

## 12 / Jacob Klapwijk

### *Epilogue:*

### *The Idea of Transformational Philosophy*

My reading of the preceding chapters left me much impressed with how laboriously people toiled to retain their identity as Christian thinkers in the spiritual battles of their age. Their two-pronged commitment—to hold on to the unique truth of the gospel and to do justice to the meaning of contemporary philosophical insights—drove them to exert themselves relentlessly. Their frequent reward was insinuation and contumely. To them may be applied Norman Fiering’s recent observation regarding Malebranche and Jonathan Edwards: they ‘confused and irritated opponents because they loved God more than philosophy.’<sup>1</sup>

The unevenness and the tensions in the results of their efforts tend to evoke my sympathy rather than leave me irritated. After all, they make palpable the tenacity with which existentially believing folk bit into the issue which concerns us here, the questions of ‘synthesis’ and ‘antithesis.’ More to the point is that, as I see it, such tensions are highly relevant *caveats* for our own attempts at systematic articulation and correct insight. So, I propose to sketch the contours of this tension-filled terrain in the light of the material presented above; after that I will try to indicate the systematic relevance of these data.

#### *1. Christian faith and ancient philosophy*

One notes evident tensions in the thought of the second- and third-century

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<sup>1</sup> Norman Fiering, *Jonathan Edwards’s Moral Thought and Its British Context*, 51.

Apologists. Origen, for instance, who would be wholly Christian and wholly Greek philosopher, ended as a Christian martyr and ecclesiastical heretic (ch. 2.4). Caught between two fires, he sought to make perspicuous the continuity between ancient philosophy and the Christian faith by way of the idea of the universal *logos*. He did not succeed, at least not entirely, since in the last analysis the looked-for continuity retained traces of discord (ch. 2.6). [242]

The Church Father Augustine, living some centuries later, left us with similar discrepancies. After his conversion Augustine took it upon himself to defend the faith. To do so he pressed into service a type of philosophy that in fact derived from neo-Platonism, only to find that neo-Platonism is not readily amenable to Christian doctrine and the reverse more difficult still. The religious antithesis—the battle between the Kingdom of God and a world that rejects its Maker—weighed heavily upon him. It took him the rest of his life to reach a breakthrough and to eradicate the last vestiges of the Platonic framework still lurking in his thought (ch. 3.6,7).

When we turn to the Middle Ages and pick out as representative Bonaventure, we find that the tensions have not lessened. Working within the Augustinian tradition and especially inspired by Francis of Assisi’s poverty-ideal, Bonaventure understood the wisdom of God to be based in humility and thus truly opposed to the wisdom of the world to which the ancient philosophers had succumbed. Meanwhile, speaking of ‘the journey of the mind into God’ Bonaventure looked for support in a mysticism the origin of which was (in his case) Greco-Platonic rather than Christian. He supposed that the Christian’s soul, on its way to perfect illumination and loving repose in God, was to traverse various stages—including that of the philosophical sciences whose radiance comes to us through the Greeks (ch. 4.7).<sup>2</sup> It seems as if Bonaventure would both shed and embrace the Greek world of thought.

I find it highly arresting that even in the most meticulously balanced systems ever produced in the history of Christian thought, those of Thomas Aquinas and Hegel, the tensions are but thinly veiled. As to Thomas, the author of the relevant chapter draws on Thomas’s own texts to demonstrate how the Angelic Doctor linked the relation between philosophical knowledge and Christian faith to the distinction

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<sup>2</sup> Bonaventure, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* 3, 6.

between the natural and the supernatural human destiny. This allowed Thomas to grant space to (the Aristotelian idea of) the natural desire to know proper to all, and constitutive also of Greek philosophy. Aertsen shows, however, that the distinction between the two levels of nature and supernature cannot really be harmonized with another of Thomas's views: the circulation motif which, though couched in neo-Platonic terms, expresses the basic biblical principle that in existential faith the human person, the creature of God, is immediately and undividedly related to the one Origin (ch. 5.10). [243]

## ***2. Tensions in modern and contemporary thinking***

In modern times latent tensions still abound in Christian reflection, even in the case of Hegel's great system. For instance, Hegel first posits an 'antithesis' in the history of thought between paganism and Christianity; next this antithesis is said to coincide with the 'distinction' between Greek and modern philosophy; ultimately the two are called 'continuous,' supposedly in virtue of the autonomous and freely self-determinative Idea (ch. 7.5).

It is well to be alert to such frictions in Hegel's system since, obviously, they tend to cast doubt on the remainder of his tale. I might, for example, refer to his assertion that Luther's insistence on personal faith and freedom of conscience sired the eighteenth-century penchant for rational emancipation (but compare my observations in ch. 6.3). Doubt also arises in connection with Hegel's thesis that Christian faith and the secularized ideal of freedom are ultimately reconciled and unified in the advent of the speculative concept of God: recognition of the Spirit in the present (but see my critique in ch. 6.9).

It can be said, then, that even Hegel's 'reconciliation with the present' falls short of seamless synthesis; evidently, the exclusive truth of Christianity resists integration into Hegel's inclusivistic and, hence, relativizing philosophy of religion. We are not really surprised to see his difficulties reflected in those Christians whose thinking is influenced by him, such as Ricoeur, Moltmann, Tillich and Pannenberg.

With Tillich, Pannenberg and many others we are placed squarely before the staggering problems of our own century. In a world torn by war and violence we keep hearing the painful lament: reality around us is not reconciled at all, is not in the

least infused with Christian spirit—what are we to do? Christian thinking, long dissatisfied with Hegel (Kierkegaard!), is in for radical reorientation. To this end, the question of how belief in God relates to the given (which the Church Fathers and the Scholastics were wont to formulate as a philosophic–theological problem) tends to be transposed among post-Hegelians into a historical or dialectical task (cf. Gutiérrez): it is up to us to interpret and shape this broken, unreconciled world in terms of Christ. All in all it cannot be said that in our time the tensions are abating!

Tillich’s ‘dialectics of theonomy,’ for instance, testifies to such frictions. According to Tillich, the great *kairos*, i.e., the incarnation, marked the insertion into world history of theonomy as a synthesis of autonomy and heteronomy. But Tillich cannot deny that the most thoroughgoing realizations of this theonomy still harbor ‘the seeds of contradiction’ (ch. 9.9), [244] in view of which he pleads for historical openness; no Hegelian reconciliation with the present is possible; there will always be need of ‘a new synthesis’ (ch. 9.1).

