, 16 and 2011b:48,49). At the recent International Symposium of the Society for Christian Philosophy (Amsterdam, 15-19 August, 2011) there were no fewer than 250 participants from approximately thirty different countries in attendance!

## **8 Looking back**

Thinking the way Stoker did, with a Reformational Christian approach, practising real Christian scholarship, is no simple and easy calling. Therefore we should give him recognition for what he achieved. Hart (1976:92, 93) justly concludes his essay on the ideal of Christian scholarship as follows in a modest manner:

The idea of Christian scholarship to me is filled with intrigue and challenge, with hardship and trouble, with joy and reward, with sin and misery, with salvation and redemption and above all with needs. There are those who sneer at the idea and there are others who believe with some romantic nostalgia that the idea has had its time... Maybe it should teach us that the suction of modern (secular) scholarship away from redemption is greater than we had thought it to be. In that case let us have the humility to see the need for implementing the idea of Christian scholarship.

As we stated at the beginning of this chapter, its objective was to meet this need. This was done by simply telling the story around Stoker and the emergence of his philosophy – a fragment only of the broader Reformational tradition – to a younger generation. In this we have attempted to present Stoker neither as a vague legend nor as a holy icon, but in such a way that even after his death his thinking can act as a “mentor” to a new generation.

The well-known theologian, Bonhoeffer (who was murdered by the Nazis during the Second World War) shortly before his death wrote the following (somewhere in Bonhoeffer, 1968): “The last question is not how I will leave the scene but how the next generation will carry on with their life”. This was also the deepest motivation for this contribution: To blow on the smouldering coals of an important tradition, to cause

it to flare up once more so that the flame of Reformational enthusiasm may be carried further by a younger generation.

## Chapter 4

### THE CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY OF H. DOOYEWEERD (1894-1977) as reconstructed according to Vollenhoven's problem-historical method<sup>1</sup>

*This fourth chapter tries to reconstruct the contours of the complex philosophical development of Dooyeweerd by employing the problem-historical method of philosophical historiography of his colleague, Vollenhoven.*

*The introduction provides important background information about this internationally acclaimed scholar. It is indicated that at the emergence of a reformational philosophy (1918-1922) these two thinkers shared a viewpoint developed by Vollenhoven. Afterwards, however, their philosophical journeys developed in different directions, distinct from each other.*

*A second section of the chapter draws attention to the fact that long ago already Vollenhoven and some of his followers suspected monarchian tendencies in Dooyeweerd's thinking. Since 2010 new research suggests that his philosophy developed during a period of about fifty years through at least the following three phases: 1918-1922 (critical realism), 1923-1928 (semi-mysticism) and 1929-1977 (monistic monarchianism).*

*This hypothesis about Dooyeweerd's philosophical development enables a next (third) step, viz. to trace the possible internal influences (from his like-minded predecessors) as well as external (secular) ones on the formation of his thinking. A following (fourth) part provides a few highlights of his contribution to Christian scholarship. Finally, looking back on all four chapters, this chapter is concluded with a few remarks about the road ahead.*

#### **1 Introductory remarks**

As a background the following remarks are important, especially to readers to whom Dooyeweerd is an unknown philosopher.

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<sup>1</sup> With gratitude to Dr. Antony Tol who helped me to a better understanding of the philosophy of both Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven



### **1.1 Link with previous chapters**

This chapter is the last dealing with the founders of a Christian philosophy. (It is recommended that the reader study all four, since they complement one another.) The first chapter dealt with J. Calvin (1509-1564), the second with D.H.Th. Vollenhoven (1892-1978) and the third with H.G. Stoker (1899-1993).

### **1.2 Objective**

In the second chapter it was argued that a tradition cannot remain alive unless it is passed on to a younger generation. This also is the objective of this final contribution. By means of an overview and a version which we hope will be intelligible, the philosophical heritage of Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977) is introduced to a new generation. It is the expectation that the interested reader will follow up the bibliographical references in order to obtain a more complete view of the contours of Dooyeweerd's thinking than that which can be offered in a chapter of limited length. It is also the author's conviction that knowledge of philosophy – especially a Christian one – is of great importance to Christian theologians and other scholars.

### **1.3 An important philosopher**

Among the 20th century triumvirate (Vollenhoven, Stoker and Dooyeweerd) the latter's philosophy is internationally the best-known. The bulky "Festschrift" dedicated to Dooyeweerd to commemorate his seventieth birthday (cf. De Gaay Fortman, 1965), comprising approximately thirty contributions by authors from different backgrounds and parts of the world, is testimony to his worldwide renown. In his contribution Klapwijk (1980) also discusses Dooyeweerd's significant contribution in the hundred years of philosophy at the Free University. At the commemoration of the year of his birth two more volumes were published (cf. De Bruijn, 1994 and Geertsema *et al.* 1994). His life and philosophy are again briefly discussed by Woldring (2013:98-104).

Dooyeweerd is regarded as one of the most creative Christian philosophers (cf. Young, 1966). We quote only two evaluations of the stature of this philosopher:

...without exaggeration Dooyeweerd can be called the most original philosopher Holland has ever produced, even Spinoza not excepted (Kalsbeek, 1975:10).

And Wolters (1985:17) writes the following about him:

If the basic premise is granted that religion is necessarily a central factor in all philosophizing, then Dooyeweerd is a pioneer of heroic proportions in twentieth century philosophy... he may prove to be a worthy modern follower of such Christian giants as Augustine from the early fifth century...

However, sometimes Dooyeweerd's contribution is over-estimated and it is even presented as if his philosophy is the only Christian philosophy available. Vollenhoven is then regarded as his pupil or at most as a collaborator to his "Philosophy of the Cosmonomic Idea". As will, however, become clear later on in this chapter there are, apart from broad similarities, also radical differences between the philosophies of these two.

#### **1.4 A complex philosophy**

Even people who know Dooyeweerd's philosophy admit that it is not a simple system. Henderson (1994:13) for instance, writes:

Dooyeweerd may be said to have the ambivalent honor of being a grand system builder... The comprehensiveness of his philosophy is part of its grandeur but also a stumbling block to many interested in familiarizing themselves with it. Its immensity as a system makes it difficult to penetrate, challenging to comprehend...

Chaplin (2011:3), too, mentions the "great complexity and, at times obscurity of Dooyeweerd's thought".

Fortunately, for those who have no desire to dig into Dooyeweerd's massive oeuvre, there are simple introductions (cf. e.g. Spier, 1966 and 1972, Kalsbeek, 1975 and 1983 and on a slightly more difficult level, Hommes, 1982 and Troost, 2012).

#### **1.5 Dooyeweerd's own writings and biography in English**

Dooyeweerd's main works are the three-volume *De Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee* (1935-1936) and its four-volume English version, *A new critique of theoretical thought* (1953-1958). The "Dooyeweerd Centre for Christian Philosophy" (at Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ontario, Canada) have already translated and republished through the Edwin Mellen Press a number of Dooyeweerd's collected works in English (see [www.redeemer.ca/Dooyeweerd-Centre](http://www.redeemer.ca/Dooyeweerd-Centre) and for

orders: [books@redeemer.ca](mailto:books@redeemer.ca)). The director of the above-mentioned centre is Dr. Harry van Dyke and the editor of Dooyeweerd's works is Prof. Danie F.M. Strauss (of South Africa). At the moment the Reformational Publishing Project [www.reformationalpublishingproject.com](http://www.reformationalpublishingproject.com) is continuing to publish through Paideia Press in Grand Rapids the rest of Dooyeweerd's works.

Those interested in the history of Dooyeweerd's life can refer to the biography by Verburg (1989). (An English version of this is to be published shortly by Paideia Press, Grand Rapids, Michigan.) For a quick introduction to Dooyeweerd's life and work, one may consult Wikipedia ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herman.Dooyeweerd](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herman.Dooyeweerd)). An interview with Dooyeweerd is available via the Reformational UK Blog: [http://www.reformational.org.uk/index.php?option=com\\_content&id=141&Itemid=60](http://www.reformational.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&id=141&Itemid=60).

### **1.6 An abundance of secondary sources**

The volume of literature on Dooyeweerd's philosophy has increased exceptionally rapidly and widely. Henderson (1994: notes on pp., 14) as long ago as 1994 gave a list of no less than a dozen doctoral theses on various facets of Dooyeweerd's philosophy. Since then the production of scholarly books on his philosophy has not stopped. Just a few of the more recent examples are those by Choi (2000), Strauss and Botting (2000), Chaplin (2011), Ive (2012) and Troost (2012). Each one of these books offers many more sources in their respective bibliographies. And then we have not even mentioned the numerous articles in academic journals and anthologies. (Cf. e.g. Basden, 2002; Clouser, 2009 and Zuidervaart, 2008).

### **1.7 Yet not the influence expected**

In spite of what has been said so far on Dooyeweerd and his philosophy, Zijlstra remarks (1975:29) about it that "It has not exerted the influence one might have expected, not in its homeland nor elsewhere." He then enumerates various reasons for this less than expected impact. Among these are the following: (1) the secular climate of the twentieth century; (2) the way in which Dooyeweerd's main work (*A new critique of theoretical thought*, 1953-1958) was translated into poor English and landed without context in the English-speaking world; (3) the fact that Dooyeweerd's philosophy was controversial on many points (e.g. his supposed rejection of the age-old dualism of nature and grace; his new view of theology as a science; the socio-

economic-political implications of his philosophy); (4) the situation in different factions of Protestantism.

About the latter Zylstra says that orthodox Protestantism did not have an own Christian philosophical tradition (it was influenced heavily by Aristotelian-Thomistic thinking), while liberal Protestantism usually worked eclectically. About the first group he subsequently says (Zylstra, 1975:29, 30):

Orthodox Protestantism, in its Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican, and numerous conformist persuasions, has not developed a Christian philosophy that could serve as a worthy alternative to Neo-Thomist and humanist philosophies. This meant that the academic leaders of orthodox Protestantism were theologians, not particularly interested in philosophical matters and generally not conscious of the philosophical assumptions that had surreptitiously crept into their theological systems. In view of this it is not all together surprising that this new philosophy was little understood and less appreciated in theological circles.

This statement served as an additional incentive for writing this and the previous two chapters.

## **2 Problem statement and hypothesis**

It has been mentioned above that the philosophy of Dooyeweerd is complicated, difficult to analyse and summarise. Putting together the puzzle or providing a comprehensive overview of his philosophy is something not easily achieved.

### **2.1 *Dooyeweerdian interpretations alone do not help***

This problem is not solved either by most of the writings on Dooyeweerd already mentioned, however valuable, since they mostly amount to confirmations of his philosophy. In the works of those sympathising with his philosophy one does also find much critique, but mostly a further elaboration of certain facets of his thinking (cf. earlier on e.g. Kock, 1973 and more recently for instance certain chapters in Strauss & Bonting, 2000), or misunderstandings about his philosophy are cleared up (e.g. Strauss, 2004 and 2006b). A good example is offered by the Dooyeweerdian, Ouweneel (1986:346-419). He did review the different points of critique on Dooyeweerd's philosophy by earlier Reformational philosophers like Vollenhoven, Stoker and Popma), some outsiders and also some more recent critique from the

Netherlands and North America. But he simply kept defending Dooyeweerd's viewpoints.

