

Reformational Philosophy on the Boundary between the Past and the Future

Jacob Klapwijk*

It is my intention in this paper to cast a look back over fifty years of reformational philosophizing. Together with you I want to ask: What have been the most important fruits of all the scholarly efforts that were made in the past within the Association for Calvinist Philosophy? It is also my intention to take a look ahead, to the extent that this is humanly possible. Let us ask what reformational philosophizing could mean for today's situation, and for tomorrow's.

The world has changed drastically. Seven central themes

The world has changed drastically. Today's world is different from the one in which our pioneers, Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd, once had to lift their voices. The thirties were years of uncertainty, of economic malaise and political tension, a time during which the dark shadows of the Second World War began to form. Yet there was also at the same time unbounded self-confidence, belief in human resilience and in the impelling force of 'scientific intelligence' (the term is John Dewey's). Here, on the

* This paper was prepared for the Third International Symposium of the Association for Calvinist Philosophy, 'On Being Human', and presented on August 15, 1986 at Zeist, The Netherlands, in celebration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Association.

To facilitate international discussion I have referred to English-language publications as much as possible, in both the text and the notes. As a regrettable but unavoidable result, a number of publications important to the Association have been left out of consideration.

I wish to thank especially, among those to whom I am indebted, dr. J.D. Dengerink and dr. M.D. Stafleu, for their extensive and documented commentaries on an earlier version of the text. The text is translated from the Dutch by Herbert Donald Morton.

European continent, our Association was confronted with the self-confidence of neokantian and phenomenological thinkers who adhered to the self-sufficiency of theoretical reason or who cherished philosophical intuition as an axiomatic certainty and who brushed Christian presuppositions or principles aside as ‘theology’.

Fifty years later this world has taken on a very different appearance. We have had two world wars and are confronted by the threat of a nuclear holocaust. We have known intoxication from a surfeit of welfare, and we [102] are confronted by grossly polluted land, seas, and air. We have inherited an earth which has been subjected to predatory plundering and which is no longer in a condition to be the *alma mater* for its five-billionth inhabitant, who – it is thought – was born somewhere in the Third World on July 7, 1986, under a corrugated roof. We have become members together of an open global society two-thirds of whom hunger for bread or thirst for justice. Our *alma mater* is pregnant with impending destruction.

I know, it is true, in this brutal and cynical world many naive souls are still to be found who expect deliverance to be provided by cybernetics, by artificial intelligence and information technologies as the panacea for the society of the future. There are however a good many others, including many scientists, who have lost confidence in the self-sufficiency of ‘science’ and ‘intelligence’. Many have a vague suspicion that science has become a toy and puppet of special interests, an instrument of power, or a cork adrift on the current of history. It is sometimes asserted openly that theory does not disclose truth and reality, but hides lies and injustice.

And philosophy today? It adjusts itself to these trends. Contemporary philosophy has developed into a critique of ideologies or it has postured as a hermeneutics of suspicion or has simply presented itself as a continuation of the conversation of the West (Richard Rorty). Axiomatic certainties have had their day, the self-confident rationalism and ‘foundationalism’ is a thing of the past. The thesis that philosophy proceeds from worldview principles or from a personal commitment is for many philosophers today no more than kicking in an open door. Yes, the world of the philosophers has also changed drastically. Does that imply that the agenda for reformation in philosophy has become obsolete?

Standing at the boundary between the past and the future, we cast a glance

back and at the same time, as far as possible, a glance forward. I have asked myself how we can best proceed. One could try to sketch a line of development and show how scholarly thought within the Association has developed in phases: a phase of reconnoitering the terrain, a phase of systematizing, a phase of further expansion, etc. One could also try to sketch a line from one generation to another: a generation of founders (Vollenhoven, Dooyeweerd, Stoker, Van Til, etc.), a second generation that arose after the Second World War with a charisma of its own (Zuidema, Popma, Mekkes, Runner, Van Riessen, etc.), and a third generation that is now contributing its ideas in various countries and regions of the world. One could also try to summarize the work that has been done and still should be done in several philosophical disciplines: cosmology, theory of knowledge, philosophical anthropology, social philosophy, philosophical ethics, etc.

