
Moments of agreement: the reformational worldview in dialogue with other Christian worldviews

Renato Coletto
School of Philosophy
North-West University
POTCHEFSTROOM
renato.coletto@nwu.ac.za

Abstract

The reformational worldview is often discussed by focusing on its diversity from other Christian worldviews. After a brief discussion concerning the reformed type of worldviews, this article tries to identify “moments of agreement” between the reformational worldview and other classical Christian worldviews characterised by the nature-and-grace paradigm. In the following step, the author asks to what extent these moments of agreement entail the possibility of concrete cooperation between Christians adopting different worldviews. Here the two extreme alternatives of isolationism (in order to avoid compromise) and compromise (in order to avoid conflicts) present themselves. It is suggested that Christians should accept both the unique traits of their worldviews and the opportunities to cooperate with fellow-Christians, even if temporarily or in limited areas.

Opsomming

Momente van ooreenkoms: die reformatoriese wêreldbeskouing in dialoog met ander Christelike wêreldbeskouings

Die reformatoriese wêreldbeskouing word dikwels bespreek deur te fokus op sy verskille met ander Christelike wêreldbeskouings. Na 'n kort bespreking aangaande die soorte reformatoriese wêreldbeskouings, probeer hierdie artikel om "momente van ooreenkoms" te identifiseer tussen die reformatoriese lewensvisie en ander klassieke Christelike wêreldbeskouings wat gekenmerk word deur die natuur-genade paradigma. In 'n volgende stap vra die outeur tot watter mate hierdie momente van ooreenkoms konkrete samewerking tussen Christene wat verskillende wêreldbeskouings huldig, moontlik maak. Hier stel die twee uiterste alternatiewe van isolasionisme (om kompromie te vermy) en kompromie (ten einde konflik te vermy) hulself aan die orde. Daar word voorgestel dat Christene beide die unieke eienskappe van hul wêreldbeskouing en die geleenthede om met mede-Christene saam te werk, aanvaar, selfs al word dit net tydelik of in beperkte areas gedoen.

1. Introduction

The reformational worldview (or ground-motive)¹ belongs to the reformed "family" of worldviews. More specifically, it is the worldview developed by Kuyper, Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven (the founders of reformational philosophy) and by many others who aimed at promoting an integral Christian approach to politics, scholarship, the arts and so forth. The unique traits of the reformational worldview (on which I will return later) are often highlighted and *contrasted* to other Christian approaches, mostly characterised by the nature-and-grace motif. I have done so myself in a recent article (Coletto, 2014) in which I argue that the reformational worldview, when compared with the other Christian worldviews, reveals itself as belonging to a different group. In fact, it rejects the nature-and-grace approach and it appeals to the threefold theme of creation-fall-and-redemption. After publishing that article,

¹ In the following pages I will use the terms worldview, paradigm and approach as synonyms of *ground-motive* (Dooyeweerd's term). All these terms will refer to the ultimate (i.e. religious) source from which human acts (including theoretical thinking) are issued.

however, I received a mail from Prof. Jim Olthuis,² who pleaded for a more “ecumenical” approach, one that could help recognising the commonalities between the different Christian approaches.

At that time I responded rather grudgingly. It is exactly due to its uniqueness and originality that the reformational worldview could provide genuine alternatives to scholasticism, pietism, dualism and so forth. One of the most radical expressions of this idea is attributed to Groen Van Prinsterer, who is reported to have said: “in our isolation is our strength” (quoted in Runner, 1970:19). Nevertheless, I started reflecting on the commonalities between Christian worldviews and I became intrigued by the topic. This article is the result of such reflections.

The first aim of this article is to clarify some characteristics of the reformational worldview. In particular, I will ask the question whether it is appropriate to define the reformational worldview by using the formula “grace transforms nature”. I will argue that this formula seems to define other reformed worldviews that adopt the basic themes of nature-and-grace. In the second phase of this article I will search for some “moments of agreement” between the reformational worldview and other Christian worldviews belonging to the Lutheran group, the Catholic or other groups. Finally, some reflections are proposed on the issue of Christian ecumenism, dialogue and cooperation. Here the question is: having identified some moments of agreement between different Christian worldviews, to what extent does this agreement establish the possibility of cooperation among Christian scholars, politicians, church leaders and so forth?