Also the critiques Dooyeweerd received from like-minded colleagues (like Vollenhoven and Stoker – cf. previous chapters) are usually focused on subdivisions of his philosophy and thus do not help one in forming a comprehensive view of Dooyeweerd's philosophy.

Wolters (1985:1 et seq.), for instance, sketches in an illuminating way the different influences of the philosophical environment of the time on Dooyeweerd's philosophy. However, he concentrates mainly on the possible influences exerted by individual philosophers and schools. He does suggest possible phases in Dooyeweerd's thinking, but does not demarcate them clearly.

The contributions by Kraay (1979 and 1980) also deal with different key concepts in the development of Dooyeweerd's philosophy. First there is the emphasis on the worldviewish-religious, then on an Archimedes point, cosmomic idea (and since 1939) on ground motifs and transcendental criticism. From this it becomes clear that Dooyeweerd's philosophy did show development, but the course of the development is sketched in terms of significant new *concepts* in Dooyeweerd's work only and is not distinctly divided into *phases or periods*.

## **2.2 Hypothesis**

The author's hypothesis is: (1) that a better perspective on the whole of Dooyeweerd's philosophy could be reached if it were possible to distinguish and typify his development clearly in several phases of thinking; (2) that such changes in his philosophy could be the consequence of influence by certain philosophers or philosophical schools; (3) that such a reconstruction could better be done externally than within the Dooyeweerdian tradition, since it would afford the necessary distance; (4) that this interpretation of Dooyeweerd should in a religious sense not be insensitive to his ideal of a Christian philosophy.

Such an approach is possible, in the first place, because the fundamental Christian *worldview* of the triumvirate did show similarities but its *philosophical* explication differed. Secondly, such an approach is not unusual or unjustifiable. Malan (1968) and Kock (1973), for instance, approached Stoker's philosophy from a Dooyeweerdian angle. The fact that different Reformational philosophers have

different viewpoints need not be assessed negatively either. It proves that they were not all just repeating the same philosophical tune.

Before an effort is made to reconstruct Dooyeweerd's course of development from another, namely a Vollenhovan perspective, attention should first be drawn to the respects in which their philosophies differed.

### **2.3 Differences between the philosophies of Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven**

Up until recently there was uncertainty about the similarities and differences in the philosophies of Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven. Dooyeweerd did not speak openly about it and was inclined to identify Vollenhoven's philosophy with his own by calling the latter his "fellow worker" (cf. Dooyeweerd, 1935, 1:33) and later on even merely a "supporter" (cf. Dooyeweerd, 1953, 1:31, footnote). In this way followers of Dooyeweerd were also misled to think that there actually is very little or no difference between the Christian philosophy of Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven.

#### *2.3.1 Admitting differences between them*

However, in the previous two chapters attention was already drawn to their differences. As was said then, Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd did not publicise their differences – a united front was of strategic importance to their Reformational movement. At a request made by the Society for Calvinistic Philosophy (in 1947) Vollenhoven, however, drew up a "divergence report" which was only discovered much later in the Vollenhoven Archives (housed at the "Historische Documentatie Centrum voor het Nederlands Protestantisme" at the Free University in Amsterdam) and published still later in Vollenhoven (1992:107-117).

From this document it transpired amongst other things that on the following points Vollenhoven had different opinions from Dooyeweerd's: (1) on the relationship between the law and the subject of the law; (2) on time; (3) on the human heart (which Dooyeweerd considered to be supra-temporal and Vollenhoven did not); (4) on the nature of religion; (5) various issues of an epistemological nature. Wolters (1985:16) also points out that Vollenhoven could never concur with the following ideas of Dooyeweerd: (1) his transcendental critique, (2) creation as meaning, (3) cosmic time, and (4) his analysis of Western philosophy according to four foundational religious motives.

All these differences arise from deeper, more fundamental ontological and anthropological points of departure in Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd. For the sake of simplicity their ontological difference can be formulated as follows: In his philosophy Vollenhoven departed from the radical ontic difference between God, his law and his creation as well as their religious alliance. Dooyeweerd made a distinction between God (as eternal), the human heart (as supra-temporal) and the rest of the cosmos (as temporary) which includes both a law side and a subject side.

### 2.3.2 *Also observed by their followers*

Some of these important differences were observed by both Vollenhovian and Dooyeweerdian followers. Zylstra (1975:22-23), for instance, writes that there is no significant philosophical problem which these two did not each develop in their own way. He then mentions their theories on the human heart, the doctrine of modalities, view of time, epistemology and the place of the Bible in theoretical reflection, philosophy included (cf. also Friesen, 2005).

### 2.3.3 *A one-sided view*

Even considering his dedicated labour to make known the philosophy of Dooyeweerd (cf. e.g. Strauss, 2009 – a book comprising 700 pages), I have to differ with my colleague from Bloemfontein who suggests huge similarities between Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven (cf. Strauss, 2006a). He does discuss four differences too (p. 26-34), but predominantly emphasises their likeness. According to him it emerges mostly on three points, namely Dooyeweerd's and Vollenhoven's (1) distinction between God and creation and their emphasis on God's laws for creation; (2) their fundamental ideas and (3) their doctrine of modalities.

I have doubts about these similarities. I therefore have to question Strauss's view (2006a:53) which runs as follows:

Contrary to a long-standing tendency to portray the relationship between Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd in fairly diverging terms, the present discussion advanced an alternative view, one in which it is argued that these two thinkers in fact are much closer to each other.

Perhaps one may attribute this conclusion mainly to the fact that Strauss did take note of Vollenhoven's systematic philosophy (for instance in his *Isagôgè*) on which Vollenhoven did not publish anything after approximately 1940, but did not consider

Vollenhoven's problem-historical method, developed later (cf. the second chapter in this book) to which he made alterations up to 1975 and which also affected his own systematic viewpoint.

#### *2.3.4 The debate continues*

In 1975 Zylstra (in 1975:23) still wrote that the relationship between Dooyeweerd's and Vollenhoven's philosophy was not clear. "The history of their relationship, their mutual influences, their differences, and their respective contributions still needs to be researched and explicated."

Afterwards Wolters (1985:16) too, pointed out that by the time Dooyeweerd had developed an interest in philosophy, Vollenhoven had already done a doctoral thesis in philosophy and written articles in this field of study. Therefore he writes:

It would be quite mistaken to picture Vollenhoven as a kind of second fiddle to Dooyeweerd's genius. On the basis of Vollenhoven's early publications, a good case can be made for the thesis that he in some significant ways shaped the developing systematic philosophy of Dooyeweerd...

More recently Friesen (2005) also emphasised philosophical differences between Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd.

The above hypothesis of Wolters has in the meantime been confirmed by the doctoral thesis of Tol (2010a:263 et seq.) as well as by its summary (in Tol, 2011a and 2011b) to be reviewed under 3.3.1 below.

### **3 Dooyeweerd's development analysed from a Vollenhovian perspective**

An approach to Dooyeweerd's philosophy from Vollenhoven's problem-historical method is found in Vollenhoven's work itself as well as in that of his followers. This method uses its own unique terminology, the meaning of which may not be clear to all the readers. Within the limited length of a chapter only the most important terms will be explained. Therefore Brill (1986) is recommended as an easily understood version of Vollenhoven's method. (Cf. also the other articles on this method mentioned in chapter 2.)

#### ***3.1 Vollenhoven on possible influences on Dooyeweerd***

As we have already mentioned, Vollenhoven only rarely and reticently spoke about the philosophical views of his colleague and brother in law Dooyeweerd (cf. Brill in



Vollenhoven, 2000:92 footnote 11). Initially he saw Dooyeweerd in line with a Platonising, dualistic monarchianism. Afterwards (since 1959) as a semi-mystic philosopher. Since 1973 he interpreted Dooyeweerd as a monistic monarchian – a new type distinguished by Vollenhoven.

Vollenhoven saw the following historical line: Speusippos (Plato's follower at the Academy) – Plotinos – Husserl – Dooyeweerd. (For more on Husserl's philosophy cf. De Boer, 1968). De Boer (1984:250) already wrote that Dooyeweerd was *not* an Aristotelian philosopher. And Geertsema (1970:151) indicated the kinship between Plotinos and Dooyeweerd.

Dooyeweerd's philosophy distinguishes between (1) the *Archè* (Origin) (2) the totality of meaning (in the human heart) and (3) the diversity of meaning (the cosmos). The human heart transcends the cosmic diversity (it is supra-temporal) and is directed towards final unity in the *Archè* (God). In this way the human heart attains an all-encompassing view!

As will be explained later on, this type of philosophy is related to the so-called henological tradition (cf. Aertsen, 1985 and Beierwaltes, 1985). Kennedy (1991) calls it mystical monotheism. This whole tradition is explained in Vollenhoven (2000:336-340 and in maps numbers 13a, 26a, 39a and 52a of the same publication).

However, Vollenhoven merely points out suspected *influences* on Dooyeweerd and never, as far as I know, stated anything explicitly about any *development* in his work.

### **3.2 Followers of Vollenhoven on Dooyeweerd's philosophy**

Several of Vollenhoven's students also analysed Dooyeweerd's philosophy.

#### **3.2.1 Peter Steen (1935-1984)**

Steen (1983) as far back as in 1970 tried to reconstruct the overall structure of Dooyeweerd's philosophy mainly according to Vollenhoven's problem-historical method, but without the important insights that Vollenhoven developed later on. He could not claim to have succeeded satisfactorily. For instance, he first found a doctrine of priority in Dooyeweerd's anthropology, but later he says (p. 255) that he could also have been a monarchian. (Monarchianism, as the word "monarch" indicates, views God as the Absolute Ruling One.) He did mention a possible

evolution in Dooyeweerd's philosophy, but simultaneously created the impression that Dooyeweerd stuck to the same conception through his career.

For some reason or other Steen's reconstruction of Dooyeweerd's philosophy did not receive the attention it merited. Since he did not have Vollenhoven's later problem-historical research available when writing his thesis (in 1970), it is understandable that he could not give a clearer typification of Dooyeweerd. Nevertheless he made a thorough study of Dooyeweerd's writings and what he wrote can today be put to good use with the new knowledge at our disposal. Just a few points of his significant contribution are highlighted here.