In my presentation I leave these options for what they are. Besides various other objections, I fear that these approaches would require too much time, that they would prove too broad and unwieldy. So I shall choose another way. I want to present to you a number of themes that have since the earliest time occupied the center of interest within our Association, yes, that have even become distinctive of what many understand by ‘reformational philosophy’. Each theme is presented with a brief evaluation in which I attempt to show why and to what extent it may need to be reformulated with a view to today’s world and tomorrow’s. [103]

It is my intention to deal with seven central themes: the religious antithesis, the relation between Scripture and philosophy, the so-called creation ordinances, the theme of meaning, the statute of man, the transcendental critique, and, finally, the theory of history and culture.

Religious antithesis: The idea of transformational philosophy (I)

The first central theme I want to raise is that of the religious antithesis. There is a good reason to begin just here. I believe that no theme is so characteristic, so distinctive for the movement of reformational philosophizing as what people have tried to express with these two words: ‘religious antithesis’. Groen van Prinsterer and Abraham Kuyper put this notion into a formula, but in point of fact it goes back to the calvinist reformation, to the augustinian tradition, yes, to the biblical witness.

There we hear about the deep, radical fall of the first man, a fall in which he dragged the entire creation with him and brought it within the reach of the evil one. There we also hear about the counter-offensive of the risen Lord, the second man, the second Adam, who through much tribulation, through joy and sorrow, brings man, the world, the fallen creation, back to its appointed end: the kingdom of God.¹

What has this religious antithesis, this struggle between the risen Lord and ‘the power of darkness’ (Col. 1:13), to do with our philosophizing? I would say: Everything! It was Augustine who showed that the struggle between the city of God and the city of the evil one is world-wide in its scope. It was Calvin who showed that this struggle touches the entire man, yes, that even human reason is darkened and blind and dependent upon salvation. It was Abraham Kuyper who therefore warned against the spirit of Christian synthesis and accommodation in science and asserted that the science that issues from the saved life and born-again heart must be different from, yes, must be diametrically opposed to science as practiced in the non-Christian world. It was Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd, finally, who, each in his own way, attempted to explain *how* the religious antithesis operates, *how* belief and unbelief penetrate into the world of science.²

If I am not mistaken, within our Association during the past half century this doctrine of religious antithesis has never been directly challenged. However, there has been some uncertainty about the practical implications of this doctrine, and in particular about the question of whether, to what extent, and on what grounds the antithesis allows or else excludes communication and cooperation with those of another mind. Thus there was already a remarkable difference in philosophizing between Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd. Leery of the spirit of synthesis, Vollenhoven designed not only for systematic philosophy but even for the history of philosophy a practically brand new philosophical vocabulary. Dooyeweerd, in contrast, concerned about a Christian contribution to the philosophical discussion [104] in general, yes, to the *philosophia perennis*, introduced his own philosophical categories into the field only where strictly necessary.

¹ See J. Klapwijk, ‘Rationality in the Dutch Neo-Calvinist Tradition’, pp. 94-99.

² For a profound analysis of Kuyper’s view, see S.U. Zuidema, ‘Common Grace and Christian Action in Abraham Kuyper’, trans. Harry van Dyke, in *Communication and Confrontation*, pp. 52-106. With respect to Calvin, Kuyper, Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven see further Klapwijk, ‘Calvin and Neo-Calvinism on Non-Christian Philosophy’ and Dooyeweerd’s Christian Philosophy’.

During the post-war years the uncertainty increased. In the Netherlands and elsewhere the neocalvinist subculture lost its closed character. The framework of the kuyperian pattern of organization began to break up. And as the number of experts in our circle increased and our contacts with those of other minds became more frequent, the practical thrust of the religious antithesis became, if I am not mistaken, ever less clear.