The purpose of this article is to help Christians from different confessional traditions and different vocations to better understand the roots of each other’s positions and to be able to cooperate better. However, as my research-focus is on science and scholarship, the discussion will often (though not exclusively) proceed in relation to problems, examples and issues pertaining to Christian scholarship. I will begin from a general introduction to the main Christian worldviews or ground-motives.

2 Personal communication of 22 April 2014. Prof. Jim Olthuis is Professor Emeritus from the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto, an important centre for reformational scholarship in North America.

2. Christian worldviews

Traditionally, at least in reformed circles, the most influential worldviews or ground-motives operating in the Christian community are considered to be five. This has been the shared opinion of authors like Bavinck (1888; cf. Veenhof, 1994), Niebuhr (1956), Olthuis (1970), Wolters (1989) and Van der Walt (2001). There is also substantial agreement on the definition of the five worldviews. They are the Liberal worldview, the Roman Catholic, the Lutheran, the Anabaptist (nowadays Charismatic or Pentecostal) and the Reformed worldview. (Of course different authors use different labels and definitions, but they coincide to a very large extent). These worldviews can be associated with specific Christian confessional traditions (as I did just now), provided one keeps in mind that not everyone within a certain tradition will adopt the same worldview. For example, when one thinks of the Roman Catholic tradition, one will soon discover that although the grace-above-nature approach (see Figure 1) is adopted by a majority of Roman Catholic scholars, Tertullian and Augustine followed different ground-motives.³ The same situation will emerge if we look at more recent authors or movements and if we look at any other confessional tradition.

One should also keep in mind that, within the same worldview, different sub-versions are available. For example the Lutheran worldview “grace alongside nature” can lead to at least two sub-versions. In one case the relationship between grace and nature can be seen as one of concordance, dialogue and interaction. But it is also possible to imagine nature and grace as two “closed compartments”: still integrating and compatible with each other but having little or no interaction between them. In the following pages I will mention some of the sub-versions but I will focus especially on the main versions.

Of course there are different ways of portraying the relation between the Christian worldviews. A scheme elaborated by Olthuis classifies them according to the sequence displayed in the first column of Figure 1.⁴

Figure 1: an overview of the most common Christian worldviews

- 3 As far as Tertullian is concerned, Van Niekerk (2006:33) rightly regards him as the first scholar who adopted the grace-against-nature approach (Van Niekerk calls it a “fundamentalist” approach). As far as Augustine is concerned, Dooyeweerd (1984, 1:178-179) says that his fundamental paradigm was the biblical ground-motive (creation-fall-redemption), though he recognizes that Augustinian philosophy is infiltrated by Greek philosophy.
- 4 It should be noted, however, that Olthuis does not explicitly use the labels (Liberal, Catholic etcetera) that appear in the first column above. The definitions of the second column are derived from both Wolters (1989:24) and Van der Walt (1994:99 ff.; 2001:74). The “key-ideas” of the third column are my own attempts (see Coletto, 2012:2, Table 1) at capturing the main aims of these worldviews.

Type:	Definitions:	Key-ideas:
1) Liberal	Grace equals nature	Acquisition, incorporation
2) Catholic	Grace above nature	Integration, synthesis
3) Lutheran	Grace alongside nature	Parallelism, compatibility, complementarity
4) Anabaptist	Grace against nature	Opposition, conflict

The sequence proposed by Olthuis does not follow historical or chronological criteria, but is rather informed by systematic concerns. Olthuis (1970:108 ff.) explains that his intention is to place the two more “moderate” worldviews in the two internal positions (2 and 3), while we find the more “radical” ones at the top and bottom positions (1 and 4). This sequence also shows that the two radical worldviews are the most far from (i.e. opposed to) each other.

Olthuis, however, does not include in his scheme the reformed or the reformational worldview (although he discusses the others from his reformational point of view). Should a fifth row be added to illustrate the family of reformed worldviews, it would look more or less as follows.