Pannenberg’s construction of history, though expressly meant as Christian apologetic, cannot overcome the controversial nature of reality either (ch. 10.6). Following Hegel, Pannenberg is prepared to attribute ‘Christian motivation’ to modernity’s emancipatory philosophies and secularization urge, but all this is ‘ambiguous’ as well.<sup>3</sup> Is it possible to effectuate a synthesis? Unlike Tillich, Pannenberg no longer takes for granted that philosophy and theology can cooperate and be in correlation; they have become competitors. Nevertheless, he retains a ‘Barthian moment,’ that is, he is confident that its eschatological anticipation equips theology to interpret reality more comprehensively, and to take up into the heart of Christianity whatever insight may derive from other sources more adequately than any philosophy or ideology ever could (ch. 10.7).

Chapter 11 deals with Gutiérrez, whose theologically tinged theory of society is oriented to Marx rather than Hegel. In his work the tension between faith and reality as given is greater than any hitherto encountered. Compassion with a humanity oppressed forbids Gutiérrez to rest content with reconciliation with the present; it drives him to press for revolutionary liberation *in* the present, brandishing a utopian blueprint. Strangely, as soon as the relation of faith to modern philosophy—our theme—is at stake the tension suddenly subsides. It seems as if the vision of a

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<sup>3</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Basic Questions in Theology* III, 191.

new humanity and a new society, free of political and social oppression, can be grafted straightway onto Marxist or neo-Marxist philosophies of emancipation and simultaneously be understood, with equal ease, in terms of the growth of the Kingdom of God (ch. 11.5).

Perhaps some will object that Gutiérrez does not advocate ‘identification’ of the process of political liberation with the coming of the Kingdom of God, and that he realizes that the human, all too human work of political liberation cannot be free of ambiguity.<sup>4</sup> I would gladly concede the point; nevertheless it remains that, as Wolters says, Gutiérrez is far too prone to gloss over the tension between the Christian faith and the humanistic bent of modern philosophy ever since Descartes. This tendency is not instigated by a wish to legitimate contemporary thought as Christian—Hegel’s influence is not as direct as that. Rather, the reason why Gutiérrez displays little sensitivity to this tension is that utopia, as modern product of rational analysis, belongs at a level other than that of [245] the Christian hope to which it is said to relate. It seems to me that Wolters is quite right in saying that liberation-theology (I would restrict this to ‘as elaborated by Gutiérrez’) cannot be understood apart from ‘classical Thomism.’ Wolters is ‘dead-on’ when a little later it becomes clear that this version of the Thomistic synthesis is a modern one, gravitating toward Marxist philosophy of history rather than toward the ancient metaphysics of being (ch. 11.2). One should take note of this philosophical shift on the part of Gutiérrez, who is known to have reservations regarding traditional Thomism and its supernatural values and two-layered order of reality, meanwhile retaining much of Thomas in his theory.

Personally, I would want to take into account another aspect as well: it seems to me that Gutiérrez, in affinity with Maurice Blondel, Karl Rahner and other neo-Thomists, displays a kind of Christian-existential counterpoint in the idea that it is the whole person, including all the disrupted social relationships, who is in faith oriented to God’s salvation (cf. my earlier remark of similar import regarding Thomas, ch. 12.1). Gutiérrez formulates this counterpoint in the maxim: ‘but one call to salvation’<sup>5</sup> All things considered, then, it turns out that this thinker of the Latin American basic communities, who *prima facie* seemed to let Christian faith and neo-Marxist philosophy coalesce without a hitch, has not really

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<sup>4</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 175-78.

<sup>5</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 69-72.

solved the problem of synthesis.

So far it seems as if our conclusion must be negative. Two thousand years of church history witness to recurrent efforts to unite Christian faith and non-Christian thought in a synthesis; attempts at harmonization or accommodation—at least those investigated in this book—were never wholly successful.

At cross-purposes to these there have been many markedly antithetical approaches as well. I have in mind the early Christian Apologists Irenaeus, Tatianus, Tertullian, the contempt of all worldly learning expressed in the writings of Medievals such as Peter Damiani and Bernard of Clairvaux, the sturdy repudiations voiced by the reformers Luther and Calvin, the neo-Calvinism of Kuyper and Dooyeweerd. The path here trod is a thorny one; the antithetical tradition contains many a trace of synthesis (Scholasticism in Calvin, ch. 6.5; Kuyper influenced by Thomas and Bonaventure, ch. 8.5; and so on). Even Dooyeweerd, emphatic in taking the religious antithesis as starting point for philosophy and decidedly averse to synthesis, does not hesitate to acknowledge ‘elements of truth’ in [246] non-Christian thought,<sup>6</sup> and he formulated his transcendental philosophy in the context of a commitment to sustained communication with dissenters (ch. 8.7). When reading Tertullian, who denied every kind of contact between ‘Jerusalem’ and ‘Athens’ (ch. 1.3), one is bound to wonder whether he in fact did sever all lines of communication. At times Tertullian frankly admits that the philosophers’ assertions were not always wrong.<sup>7</sup>

Clearly, more needs to be said below about the antithetical approaches found in the Christian philosophical tradition. For now I merely mean to make room for the possibility that antithetical thought is not immune to the tensions noted earlier. Could some form of synthesis be present under cover of antithesis? Conversely, might not antithetical traits sometimes be observable in philosophies of synthesis? Let us assume for now that on the philosophical level a Christian approach can be neither exclusively antithetical nor completely synthetic.

### ***3. Probing the motives***

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<sup>6</sup> Herman Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique* II, 311.

<sup>7</sup> Tertullian, *De anima*, 2.

The repeated attempts at synthesis in the philosophical tradition of Christianity were crossed time after time by antithetical approaches; in fact, elements of synthesis and of antithesis are frequently, if not always, found in one and the same thinker. It is understandable that this should be the case, since both the synthetic and the antithetic approach surely serve authentically Christian interests.

Those who emphasize the antithesis mean to do justice to the biblical testimony regarding the enmity between the Kingdom of God and the realm of darkness as constituting two opposed principles inscribed in all of human life including culture, society, science. This opposition is not between two levels, a ‘higher’ and ‘lower;’ consequently, in spite of all such attempts it cannot be made to fit in a hierarchical order of being as the Scholastics tried, or in a Lutheran doctrine of two realms. Nor is the contrast one of ‘earlier’ and ‘later,’ of logical or historical contradiction, so that neither idealism nor materialism can encompass it in their dialectical philosophies of history. Antithesis at bottom refers to the all-encompassing, directional divergence between life as oriented to and on the way toward God, and apostasy which estranges the whole of life and society from the covenant with God. In a renowned passage in *De civitate Dei* Augustine expressed this universal antithesis thus: ‘Accordingly, two [247] cities have been formed by two loves: the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; the heavenly by the Love of God, even to the contempt of self.’<sup>8</sup> It took a work comprising twenty-two books to demonstrate the biblical roots of this religious antithesis, and to chart its effects throughout culture and in the life of nations up to the end of world history.