- He offers (Steen, 1983:201,210,254-5) important information on Dooyeweerd's early critical realism (denoted by him as neo-realism).
- He shows what a key role Dooyeweerd's idea of a supra-temporal heart plays in his entire philosophy – it determines all its other aspects. Furthermore he shows by means of quotations from Dooyeweerd's work (cf. e.g. Steen, 1983:219,253) that Dooyeweerd's idea of the heart as *aevum* (created eternity or supratemporality) was derived from scholastic philosophy, specifically from Thomas Aquinas. He also points out the implications thereof, namely the possible depreciation of creation and time.
- Further Steen (e.g. p. 51-71, 191-193) describes distinctly the two directions in Dooyeweerd's philosophy: from above (the eternal) a diversification to the temporary diversity, and from below a concentration on the eternal Unity (thus not unity *in* diversity but unity *above* diversity). Being focused on the terrestrial, the temporary, is therefore regarded as idolatry, while being focused on the eternal would imply faith.
- Dooyeweerd's idea of the meaning character of creation also becomes more distinct in Steen's work. He points out (cf. e.g. p. 83, 222, 224, 255) that Dooyeweerd probably confuses structure and direction. He understands the *religious* direction (man *reaching out* in faith to God) as an *ontic* reaching out over and above creation. Most probably Dooyeweerd derived this idea from the Thomistic idea of a natural longing (*desiderium naturale*) from the domain of nature to the supernatural.
- This brings us to a last but significant discovery by Steen, namely that Dooyeweerd – in spite of all his critique of the Roman Catholic doctrine of nature-

supranature – could still not free his own philosophy from it, but merely reformulated it.

Dooyeweerd (1928:27) states his own (translated) view as follows:

Not nature as a step to grace as in Roman Catholicism, no heathen foundation under a Christian roof. No essential breach between nature and grace, as in Lutheranism, but nature and grace in an indissoluble, harmonious association (for Steen's critique of this, cf. p. 114-124).

Unfortunately Dooyeweerd's view of a harmonic relation between nature and supernature was exactly what Aquinas had also taught!

It would also seem as if Dooyeweerd's *supratemporal* human heart (*aevum*) and its striving towards the *eternal* Origin (God) form the link or guarantee this harmony between (temporary) nature and (eternal) grace.

### 3.2.2 Harry Fernhout

Also according to Fernhout (1975:74-76), Dooyeweerd thinks (most probably in a dualistic way) within a monarchianistic framework. The highest dimension of being human, the heart, which is supposed to be supra-temporal, supra-corporeal and supra-modal, is the central, ruling and uniting factor of being human, as well as a reflection of the image of God. Towards this focal point the whole creation is directed and the diversity is drawn together to a unity. It further serves as a link by means of which God (regarded as Monarch) rules the world. It seems as if Fernhout departed from the idea that Dooyeweerd held this conception all through his life.

### 3.2.3 Jan Taljaard (1915-1994)

One year after Fernhout Taljaard, who did his doctorate under Vollenhoven, discusses different facets of Dooyeweerd's philosophy (cf. Taljaard, 1976, index on p. 300 where the different pages are given).

He showed (p. 84 et seq.) the parallels between Aristotle (in his later monarchianistic phase), Thomas Aquinas (in the first monarchianistic period of his philosophy) and Dooyeweerd's ontology. At the top of the hierarchy of being is the godhead (or Monarch); then lower down follows a divine, supra-personal, universal intellectual spirit, diverging into individual branches; next (at a lower level) the individual human spirits or heart; and (lower still) the rest of creation. The higher parts of being

(monarch and spiritual intellect) *express* themselves in the lower (human being), while the lower (human being and the rest of the cosmos) *refer back* to the higher.

Dooyeweerd's monarchianistic anthropology, according to Taljaard, is enriched by Aquinas' doctrine of the analogy of being and the heart as something supra-temporal in contrast to a temporary body. Here, too the *expressive direction downwards* and the *referring upwards* (cf. Steen and Fernhout above) distinctly come to the fore:

God expresses himself in man by creating man to his image and likeness and man expresses himself, with cosmic time as an intermediary, in every modality, according to Dooyeweerd. Every modality expresses every other modality and every one refers to every other one, and together they refer back to the ego of man, who again refers back to God (Taljaard, 1976:107–108).

According to Taljaard, Dooyeweerd thus accepts two origins (a double monism), namely God as the eternal Origin of everything that exists, and the supra-temporal human heart as a lower origin of the temporary world. Each one of these origins diverges downwards in a variety and they all come together upwards in unity, first in the human heart and then in Christ.

Dooyeweerd's religious ground motifs are regarded by Taljaard (1976:157) as offshoots of the supra-individual intellectual spirit (directly below the Monarch). He also explains (cf. Taljaard, 1976:273 et seq.) Dooyeweerd's epistemology in the light of his monarchianistic worldview and anthropology.

### **3.3 *An evolution in the philosophy of Dooyeweerd?***

Although they agree that Dooyeweerd's philosophy has a definite monarchianistic colour, Vollenhoven's followers did not mention whether this was the case all through his life, and thus they nowhere raise the possibility of a distinct development and therefore a change in his philosophy.

#### **3.3.1 *More recent research***

Contemporary followers of Dooyeweerd's philosophy, however, are more conscious of a possible evolution in his philosophy. Chaplin (2011:25), for instance, writes that, although the essential structure of Dooyeweerd's philosophy was formulated by approximately the middle 1930's, it would not be surprising if significant shifts took

place afterwards during the five decades in which he published. Unfortunately Chaplin's work focuses on Dooyeweerd's social philosophy and possible different phases in his thinking do not clearly emerge in the rest of Chaplin's otherwise excellent work.

### ***Three phases in Dooyeweerd***

However, this gap has recently been filled by the already mentioned research done by Tol (2010a). He distinguishes a clear evolution in at least the following three phases: Dooyeweerd 1, covering the period 1918-1922, Dooyeweerd 2, from 1923-1928, and Dooyeweerd 3, from 1928-1977 (his final viewpoint). In phase 1 Dooyeweerd joined up with the (earlier) viewpoint of Vollenhoven, namely critical realism, which was merely a modification of Reformed scholastic philosophy. In phase 2 he held a semi-mystical conception in line with Augustine, Calvin and especially Kuyper. His final, third conception was a monistic monarchianism in line with the Greek philosopher Speusippos, the neo-Platonic Plotinos, the Renaissance philosopher, Cusanus and especially the neo-idealist, rationalistic philosopher, Husserl.

### ***The latest hypothesis***

Most recently Tol (in his e-mails dated 15 and 25 May 2012 to the author) launched the following hypothesis in which he distinguishes an additional phase between Dooyeweerd 2 and 3 described above – a total of four different periods in the development of Dooyeweerd's philosophy.

They are: D (= Dooyeweerd) 1 (up to 1922) thinks in a critical-realistic way. His idea of law also determines individual entities. D2 (from 1922/23) moves to a semi-mystical philosophy. But because of his idea of law as God's plan for the world, his critical realism is continued. D3 (from 1928) changes to a dualistic monarchianism. His law-idea now becomes a transcendental-critical idea. As a result of a continuing semi-mystical influence, Dooyeweerd now emphasises the meaning character of the cosmos – which renders material reality more or less redundant. His idea of law is also no longer connected to God's plan for the world, but it is lead in a transcendental-critical way by the transcendent human ego or heart. This is the already mentioned "top-to-bottom" direction. D4 (from 1940-1977) proposes his four religious ground motives. The human ego is no longer regarded as transcendent, but

as transcendental – the previously indicated movement from “below-to-above”. Dooyeweerd’s dualistic terminology is also replaced by a monistic one. The even stronger mystical line (cf. Plotinos, Augustine, Cusanus, Calvin, Kuyper and Husserl) is now clearly evident.

This new hypothesis indicates the great influence of semi-mysticism on Dooyeweerd. (It is not limited to phase 2, but recurs even more strongly in his final phase.)

However, with this new suggestion of Tol, Dooyeweerd’s development becomes even more complicated and difficult to follow. Therefore we will rather stick to Tol’s earlier hypothesis of only three phases.

### 3.3.2 *Caution desirable*

It would not be extraordinary if Dooyeweerd were to show development in his thinking – it is something that occurred in the work of numerous dynamic philosophers during the course of history. Distinguishing certain phases in a philosopher’s evolution does not mean, however, dividing it into watertight or abrupt chronological periods. The transitions are usually gradual and not sharply delineated. If one or other crisis or radical break does not occur, but rather a gradual transition is evident, it is not always easy to show where one influence dwindled or ceased and another became stronger. Nevertheless it can be a great help in forming a better understanding of a philosopher and getting an overview of his philosophy.

Wolters (1985) therefore deals very cautiously with the influences on Dooyeweerd. Sometimes he says that it could simply be verbal similarities not concerning content; at other times that Dooyeweerd reworked in his own way what he had taken over from others; still another time that the similarities between Dooyeweerd and another philosopher call for further investigation; and finally that it is not clear what particular influence there was.

### 3.4 *The value of this view on Dooyeweerd*

If Tol’s above analysis of the evolution of Dooyeweerd’s thinking is correct, it offers a good overview of his whole philosophy. It also explains why different concepts emerge in his philosophy or become more prominent at certain times. Furthermore it also clarifies his preference for certain former or contemporary philosophers during certain periods of his career. When his oeuvre is studied the dates of the three phases can therefore also be kept in mind.

Translated into an image, one could say his clear evolution in three phases is like the inner steel framework which firmly keeps upright three concrete structures of a building. The concrete structure around each one then is a whole cluster of ideas which forms Dooyeweerd's conception during a certain period. In what follows something more will be said about each one of these three phases as well as about the individuals or philosophical schools that had an influence on Dooyeweerd's philosophy during a specific period.

#### **4 Influences on Dooyeweerd during three possible phases of his philosophy**

As was the case with Vollenhoven and Stoker (cf. two previous chapters), Dooyeweerd was influenced both "from within" (by fellow-believers from his own tradition) and "from outside" (the secular philosophies of his times). During the first two phases the influence exerted by his own tradition is perhaps much more distinct than in his final phase.

##### **4.1 The initial phases of Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven: 1918-1922**

Dooyeweerd repeatedly says (e.g. 1973:8) that he and Vollenhoven had to assume positions over against two schools – and in their reaction were also influenced by them without realising it? – which in their initial years proved to be influential, each advocating its own epistemology.

##### **4.1.1 Two directions or schools**

On the one hand there was the direction of his own like-minded predecessors, namely in particular Kuyper's effort towards a worldviewish reformulation of Reformed scholastic theology. On the other hand there was the later humanist-inspired rationalism of neo-idealism, in particular of the neo-Kantians, with which they were confronted (cf. Meyer, 1949:114-140 for details about the different schools in neo-Kantian philosophy).

Each of these two schools wanted to show in their own way how the "subject" (the one who knows) and the "object" (knowable things) meet. Scholasticism accepted on the basis of the *logos doctrine* (laws as real "things" in creation and in the human intellect, i.e. a form of realism) that there can be agreement between intellect and being. The neo-Kantians rejected this agreement and taught that scientific knowledge was the rational construction of the human mind, so that external reality

had practically lost its value. It is therefore understandable that Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd initially felt more at home in the Reformed-orthodox thinking in which they had grown up.