Figure 2: an overview of the Reformed worldviews

Type:	Definitions:	Key-ideas:
5) Reformed	Grace transforms nature, Creation, fall, redemption	Reformation, transformation

In the following pages I would like to discuss the moments of agreement between the first four worldviews and the reformational worldview. The reasons for choosing the reformational worldview as a term of comparison (and not the whole family of reformed worldviews) is that the reformational worldview is often contrasted to other worldviews and it is time to rectify the situation. I am quite confident, however, that what will be argued below about the reformational worldview is applicable to most reformed worldviews.

Before coming to the moments of agreement, however, I would like to question a fairly common definition of the reformational worldview.

3. The reformational worldview: creation-fall-redemption

Most Christian worldviews share a fundamental feature: they are all shaped by a basic distinction between nature and grace. They differ in the way they understand the relation between nature and grace, but they agree that this is the basic distinction.⁵ The reformational worldview, by contrast, finds itself in a rather unique (some would say isolated) position. In fact, the latter does not stem from a different understanding of the relation between nature and grace but it consciously appeals to the threefold biblical theme creation-fall-redemption. (Some regard it as necessary to add a fourth theme, i.e. consummation – cf. van der Walt, 2012:7).

The fundamental traits of the reformational worldview have been recently out-laid and discussed by Bishop (2015:1). Some of these traits are the recognition of God's sovereignty over "all spheres of life", the rejection of the idea of religious neutrality, recognition of sphere sovereignty, the rejection of the nature-grace duality, the importance of the cultural mandate (i.e. the ambition of promoting Christian scholarship, Christian politics) and so forth. Bishop (2015:1) correctly links all these themes to the biblical ground-motive of creation, fall and redemption.

In some cases, however, the reformational worldview too has been described in terms related to the nature-and-grace language, by using the formula: "grace transforms nature".⁶ Perhaps this was due to a need to compare more easily the five worldviews-families and to let their key-ideas emerge with more clarity. Yet I would like to argue that it is inappropriate to define the reformational worldview by using the formula "grace transforms nature". It is inappropriate in the sense that it does not reflect the real intentions and aspirations of the reformational community.

In fact, the "grace transforms nature" paradigm implies a line of distinction

5 It might be asked whether in the various Christian positions the notions *nature* and *grace* have comparable meanings. Apart from small possible variations, the different worldviews will identify the same realities as belonging to the sphere of grace or to the sphere of nature. For example: theology (among the sciences), the church (among social institutions) the human soul (among other "parts" of a human being) and faith (among other "faculties") will always be related to the sphere of grace. By contrast, natural science, the state, the human body or reason will be associated with the sphere of nature.

6 See for example van der Walt, 1994:101; Wolters uses the formula "grace restores nature" (quoted in van der Walt, 2001:73). One could argue that the nature-and-grace worldviews constitute diverse alterations of the threefold biblical motif creation-fall-redemption. The latter is first divided in two poles; then one of its components is given prominence to the detriment of others (see Coletto, 2014:9-10).

between grace and nature. This line is used to distinguish, in society, between the institutions related to grace (the church, the missions, perhaps the Christian school) and the institutions related to nature (the political party, the factory, the municipality). When it comes to science and scholarship, the same line will distinguish the disciplines related to the sphere of grace (theology, church history) and to the sphere of nature (philosophy, biology, economics etcetera). When it comes to human beings, the same line will be drawn to distinguish the soul from the body and the activities related to nature and grace.

Once this distinction is drawn, “grace transforms nature” means that it is the task of the church to transform politics according to its principles by having a degree of influence on a government or on a Christian party. The same situation can be envisaged if we speak of Christian scholarship. It is theology as the “queen” that Christianises philosophy, biology or sociology. In other words, this definition implies firstly a distinction and secondly a “mediator”, a privileged agent through which the ideal of reformation should be promoted or achieved.

In the reformational worldview, by contrast, the reformation-process is not in the hands of a mediator; it is rather in the hands of the different agents operating in the different spheres of life and society. This type of ideal avoids introducing a certain hierarchical view of social institutions, scientific disciplines or human activities. A hierarchical view is inevitable, I think, when we distinguish between the spheres related to grace and the spheres related to nature. This makes it impossible to really adopt the old Calvinist ideal of living *Coram Deo* (each sphere, vocation or field of study is placed “in front of God”, without mediators or hierarchies).