Recognition of the religious antithesis is a feature of the antithetical approach in philosophy. It may well be, however, that this recognition is inspired by negative motivations, as church history frequently shows. I would mention three such motives which, I suspect, are psychological and sociological bedfellows. First, antithesis may mean flight from the world and refuge in illusionary, cherished isolation. But isolation courts complacency. Secondly, antithesis may amount to privatization of the Christian faith, such that the rule and coming Kingdom of God is reduced to a dialogue between God and the individual soul alone. Obviously, this attitude surrenders all of culture to secularization or, rather, to de-

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<sup>8</sup> Augustine, *De civitate Dei* XIV, 28.

Christianization. Thirdly, antithesis may represent the refusal to render account, *apologian* (as 1 Peter 3: 15 demands), to anyone who inquires after the reason, *logon*, of the hope that is in us. It is not hard to see that such fideistic irrationalism invites all manner of obscurantism. What we have here, then, are three veritable derailments of antithesis: isolationism, privatism and obscurantism are so many blind alleys blocking the path to Christian reflection on the crucial questions raised in this book.

It is the lasting merit of the Church Fathers since the days of Justin Martyr, the ‘Christian in philosopher’s garb,’ that they took up the challenge of Greek culture and indeed, true to St. Peter’s word, transposed their hope into a Christian apologetic. Theirs was a synthesizing philosophy, a balancing act on the tightrope of rational argumentation. And while those who wrote the various chapters in this book felt that Clement, Origen, Hegel, Pannenberg, should be criticized, they do not hesitate to express their high regard for these pioneers of the spirit, gratefully acknowledging that these men, casting their profoundest convictions in the mold of contemporary categories, truly sought to defend the faith.

On the other hand it remains that the synthesis approach, too, may go astray. Once again I would mention three types of error, each of which is met with in this book: (1) *intellectualism*—the problems of *gnosis*; belief as intellectual assent; (2) *elitism*—two kinds of Christians; theology as the queen of the sciences; deification of reason; (3) *inadequate criticism*—lack [248] of radical critique; are ancient metaphysics and modern humanism really assessed in terms of their apostate roots?

Above, I concluded that the Christian philosophies of antiquity, of the Middle Ages and of modernity all *de facto* feature tensions between exclusivism or inclusivism, or between a relatively synthetic and a relatively antithetic attitude regarding the prevalent systems of thought. When next one turns to the authentically Christian motives that evidently play a part in all of them—leaving aside the harmful extremes of both antithesis and synthesis—a *de jure* choice is difficult. Should we say that translation of the Christian message into the categorial context of contemporary thinking and recognition of the religious antithesis as universal incision and divergence are as such mutually exclusive? This is what we want to know.

And so I asked myself what to make of a phrase like ‘between antithesis and



synthesis’ (which was the working title of this volume). Does it designate a recurrent historical or structural dilemma in the face of which the Christian tradition, twisting and turning as it may, is forever forced to choose? Or could it, perhaps, refer to a sea channel whose narrow fairway demands meticulous navigation since Christian reflection, if orienting itself to the beacons on one side only, will surely run aground?

Toward the end of chapter 8, above, I attempted to steer a course that would take full cognizance of the most basic motives in both the synthetic and the antithetic attitude. In that context I spoke of an ‘on-going transformation of philosophy’ (ch. 8.9), in which the ideas of criticism and transformation would honor the antithetical principle while the notions of appropriation and integration would do justice to the synthetic tendency in Christian thought. At this point we can generalize the problem to embrace the scope of this book as a whole: can the idea of transformational philosophy be made fruitful for Christian believers seeking their way in non-Christian thought?

#### ***4. The idea of transformational philosophy; Augustine and Thomas***

Before starting out, I should stipulate that transformational philosophy cannot rest content with a smoothed-out compromise, cannot be satisfied with a formula designed to conceal the tensions and contradictions that beset the Christian tradition of thought. Much rather, transformational philosophy means to pierce through the contradictions, to explore them systematically, to seek a new way of posing questions which, I think, ought to be followed up with comprehensive research on the part of Christians. [249]

Transformational philosophy assumes that every Christian philosophy arises in the context of a broader tradition and hence simply cannot avoid dealing with ‘non-Christian thought’ in some way; that by reason of this something invariably happens in the relation of the one to the other; that a process of thoroughgoing hermeneutics is in fact in progress. Essentially, this process comes down to this: invoking the Christian faith one either embraces current philosophical wisdom uncritically or—and this, I think, is the normative sense of transformational philosophy—one seeks to make sense of these insights in terms of the Christian point of view. The former

would be ideological legitimation; the latter might be called critical or discerning transformation. (I grant that a third way exists: there are those who disregard certain views completely; given philosophy’s claim to truth, however, this reaction exhibits mere philosophical incompetence.)

The new question may now be formulated: Given a philosophy which, with initial justification, may be characterized as either synthetic or antithetic—to what extent does it reveal attempts at ideological legitimation, or, as the case may be, Christian transformation of the consciously or unconsciously appropriated body of thought? Succinctly put: What transformational quality does a given Christian philosophy prove to possess?

While I believe that this approach alone can do justice to the real significance of past and present Christian views, I am equally sure that the task is far from easy. Obviously, to assess ideological legitimation or critical transformation one cannot simply take declarations of intent at face value; needed is in-depth analysis of content. Also, conformation and transformation often appear side by side, which means that in such cases evaluations must be in terms of degree—the evidence has to be weighed with meticulous care. Still another complication is that nobody can inquire into a philosophy’s transformational quality without putting personal convictions on the line.

Nevertheless, it seems to me that scientific integrity and Christian solidarity compel one to investigate to what extent transformational elements do occur in such synthetically or antithetically oriented philosophies. In retrospect one notes that in this volume a measure of sensitivity to this kind of approach is certainly present. In his study on Augustine, for example, Bos raises as a ‘question of principle’ whether Platonism is amenable to Christian appropriation. With evident approval he mentions that traces of transformation are present in Augustine’s work (ch. 3.6). Indeed, at the outset of the essay the matter is very well put: should we look upon Augustine’s Christian philosophy ‘as water changed into wine or as vintage diluted?’ It reminds me of something Thomas wrote in his work on [250] Boethius: ‘Those who make use of philosophical proofs in sacred doctrine by drawing them into the service of faith do not mix water and wine but *convert* water *into* wine’ (italics mine).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In Boethii De trinitate*, 2, 3, ad 5.

Naturally, such words caution us to be circumspect in dealing with Thomas as well. For instance: how right is Michael Marlet in saying that in the final analysis Thomas’s is not a philosophy of synthesis but—like Herman Dooyeweerd’s—a Christian ‘transcendental philosophy,’ ‘a philosophy (believingly) conscious of its concrete, Christian *a priori*?’<sup>10</sup> This question is of immediate relevance, since in chapter 5 Aertsen calls attention to Schillebeeckx (whose views are akin to those of Marlet) and agrees that such a concrete *a priori* of faith corresponds to Thomas’s deepest intention (ch. 5.12); above, I referred to this concrete *a priori* as ‘Christian–existential counterpoint.’