For those who are not versed in the history of Western philosophy, the following explanation should be of value: From approximately 1600 to 1900 the dominant school was rationalism. According to this viewpoint the human mind (*ratio*) was absolutised as the norm for theory and practice. As a consequence of internal differences in emphasis rationalistic philosophy can be divided into two main periods: earlier/older rationalism (c. 1600-1830) and later/younger (c 1830-1900). In older rationalism there were, however, three separate movements: scientism, enlightenment (*Aufklärung*) and (old) idealism (e.g. Kant). In younger rationalism parallel tendencies occur: positivism, neo-*Aufklärung* or neo-positivism, neo-idealism. Neo-Kantian philosophy, which was popular in Dooyeweerd's time, fell under the latter trend (cf. Vollenhoven, 2005b:75-83).

#### 4.1.2 *Vollenhoven at approximately 1918-1922*

As an introduction to the conferral of his doctorate (Tol, 2010b) presented a brief summary (cf. also Tol, 2010a especially p. 294) which is used here. From this it transpires that Dooyeweerd possibly in the beginning of his philosophical career took over Vollenhoven's semi-scholastic viewpoint, and that later on they gave up their initial common view and each took his own direction.

During this initial phase, starting with his doctoral thesis (of 1918) Vollenhoven's conception is not always very clear. What is clear, however, is that his philosophy is still very near to the Reformed scholastic tradition of his tutor, Woltjer, and his many predecessors. This was the realistic tradition (also called *logos* speculation). At this stage, Vollenhoven already labelled his own view as *transcendental* or *critical* realism.

Klapwijk (2013a:26) indicates how this kind of critical realism (already in Kuyper) is of ancient origin:

The doctrine of the Logos, developed in the ancient Stoa, adopted by the Church Father, Augustine, and incorporated into medieval scholasticism, Kuyper borrowed from his Free University colleague, Jan Woltjer. And like Woltjer, Kuyper ties the Logos doctrine to a neo-Platonic realism of ideas.



Universal regularities in the cosmos... are traceable to *ideas* (as in Plato), yes to ideas *in the mind of God* (as in neo-Platonism). The cosmos is a real embodiment of the ideas whereby God once created the world. That is why the human mind, as the image bearer of God, is logically moored to the objective world.

But knowing the world implied for Vollenhoven much more than merely analysing the phenomena and abstracting their eternal ideas or *logoi* (= usual realism). Knowledge demands a *critical* ordering to which logical norms apply. The knowledge of the world is based on a number of basic intuitions (influence from Bergson) which would guarantee that it was scientific knowledge.

Therefore Vollenhoven distinguished a three-pronged view of world, human being and scientific knowledge. Because the world, with its rational ideas, is founded on the eternal Counsel of God, the human intellect is guided by norms coming from the divine Spirit. And the divine *Logos* (revelation of the Word) is the guarantee of a harmony between the subject (one who knows) and the object (the knowable). Agreement exists between the objective rationality of the world order (*ideas*) and the subjective rationality of the human intellect.

The age-old idea of law which lies behind this view is the typically scholastic one which is found, for instance, very distinctly in Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274). The original Platonic ideas, regarded as things (Latin: *res*, hence "realism"), was changed in the Christian tradition as follows: The ideas or *logoi* (laws) exist *ante rem*, in the intellect/spirit of God; God creates them *in rebus*, into the created things; these divine ideas or law-like germs in things can be abstracted by human beings so that they can also be understood *post rem* by the human mind. The guarantee that correct, scientific knowledge of the laws (*logoi*) has been gained (in other words the conformity between the law *in rebus*, in the things, and the knowledge of the law *post rem* in the human reason or *logos*) is given by the divine *Logos*, God's revelation in the Scriptures and finally in Christ (the *Logos*).

A remarkable similarity therefore exists between Vollenhoven's and Dooyeweerd's initial critical realism and Thomas Aquinas' realistic view of the law (cf. Van der Walt, 2012). However (cf. Vollenhoven, 2005a:348-349) the term "realism" may be used in

different ways, so that a direct line between Aquinas and his later interpretations cannot always be drawn.

#### 4.1.3 *The beginning of Dooyeweerd's philosophy*

During this time it seems as if Dooyeweerd held the same viewpoint as Vollenhoven and he also called his viewpoint (just as Vollenhoven did) "critical realism". When, after his studies in law, Dooyeweerd started to develop his own philosophy and they both lived in The Hague in close contact with one another, he probably learned much from his brother-in-law, Vollenhoven.

#### 4.1.4 *Vollenhoven from approximately 1922/1923*

However (as already indicated in chapter 2), A. Janse of Biggekerke (1890-1960), who at the time was in correspondence with Vollenhoven, started raising critical questions on an important part of the contemporary scholastic Reformed theology (also called Reformed orthodoxy), namely the idea of a separate immortal, rational soul. He proved from the Scriptures that it was an unbiblical, pagan idea (for more on Janse, cf. Van der Walt, 2008:189–229).

These thoughts of Janse stimulated Vollenhoven from the middle of 1922 to a reappraisal of his own anthropology (cf. e.g. his statements 19 and 25 during the conferral of his doctorate in 1918). Therefore also the position of the knowing human being changes. No longer is scientific knowledge made dependent on a supposed immortal, reasonable soul (the *post rem* idea) but dependent on the order of the *world* itself. However, he still adheres to a kind of scaled down realism (the idea of the law *in rebus*, in the created reality is maintained).

In the summer of 1922, however, Vollenhoven broke completely with Reformed scholastic realism (which also included laws in God and man). He also began to realise that there was no polarity between "subject" (the one who knows) and "object" (the knowable), but that knowing and knowledge itself were part of the created reality. Knowable reality, therefore, to him was no longer unfamiliar to logical thought.

Under the influence of Janse's anthropology (who rejected the soul as an immortal substance) the intellect itself (traditionally reckoned as the highest, rational function of the soul) also loses its autonomy and meaning. The rational or logical was now regarded only as one of the *functions* of reality as a whole. (Vollenhoven's doctrine

of modalities was probably taken over from the Freiburg neo-Kantian, Emil Lask's regional categories.)

Instead of the idea of an ontological hierarchy of being, which relativised the distinction between God and his creation, Vollenhoven now distinguished clearly between God (the Law-Giver), his creation and his laws for what was created, including his norms for the activity of knowing. Together with this the role of the one who knows, which was over-emphasised in neo-Kantian philosophy, was also relativised. The emphasis on the self (the one who knows) is therefore reduced in Vollenhoven's philosophy and that on the (knowable) world is increased, while both are determined by fixed, God-given norms.

From 1923, therefore, Vollenhoven relinquished his scholastic background and offered an alternative to his earlier critical realism, namely the "realism" of his doctrine of modalities.

#### 4.1.5 *Dooyeweerd from approximately 1923*

From approximately 1923, most probably to 1928, Dooyeweerd was substantially under the influence of Kuyper who still thought to a great extent on semi-scholastic lines. During this time Dooyeweerd was strongly attracted by Kuyper's semi-mystical idea that the human heart, in contrast to the body, was something transcendent and semi-eternal.

Between 1928 and 1930, however, a minor shift occurred in Dooyeweerd's work which was to lead to his viewpoint as in his *Wysbegeerte der Wetsidee* (1935/1936) in which he takes leave of his initial critical-realistic phase. Then he most probably gives the ego or heart an even more central, supra-temporal role.

Now Dooyeweerd called his philosophical method a "transcendental critique". A *critical* philosophy, for he was still concerned with the essential conditions for theoretical knowledge, but simultaneously *transcendental*, because it was occupied with the last Origin of thinking. From the Origin springs the cosmic diversity (a descending, diverging process), but the diversity also converges again on the same Origin (an ascending, converging direction) – a typical monarchianistic pattern of thought, already suggested above by Steen and Taljaard. The supra-temporal heart functions as a kind of secondary centre, because on the one hand it bears the image

of God (the Origin) and on the other hand it is an intermediary focal point between God and the rest of the cosmic diversity.

Thus Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd took leave of critical realism in different ways. Vollenhoven took the decision earlier, accepting a realism of modalities. Dooyeweerd shifted to his transcendental critique. (On his transcendental critique, much has already been written, for instance by Brümmer, 1961 and more recently Choi, 2000, Clouser, 2009 and Zuidervaart, 2008.)

A similarity may exist between Dooyeweerd's transcendental critique and the doctrine of immanent logical objects. According to this viewpoint, knowable reality arrives as impressions in human reason. Then they are intentionally viewed as "Gegenstände" and/or reveal themselves in a phenomenological way (cf. Husserl).

#### 4.1.6 Summary

Tol (2011a) summarises the results of the differences in the development of Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd described above as follows:

In short, Vollenhoven came to *reduce* the emphasis on the self and centre his thought in the reality of law and law-spheres, i.e. the law-subject distinction, implying (normative) law as a boundary. Dooyeweerd *increased* the emphasis on the self in reducing its attention for the world and by situating the self in a supra-temporal environment that overviews the world as meaning... This world of meaning, that the self-overviews, involves law and subject as (mere) 'sides', thereby retaining something of its origination in the methodological sphere of critical realism.

From out of the supra-temporal heart (with which he replaced reason) Dooyeweerd therefore wanted in a certain sense to oversee the cosmos.

#### 4.2 Dooyeweerd's second phase (1923-1928) in more detail

Most earlier and later researchers agree that Kuyper (1837-1920) had a substantial influence on Dooyeweerd's philosophy (cf. e.g. Young, 1952:42 et seq.; Zylstra, 1975:17,18; Wolters, 1985:2-10 and Chaplin, 2011:27-28). The latter author correctly remarks (p. 28) that Kuyper's great influence is particularly clear in Dooyeweerd's early publications (cf. e.g. Dooyeweerd 1937 and 1939). Henderson (1994 and 2013), too, who wrote on Dooyeweerd's earlier philosophy (1918-1928),

points out the great influence of Kuyper's philosophy. (For the more specific influences from Kuyper, reference can be made to Wolters, 1985:2-10, Glas, 2011b:310 and Klapwijk, 2013b).

#### *4.2.1 Semi-mysticism in Kuyper's thinking*

Kuyper was an influential scholar. For his contributions in various spheres of life, his writings (in English), his worldwide influence up to today, the reasons for it as well as the main lines of his Reformational worldview, Van der Walt (2010a en 2010b) offers valuable information to the reader who wants to be quickly informed of his way of thinking. Other works of more importance for the study of Kuyper's life, his publications and theology are Vanden Berg (1978); Stellingwerff (1987 and 1990); Heslam (1998); Kuyper (1998); Van der Kooi & De Bruijn (1999); Kuipers (2011); Bishop and Kok (2013) and Bratt (2013).