Perhaps, the formula “grace transforms nature” identifies a view of life that Dooyeweerd (2012:38) called the “reformed-scholastic” worldview. Dooyeweerd did not mention the specific formula (“grace transforms nature”), but he attributed to the reformed-scholastic attitude, strategies that fit perfectly the above description of this worldview. For example, according to Dooyeweerd, reformed-scholasticism will be forever suspicious of a philosophy that does not place itself under the authority of reformed theology. In fact (I would comment), it will identify theology as the “mediator” in the process of the reformation of scholarship.

Nevertheless, according to Dooyeweerd, this “reformed-scholastic” worldview should not be regarded as a Lutheran or Roman Catholic approach (cf. Dooyeweerd, 2012:38). It is also not a sub-version of those worldviews, I would say; as its key-idea is one of “reformation”, it belongs to the reformed

tradition. In fact, it shares other crucial characteristics of the reformational worldviews, for example the idea of God's sovereignty in all spheres of life, the importance of the cultural mandate and so forth. Those who adopt this worldview can often embrace the Calvinian ideal of reformation "in all spheres of life". It is not necessary to introduce a limitation (although it is sometimes introduced) to the scope of reformation. It may also be possible to accept, at least to some extent, the principle of "sphere sovereignty", namely the recognition of the peculiar nature and role of each social or modal sphere. Dooyeweerd did not spare his criticism on the reformed-scholastic tradition; and yet he did not lose sight of its valuable aspects. The same can be said of the Roman Catholic tradition and so forth. This is one of the reasons why Dengerink (1994) regards Dooyeweerd as an "ecumenical" philosopher.

In the next section, I would like to place the reformational worldview in dialogue with the other nature-and-grace approaches. The two "moderate" approaches (2 and 3 – see Figure 1) will be discussed first, then the two "radical" ones (4 and 1) will be discussed. My aim, however, is not to make an exhaustive list of all the possible moments of agreement between these worldviews. The discussion should be regarded as exemplary rather than exhaustive.

4. The Roman Catholic worldview: grace above nature

There are certainly good reasons, for reformational thinkers, to question the grace-above-nature approach to scholarship, to politics, to education and so forth. Generally speaking, this approach seems to express especially the "synthetic attitude", an inclination to accommodating, compromising or integrating. What should one say concerning the possible moments of agreement with the reformational worldview?

In my opinion, the main moment of agreement lies in the fact that this approach comes closer than others to the idea of reformation. True, it can always be objected that grace and nature are like oil and water, they never really mix. It is also true that grace is typically supposed to "control" nature, which is not the same as reformation. What is actually achieved, in most cases, seems to be a synthesis.

Yet one should pay attention to the formula "*gratia naturam non tollit sed perficit*" (grace does not eliminate nature but brings it to perfection or completion – Aquinas, 2006, 1,1,8). According to this ideal, grace is not simply placed on top of nature as a static element that is simply compatible

with or integrates nature. In this formula we sense something of an influence of grace upon nature. This is confirmed by the specific scheme according to which, in Scholasticism, faith was supposed to be related to reason. In this scheme, we don't find the "oil above water" idea, as if the two levels were impermeable to each other. The interaction was limited, but present. For example, faith (mainly theology) was supposed to object to all the findings of reason (mainly philosophy and the other sciences) that were not in line with the Christian faith. Reason, on the other hand, was even entitled to the privilege of systematizing the doctrines of faith (Clouser, 2005:100 ff.).