Aertsen does append some much-needed reservations, as I do more explicitly in my attempt to sketch the break between late-medieval thought and the Reformation which a comparison of Calvin and then current Thomism reveals (ch. 6.2,3). To be sure, both Aertsen and I differentiate between Thomas and Thomism. In Calvin’s days Cajetan c.s. were distorting Thomas’s intentions and heading for a clear-cut dualistic supernaturalism. This goes to show how vulnerable the Christian transformational intention can be: I fear that detailed comparison of Luther with Lutheranism (Melanchthon, Johann Gerhard) or of Calvin with Calvinism (Beza) would tell a similar tale.

### ***5. Hegel: inverse transformation***

Turning to nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophy we find the question returning with increasing urgency. In what way have Hegel and more recent thinkers in the Christian tradition—such as Tillich and Pannenberg—given form to Christian thinking as transformational philosophy? The question arises almost spontaneously as it were, since the writers in this book keep telling us that, certainly in the case of these modern and contemporary thinkers, it will not do to label their dealings with the relation between Christian faith and non-Christian thought as instances of unqualified ‘synthesis’ or ‘antithesis’ (ch. 7.7; 8.4; 10.7). With respect to Hegel, Griffioen goes as far as to say that ‘thought implies transformation’ (ch. 7.2). Like Hegel, Paul Tillich calls for a new, christologically founded synthesis. Morbey refers to Tillich’s characterization of [251] this process as one of ‘reception

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<sup>10</sup> Michael Fr. J. Marlet S. J., *Grundlinien der kalvinistischen ‘Philosophie der Gesetzesidee,’* 107.

and transformation’ (ch. 8.8).<sup>11</sup> Vroom says of Pannenberg that ‘from out of the heart of the Christian view of reality ... the other insights are transformed’ (ch. 10.7). Pannenberg’s own arresting formulation refers to the task ‘to transform ... in the critical light of the biblical idea of God.’<sup>12</sup> Can we doubt that this is a plea, in terms similar to mine, for the very thing which I described as a critical transformation of non-Christian thought?

Let us consider Hegel. It is certainly true that one will encounter no antithesis or synthesis in the sense of outright rejection or complete acceptance of ancient or modern philosophy. On the contrary, Hegel is convinced that the Christian spirit is to manifest itself in every direction and hence must infuse philosophy as well. This is the point of the central role accorded to synthesis or reconciliation with the present. It seems to me, though, that actual transformation of the philosophical tradition from the perspective of the Christian faith is something else. Hegel himself adds serious impediments to such transformation since, unlike his predecessors, he does not approach philosophy in terms of faith but prefers to think of faith philosophically (ch. 7.3). Moreover, he is wont to describe the relation of faith to ancient and modern thought dialectically, under the aegis of *Aufhebung*, i.e., ‘destruction’ and ‘preservation.’ For the most part then, especially in relation to modern philosophy, Hegel’s ‘reconciliation’ amounts to ideological legitimation: ‘Modern philosophy is, as such, united with religion, since it originated within the world of Christendom.’<sup>13</sup> This is why Griffioen finds Hegel’s position to reduce to a ‘dialectical justification’ of the philosophical tradition (ch. 7.9), such that one cannot speak of its ‘philosophical conversion’ or ‘inner reformation’ (ch. 7.3).

Well, did not Hegel, possibly more than anyone, revolutionize the history of philosophy (ancient and modern) by including it in the sweep of his reflection? Will we not be hard put to find greater transformational intentionality and potential than in precisely his dynamic dialectics? To be sure. But, as I see it, Hegel’s dynamics is heading somewhere else; following in its wake is an ‘inverse transformation.’ We should bear in mind that confrontation between Christian faith and non-Christian thought properly implies interaction, in which each

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<sup>11</sup> Paul Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought*, 14.

<sup>12</sup> Pannenberg, *Basic Questions II*, 139.

<sup>13</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Einleitung in die Geschichte der Philosophie*, 192.

influences the other. It is not only the case that faith can transform an intellectual tradition; such traditions, too, are able to reinterpret the implications of the Christian [252] convictions. And if current patterns of thought are not brought under the rule of the gospel, chances are that eventually they will gloss the biblical view on reality and the coming Kingdom of God. The next stage would be that Christian faith becomes system-corroborative, handmaiden to ideology. At that point we would have before us an instance of 'Christian' transformational philosophy in the anti-normative sense.

Here is an example of what I would call inverse transformation: this book contains recurrent mention of Christians who have come to understand 'faith' intellectualistically. Influenced by prevailing ancient or modern philosophies and their perennial rationality cults, they have adjusted their conceptualizing accordingly. I am thinking of Clement of Alexandria and Justin Martyr, both of whom defended the Christian faith as system of (higher, superior) 'wisdom,' and of Thomas, who pictured faith as the perfection of 'natural reason.' In these instances we meet with different forms of intellectualization of faith under the transforming pressure of Greek philosophy.

Something like this happened in the case of Hegel. In connection with Hegel's philosophy of religion Griffioen remarks that 'reason, as the supreme judge in all matters of truth and falsehood, is the correct philosophical translation of the justification by faith alone' (ch. 7.5). If this was Hegel's understanding, can we avoid the conclusion that he intellectualized faith—in a new style? Hegel's subjectivistic and activistic concept of reason is marked by modern Western thought, by Renaissance, Cartesianism, Kant and Fichte, rather than by the Greeks. His inverse transformation is unequalled: no longer is faith the perfection of reason (as it was for the Greek-inspired Medievals); in modern speculative idealism reason is the perfection of faith!

Space is lacking here to consider Tillich and Pannenberg extensively in terms of the idea of transformation and the danger of inversion. In the case of Tillich one suspects that the 'method of correlation' obstructs the transformation of philosophy. The method assumes that the symbols used in Christian proclamation need to be interpreted such that they 'relate' to human 'self-understanding' (which in turn is expressed in modern art, literature, science and

contemporary philosophy). On this point Pannenberg’s program is the more radical one, since it urges critical transformation of philosophy and the sciences rather than mere dialogue with them. But on this score, too, I would emphasize that patient analysis of its content alone can clarify the actual scope of this critical transformation. Considering Pannenberg’s emphasis on the Christian motivation of the modern age (ch. 12.2), his understanding of Christian philosophy as [253] theology (ch. 10.6), and his view of the autonomy of reason,<sup>14</sup> one may well ask whether these impulses hinder rather than encourage the kind of critical penetration and reformation of philosophical thinking which we need.