According to Vollenhoven (in Bril, 1982:102-104), Vander Stelt (1973) and Klapwijk (1980:530-542 and 2013b:293), Kuyper (in line with Augustine and Calvin amongst others) was a semi-mystical thinker.

According to Vollenhoven (2000:250,256), Kuyper first adhered to a dualistic ontology combined with an intellectualistic monargian anthropology. He then changed in his philosophy towards a monistic ontology and a pneumatological theory of interaction between body and soul in his anthropology. Since his mysticism influenced Dooyeweerd, we have to spend some time first on Kuyper's viewpoint in order to understand Dooyeweerd.

#### *Two anthropologies*

Two different anthropologies were popular throughout in the Reformed orthodox tradition. The first is a dichotomist anthropology, according to which the human being is composed of two separate substances, viz. a body and (an intellectual) soul. It is believed that God creates every individual soul, which at death, continues to exist separately in an intermediate state, only to be united to the body at its resurrection. Since God creates human souls, this theory is called creatianism, and since the soul is regarded as a separate substance, it is indicated as subsistence theory. Representatives of this kind of anthropology were Thomas Aquinas, Herman Bavinc and Hendrik Stoker (see previous chapter).

The second option, favoured by other Christian orthodox thinkers, was a trichotomist anthropology, according to which the human being, apart from his/her body, consists of a soul and a spirit. The soul was divided in three parts: intellect, will and emotions, associated with head, hand and heart. In this case it is believed that the soul, sometimes also called the spirit, flows or emanates from God and is at death again united with Him. This neo-Platonic anthropology is called semi-mystic, since it believed in a mystic, ontological union of the human soul with God (the "semi-" will be explained below). Representatives of this trichotomist view of the human soul (not always clearly distinguished from the spirit) were, inter alia, Augustine, Calvin and Kuyper.

Both these anthropologies are of ancient Greek origin (Aristotle already advocated a mystical view) and not biblical at all. (For the historical roots of the trichotomist view or faculty psychology, and its influence throughout the Christian tradition, cf. Vander Stelt, 2005 and for the mystical tradition various sections of Venter, 1985.)

The division of the spirit or soul into three faculties lead to a long struggle throughout history between

### ***Intellectualism, voluntarism and emotionalism***

These three distinctions in the human soul/spirit influenced also Christian thinking throughout the ages up to the present day.

- *Intellectualism* is typical of Aristotelianising thinking. It emphasises the intellect or head (as the highest part of the soul) and leads to orthodoxy (= correct doctrine and abstract thinking).
- *Voluntarism* is typical of Platonising thinking, emphasising the will or hand (regarded as the most important part of the human soul) and leads to orthopraxis (= correct conduct or action).
- *Emotionalism* is typical of Hippocratic-pneumatological thinking. It emphasises the spirit (regarded as the highest part of the soul) with the emphasis on individual emotion, feeling, experience, piety. Its resulting passivity and meekness are, however, not to be identified with genuine Christian humility and piety.

Also our Reformed-Christian tradition has unfortunately developed according to these three erroneous perspectives: From about 1550-1700 it was predominately

intellectualistic; during the eighteenth century (the Further or Second Reformation) emotionalism took the lead; during the nineteenth century (the mature Kuyper and his followers) voluntarism guided Christian action; and today we again see a revival of 18<sup>th</sup> century emotionalism – also in the Reformed world. Great emphasis is placed in church and theology on a close, intimate, personal relationship with God – without indicating exactly what it entails. Is it viewed as an *ontological* relation (semi-mysticism) or a *religious* one (the biblical viewpoint)?

### **Kuyper's "three little foxes"**

Kuyper's initial dichotomist anthropology is clearly reflected in his older publications still under the influence of Reformed scholasticism. According to such a (monarchian-tinted) anthropology the intellectual soul rules over the lower body. Such a philosophical viewpoint implies human passivity.

When Kuyper turned to a monistic philosophy, his anthropology changed to a spirit (sometimes called soul) consisting of an intellect, will and emotion in the higher divergence from the original unity and a body in the lower bifurcation. The higher spirit/soul and lower body interact with each other. According to this anthropology human activity is recognised and passivity criticised.

These threefold parts of the human spirit are described in Kuyper's book *Drie kleine vossen* (Three little foxes) of 1901 – derived from the Song of Songs: 2:15. In it he discussed the three "foxes" that may endanger the church and Christian thinking in general. They are: intellectualism, mysticism and practicalism or activism. According to Kuyper, as such none of them are dangerous, as long as they are kept in balance – there should be harmony between head, heart and hand. However, to isolate the one from the other and overemphasise one of them is dangerous. Kuyper himself struggled to keep the proposed balance since he had to decide whether the intellect, will or emotions interact with and therefore influence bodily life.

By the way, we find the same anthropology (of intellect, will and emotion) and the same struggle in Kuyper's contemporary, Bavinck (1922:91, 237-238) to decide between intellectualism and mysticism, regarded as deviations, and an effort to arrive at the – according to him – correct perspective.

In his meditations *Nabij God te zijn* (cf. Kuyper, 1908, 1925 and 1997) the human heart is granted priority above the intellect and the will (for details, cf. Bratt,

In his meditations *Nabij God te zijn* (cf. Kuyper, 1908, 1925 and 1997) the human heart is granted priority above the intellect and the will (for details, cf. Bratt, 2013:314-318). Emotions determine our visible, bodily life. According to Kuyper, all religion – also the Christian – is therefore the most personal experience of the divine by the highest part of the spirit (the heart or emotional part). It is an *appropriation* of the divine, a *hidden* walk with God, in which the solitary individual soul is *engrafted* into God. By checking out one's spiritual-emotional experience of God, one should establish *religious certainty*, *has to ascertain whether one is saved or not!*

### ***Semi-mysticism***

Like some contemporary Reformed theologians Kuyper did not support "mysticism" in the full meaning of the word. He distinguished between being "mystical" and "mysticism". This probably means that he did not want to support a *radical* or *complete* kind of mysticism. Complete mysticism teaches that the *complete* human being (body and soul) is of divine descent and has to unite again with the godhead. As a Christian philosopher Kuyper could not accept this kind of deification in which the human body is also included.

In *semi-mysticism*, however, only in the highest part of his soul (often called the spirit) a human being also contains something divine. After death it returns into God, but can already in this life pursue a mystical (that is, *ontic*) union with Him.

### ***Emphasis on the will***

As said, Kuyper himself could not keep the balance between intellect, emotion and will.

We have already indicated above that Kuyper's philosophy changes (about 1885) from a dualistic monarchianism to a monistic conception, which did not deny but acknowledged human responsibility. This tendency was strengthened by the following shift. After first putting emphasis on the intellect (head) during his initial scholastic phase and then on emotion (heart) in his later works, Kuyper stressed the human will (hand). In the interaction between spirit and body the will determines our concrete, bodily activities. The reason for this shift may be that Kuyper came to realise that semi-mysticism leads to human passivity – while he wanted to encourage his followers to be actively involved in culture.



the Christian faith a firm abiding place. One's faith had to look above personal experience to the promises in the written revelation of God for its ultimate justification.

While in intellectualism one gets to know God and the world with one's mind, and in emotionalism via one's experienced feelings, now one (according to Kuyper) has to know Him, oneself and the world through one's concrete deeds in practical conduct. From then on (cf. Bratt, 2013:168) the Kuyperians were associated with active players in socio-political-economic life, while the Christian Reformed people of the Netherlands were inclined towards more passive, mystical experiences.

### **Critique**

Although up to today (semi-)mysticism is defended as a biblical idea even by Reformed theologians (cf. e.g. Van Schaik, 2005) also in South Africa, Reformational philosophers like Vollenhoven, Popma and others regard it as being of pagan origin, and something that poses great threats to the Christian faith (cf. Van der Walt, 2011:278-281). Vollenhoven justly emphasises a clear boundary between God and his creation and intimates that the human being in his/her entirety is part of creation, therefore exists "below" this boundary and cannot even be partly divine.

This implies a *radical* – not a relative – distinction between God and man. Not even the highest part of the spirit or soul (intellect, emotion or will) can be regarded as divine. Furthermore, clearly the human being, according to God's revelation, is not composed of body and soul, the latter comprising intellect, emotion and will. According to a Reformational anthropology many – about fifteen – *facets* or *aspects* (not *parts*) can be distinguished in being human.

After explaining the philosophy behind Kuyper's theology, we now again turn to Dooyeweerd's philosophy.

#### *4.2.2 Semi-mysticism in the philosophy of Dooyeweerd*

Dooyeweerd relates in various passages (cf. Henderson, 1994:113-115) how, when in 1923 he read some of Kuyper's (semi-mystical) meditations, it brought about a turning point in his philosophy. He then discovered the human heart as the root of life. On the very first page of the first part of his main work (Dooyeweerd, 1953:v) he mentions his discovery of the "...central significance of the 'heart', repeatedly proclaimed by Holy Scripture to be the religious root of human existence". However,

this was the semi-mystical heart of Kuyper – not of the Bible. Several writers in the past had already drawn attention to this.

Steen (1983:229) writes: "If Kuyper is to be called semi-mystic, then Dooyeweerd cannot escape this qualification either, since he is almost identical to Kuyper on these points".

Velema (1957:238) later sees a relationship between Kuyper and Dooyeweerd when he writes: "A similar structure [to that of Kuyper] is also found in Dooyeweerd, when he speaks about the supra-temporal religious root of creation". [Translated from the Dutch - BJvdW]

Popma also sees a definite relationship between the (semi-)mystical philosophy of Kuyper and Dooyeweerd's philosophy. In the writings of both of them historical time is characterised by a shortage of being and mystic time by a fullness of being. Dooyeweerd's "supra-temporal body of Christ" is related to Kuyper's expression "mystical body of Christ" (Popma, 1962:241-243).

Popma (1962:244-5) also criticises Dooyeweerd's viewpoint on the function of faith, which entails that faith is something transcendental as a consequence of "...its immediate relatedness to the transcendent root and the origin of temporal existence". On this Popma says that: "... the supporters of Reformed mysticism can justifiably lay claim to quotations from [Dooyeweerd's] *De Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee* and *A new critique*". He continues (Popma, 1962:245): "... Dooyeweerd's idea of the function of faith possibly reveals a still tougher remainder of mysticism" (than there is in the work of some scholastic Reformed philosophers).

A half a century ago Wiskerke (1978) also suggested semi-mystical tendencies in Dooyeweerd. And recently Friesen, (2003a, 2003b and 2009) too, again suggested mystical trends in the work of Dooyeweerd, although from a different origin than from Kuyper. According to him Dooyeweerd was influenced by the German Catholic philosopher Franz von Baader (1765-1841). Von Baader tried to anchor Christian thinking in the mysticism of inter alia Meister Eckhardt and Jacob Boehme (cf. Meyer, 1950:393-399). Readers interested to follow the strong reaction of Dooyeweerdian-orientated thinkers against Friesen's viewpoint may consult Strauss (2004), Plantinga (2009), Glas (2009) and Geertsema (2009).