Just consider for a moment our present situation! The world lies open to all, open also to the prevalent science. In today's world, science is more powerful than ever before. It has become the number one cultural power. The cool calculations of our scientific experts have permeated practically all sectors of our existence. Scientific experts guide technology and dominate economic production, political activity, military logistics, world trade, yes, the communications systems of our information society. In such a scientized world does it still make sense to speak of antithesis and of a reformation of philosophy and science? Is the era of a separated, antithetical scholarly praxis of the sort Kuyper could still call for in his Stone Lectures not for good and all a thing of the past? Are we not compelled, for better or for worse, to cooperate with and to accommodate ourselves to the operative scientific system with all its built-in values of control and domination, if we as Christians would still like to have at least some influence on behalf of what is good?

My response to such questions and suggestions is that I reject this dilemma of either separation or accommodation. The situation in which we find ourselves today as Christian scholars is really a missionary situation. It resembles that of the first Christians who had to carry the biblical message into an overwhelmingly apostate culture. It resembles too the situation one finds today in many mission fields. There too the question arises of how the Christian gospel must be given concrete form in the presence of an existing socio-cultural system. Inasmuch as Christ claims the whole of life, a simple accommodation to the pagan cultural system is forbidden. But is our goal then to form there an alternative, Christian subculture or counterculture? Or will it be our aim that non-Christian peoples should learn to praise and serve God in ways expressive of their own culture and lifestyle?

In modern theory of missions a case is often made for ‘acculturation’ or ‘indigenization’. The question becomes one of precisely what these terms mean. ‘Acculturation’ or ‘indigenization’ can mean accommodation, a process whereby

the Christian message is simply adapted to the autochthonous culture. Here Kuyper, Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd would rightly speak of synthesis. ‘Acculturation’ or ‘indigenization’ can also mean something quite different, however, namely, arrest (an old *gereformeerde* word), that is, a process whereby peoples and nations with their indigenous cultural traditions surrender themselves to the rule of the risen Lord. Johan Bavinck, the missions theorist of the Free University in Amsterdam, made use in this connection of the concept of *possession*: ‘the Christian life [105] does not accommodate or adapt itself to heathen forms of life, but it takes the latter in possession and thereby makes them new. Whoever is in Christ is a new creature.’³ In other words, it is Christ who as Lord of the world lays claim not only to the human soul but to all the concrete forms of culture in and through which man seeks to express himself. Acculturation means, thus regarded, a process of purification and consecration, in short, the transformation of a given culture into the service of Christ.

To return now to science and philosophy! Science and philosophy are exponents of culture, certainly of the contemporary scientized culture of the West with its pan-global action radius. Engaged in scholarship ourselves, we are confronted with a plethora of scientific theories, often too with an overpowering crush of philosophical ideologies. So the problem becomes concrete: What does the Great Commission of the Risen Lord require of us, scholars and scientists, anno Domini 1986, regarding the religious antithesis?

My answer is: it requires of us a new style of reformational philosophizing. For the time being we can probably best refer to this style of philosophizing with the help of the general term: ‘transformational philosophy’. The idea of transformational philosophy is based on the notions of assessment, arrest, and appropriation. The central category is ‘transformation’. Transformation is critical assessment, selection, and appropriation of existing intellectual goods in such a way that their incorporation into a Christian worldview means a restructuring and redirecting of their content, a redefining of their scope or meaning.

Thus, more concretely speaking, key concepts in the sciences such as information and communication, repression and liberation, class struggle and human dignity, etc., etc., are not contraband the moment we find them in a humanistic theory or

³ J.H. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, pp. 178-79. Cf. C.H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, pp. 318-23, 345-59.

philosophy. Apart from their non-Christian background or from the horizontalistic perspective in which they are placed, many of these concepts represent valuable insights. Therefore it is my conviction that in many cases such concepts can and, indeed, should be de-ideologized and incorporated into a Christian perspective.