The idea that grace affects nature might also be present in the theme of *incarnation*, which is typically emphasised in Roman Catholic theorizing (De Chirico, 2003:247 ff.). It might be objected that incarnation is not exactly a penetration of grace into nature. It is rather an actualisation of the divine in the sphere of grace: in the church, in the sacraments (cf. the doctrine of trans-substantiation) in the person of the *sacerdos* (i.e. the priest, who becomes an *alter Christus*). Incarnation seems to concern mainly the realm of grace, rather than nature. Nevertheless, it is not by chance that only in the Roman Catholic scholarly tradition, for example, we find the presence of a Christian philosophy. By contrast, there is no Baptist, Anglican, Pentecostal or Lutheran philosophy! In these traditions, the very attempt at establishing a Christian philosophy would not be justified.⁷

Yet there are Roman Catholic philosophies; they are *Philosophia in ecclesia accepta*, philosophical systems accepted as being in line with Roman Catholic principles and doctrine. In addition, there are Roman Catholic political parties, universities, unions, and all sorts of associations. All this should be kept in mind when evaluating the Roman Catholic worldview and its potential cultural impact. We can now move to the second "moderate" worldview.

5. The Lutheran worldview: grace alongside nature

"Parallelism" can be regarded as the key-word, the main idea shaping the Lutheran worldview. The relationship between nature and grace is one of concordance, integration, compatibility and never one of conflict. This, however, poses some problems. For example, the idea of concordance

⁷ There are, however, some exceptions to this rule. Kierkegaard, for example, did elaborate his own philosophy in which he refers explicitly to themes and problems directly related to his Lutheran faith. Of course it can be objected that this does not yet constitute a Christian philosophy in an integral sense. But this is a different problem.

seems to exclude the possibility of conflict. Yet several theories, not only in the natural sciences, do conflict with Christian principles, beliefs and so forth (cf. Heyns and Coletto, 2015:54 ff.). Resorting to a position where two compartments are established, in order to prevent conflicts, creates a situation in which the Christian scholar starts living a dual existence (cf. Barbour, 1990:89). God is king of a religious sphere whilst other kings reign on a supposedly common or neutral (academic, political or economic) sphere. And the complaints could go on.

Is there anything to appreciate in this paradigm? I would say that the distinction between science and religion, for example, should be appreciated. The same can be said of many other distinctions like church and state, philosophy and theology and so forth. From a “parallelist” point of view the argument is often advanced that the other approaches do not manage to distinguish properly between the different issues, questions and fields. But there is no wish, at least from the reformational side, to blur these distinctions. On the contrary, the reformational worldview is in favour of clarifying them as much as possible. The main difference is that, the reformational position is not inclined to distinguish in binary patterns (in couples, in two camps, in a duality). It rather tends to distinguish a plurality (e.g. not only church and state but also universities, families, parties, associations and so forth). Another difference is that, once the distinctions are made, the reformational position tends to see a dynamic interaction between the distinguished items, rather than closed compartments or simple compatibility. But this does not alter the agreement on the necessity of several distinctions.

Another idea that can be appreciated in this paradigm is that science and religion, church and state, theology and philosophy (and so forth) should attain a relation of harmony, concord, compatibility and integration. The reformational worldview does not posit this compatibility in every instance, thus denying the possibility of conflict. But there is no reason to imagine a constant state of conflict, for example between religion and science. In this sense the Lutheran worldview is right in rejecting the idea that science is always in opposition to religion, as if the two were incompatible.

The latter is the position of secularists like Dawkins. Van Niekerk calls it a “fundamentalist” position and tends to associate it with a Christian type of fundamentalism that would be the opposite of (but in a way similar to) secular fundamentalism (Van Niekerk, 2005:170-171,180). There would be then, two types of fundamentalism: secular and Christian (the latter being represented mainly by the Anabaptist position) the one rejecting religion and the other rejecting science. This scheme is supported by Barbour too

(1990:78 ff.). There are in fact Christians who reject some scientific theories on the basis that these seem to contradict the Bible. And yet one should note that, Christian creationists for example, do not reject science in its entirety as Dawkins and Hawking entirely reject religion. Creationists reject only *some* theories but are often prepared to argue *scientifically* to prove that there is evidence pointing in favour of alternative theories. With this, we have already introduced the Anabaptist worldview.