#### 4.2.3 *Positive influences from Kuyper*

Apart from this not so good influence from Kuyper, there were also Reformational elements in Kuyper's thinking that must have attracted Dooyeweerd.

In Chapter 5 of a yet unpublished manuscript Vander Stelt (2013) deals in detail with Kuyper and although he does not follow through the lines to Dooyeweerd, the following points in Kuyper's more Reformational thinking – which also must have inspired Dooyeweerd – can clearly be observed.

##### ***God's kingdom wider than the church alone***

In the first instance, the mature Kuyper no longer identified Christian life with life in the church only, but (as indicated already) pleaded for involvement of Christians as citizens of the kingdom of God in all also showed how this is possible. This was a tremendous step ahead since Protestant Christianity had for almost three centuries (after Dort) more and more limited the Christian faith to spiritual and personal life, and to issues relating to church and theology. Christians consequently had little influence on the crises in Western society and culture (Vander Stelt calls it “navel-gazing”). In his later books like *De gemene gratie* (*Common grace* in 3 volumes) and especially *Pro Rege* (3 volumes) Kuyper, in contrast to his former tendency (up to c.1885) of fleeing the world in passivity, emphasised that Christians should be followers of Christ in all spheres of society, since he is King over every square centimetre of creation. He emphasised the importance of a Christian worldview and philosophy as well as Christian organisations and institutions in order to reach this goal.

In his thinking Kuyper could not fully depart from the dualism of nature and supernature (cf. Zuidema, 1972 and Van der Walt, 2001:14-16), but his intention was to overcome it and to indicate that the whole of life is either a religious service or disserve of the God of the Bible.

##### ***God's threefold revelation as the norm***

In the second instance, Kuyper showed that the norm for all Christian activities is God's revelation. However, he did not – the way his predecessors did in a biblicist manner – restrict God's revelation to the Scriptures. God reveals Himself first in creation and history, then in the Scriptures, and finally in the Word incarnate, Jesus Christ. Therefore God's revelation in the Bible is not isolated from our human

experience in particular times and circumstances. His threefold revelation forms a unity. Neither does it pertain only to the personal/spiritual life of a human being. That would mean that the greater part of life is of lesser significance – a kind of temporary scaffolding which can be left behind when eternal life starts with the death of a person.

### ***The fundamental role of faith***

A third important perspective which made it possible for Christians to live here and now *coram Deo* (in God's presence) in everything they think and do was Kuyper's view of faith as something foundational. He rejected the Thomistic idea that supposed faith to be an additional grace (*donum superaditum*) and does not essentially form part of a human being. According to him it is impossible *not* to believe. Therefore *non*-believers do not exist, only *dis*believers. All people have the *structural* or formal capacity to believe. (Later on Dooyeweerd would call it a function or modality.) However, belief's religious *direction* can differ – in obedience to God's revelation or not – and it determines all the comings and goings of a human being.

### ***A new view of theology***

In the fourth instance Kuyper also distinguished more clearly than his predecessors (including Bavinck) between Christian faith (as something prescientific and basic) and theology (a science). To him theology no longer is the queen of sciences, it does not have the monopoly on God's Scriptural revelation, it has no supernatural authority, it is not practised without an (implicit or explicit) overall philosophical view of reality. Bavinck (e.g. 1922:249) still regarded theology as "(a) speaking about God, through God and toward God"!

All four of these Scriptural lines run from Kuyper right through to Dooyeweerd and also Vollenhoven.

#### ***4.2.4 Dooyeweerd's idea of law***

Apart from reflecting on the *structure* of the cosmos (which leads to a certain *type* of philosophy), every philosopher should also reflect on the normative *direction* or how one should think and act. Up to now this article was mainly about Dooyeweerd's *type* of philosophy (his ontology, anthropology and epistemology).

Dooyeweerd calls his philosophy (cf. especially his earlier articles from approximately 1924 in *Anti-Revolutionaire Staatskunde* as well as Dooyeweerd, 1935, Chapter 1:34 et seq.) the "Wysbegeerte der Wetsidee" (The Philosophy of the Law-idea). So his idea of law played an important part in his philosophy and should get the necessary attention in order to make this overview complete. In the sources mentioned he constructs his idea of law on the idea of God's sovereignty over everything and therefore regards the law as a boundary between God and his creation. It would seem as if during his second phase (abandoning the critical realism of the first) he reaches a more Scriptural view of God's law. But according to Tol's three phases, Dooyeweerd's third (monarchianistic) phase already started more or less in 1928.

Unanswered questions therefore are whether shifts also occurred in Dooyeweerd's idea of law. And if they did, what is the relationship between his typological changes (in three phases) and the normative direction or current of his philosophy? Or the other way round: Which philosophical currents (e.g. initially neo-Idealistic rationalism and later on perhaps irrationalism) influenced his type of philosophy? This question leads our investigation to the next point:

#### *4.2.5 Influences from outside the circle of Dooyeweerd's like-minded predecessors*

Apart from influence by Kuyper, one has to reckon simultaneously with neo-Kantian or neo-idealist influences on Dooyeweerd which we have already drawn attention to and numerous other authors have already pointed out (e.g. Brümmer, 1961:13 et seq.; Wolters, 1985:10 et seq.) Dooyeweerd (1953:v) admits it himself: "Originally I was strongly under the influence first of the neo-Kantian philosophy, later of Husserl's phenomenology". The first was the fashionable philosophy of the times and Henderson (1994) points out its influence in Dooyeweerd's work already before 1928 (i.e. in his second phase). Dooyeweerd was especially interested in the neo-Kantian epistemology. (The main focus of these neo-idealist philosophers also was the question how one could reach reliable scientific and practical knowledge.)

#### ***Confronted with two viewpoints***

Henderson (1994:182) and Steen (1983:14-20) say that in his early development Dooyeweerd was confronted with two viewpoints (cf. again 4.1.1 above):

On the one hand (during the first phase in his philosophy) Dooyeweerd accepted the critical realism of the Reformed-scholastic tradition of his like-minded predecessors. According to this viewpoint, as we have explained already, the *logos* doctrine (of Woltjer and others) took care that there would be conformity between the human mind and the objects of knowledge in reality. Later on, however, Dooyeweerd felt that the *logos* doctrine led to a Platonic duplication of reality. He also could not reconcile himself with the idea that knowledge is merely the agreement between intellect and being, in other words that knowledge is merely a duplicate of reality. Therefore critical realism could not really satisfy him anymore.

On the other hand he could not fully accept the neo-idealist epistemology either. While, on the one hand, realism laid a too one-sided emphasis on the things (objects to be known), the neo-idealism of the neo-Kantian schools (e.g. the Freiburg, Baden and Marburg schools), on the other hand, over-emphasised the one who knows (the subject). As is the case with all rationalistic philosophers, the laws or norms for reality was a prioritised, that is placed from outside to inside the absolutised reason. (Reason prescribed in an autonomous way how reality ought to be.) Dooyeweerd's first critique of rationalism was that reality (as something merely logical) disappears or is absorbed into the human mind. According to him these idealists had lost their grip on reality itself. Even God had merely become a product of human reason!

In the second instance Dooyeweerd could definitely not accept the neo-idealist idea that the human intellect can be autonomous, in other words determine its own norms, instead of being subject to external, divine norms. Eventually Dooyeweerd chose for God as Creator and Law-giver, and also as the Source of the norms for the logical activity of knowing. Thus he replaced the neo-Kantian autonomy with theonomy.

### ***Dooyeweerd's solution***

The integration of the one who knows and the knowable (or subject and object as they were called at the time) Dooyeweerd finds, as said, from approximately 1923 (the second phase of his development) in the human, semi-mystical heart which he has discovered in the meditations of Kuyper (cf. Henderson, 1994:114,115). Not reason, but the heart to him qualifies a human being. It also is the centre of intellect,

will and emotions. Thus Dooyeweerd replaces the absolutised reason of neo-idealism with a supra-temporal ego or heart (cf. Henderson, 1994:115).

Dooyeweerd himself (1953:55) for instance writes: "He [God] has expressed His image in man by concentrating the entire temporal existence in the radical religious unity of an ego in which the totality of meaning of the temporal cosmos was to be focused upon its Origin".

The conclusion by Henderson (1994:182) is that these two schools (the neo-Calvinist and neo-Kantian) in the work of Dooyeweerd "cannot be traced to simply the one or the other, but were involved". Therefore the reader is repeatedly struck by the definite neo-Kantian colour of his philosophy. (Cf. e.g. Hart, 2000:125 et seq. who points out substantially rationalistic traits in Dooyeweerd's idea of law or order.) Just like Kant (old idealist) and the neo-Kantians (neo-idealist), Dooyeweerd also focused on epistemology, on the possibilities and conditions for scientific thinking (i.e. a transcendental critique).

### **4.3 Dooyeweerd's third, monarchianistic phase (1928-1977)**

Since Vollenhoven, and some of his followers regarded Dooyeweerd mainly as a monarchian philosopher (cf. 3.2 above), we will now concentrate on this issue. What exactly does monarchianism entail? Who were its previous representatives? How does it differ from Dooyeweerd's prior, semi-mystical conception?

#### **4.3.1 A brief systematic description**

Only since 1973 did Vollenhoven (in his *privatissima*) distinguish a *monistic* monarchianism alongside the dualistic type. Some viewpoints which he first indicated as semi-mysticism, he now typifies as monistic monarchianism. (For the similarities and differences between these two viewpoints, cf. 4.3.6 below.) For detail Vollenhoven (1979), and Bril (1982:63-68,118-120 and 1986:153-163) can be consulted.

#### **Monistic and dualistic philosophy**

According to Vollenhoven's terminology a monistic philosophy accepts the original unity of everything – from which diversity then springs. This philosophy forms, as it were, the opposite of a dualistic ontology which claims that there originally existed a

duality or twosome – usually called the higher or transcendent and the lower or non-transcendent parts.

### ***Monarchian philosophy***

Monarchianism (from the Greek *monarches* = the sole ruler) denotes a transcendent godhead or sole ruler right at the top of the hierarchy of being or pyramid of being. Below it follows a non-transcendent but universal thinking spirit (*nous*), something divine, yet not equal to the godhead (monarch) himself. Right at the bottom of the pyramid of being is the human being, consisting of *psyche* (spirit) and *soma* (body). The spirit of the individual human being (as seen by dualist monarchianism) is not capable of action in itself. However, from time to time it is actualised or brought into motion by the universal *nous*. (For details, cf. Vollenhoven in Bril, 1982:63, 79, 94 et seq.; Vollenhoven, 2000:339 and 2011:125, 126 et seq.) Note the similarity here with Dooyeweerd's religious ground motives.

### ***Cosmological philosophy***

This static view is further reinforced by the fact that monarchianism is a form of cosmological philosophy. In other words, it lays all emphasis on the fixed structures of things and not on their origin and development.