I have to add that the idea of transformational philosophy presupposes a recognizable, distinctive position of ourselves, *in casu* a distinctively Christian or, more specifically, reformational position. This is indispensable because such a recognizable point of departure is the very condition for the possibility for authentic transformation. Our own position, although we often stumble, is in Christ, and we take non-Christian thought into captivity as it were, for Christ (cf. II Cor. 10.5). The idea of transformational philosophy excludes by definition, however, the possibility of a separate alternative circuit of Christian scholarly praxis because it proceeds on the basis of the dynamic notion of *possessio*. I like to put it this way: reformational philosophy is at the same time transformational philosophy.

Do not forget that the work of science in non-Christian circles is also carried on in terms of transformation. What we presently understand by ‘modern secularization’ is in fact nothing other than a process of transformation – I call it ‘inverse transformation’ – that originated in the Renaissance and Enlightenment and entails the willful or unconscious categorical bending and systematic transformation of the Christian spiritual and [106] intellectual heritage in the spirit of humanism. I would even defend the thesis that practically the whole of modern humanistic philosophy derives from a transformation of the Christian inheritance. When Karl Marx, for example, speaks of ‘alienation’ and ‘emancipation’, then one can justifiably ask whether he has not appropriated these concepts and whether they do not originally belong to Christianity.

Hegel sensed something of these original claims of Christianity when he once characterized the whole of modern philosophy as ‘Philosophie innerhalb des Christentums’⁴. At the same time, I object to Hegel’s terminology. For it obscures the primary central theme of reformational philosophy: the religious antithesis. Wherein is the religious antithesis then revealed? It is revealed in the struggle between sanctification and secularization, between a transformation dominated by the *possessio* of Christ and an inverse transformation dominated by various forms

⁴ Cf. G. W. F. Hegel, *Einleitung in die Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 192.

of human expansion and control.⁵

Scripture and philosophy: The framework of a worldview (2)

The second central theme I want to take up in this paper is the relation of Scripture and philosophy. During the course of the years, I have gained the impression that on this crucial point there is within the Association, remarkably enough, a considerable difference of opinion. I also have the impression that this difference of opinion has historical roots in divergent views discoverable already in the thirties in Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd.

I begin with Vollenhoven's view. Vollenhoven used to emphasize that philosophy and science must always be practiced 'in the light of Holy Scripture'. He worked out this conception, which as such will elicit opposition from no one in the Association, in the following way. Christian and in this case calvinist or 'scriptural' philosophy has to draw upon two sources or 'means' of knowledge, nature and Scripture, say the empirical facts and the data of the biblical revelation.⁶

Yet in this regard Vollenhoven's philosophy entails a serious difficulty, namely, the question of its relation to theology! Let us suppose for a moment that Christian theology may be described as theoretical reflection on the biblical revelation as it is to be understood in faith – where then remains the difference between such a scriptural philosophy and Christian theology? In other words, how can a Christian philosophy without further qualification draw and reflect upon the data of Scripture? In this way does not the very thing we are always challenged about by opponents actually happen, namely, that in Christian philosophy, philosophy and theology are mixed together?

I turn now to Dooyeweerd's view. For reasons like those I have mentioned, Dooyeweerd grew increasingly leery of making direct appeals to Scrip-[107]ture in the context of philosophical argumentation. He learned early that such appeals rendered his scholarly arguments vulnerable to incidental attacks by theologians

⁵ See for a further elaboration Klapwijk, 'Antithesis, Synthesis, and the Idea of Transformational Philosophy', and 'The Idea of Transformational Philosophy'.

⁶ See D. H. Th. Vollenhoven, *Isagooge Philosophiae*, § 171, p. 119.