6. The Anabaptist worldview: grace against nature

Roy Clouser (2005:111-122) has written a convincing text to show that Christian “fundamentalism” (what I have called the Anabaptist worldview) is not a tenable position. The main problem, according to Clouser, is neither a radical rejection of science nor literalism in biblical exegesis. It is rather the belief that the Bible contains (pronouncements about) scientific theories – Clouser calls it “the encyclopaedic assumption” (2005:111). Science, therefore, is not always or necessarily rejected by the Anabaptist, but is supposed to be controlled by religion. The mistake, it is often argued, is that this “control” is supposed to occur directly via the biblical text; actually the biblical text supplies, confirms or falsifies theories.⁸ This is unacceptable to many Christians. Nevertheless, the Anabaptist is among the few Christians who dare to imagine and to propose theories that are supposed to be Christian!

Nowadays, many Christian scholars show embarrassing holes in their ecumenical cloak when it comes to this worldview. They can show tolerance in abundance as long as they deal with other worldviews. But when it comes to the Pentecostal or Charismatic position, they feel entitled to comments and attitudes that border on hostility.⁹ This does not happen by chance: there is a specific element in this worldview that cannot be tolerated by most of the other positions, even though they all stem from the same root.

And yet this “intolerable” element is a moment of agreement with the reformational worldview. It is the idea that science is not religiously neutral

8 On this point Clouser specifies: “I do not mean to suggest that this never happens. (...) But (...) while there are occasionally revealed truths that should be part of a theory or can confirm a theory, these are few and far between and cannot constitute a model for the general relation of religious beliefs to theories” (Clouser, 2005:348, fn. 11).

9 These comments often appeal to a presumed “majority” among Christian scholars. Yet it is conveniently forgotten, that the Anabaptist paradigm is adopted by a growing number of Christians, many more than one can find within the (numerically shrinking) Lutheran or Liberal traditions.

but is shaped by a certain religious stance. From the Anabaptist point of view, secular scholarship (politics or art) and Christian faith do not automatically agree; on the contrary, conflict can be expected. Here the important theme of the *antithesis* emerges, a theme that is regularly downplayed in many Christian circles. But this theme is a banner for the Anabaptist. In some cases, the Anabaptist emphasis on the antithesis results in a sort of withdrawal from “the world” – which is typical of some of these communities. However, this is not always the case. In some cases, for example in politics, this ground-motive has inspired original proposals (e.g. Yoder, 1994). In some cases the Anabaptist can put to shame Christians who are only capable of choosing between secular options or to adopt them in a slightly modified form.

There is another moment of agreement between the reformational and the Anabaptist worldviews. They are both inclined to support the idea that religion plays a crucial and legitimate role in all areas of life (cf. Clouser, 2005:121). Anabaptist opposition to some political doctrines, economic models and so forth, is due to the intuition that the latter are only pretended to be purely rational, neutral or objective, while they are based on a religious choice. The intuition that religious beliefs play a crucial role in life is the basis on which the Anabaptist tries to forge alternative doctrines and theories that are biblically founded.

7. The Liberal worldview: grace within nature

The Anabaptist and the Liberal worldviews are the two “radical” ones in Olthuis’ scheme and the most opposite (see Fig. 1, above). To describe the Liberal approach, Al Wolters (1989:24) uses the Latin formula *gratia instar naturae* (grace equals nature). Niebuhr (1956) speaks of the “Christ of culture”. It could also be possible to coin the formula “nature above grace”: nature has priority on grace. This would then place the Liberal worldview in direct opposition to the Roman Catholic basic idea (grace above nature).¹⁰ The basic Liberal idea is that nature is first of all God’s creation and it has not been deeply affected by the entrance of sin in the world. This opens up a fairly optimistic view of the human condition; human beings are primarily God’s creatures, bearing the image of God. This creates a view according to

¹⁰ Notice that this would also question Olthuis’ scheme (see Fig. 1), in the sense that Olthuis places the Liberal and the Catholic worldviews rather close to each other. In a similar way we have just noticed that the Lutheran and the Anabaptist positions (again close neighbours in Olthuis’ scheme), do conflict sharply in their basic attitude (i.e. concordance versus conflict). I say this not to underplay Olthuis’ scheme but just to acknowledge once again that, when it comes to classifying worldviews, all schemes seem to have their limits.

which human beings (believers or not), in their daily activities do respond to God's original plan. More specifically, this generates a fairly optimistic view of the possibilities of reason, even when the latter is not accompanied by the Christian faith.