### ***6. The inadequacy of synthesis terminology.***

#### ***The dialectic of transformation and its inversion***

Discovery of the hidden conjunction of transformation and inverse transformation puts a different aspect on the problem of synthesis. I fully agree with Douwe Runia who, in connection with Philo, known as the first great proponent of synthesis (in his case of Jewish belief and Greek philosophy), recently remarked that ‘the notion of “synthesis” or “reconciliation” presupposes a division into distinct blocks much clearer to us than it was to Philo, on whom we should not foist a pagan–Christian antithesis *avant la lettre*.’<sup>15</sup> Evidently, Runia means to say that a New Testament view of the religious antithesis between (Judaeo-)Christian faith and pagan religion may lead one to designate Philo’s use of Greek philosophy as an attempt to fuse the incompatible, but that Philo himself felt no such contradiction or experienced it less keenly.

I believe that Runia is right; in fact, I would say that this volume shows that his observation need not be restricted to Philo and is applicable also to a number of early Christian thinkers. In the case of Clement, much influenced by Philo, the term ‘synthesis’ is not the most felicitous characterization. It is even less appropriate to Justin Martyr’s quest for ‘identification’ of Christian faith and Greek philosophy. Again, to the extent that Origen meant to bring out the ‘continuity’ of faith and pagan philosophy, ‘synthesis’ seems an inadequate designation as well.

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<sup>14</sup> See Jacob Klapwijk, ‘Geloof en rede in de theologie van Troeltsch en Pannenberg.’ In: *Vrede met de rede?*, 63 ff.

<sup>15</sup> Douwe T. Runia, *Philo of Alexandria* I, 440.

Above, it appeared that the terms ‘antithesis’ and ‘synthesis’ do not really fit Hegel, Tillich and Pannenberg either. It seems, then, that the question may be raised generally: Is this synthesis terminology satisfactory? Are ‘synthesis’ and ‘antithesis,’ as characterizations of specific philosophical approaches (note that at this point I am not talking about the *religious* antithesis, for which see ch. 8.6,7; 12.3), the right terms to get a hold on the problem of Christian faith and non-Christian philosophy? If it be granted that the concepts forged in Christian philosophy cannot be expressed other than by way of critical examination and transformation [254] of the historical materials at hand, then it is immediately obvious that ‘antithesis’ between philosophical systems will not do. What about—philosophical—‘synthesis?’

A first consideration is that this term presupposes an *opposition of principle* (e.g., between Christian doctrine and non-Christian thought). Synthesis thinkers supposedly attempt to close the gap between principles. But this is not how these people experience it, or, if they do note such opposedness, they would surround it with reservations (see Runia’s argument). To them the term ‘synthesis’ seems misleading. On the other hand, from the standpoint of those who reject synthesis the term is questionable as well. The opponents of synthesis-philosophy accept that two principles are at issue but deny that these can possibly be brought together. Dooyeweerd was quite aware of this, which is why at times he correctly speaks of ‘apparent’ synthesis, appearance in the sense of semblance.<sup>16</sup> I would add a third consideration, derived from the train of thought developed in this chapter. ‘Synthesis’ is a static term containing not a hint of the field of tension surrounding Christian thinkers open to the questions of their times, a field of tension stretched out between the poles of transformation and inverse transformation.

I suggest, then, that future research should focus on problems engendered by this tension rather than on the traditional problems of synthesis. Let me give an example. H. Robbers S. J. wrote: ‘Clement of Alexandria ... worked with a wholly original Christian metaphysics towards a *thorough reform* of Greek philosophy’ (italics mine).<sup>17</sup> In this arresting final sentence of his essay, Robbers in effect makes a claim—adequately argued or not—regarding the transformational quality of

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<sup>16</sup> Dooyeweerd, *Reformatie en Scholastiek* I, 19.

<sup>17</sup> J.H. Robbers, ‘Christian Philosophy in Clement of Alexandria.’ In: *Philosophy and Christianity*, 211.

Clement’s philosophy. To tell the truth, a claim of this sort seems to me more significant than the traditional question whether or how extensively Clement has incorporated elements lifted from Philo, the Stoics or Middle Platonism. The focus should be on the manner not measure of incorporation.

For the most part this volume is aimed at *models* of incorporation. This is a first step, a necessary preliminary. If we want to know whether Clement can rightly be called a reformer of philosophy we must first find out what instruments he meant to apply. Specifically, we shall have to determine whether the model of subordination can be considered a suitable medium of reform or, alternatively, an open door for inverse transformation, starting point of the ‘Hellenization’ of the Christian faith (as [255] Porphyry, neo-Platonist adversary of Christianity, said in connection with Clement’s pupil Origen).

But even if the negative judgment were to prevail, the case of Clement would not yet be settled. A human being is a bundle of contradictions; consequently, it may well be true that Clement intellectualized faith (as I suggested) and simultaneously reformed Greek thought (as Robbers claims). In other words, transformation and its inverse can clash in the mind of a single person. Is this what Bos was thinking of when he noted Clement’s reappraisal of both Greek philosophy and Christian faith and added: ‘There is reason to believe that these two are related’ (ch. 1.3)? That connection could prove to be outstandingly dialectical!

### ***7. Religious antithesis. The spell of contemporary thought***

We return to the point at which my argument began. The situation of a Christian scholar who seeks solidarity with the surrounding world of learning and wants to be loyal to the Lord Jesus Christ soon proves rife with tension. Such tensions are not mere logical inconsistencies, although *non sequiturs* and ambiguities are the first things accurate analysis reveals. These tensions outstrip historical dialectics as well, although history does play its cunning games with our sagacious schemes of synthesis and antithesis. Deep down, all of these tensions are bound up with the religious conflict, are linked to the urges toward sanctification and secularization. A philosophical description of this conflict must needs resort to abstract terms such as ‘the dialectics of transformation and its inversion.’ *In*



*concreto* it reduces to the brokenness of Christian existence, the struggle of faith, the effects of the religious antithesis in the personal and communal consciousness of Christians on-the-way.

In regard to the religious antithesis and its impact on philosophy neo-Calvinists, as we saw in chapter 8, frequently distinguish two main streams in the Christian tradition. Kuyper contrasted Calvinist and 'Romanist' (Roman Catholic) philosophy; Dooyeweerd spoke of reformational versus scholastic philosophy; Vollenhoven distinguished antithetic and synthetic philosophy. In view of the analysis above, each of these oppositions, whose scope is practically identical, lacks subtlety and in fact misses the heart of the matter.