### ***Different types of monarchianism***

As mentioned already, Vollenhoven distinguished different sub-types in this school, amongst others apart from a dualistic, since 1973 also a monistic one (cf. Bril in Vollenhoven, 2000:22-28; 335-336). The last-mentioned form of it is already found amongst others in the work of the ancient Greek philosopher, Speusippos (410-339 BC), Plotinos (205-270 AD), the Renaissance philosopher, Cusanus (1401-1464) and the rationalistic philosopher Husserl (1859-1938).

In a dualistic monarchianism the godhead (or God in Christianised philosophy) is the Immovable Mover who, as object of desire, sets in motion the lower cosmic reality so that it can strive back to the higher objective or godhead. With the monistic type god/God, however, is a Ruling One or Working Being which brings the lower into motion. (For the latter type, cf. Vollenhoven, 1979; Vollenhoven in Bril, 1982:62–68,118–120; Bril, 1986:375; Vollenhoven, 2000:22–28,335–336; 2005a:264; 2011:117–155.)



First something about monarchianism in general.

#### 4.3.2 *An age-old monarchian tradition*

The monarchianistic worldview is probably originally already found in the work of the Greek philosopher Aristotle (384-322 BC) in his later phases of development. In any case a (noölogical) kind of monarchianism is already found in the work of Alexander of Aphrodisias (c. 200 AD), so that later on it became known as Alexandrism. This pagan notion of a godhead was, however, linked with the biblical idea of God since the early Christian philosophy and continues into the Middle Ages and even up to today. (The well-known medieval philosopher, Thomas Aquinas, for instance, initially thought in a monarchian way and only later shifted to a subsistence theory.)

Monarchianistic philosophers mostly deny the tri-unity of God and are known in church history as the anti-Trinitarians or Unitarians (cf. Polman, 1960). They were therefore regarded as heretics (probably the reason for Thomas's change of view). According to an old decree by Theodosius the Great (395 AD), those who denied the Tri-unity at the time could be punished by death. This is the reason why, for instance, the Unitarian, Michael Servet, died on the stake in Genève in the time of Calvin.

Although according to today's criteria this persecution should not have taken place, nevertheless the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches of the time had some insight into the danger of monarchianism. Since the activity of individual human beings is totally dependent on the impulses from the ruling monarch (god/God) via the universal thinking spirit (nous), a monarchianistic view leads to quietism, passivity and apathy in the human being. If it is true that the divine, sole working and sole ruling monarch (identified with the God of the Bible by Christian synthetic philosophers) determines everything a human being does, then human remorse, joy, et cetera is regarded as his work only. Remorse and other human behaviour then are senseless, since they are simply a result of divine actualisation. In this way a human being is exempt from his own responsibility. Monarchianism therefore is an unbiblical way of thinking about both God and man and their relationship.

#### 4.3.3 *Some historical representatives of monistic monarchianism*

As we have mentioned, Vollenhoven supposes the following historical line in the case of the monistic type of monarchianism: Plato – Speusippos – Plotinos – Augustine – Cusanus – Calvin – Kuyper – Husserl – Dooyeweerd. We leave out

most of these thinkers and limit ourselves here to only three of Dooyeweerd's other supposed predecessors to indicate the similarity between their views and his philosophy.

### **Plotinos (A.D. 205–270)**

The monistic monarchianistic tradition in philosophy is sometimes also called the henological tradition. The name is derived from the Greek *hen* (=one) which clearly denotes its monistic nature (cf. Again Aertsen, 1985, Beierwaltes, 1985 and Kenney, 1991). According to Plotinos the *hen* (one) or godhead exists beyond all being – it is transcendent. The world's diversity emanates or flows gradually out of the godhead as the original unity. One could call it the typical, already mentioned monarchianistic "top-to-bottom" philosophy.

Concerning the human being, Plotinos accepts a supra-temporal, immortal part, the soul. A human being should be absorbed in his own soul, in his "Seelengrund" or "Seelenspitz" (German: "Selbstversenkung" – self-absorption). As a consequence of the fact that monistic philosophy accepts a hierarchy of being and no radical distinction or boundary between the godhead and a human being – the former simply is higher than the latter – a human being in the inner depths of his own soul/spirit discovers the divine ("Innerschau"). The human being is then united with god in ecstasy (*unio mystica*). In this way he is exalted ("Erhebung") above the world so that, instead of seeing its plurality, he sees the original unity or godhead (= "Einheitschau"). He obtains a God's eye view of reality! This is the by now well-known ontic movement of "below-to-above" philosophy of monarchianism.

According to an age-old earlier tradition – going back to Greek philosophy – the *hen* or godhead (the transcendent) of Plotinos is the eternal one. Over against him stands the cosmic reality as the (non-transcendent) temporary or transitory. Time, contrary to unity, is a form of division or diversity, of fragmentation, emanating from the eternal unity. Think of a prism which fragments (white) light (the eternal) into different colours (the temporary). Geertsema (1970:151) points out an unmistakable relation between this idea of time held by Plotinos and that of Dooyeweerd.

However, not all cosmic things are of a temporary nature. As we have said, Plotinos accepts that the *psychai* of human beings exist on almost the same level as the godhead, that is, above time or semi-eternal.

### **Cusanus (1401–1464)**

According to Vollenhoven a similar philosophy is found in the work of Meister Eckehardt (approximately 1260-1328). A tutor of Cusanus, Heymeric van de Velde (= *a Campo*, in Latin) also taught (like Plotinos) that all cosmic things emanate from God (*emanatio*) and return to him (*reversio*). The human being should begin with self-knowledge, since the intellect of a human being mirrors everything that exists. Self-knowledge also leads to knowledge of God, since a human being in an ontic way is related to God in the higher part of his intellect. Van de Velde already uses the term *coincidentia oppositorum* (= coinciding of opposites), viz. the coinciding of the way downwards from the divine unity to creational diversity, and the opposite way upwards from the cosmic, temporal diversity back to divine, eternal unity.

These ideas emerge clearly once more in the work of Nicholas of Kues (Latin: Cusanus.) Bril in Vollenhoven (2000:109) and also the Wikipedia website provide information on books of and about Cusanus. According to the doctrine of *coincidentia oppositorum* the godhead guarantees the unity above all (cosmic) division, the removal of all finite, temporary contradictions. Therefore he propagates a *docta ignorantia* (doctrine of learned ignorance) as the only way of knowing God. (For a brief but excellent exposition of Cusanus's neo-Platonic mystic philosophy, cf. Venter, 1985:42-44 and for the text of Cusanus' book, *De docta ignorantia* (Learned ignorance) see Hopkins, 1981.)

In the philosophy of Cusanus one finds again the double movement of "Erhebung" (the direction or elevation from below to above, to the Unity) and the resulting "Einheitschau" (view of the unity), as well as the reversed idea of the temporary reality as a "fragmentation" of the eternal (that is, the direction from above to below).

With Cusanus' idea that creation flows out of God, or that God is ontologically present in the cosmos, the danger of pantheism cannot be avoided. And if one additionally views God as the monarch, determining everything in the world, one is faced with determinism and passivism on the human side. However, if one accepts an arbitrary, capricious God (like Occam), one is left totally in darkness. I prefer to think of God as the All Powerful, who nevertheless remains faithful to all the promises in his Word and allows human responsibility.

### **Husserl (1859–1938)**

According to Vollenhoven this train of thought continues up to Edmund Husserl. In his work Vollenhoven distinguishes an evolution (cf. also De Boer, 1968 and 1977) in the three phases with which the reader will not be tired here.

Like all late rationalist philosophers, Husserl laid great emphasis on scientific methods to reach true knowledge. Like a typical (neo-)idealist he also made an effort to bring about a reconciliation between theoretical reason (natural scientific methods) and practical reason (methods used in the humanities). Above all, however, he was a rationalist (cf. Son, 1972:59 et seq.), who believed in reason (an absolutised, autonomous, that is, self-justifying intellect). His philosophy thus offers a transcendental critique, in other words a description of the conditions for the existence of reason or consciousness and the way it works. He investigates the aprioristic contents of reason (its normative character) with his phenomenological method.

A brief comparison with Thomas Aquinas and Husserl reveals the following. Dooyeweerd's philosophy is related to the first phase (monistic monarchianism) in Aquinas' philosophy. When he (Aquinas) changed in his anthropology to a subsistence theory, it was still *without* immanent logical object. However, later on philosophers like Husserl (cf. Vollenhoven, 2005a:403) adhered to a subsistence theory *with* immanent logical object, combined with the idea of intentionality. In this way in Husserl's philosophy, the external world becomes nearly redundant, deprived of reality. Also in Dooyeweerd's final phase reality is merely called "meaning".

In any case Vollenhoven (in Brill, 1982: 105-109, 118-120 and 2000:247,259) as well as Verburg (1989) suspects definite influence of Husserl's monarchianism on Dooyeweerd.

#### **4.3.4 Dooyeweerd as a monarchian**

Indeed one finds in the work of Dooyeweerd *both* the above-mentioned directions which we have pointed out repeatedly. In the first instance a descending, diverging direction from the Origin (as Unity) downwards into cosmic diversity, and in the second instance an ascending, converging direction from the cosmic diversity to a unity in the Origin, God.

From a supra-individual thinking spirit (not very distinctly identifiable in Dooyeweerd's case) activation takes place in a downward direction – think of Dooyeweerd's four religious (spiritual) – but mysterious – ground motifs, supposed to be the driving force behind Western civilisation (cf. Dooyeweerd, 1979). The other way round, temporary reality (*temporalitas*) is directed via the supra-temporal human heart (*aevernitas*) at the eternal Origin (*aeternitas*).

By the way, in this respect there is in Dooyeweerd's work (just as in Husserl's) again a remarkable similarity to the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas (1224/5-1274), who also was first a monarchian as described by Aertsen (1974 and 1982). According to this author a central idea of Thomas also was the circulation motive: The lower, temporal creation flows from the eternal God (Origin), while also returning to God (now its highest Purpose). Also Dooyeweerd's idea of the heart as an *aevum* (a supra-temporal centre in the human being) already occurs in the work of Thomas (cf. Van der Walt, 2013:11) and is taken over by Dooyeweerd (1940: footnotes 23 and 24 on p. 181) – without any critique.

#### 4.3.5 Dooyeweerd's supra-temporal heart and creation as meaning

For Dooyeweerd's anthropology one should consult his recently published work (cf. Dooyeweerd, 2011), available for the first time – previously it only existed as a manuscript. It was written as the third part of *Reformation and scholasticism in philosophy* (published in 1949 in Dutch).

Within his monistic monarchianistic ontology Dooyeweerd's idea of a supra-temporary heart – which was criticised by many (already by Wiskerke 1962a, 1962b) – also becomes clearer. The human heart to Dooyeweerd is the converging point which guarantees the supra-temporal unity of creational diversity and directs it to the Origin of everything. So to Dooyeweerd's way of thinking the whole creation converges in the human being in an anthropocentric way. Henderson (1994:200) calls it the "switchboard" in which all facets of creation are represented, but he regards it as a "troublesome idea" in Dooyeweerd's writings.