For what I can see, this worldview entails at least two sub-versions. The first one I would call "adoption", in the sense that theories and accomplishments that are recognised as particularly helpful, excellent and so forth, are appropriated by the Liberal scholar. Usually, the (secular) trends, theories or political options are compared and one of them is preferred, adopted and therefore regarded as Christian. A second sub-version of the Liberal worldview (see Figure 1) can be called "elaboration". In this case a secular (or semi-secular) theory is not simply adopted but becomes a starting point for the elaboration of subsequent theories, views or doctrines. Both strategies are present in Van Huyssteen's book *Duet or duel?* (1998), dealing with religion and science. First he *adopts* the theory of evolution as the most central idea for his theology. Once this operation is completed, he tries to *elaborate* on the evolutionary theory in order to provide a new basis for the dialogue between faith and science.

As a reformational scholar, Klapwijk rejects the Liberal approach but at the same time tries to establish a bridge of discussion and alternative strategies. For Klapwijk (e.g. 1986:146), before importing a secular idea, concept or theory within a Christian worldview, it is necessary to proceed to its "transformation". In other words, it is necessary to adapt the concept or idea to the new (Christian) environment.¹¹

Klapwijk's attempts help realizing that the Liberal worldview cannot be easily accepted by the reformational scholar. It is perhaps the worldview that is the most alien to the reformational mentality. In fact, it promotes exactly what the reformational scholar tries to avoid: a sort of Christianization of secular scholarship. At this juncture one may legitimately wonder whether there may be any moment of agreement between the two standpoints.

Yet I would say that even this worldview has something important to offer. It is, in my opinion, the idea that the target of redemption is creation. In its orientation towards "nature" this worldview has always promoted a strong involvement with social problems, with politics, with education and

11 "One thing is certain", writes Klapwijk, "it should never be our intention to accept uncritically ideas from pre-Christian or post-Christian cultures. Equally unacceptable it would be to make an external adaptation of such ideas to Christian doctrines. (...) The appropriation of non-Christian learning (...) must consist rather in critical assimilation *into* a Christian view of reality" (Klapwijk, 1986:146).

so forth. The Liberal has often been accused of downplaying church-life or the inner life of the soul in order to reach-out to the poor, to promote a “social gospel”, to oppose the power of multi-national companies and so forth. There is certainly some truth in these allegations; yet it should not be forgotten that they come from circles that have thoroughly neglected their cultural engagements. In these circles, often, the target of grace seems to be the Christian community, the souls, some sort of supernatural realm, the missions, theology and so forth. The idea of reaching out to the poor, to resist social or economic injustice, to work for political fairness has often been vague, blurred and watered down by individualist strategies.

A straightforward involvement with social issues and the intuition that the Gospel addresses problems of this world, is probably the best contribution of the Liberal worldview. It appropriates the words of Jesus in the parable of the tares: “the field is the whole world” (Mat. 13:38).

8. Where do we go from here?

There are moments of agreement between the basic paradigms adopted by Christians. This means that there are also many disagreements. At this point a question emerges. Should Christians then cooperate as much as possible, or should they rather act in line with their worldviews?

In this respect, two positions seem to emerge. On the one side we have Christians who are determined to avoid conflicts and divisions at all costs. On the other hand we have Christians who are determined to avoid compromise at all costs. The first group will argue that the worst thing that can happen to Christianity is to show internal divisions. We should rather show our unity in love. If necessary, we should overlook our doctrinal differences and work together for the sake of our common Christian witness to the world. In fact, the Gospel says that it is exactly in that unity that the world will see our love and will be convinced of our faith (John, 17:21).

This position, however, is not without its problems. When our starting points are different, it is often replied, it is useless to pretend that there is unity. What is in fact unity without truth? The gospel asks that the disciples be united in the truth (John, 17:17) not in a formal external structure. This is the reply of Christians who do not fear so much the divisions but rather ambiguity and compromise. From their point of view it is clear why those who don't care much about the truth will always join the majority. They choose the “broad way”, because they are more interested in consensus than in the truth.