I would say that these distinctions are significant only insofar as they refer to a basic difference in *acknowledgment* of the kind of impact the religious antithesis has on philosophy. If taken to suggest a basic difference in *operation* of the religious antithesis these distinctions soon become [256] mere caricatures. Certainly, acknowledgment of the significance of the religious antithesis for philosophy enables one to recognize more readily its operation in the history of thought and to choose one's position in it critically. But even those who fail to acknowledge or perhaps expressly deny, may nevertheless surrender unconsciously to the operation of the religious antithesis and share its blessings (just as there may be unconscious resistance). Thank God, the battle between the Spirit of God and the spirit of apostasy does not depend on express acknowledgment of it in Christian philosophizing!

Any Christian philosophy worthy of the name is exposed to the dialectics of transformation and inverse transformation. Sad to say, we often find it very difficult to apply this insight to our own efforts. Accustomed to relying on the self-evidence of our own (Christian) tradition, under the spell of contemporary thought, or both, we tend to be more astutely aware of the shortcomings of others, especially of those of former days, than we are of our own failings. History's shifting images delude us time and again.

What I mean to say here is that humanity participates in a hermeneutic process of understanding, and that in consequence of this a later generation is apt to paint a picture of Clement's or Augustine's place in the history of Christian reflection different from how they or their contemporaries saw it. When people look back on

the past the models of transformation there encountered almost always appear to be of the inverse kind—justly called ‘models of synthesis’ when objectified. Meanwhile, we may be sure that in those days these models were appreciated differently, that people welcomed them as tools of transformation, as God-given instruments to subjugate exogenous notions to the rule of the gospel. It is not surprising that later generations no longer experience things this way. Having become insensitive to the spiritual liberation offered by Augustine’s Christian Platonism as compared to the neo-Platonism of Plotinus, they lament the heavy load thus laid upon the church. The shifting image invites suspicions of synthesis.

This is the sort of thing that happened in the case of the redoubtable Tertullian, whose uncompromisingly antithetic rejection of Greek philosophy is usually rendered as ‘*credo quia absurdum*’ (I believe because it is absurd). Actually he expressed himself more sweepingly: ‘*credibile est quia ineptum est*’ ([Christianity] is worthy of belief because it is foolish).<sup>18</sup> Vollenhoven, Professor of Calvinist Philosophy at the Free University, Amsterdam, used to speak of Tertullian as an example of ... synthesis.<sup>19</sup> [257]

I am sure he was quite right—looking back from half-way the twentieth century. In spite of all his good intentions, Tertullian in effect staked the credibility of the gospel on its *foolishness as defined in Greek philosophy*. Why did the astute Church Father not think of this critical insight himself? Well, let us just ask how we fare in transcending ourselves and in distancing ourselves from today’s climate of thought in anticipation, as it were, of future imagery. Adherents of Dooyeweerd’s Christian transcendental philosophy, for instance, should try to picture a philosophical world, say a hundred years from now, as ‘post-critical’ (in the vein of Heidegger, Gadamer, Polanyi), as a world in which transcendental criticism is wholly out of fashion, *passé*. Looking back from that hypothetical world into ours we would (*mirabile dictum*) be struck by the synthesizing potential of Dooyeweerd’s antithetic and anti-synthetic thinking. We would also be able, I should add, to assess the transformational quality inherent in this synthesizing philosophy.

### ***8. General philosophy and the dynamism of Christian philosophizing***

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<sup>18</sup> Tertullian, *De came Christi* V, 4.

<sup>19</sup> In: *The Idea of a Christian Philosophy*, 200 ff.

The above leads us to consider another aspect of our topic: the historical dynamism of Christian thinking. The contributions in this book are like photographic stills, segments of Christian philosophy lifted away from the backdrop of a much wider philosophical landscape. But to get a proper view of how Christian faith and non-Christian thinking interact we must re-insert them, so to speak, into these more general relationships.

The moment we do so, we note that the various Christian philosophical views dealt with were developed in greatly different ecclesiastical, political and social-cultural circumstances. These views bear evident marks of this and hence require to be understood in terms of these contexts which comprise both church and society. To the extent that this was feasible, the authors rightly did pay attention to the history of the church and theology, and to culture and society. Griffioen’s essay, for instance, shows rather well, I think, how profoundly Hegel’s thought was marked by societal developments such as the tortuous path of the French Revolution, the rise and fall of Napoleon and the subsequent Restoration—precisely in connection with the sort of synthesis he came to advocate, i.e., reconciliation with the present. In view of the theme, however, it was agreed that such excursions remain incidental to the design of the book as a whole. After all, to ask how transformational models originate and to ask whether they are valid are two different matters. [258]

A second point to note is that within such social-cultural contexts the Christian philosophical tradition displays its own internal dynamism as well, a vigorousness evinced by repeated rethinking of Christian doctrine and of the philosophical problems implicit in it. We see the Greek and Latin Church Fathers reaching back to (Philo and) Clement; the medieval Scholastics find inspiration in Augustine; the Roman Catholic and Protestant neo-Scholastics have recourse to Thomas; many modern theologians turn to Hegel; all of them busily incorporating and reworking the pioneering efforts of their predecessors.

With respect to the transformational models examined above we see that, once adopted (more about this below), they are not only continually reconsidered but frequently retained and reinterpreted when a new model becomes available. Clement’s subordination model, for instance, returns afresh in Origen’s doctrine of the *logos*.

Rather than ending there, it gains new momentum in Thomas Aquinas’s subordination of the *ratio naturalis* to the supernatural truth of Scripture and, it seems to me, is traceable even in Hegel’s notion of ‘*Aufheben*’ which, relative to non-Christian thought, means ‘to raise to a higher level’ (ch. 7.2).

Origen’s *logos* doctrine provides another example of this. Its contours were foreshadowed in the teachings of Justin Martyr. But the truly remarkable thing is that ever since Origen one finds almost no Christian thinkers who do not, in one way or another, include speculation about the universal *logos* in their reflections on the philosophy of their times. That Hegel’s *Geist* is related to the *logos* tradition is mentioned by Griffioen (ch. 7.1), and Graham Morbey shows how important the *logos* is to Paul Tillich (ch. 9.6).

What we have here is a thought-provoking hermeneutic configuration: on the one hand, every great figure in the tradition of Christian understanding exhibits a profile characteristically his own and, on the other hand, unites within himself the traits of many predecessors. Gerben Groenewoud puts this well when he describes Bonaventure as both ‘the culmination of the development of dealing with non-Christian thought’ and a Christian scholar who, in his own unique way, gave shape to his affinity with Francis of Assisi’s spiritualistic mysticism (ch. 4.8). This is why this book is more than a series of unrelated monographs—I mean, it goes beyond a collage of synthesis thinkers and an appendix listing separate synthesis models. If it had failed to do so it would mean that the authors overlooked the internal dynamism of Christian philosophizing.

Christian thinking, then, displays an internal dynamism because faithful reflection kept returning to its own past, to the patristic, scholastic [259] and reformational heritage of the church. Names like neo-Thomism, neo-Calvinism etc., indicate how deeply the old inspires the new.