Characteristic of Vollenhoven's position is a statement such as the following: 'If you believe God's Word and trust that Word, you obtain a philosophy the basis of which is formed by that non-philosophical, non-scientific belief in Holy Scripture and in God' ('Schriftgebruik en wijsbegeerte', *MVCW*, September 1953, p. 8).

and he feared the pitfall of scholastic tutelage. Dooyeweerd’s considered view was that the central biblical message – he spoke of the Christian ‘religious ground motive’ of creation, fall, and redemption – appeals to the heart of man and should permeate as a regenerating religious force the whole of Christian experience, hence also the thought of the Christian philosopher. And that completely aside from the problem of whether such Christian thinking can be based on biblical prooftexts!⁷

Dooyeweerd’s solution of the problem of the relation between philosophy and Scripture has also produced some headaches within the Association. Vollenhoven once confided to me that he found it unfeasible to summarize the richness of the biblical message in ‘such a formula’ (he meant Dooyeweerd’s Christian religious ground motive). Many others shared, yes share this view. It is my impression that the uncertainties and differences of opinion have had a confusing and even paralyzing effect on the work of the Association. Once when in a review of Van Riessen’s *Wijsbegeerte* I called attention to this difference between Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd, Dooyeweerd asked personally whether I was trying to create a contradiction between him and his brother-in-law. Still a young man, I experienced these words as criticism, but others assured me that Dooyeweerd himself valued and benefited from any clarification of their distinctive viewpoints.⁸

However that may be, in recent decades I have often had the feeling that within the Association we had arrived at something of a standoff. When beginning in 1939 Dooyeweerd proceeded to extend his philosophy into a general transcendental critique of theoretical thought and profiled the so-called cosmonomic idea as the inner point of connection between the theoretical argumentation in the foreground and the religious motivation in the background of every philosophical system, he only became the more resolute in his view of the role of Scripture precisely as a religious driving power, as an inspiring ground motive.⁹ He once told me that, in retrospect, he had still referred too often to the

⁷ See, e.g., H. Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, vol. 1, pp. 173-74; vol. 2, p. 52.

Characteristic of Dooyeweerd’s position is a statement such as the following: The philosophy of the cosmonomic idea rejects indeed every notion of a scriptural philosophy that seeks support in particular Bible texts for statements of *intrinsically philosophical and, in general, scientific problems and theories*’ (‘De strijd om het schriftuurlijk karakter van de Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee’, *MVCW*, July 1950, p. 3).

⁸ For the review in question, see Klapwijk, ‘Over mogelijkheden van christelijk filosoferen’.

⁹ This new development began with Dooyeweerd’s ‘De transcendentale critiek van het wijsgeerig denken’ (1939) and ‘De transcendentale critiek van het wijsgeerig denken en de

text of the Bible. His successor, Van Eikema Hommes, was of the same mind as his mentor in this regard. On the other hand we see that people like Runner and Van Riessen in their philosophical argumentation appeal to the written testimony of the Bible with great liberty and candor. Of course, for them too the Word of God is a driving and inspiring power. Yet they believe that [108] through a direct appeal to Holy Writ the light of the biblical revelation must still be allowed to shine in all its fullness in philosophical discourse.¹⁰

Also with an eye to the future, I find the question of how we as reformational Christians should deal with the Bible in philosophy to be of ‘urgent importance. We must try to arrive at a *consensus*. With that in mind, I will make three observations.

First, it is striking that Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd and so many others with them have arrived within their philosophical reflections, despite their diverging views of Scripture, at conceptions they hold in common, for example, with regard to the religious antithesis; the distinction between God, law, and cosmos; sphere sovereignty; the central importance of the human heart, and much more. This commonness of conviction indicates that the power of God’s Word is happily not directly dependent on our divergent reflections concerning it.

Next I want to say that these convictions which they and we hold to a great extent in common have not simply fallen out of the sky like the Black Stone in Mecca. They are convictions that have sprung from or crystallized within a common Christian tradition, that of the calvinist reformation of the sixteenth century and the nineteenth-century neocalvinist *réveil*. It was not without reason that our Association fifty years ago acquired the name ‘Association for Calvinist Philosophy’. This name expressed the desire to propagate what Herman Bavinck and Abraham Kuyper used to call ‘the calvinist life and world view’.