In conformity with this, to Dooyeweerd God is *being*, while creation is merely *meaning*, for it is dependent on God and points back to Him, and thus cannot have meaning of itself. At first glance it sounds like a biblical perspective (cf. e.g. Rom. 11:36), but then it should be understood in a *religious* and not in an *ontic* sense.

Does this idea of creation viewed as simply meaning not cause creation to lose its concrete feature? Glas remarks that the concept "sense" (or "meaning") in the work of Dooyeweerd is hard to digest. For how can something come out of God and be taken up into Him without itself being something? (cf. Glas, 2011a: 14–16 and 2011b: 31, 32). Maybe Dooyeweerd's idea of "sin" in Dutch (meaning) was an over-reaction to the scholastic idea of substance (i.e. that the human soul can have an independent existence).

As already suggested above in the case of Husserl's rationalism, the world outside reason becomes deprived of its concreteness or reality – it can only be rationally constituted and then studied. The question may therefore also be asked whether Dooyeweerd's view on the meaning character of cosmic reality is not an echo of Husserl's neo-idealist reductionistic rationalism.

#### 4.3.6 *The differences and similarities between monistic monarchianism and semi-mysticism*

Finally it is important to trace how the second (semi-mystical) phase in Dooyeweerd's work differs and nevertheless links up with his third (monarchianistic) period.

##### **Differences**

The most important difference between monistic monarchianism and semi-mysticism is that the former is a *monistic* conception (all diversity flows from the primary unity), while the latter fits into a *dualistic* philosophy (an original twosome of a transcendent-eternal and non-transcendent-temporary reality is distinguished from the beginning). The reader may consult Vollenhoven (2005a:377-380) for a clear description of semi-mystic thinking through the ages.

However, the dualistic character of semi-mysticism does not mean that it amounts to the same view as dualistic monarchianism. In the latter conception there is a fundamental boundary between the godhead and the divine universal thinking spirit or world-soul (*nous*). The monistic monarchian (cf. remark under 4.3.4 above that the relationship of the universal thinking spirit to God is indistinct in the writings of Dooyeweerd) and the semi-mystic does not recognise such a clear boundary. The boundary is found *within the human being himself*, because he has a higher, transcendent facet, the highest part of his soul.

As explained already, semi-mysticism usually implies a trichotomist anthropology. The human being consists of body, soul and spirit, of which the latter only is supposed to be transcendent and therefore immortal. In the case of monistic monarchianism the highest part of the human being is called the apex of the soul, which is regarded as supra-temporal (i.e. transcendent) and therefore immortal. (As indicated above, this part of the human being may also be divided into three faculties: intellect, emotion and will.)

### **Similarities**

In both cases of in monistic monarchianism and semi-mysticism, the human being therefore has something almost divine.

In both these views the point of departure is an *ontological hierarchy* with two directions. Everything comes from God as the highest being, and the lower cosmic beings eventually lead back to the highest godhead/God. The biblical idea of the human being as the image of God is therefore regarded (also by many Christian thinkers) as something *ontic* (a divine, supra-temporal *part*). Formulated differently, the image of God denotes something *structural* in a human being. Actually, however, this biblical idea denotes a *religious* relationship: Human beings mirror God's image to the extent to which they obey God's commandments, especially his law of love, and therefore are not automatically (as a consequence of their structural composition) image of God (cf. Bril in Vollenhoven, 2000:278-280).

### **Connection**

From the above it is clear that monistic monarchianism and semi-mysticism, in spite of differences, can look very similar (cf. e.g. Plotinos above). It will, therefore, not be easy to clearly demarcate phase 3 from phase 2 in the development of Dooyeweerd's philosophy. (This may also be the reason why Tol's latest hypothesis – see 3.3 above – is that the mystical character of Dooyeweerd's thinking was not left behind in phase 4, but became even stronger.)

As stated already, Vollenhoven distinguishes two phases in the writings of Kuyper: first a dualistic monarchianism and later a monistic theory of interaction. It is therefore not excluded that Dooyeweerd could have taken over, not only his semi-mystical ideas, but also his monarchianistic ideas from Kuyper and that later, under influence of Husserl's monistic monarchianism, it was reworked in a monistic way.

This concludes the Vollenhoviaian perspective on Dooyeweerd. It clearly indicates that every Reformational philosopher, as a child of his own and preceding times, never succeeds in disengaging him-/herself entirely from foreign, even unbiblical influences. The mandate *semper reformanda* (constantly to be reformed) is never finalised! (This also applies to my own effort to analyse Dooyeweerd's philosophy.) At the same time every Reformational philosopher also succeeded in progressing some steps on the way of a *philosophia reformata*. This is also true of Dooyeweerd's philosophy – our last point.

## **5 Some highlights in Dooyeweerd's philosophy**

The critical review of Dooyeweerd's philosophy above therefore does not mean that it may be disregarded as insignificant. Finally I highlight the following points of his important contribution to Reformational thinking.

- In line with the worldview of Kuyper he supported wholeheartedly the biblical idea of Christ being king in all spheres of life and also showed how it can be substantiated theoretically and practically.
- He showed conclusively that reality cannot merely be explained from a this-worldly, empirical perspective. Christian scholars should look at the world departing from its Creator and his revelation.
- Reformational philosophers should be critical of all efforts aimed at a synthesis or accommodation of God's Word and earlier pagan as well as contemporary secular philosophy.
- The antithesis between good and evil may not be sought in a distinction between the *structures* of creation (for instance life in the church is good as a matter-of-course and politics automatically is something evil). Both good and evil exist as the consequence of a contrast in the *religious direction* according to which people live in obedience or disobedience to God's law.
- Theoretical-scientific thinking is determined by such a fundamental religious surrender and is dependent on an encompassing worldview and philosophy.
- Scholars should therefore pay attention to the history and philosophical foundations of their particular subjects.



- Genuine Christian scholarship does not merely mean a pious Christian *addition* to accepted scientific results, but a profound reformation *from within* in every sphere of study.
- Dooyeweerd's philosophy provides the analytical tools to approach in a new way the research fields of the special sciences and thus prevent unbiblical approaches, reductionism and antinomies. (This applies to all disciplines. However, I mention as an example only its application to contemporary digital issues in the works of, for instance, Basden, 2002; Jones & Basden, 2003; Schuurman, 2013 and Van der Stoep, 1998.)
- Finally, Dooyeweerd further developed the Kuyperian idea of a (structural and confessional) pluralistic philosophy of society.

May these few glimpses and the preceding analysis of his philosophy encourage readers to study Dooyeweerd's writings.

## **6 Conclusion: looking back and forward**

This chapter as well as the previous three can be concluded by a short review and by looking ahead.

### **6.1 Review**

There is an African proverb that says when one speaks (and probably also writes) one should look out to provide not only food for the giraffes high up in the branches, but also grass for the small antelopes low down on the ground. Whether the preceding three chapters succeeded in providing something to chew and to ruminate on for both the giraffes (philosophical connoisseurs) and for the antelopes (ordinary interested people) they alone will be able to assess. In any case this was what the author had in mind.

All four chapters were therefore *intended to give an overview and reconnoitre*. The author would have liked to have made much more reference to the actual writings of Calvin, Vollenhoven, Stoker and Dooyeweerd. That is why this monograph has a preliminary character. Much more "Kleinforschung" (detailed research) is needed. To do this critical editions of the works of the three twentieth century philosophers are a prerequisite. As Steen (1983:278) already realised, a sound reconstruction of the origin of Reformational philosophy during the 20<sup>th</sup> century – or even of only one of

the triumvirate – would be a lifework of not only one person, but a whole team of researchers.

## **6.2 Looking forward**

I started chapter 2 with the question as to how a tradition can be passed on to a new generation in such a way that it does not become a dead tradition but remains a living one. After all the preceding pages, however, it may bring not only confusion but also frustration to the younger generation. So many differences of opinion already among these Christian philosophers! Such a complex process in which so many influences could have played a role! Unique personalities, each of whose philosophy contains something original which cannot just be traced to external influences...

Therefore the following should be kept in mind. Calvin, Vollenhoven, Stoker and Dooyeweerd were, like every generation, children of their times and above all fallible human beings so that we may never swear by their philosophies.

On the one hand profound humility is appropriate. Calvin already said that the first, second and third requirement for a true Christian philosophy is *humilitas* (modesty). On the other hand we are here dealing with a particularly rich tradition with relevance for the whole of life. It has great potential to be developed further in a critical-creative manner (cf. again my introduction to the second chapter). There is a need to build on the foundations of what was good in the past, enhanced in such a way that it will be relevant and inspiring to our own times and circumstances – a living tradition!

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The following recent book by the same author reviews different contemporary historiographical methods in philosophy and discusses in more detail the consistent problem-historical method and its implications to human sexuality and gender issues:

***Constancy and change: historical types and trends in the passion of the Western mind*** (150 pages).

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## THE BOOK

In the light of a general decline and concomitant superficiality in Christian-Reformational thinking and acting, this monograph directs our steps *ad fontes*, back to the fountains of this tradition. This turning back, however, does not imply repositioning, or an effort to uncritically revive bygone times.

- More than 450 years ago John Calvin (1509-1569) shaped a biblically-based or Reformational worldview, called a Christian philosophy, relevant for his own times.
- About 80 years ago three scholars, Dirk Vollenhoven (1892-1977) and Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977) in the Netherlands and Hendrik Stoker (1899-1993) in South Africa, building in an original way on the worldview legacy of Calvin, developed – each in his own way – a Reformational philosophy. This book focuses on the cradle of a Christian worldview and philosophy in the life and thought of these four “fathers”.
- However, our ways of thinking and acting reformationally – involvement in the whole of life and not merely in “spiritual” affairs – are never to be regarded as complete. To ensure its relevance, every new generation has, in creative ways, to rethink and rework it in different contexts. Then this unique, rich and liberating Christian tradition will continue to be a living one – also in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- Therefore, the reconnaissance offered here is a reminder, especially to the younger generation, to appreciate a valuable heritage and be inspired by it anew.
- The book, written in accessible language, is recommended reading for students and scholars in philosophy, theology and other disciplines as well as the general reading and thinking public.

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Bennie (B.J.) van der Walt (born 1939) studied Theology and Philosophy at the Potchefstroom University in South Africa and the Free University in the Netherlands, obtaining the Th.B. and D.Phil. degrees. From 1974 to 1999 he was Director of the Institute for Reformational Studies and Professor in Philosophy. Since 2000 has he been research fellow in the School of Philosophy at the North-West University. He has written many popular and scholarly articles and books and lectured in many countries. He was awarded two honorary doctorates as well as the Stals Prize for Philosophy.

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