There is still another way in which Christian philosophy is embedded in the broad context of thought and culture. Its internal dynamism is linked to the development of philosophy around it. One might say that Christian reflection looks backwards and sideways, that it reflects on the itinerary of thought beyond the pale of the *Catholica* from the pre-Socratics to this day—which brings us right back to the core of this book’s theme.

It should be clear by now that the linkage of internal dynamism and external

dynamics is of a piece with the transformational character of Christian philosophy, since such philosophy expressly relates to *and* enters into the questions raised in philosophy generally—questions urged upon Christians and non-Christians alike because all must come to terms somehow with the daily business of existing. But more needs to be said about this. Put in the form of a question: Does the linkage meant here consist in this, that in processes of transformation (or inverse transformation) Christian reflection struggles with the *concepts* and the *questions* that reach it from the outside? Or is the linkage more intimate still, involving even the *transformational models* themselves?

To prepare the answer I would pay attention to another question first, one that will have occurred to most readers anyway: Why use so many models, why so diverse? How come that Christianity did not gradually move toward a consensus on the schematism with which the believing thinker might confront current thought? I suggest that, initially, Christian reflection receives both the concepts-to-be-transformed and the models-in-terms-of-which they are to be transformed from the history of philosophy in general. If this hypothesis should prove correct—additional research is required here—we would know why even a limited inquiry (cf. Introduction) uncovers so many different models of thought.

In this connection I recall a well-known passage from Origen: ‘When with respect to geometry, music, grammar, rhetoric and astronomy the sons of the world’s sages assert that these are the handmaidens of philosophy, then, surely, we may claim similarly regarding the relation between philosophy and theology.’<sup>20</sup> Evidently, Origen felt that Greek philosophy (the then current encyclopedia of the sciences) provided a scheme that allowed him to determine the relationship of the Christian faith (‘theology’) to philosophy. One may well wonder how many other cases there must be of Christians who, purposing to fuse pagan- or secular-produced [260] insights and Christian belief, elevated exogenous philosophical constructs to models of transformation or inverse transformation. Shall we conclude, for example, that the *logos* doctrine as synthesis model used by Origen is an endogenous product of Christian reflection based on the prologue to the gospel according to St. John, which speaks of the eternal Son of God? Or should we say, rather, that it represents a specific elaboration of the speculative *logos* as encountered in Stoic

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<sup>20</sup> Origen, *Philocalia* XIII, 1.

and neo-Platonist thought, from which Origen also borrowed the related notion of ‘providence?’ How about the model of paradox, by way of which the great orator Tertullian expressed the antithesis between Christianity and paganism?<sup>21</sup> Is this not a model culled from a fashionable style (the Stoics loved it), the rhetoric of paradox?<sup>22</sup>

What shall we say of the mysticism of Bonaventure and his order? Is this medieval model of synthesis rooted in Assisi’s inspiration alone, or does it go back, via Dionysus the pseudo-Areopagite and others, all the way to Proclus and Plotinus? Again, when Thomas conceptualizes the relation of created reality to divine grace in terms of nature and supernature, is he not making use of an extra-biblical scheme of thought, a *philosophoumenon* taken from the neo-Platonic doctrine of the hierarchy of being? And all these lesser models of synthesis that play their part in patristic and medieval thought (the idea of an oral tradition of revelation, allegorical exegesis, etc.)—are they not in every case older than Christianity and borrowed from the ancients?

It seems to me that comparable questions may well be asked regarding modernity. The pedigree of many of the key words figuring in attempts to link the biblical message and modern philosophy is philosophical rather than biblical. Terms and concepts like synthesis, correlation, transcendental criticism, anticipation, utopia and so on, are not just neutral instruments entirely at the disposal of the Christian thinker (and often presented as ‘theology’). To me they seem to represent philosophical constructs within the scope of which contemporary thought, including Christian reflection, is seeking to express itself.

### ***9. The paradigmatic character of transformational models***

To avoid misunderstanding: taken up into a Christian perspective such key terms undoubtedly acquire a new meaning, if only because they function as models of synthesis. Pannenberg’s notion of ‘anticipation’ is influenced [261] by, if not derived from Heidegger’s *Vorlaufen in die Möglichkeit*.<sup>23</sup> But this anticipation is simultaneously oriented christologically and hence restructured. Putting two and

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<sup>21</sup> Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum*, 7.

<sup>22</sup> Klaas Schilder, *Zur Begriffsgeschichte des ‘Paradoxon,’* 3-18.

<sup>23</sup> M. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 262; cf. Pannenberg, *Basic Questions* III, 165.

two together it seems that Vroom has ample cause to make mention of ambiguity in Pannenberg’s concept of anticipation (ch. 10.4).

Let me add one more example: Gutiérrez. Utopia as an ideal of freedom, as a project of a non-repressive society of the future, is a philosophical model borrowed from Herbert Marcuse.<sup>24</sup> Admitting this, Gutiérrez interprets this utopia as corresponding to the Christian expectation of the Kingdom of God. Despite his disclaimers it remains that this is reinterpretation, infusion of a meaning which Marcuse certainly did not intend. Consequently, Wolters is right in noting friction on this point (ch. 11.5).

Above, I stated generally that whenever alien philosophical insights and concepts are taken up into a Christian view a transformational process is initiated, and that this process may be either beneficial or detrimental. At this point I ask: Should the train of thought suggested here not lead us to conclude that when alien philosophical constructs are turned into synthesizing *models* the same kind of thing is bound to happen? Is it correct to say that whenever exogenous constructs and frameworks are made into transformational models either detrimental or beneficial processes of transformation will come into play?

I believe this to be so. I grant that it makes of analysis a circular affair. But this circularity may tell us something; it may well tell us that commitment to a given model of transformation virtually precludes justification, and turns a deaf ear to criticism, just because the model is *foundational* and because its user will interpret every objection brought against it on its terms. On account of this circularity the models described in this book have, to some degree at least, the status of paradigms or axioms.

It is true that, frequently, people offer what they sincerely take to be biblical support. Justin Martyr believed that the (Stoic) *logos spermatikos* in which the entire human race participates is the very *Logos* of which John 1: 14 says: ‘And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.’ In Thomism the supernatural, i.e., divine destiny of humankind was often supported with an appeal to 2 Peter 1: 4: [You] ... become partakers of the divine nature.’ Hegel himself interpreted the dialectics of antithesis and synthesis theologically as a ‘speculative Good Friday.’ But if we consider the philosophical provenance and numerical diversification of the models

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<sup>24</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 31.