With that I come finally to what I call the ‘missing link’ in the discussions that have been carried on within the Association for decades now about the

grondslagen van de wijsgeerige denkgemeenschap van het Avondland’ (1941). Cf. J.N. Kraay, ‘Successive Conceptions in the Development of the Christian Philosophy of Herman Dooyeweerd’, *Philosophia Reformata* 45, 1/2 (1980): 26, 29, 39.

¹⁰ See, e.g., H. Evan Runner, ‘The Relation of the Bible to Learning’ and H. van Riessen, *Wijsbegeerte*. In his personal presentation of Dooyeweerd’s philosophy, H.J. van Eikema Hommes, in contrast, arrives at a complete rejection of ‘such external points of contact between biblical revelation and scientific problems’, which are called ‘scholastic’ in character and hence reveal the need for ‘an inner point of connection resident in the nature of scientific thought itself’ (*Inleiding tot de Wijsbegeerte van Herman Dooyeweerd*, pp. 9, 11).

relationship between the Bible and philosophy: the mediating role played in this relationship by the so-called life and world view. Thus Vollenhoven could speak of ‘scriptural philosophy’ and Dooyeweerd could mention a ‘central biblical ground motive’ as long as it was not forgotten that in doing so they understood ‘scriptural’ and ‘biblical’ within the historical tradition of the ‘calvinist’ worldview. The context provided by this worldview (which perhaps bore more strongly the stamp of self-evidence for them than it does for us) can be traced in retrospect as the binding element.¹¹ [109]

I am well aware that my rather abrupt turn to the worldview context of our philosophy – in connection with which historical calvinism functions somewhat as a basic paradigm for our scholarly work is – is fraught with not insignificant systematic considerations. Perhaps some will experience this turn to matters of worldview as a historicizing, yes as a relativizing of our own position.

My position does *not* imply a kind of Christian relativism. But indeed, it does suggest on the one side that *all* philosophy as such has worldview roots: that will have to be shown.¹² This position implies on the other side that reformational philosophy is not *simply* founded in Scripture à la Vollenhoven, not *simply* driven by the central motivating power of God’s Word à la Dooyeweerd, but that it also has concrete historical roots: that will have to be taken into account!¹³

¹¹ Philosophy and worldview both have a religious starting point, so Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven maintain. The question however is whether philosophical thought is conditioned in its own turn by worldview. Although in Vollenhoven and even more so in Dooyeweerd there is a *tendency* to deny the latter, their standpoint on the issue is not entirely consistent. Vollenhoven writes: ‘What the view of life is to non-scientific knowledge, philosophy is to scientific knowledge’ (*Schriftgebruik en wijsbegeerte*, p. 8). Yet as it turns out, philosophy on the one hand and life and world view on the other are not completely separated in his conception, for he continues: ‘scientific knowledge never loses all traces of what is nonscientific’. Dooyeweerd observes: ‘Philosophy cannot take the place of a life- and world-view, nor the reverse, for the *task* of each of the two is different’ (*A New Critique*, vol. 1, p. 128); and elsewhere: ‘A life- and world-view may not be “elaborated” philosophically. It must elaborate itself (Ibid., p. 158). Nonetheless, he goes on to say also: ‘A life- and world-view should come to theoretical clarity in philosophic thought’ (Ibid., p. 165). I call such statements happy inconsistencies!

¹² To accomplish that was the main reason I recently wrote *Orientatie in de Nieuwe Filosofie*.

¹³ The mediating role of the worldview between religion and philosophy has been presented clearly in our circles by A.M. Wolters, who writes in his *Creation Regained*: ‘Philosophical categories ... are themselves decisively shaped by a deeper-lying worldview’ (p. 97). It remains unclear in this work however whether worldviews play a mediating role between religion and philosophy just in *historical* or also in systematical perspective. This question applies especially to the reformational worldview. Taking a systematic point of view, Wolters more or less identifies the reformational or calvinistic worldview with the biblical religion or ‘biblical worldview’ in the normative sense. In contrast, he approaches other Christian worldviews from a historical point of view and considers them one-sided in their mediating role (p. 10). Cf. his ‘Dutch Neo-Calvinism: Worldview,