The answer from the opposite party is not difficult to imagine: what is purity of doctrine when it is confined in a microscopic group? In today's world only the relevant groups are visible and can offer a testimony.

The debate can go on forever, as one party is afraid of conflicts and the other is afraid of compromise. One party looks for unity and the other for faithfulness. Will the moments of agreement identified above, remain lost possibilities?

The picture can get even darker if one starts realizing that the preference for one attitude or the other is itself rooted in the same worldviews that were examined above. Take for example the Lutheran worldview: its basic idea is one of balance, concordance, peaceful co-existence. A bit maliciously, one could recall that most German Lutherans did not perceive any conflict even between Christianity and the Third Reich! It is not difficult to see that this basic attitude can only lead to a search for peaceful co-existence. On the other hand, the Anabaptist spirit is ready to follow the One who said: "I did not come to bring peace, but the sword" (Mat. 10:34). It is easy to see that this fundamental attitude doesn't care much about integration, alliances and agreements but is ready to preserve its own integrity. Is there any hope to solve this dilemma?

9. A proposal

What about the reformational worldview? Does it prefer agreement or truthfulness? Some of its favourite themes (e.g. the antithesis, the influence of ground-motives) seem to point towards truthfulness. Yet other themes (e.g. common grace, the creational structures) seem to point towards cooperation.

In my opinion it should be possible to distinguish between two levels: the academic and doctrinal on the one hand, and a "practical" level on the other. Here one should be careful not to oppose theory and practice as if they were contraries. The contrary of "practical" is not "theoretical" but "un-practical". Quite often, a theory is a very practical and needed tool to achieve some concrete goal. It is often also the result of hard practical work. Theoretical thinking is as much a practical activity as speaking, working or jogging. However, if it is legitimate to distinguish between worldview and action, I would like to offer a proposal.

Whenever it happens that Christians agree on a certain issue, can work together in a social context, in a parliament, whenever they can protest together about some injustice, they should take the opportunity for

cooperation and alliance.¹² This does not entail that differences of worldview, doctrine or tradition should be downplayed or ignored. On the contrary, such differences should be object of serious debate and analysis. The awareness and knowledge of one's own (and others') Christian worldviews will help discerning when cooperation is in fact not possible, or could be detrimental, too complicated and so forth. Nevertheless, whenever we can agree, we should join forces. The possibility of cooperation will often depend on the purposes that are selected. There is no Christian worldview that does not imply some disagreement with other Christian worldviews. But there is no Christian worldview that does not make room for cooperation, and this should be accepted with thankfulness.

10. Conclusion

In this article I have tried to point out an issue that is often neglected, namely the “moments of agreement” between the reformational worldview and the other Christian worldviews characterised by the nature-and-grace motif. After discussing a formula that is often used to define the reformational worldview I have proceeded to show the moments of agreement between the latter and other Christian worldviews. Finally, I have tackled the question whether these partial agreements should lead to common action or should rather discourage any compromise. My recommendation has been to maximise both sides; both the recognition of differences and the possibility of concrete cooperation. Instead of regarding the two as incompatible, I have suggested that they will be both necessary and useful.

I would like to conclude by quoting Dooyeweerd on the agreement among Christian worldviews.

After all, regardless of the temporal shapes in which the Christian life and world view might appear, regardless of the mutual differences between the main types of Catholicism, Lutheranism, Calvinism and the sects, regardless of the fact that here too pluriformity predominates, nevertheless those who are Christians in more than name only share one common foundation. (...) The recognition of God's sovereignty, the confession of divine providence, of sin and of redemption through Jesus Christ, consideration of the “Diesseits” (temporal existence) in the divine light of eternity (“Jen-seits”), in short, the subjection of all creatures in thought and volition not to an idea of personality or of sovereign reason, but

12 This attitude should not be limited to fellow Christians but should be extended to non-Christians as well. In the present context, however, my aim is to discuss the cooperation among Christian circles.

to the triune God, the Lord of heaven and earth, together they constitute the common confession of Christianity (Dooyeweerd, 1926:99-100).

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