[262] applied this kind of undergirding and interpreting seems spurious, an act of *eisegesis* rather than of biblical *exegesis*. However that may be, it is certain that many are not prepared to agree that the integration of faith and philosophical ideas or philosophical ideology is an operation basic to philosophy and involves the use of non-Christian conceptualizations. Pannenberg, who interprets the ‘process of assimilation’ as a ‘theological (!) appropriation’ (ch. 10.7), is one who would not agree. Further research into the historical background of such models continues to be a *desideratum*.

### ***10. Reciprocity of transformation. Communication as transformational calling***

If one does not look beyond the one-way influence of ancient and modern themes and schemes on Christian reflection, one’s re-evaluation of its place in the broad history of philosophy remains incomplete. The influence went both ways. By far the most evident (and possibly for that reason neglected) demonstration of this is medieval–scholastic thought as it stretched across the centuries. Christianity has put its ineradicable imprint on Western philosophy, not only during the Middle Ages but in earlier and especially in later periods as well.

This two-way influence may now be designated as *reciprocity of transformation*. What the expression refers to, then, is this: (a) in virtue of the religious principle inherent in the Christian faith it is possible to develop Christian philosophical perspectives and insights, an activity in which insights (originating in philosophy generally) are appropriated, critically reinterpreted, and integrated into the Christian view; (b) the philosophical tradition at large, in turn, also harbors the potential to detach concepts from the Christian philosophical heritage, to reinterpret them, and to put them to use in an opposed religious (or ideological) way of thinking. A very clear example of the latter kind of reinterpretation and reintegration is the linear view of history, which Augustine had anchored in God’s creation and the work of Christ, and which now in secularized guise ferments most of modern thought.

Given such reciprocity of transformation I offer two propositions. The first is that it is inconceivable that the tradition of Christian thinking could span some twenty centuries without a process of ‘Christianization’ in which much could be



learned or borrowed from Greco-Roman civilization and from the tremendous efforts of modern thought. On this point it would become every Christian to be grateful and modest. The corollary of this, secondly, is that the modern world of thought is inconceivable without a process of persistent secularization in which much of the Christian [263] tradition is appropriated. It seems to me that just this (and no more) is the element of truth in Hegel’s characterization of modern philosophy as ‘philosophy within Christianity’ (ch. 7.7). Tillich’s reference to the Christian tradition as *character indelebilis* of modern thought contains the same moment of truth (ch. 9.8).

Once more, then, we must return to the observation that philosophical views, including transformational models, are habitually taken over from non-Christian thought. The parameter to be added now is that non-Christian thinking has been immersed in Christianity and is thoroughly post-Christian rather than a-Christian ever since. And so the entwinement is far more intimate than pictured above. While Pannenberg’s theology of anticipation structurally depends on Heidegger, and while Gutiérrez borrows much of his sociology from Marcuse, it is equally true that Heidegger’s *Vorlaufen* and Marcuse’s *Utopia* remain historically opaque apart from Augustine’s view of history and its lasting impact on modernity. Augustine’s argument regarding the spoils of Egypt<sup>25</sup> gains an extra dimension, as it were, in the question: How did the imperious Egyptians come to possess these treasures in the first place?

Let us summarize. There is much talk nowadays about hermeneutic and philosophical dialogue. The recurrent question is: How is mutual understanding, in particular between Christians and those of another mind, to be attained and is such dialogue worthwhile? I believe that the idea of the reciprocity of transformation can clarify the communicative potential of hermeneutic understanding, and in fact underscores the necessity of philosophical dialogue—on condition that the religious antithesis and its consequent radical diversity of religious–ideological starting points in philosophy be recognized and respected. Given the enormously intricate intertwinement of Christian thinking with the ancient metaphysical and modern humanistic traditions, philosophical reflection will always be in need of communication. It is certainly vital to Christian reflection.

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<sup>25</sup> Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* II, 40, 60. See ch. 8.9.

An important implication of the intimate interlinkage of Christian and non-Christian thought is that Christian philosophy is situational, contextually dependent. Those who postulate an antithesis in philosophy have not always been sufficiently conscious of this. There is a solidarity, a bond with general philosophy and its development. This is how I can make sense of a remark in an earlier chapter: 'No one would wish to return to the ahistorical thinking of earlier ages [i.e., before Hegel]. This also holds for the Calvinist-reformational tradition' (ch. 7.9). [264]

The contextuality of Christian philosophy implies that it is bound to time and place. In terms of time this means that, notwithstanding its orientation to Scripture as the Word of God, it must be formulated anew by successive generations, always interacting with general philosophical questions. To be time-bound means that it should never elevate its philosophical pronouncements to absolutes. Its local contextuality means that, as long as it makes sense to speak of, say, French philosophy (or continental, or Anglo-Saxon or Indian), Christian philosophy will resemble a chameleon. Christian philosophy, aware of its transformational calling, may well (in fact must) articulate itself differently in Korea or Latin America as compared to Europe or North America. To many the Hellenistic *couleur locale* of early Christian thought is a stumbling block; I do not see it that way. I think there is an urgent need of a Christian philosophy of social liberation, responding relevantly to processes of emancipation as they are currently taking hold in Latin America, and so on.

Christian philosophy needs communication in all sorts of directions. The twentieth century presents new opportunities for such communication. *Nolens volens*, the churches in the West, especially the Protestant ones, have relinquished their hegemony. On every continent Christian faith communities participate in the dialogue. These communities are confronted with non-Western mores, national ideologies, indigenous cultures and subcultures. The church, moreover, has rediscovered its Jewish roots. To what extent and how well will Christian philosophical reflection prove capable of integrating all of this? Thus it is that the ideas of transformation, critique and reciprocity acquire an extra dimension; they imply entry into a world-wide community of reflection.

I know very well that in consequence of this Christianity is faced with enormous

risks. In many ways our situation resembles that of the Christian Apologists at the beginning of our era, although today we tend to be confronted with Oriental wisdom rather than Greek thought. The evils of 'synthesis' or, as I prefer to say, of 'inverse transformation' lie in wait: loss of identity, polarization, apostasy. Vollenhoven used to say that philosophical synthesis was the cause of the heresies, of the rents and the tears that divide the churches, 'tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine' (Ephesians 4: 14). Shall we say that this is a one-sided view? Vollenhoven only repeated something said long ago, by Irenaeus and Tertullian. In any case, let us reflect on it! This much is sure: it is only when the risks of communication are recognized that the challenge can be accepted responsibly. Aware of the risks we can, open to others and respecting them, truly render account of the Christian hope. [265]

### ***11. For further reading***

In two essays of mine in *Philosophia Reformata* I elaborate on major points dealt with in this chapter: 'Antithesis, Synthesis and the Idea of Transformational Philosophy,' *Philosophia Reformata* 51 (1986): 138-54; 'Reformational Philosophy on the Boundary of the Past and the Future,' *Philosophia Reformata* 52 (1987): 101-34.

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