I venture in this connection to launch the thesis that what Dooyeweerd invariably called the four religious ground motives of the Occident were not purely religious ground motives: for on the basis of the doctrine of the religious antithesis one can speak at most of two strictly religious ground motives. Dooyeweerd in fact had something else in mind: four religiously oriented worldviews, operative in Western culture. Moreover, I believe he borrowed this foursome from the Stone Lectures of Kuyper, who speaks there in so many words not only of a religious antithesis but also, more specifically, of paganism, romanism, modernism and calvinism, which he calls all-embracing worldview positions or ‘life conceptions’ that arose in history, each with its own vision of God, of man, and of the world.¹⁴ And because Dooyeweerd was often *actually* speaking of worldview positions and *not* of religious ground motives he seemed to be able to show *how* religion – via the so-called ‘cosmonomic idea’ – influences philosophy. Yet such an endeavor is impossible if indeed religion – in the Dooyeweerdian sense of ultimate commitment – is at stake, because religion transcends all scholarly exposition. Dooyeweerd accomplished his task because he in fact set out to show not how religion but how *worldviews* enter into philosophy.¹⁵

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Proceeding from the idea of worldview-oriented philosophy, the divergence between Vollenhoven with his appeal to the witness of Holy Scripture and Dooyeweerd with his appeal to the inspiring power of the biblical ground motive seems less serious than it at first appeared. For in living with God’s Word the Christian receives both instruction and inspiration.¹⁶ Both contribute to the deepening of his worldview as the binding framework for his philosophy. And yet, in this vision there is no need for converting such a ‘scriptural’ philosophy itself into theology.

Philosophy, and Rationality’. See further J.H. Olthuis, ‘On Worldviews’; and S. Griffioen, P. Marshall, and R. Mouw, eds., *Worldview and Social Theory*.

¹⁴ Cf. A. Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, chs. 1 and 6.

¹⁵ In the conception of Dooyeweerd the ‘cosmonomic idea’ (Dutch: *wetsidee*) is a limiting concept within philosophy regarding the coherence, unity and origin of all reality. It refers by way of philosophical approximation to three boundary problems: the mysteries of the world, of man, and of God (*A New Critique*, vol. 1, p. 101). In my view it is not so much religion (as ultimate commitment) as it is the worldview that can shed light on these mysteries, since in the worldview a view of man and a view of God are always inevitably included. See A. Kuyper, *Lectures and Calvinism*, p. 19.

¹⁶ Calvin emphasizes both when he writes: ‘I call “service” not only what lies in obedience to God’s Word but what turns the mind of man, empty of its own carnal sense, wholly to the bidding of God’s Spirit’ (*Institutes*, III, vii, 1).

It will be clear that my argument for the idea of transformational philosophy and my argument for the idea of worldview-oriented philosophy are very closely connected. For if the transformation of philosophy entails critically taking possession of pagan or secular scholarly thought, then this can only be accomplished responsibly by reinterpreting it and transforming it within the context of a Christian worldview.

The connection between the idea of transformational philosophy and the idea of worldview-oriented philosophy attests to the serious objections I have against the German romantic and historicist notion of *Weltanschauungsphilosophie* as we find it in the *œuvre* of Wilhelm Dilthey and also still to some extent in the writings of Abraham Kuyper. Although philosophy is inevitably conditioned by worldview, that cannot mean the philosopher's task is restricted to giving philosophical articulation and expression to the *Gemeingeist*, to the spiritual heritage of his group. With such an 'expressivist' vision of life (C. Taylor) calvinists, catholics and humanists would foster spiritual in-breeding, yes, contribute to a perspectivizing of the truth. Transformation means however an active striving and struggling for the true perspective.¹⁷

Sphere sovereignty and creation ordinances:

The creational-messianic perspective (3)

One is tempted now to take up as a third central theme the theory of sphere sovereignty, for this theme has received a very great deal of attention in our Association. Many outsiders even have the impression that for reformational philosophers everything turns on sphere sovereignty. Yet I shall mention this theory only in passing, because I want to concentrate on a related but more fundamental issue, the idea of creation ordinances.

I would like to summarize the doctrine of sphere sovereignty here in three points. First, following Kuyper's renowned address, *Souvereiniteit in eigen kring*, delivered at the opening of the Free University in Amsterdam in 1880, Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd used this doctrine to express the idea that in human society there are various structures ('spheres') such as church, state, family, education, and business, each with a God-given competency and responsibility and hence also

¹⁷ Cf. Klapwijk, 'On Worldview and Philosophy'. For the 'expressivist' vision of life, see C. Taylor, *Hegel and the Modern Society*, pp. 2-3.

independence (‘sovereignty’) [111] which must be respected by the other structures. State omnipotence and ecclesiastical hegemony are equally objectionable.

Secondly, Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd added to this *sociological* theory of sphere sovereignty a *cosmological* theory of sphere sovereignty. The cosmos as a whole and all things in the cosmos exhibit in principle various distinguishable ‘modal’ aspects, for example, a numerical, a physical, a biotic, a psychical, an analytical, an economic, a jural, an ethical, and also a pistic or faith aspect. These appear according to an ordered scale of complexity which would be inherent in all things and thus in all social structures as well. Since the cosmic aspects in question all have a particular, irreducible character – in the case of an industrial accident, for example, the physical aspect (the explosion), the economic aspect (the cost of the damage), and the jural aspect (the question of accountability) of the event may not be confused with each other – Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd also considered it feasible to speak of ‘sphere sovereignty’ in connection with them.

Finally, most surprising is the way in which Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd tied the sociological and cosmological theories of sphere sovereignty together. The sphere sovereignty of the different social structures was said to be grounded in the sphere sovereignty of the modal aspects, since every social structure not only exhibits a complete scale of cosmic aspects but also is typified by one outstanding qualifying aspect. Thus the faith aspect would be distinctive for the church community, the jural aspect for the state, the ethical aspect for the family, the economic aspect for business life, and so forth.

This theory of ‘sovereign’ modal aspects and the theory of ‘sovereign’ social structures based on it have been elaborated especially by Dooyeweerd into an imposing architectonic system. Since Kuyper’s day it has become increasingly obvious that the doctrine of sphere sovereignty entails many theoretical implications but also far-reaching political and societal consequences. From it has developed, for example, a pluralist view of society which, especially in the Dutch political context, has been an important critical alternative to the choice between the collectivist or universalist conceptions of the state associated with classical socialism and the atomistic or individualist conceptions of society of classical liberalism.

Yet it must be acknowledged in all honesty that the doctrine of sphere sovereignty has evoked many questions both within our circle and outside the Association. One

of the knottiest of these to my mind is the question of whether the theory is not carried rather too far, at the expense of its original critical thrust, when it is elaborated into a complete typology of so-called ‘structures of individuality’.

It is known that in the third and final volume of his *New Critique* Dooyeweerd turned all his genius, informed by a phenomenologically tinted analysis of being, in this direction. There he attempted to trace the individuality structures that would underly natural things (a linden tree, e.g.) and products of culture (a sculpture, e.g.) and all kinds of social institutions (a medical clinic, e.g.). Kindred spirits, including Vollenhoven, were inclined, however, to reject such an elaboration as speculative. And necessarily so, I believe, when one considers how far this typology of individuality structures is carried. I have heard Dooyeweerd himself say that [112] an individuality structure would even be the basis of jet fighters! And then to think that on the other hand for Dooyeweerd these individuality structures do not form an independent realm of metaphysical (platonic) ideas but are related to God, the good creator of the universe!

I have now said *something*, if cursorily, about the doctrine of sphere sovereignty and its strengths and weaknesses. I shall go no further into the discussion that the Association has had about it, mainly because many would find such a presentation scarcely meaningful. The discussion is not, they believe, *ad fundum*. And there is something to that. It is not the theory of sphere sovereignty but its background conviction that confronts us with the most difficult questions and that has been a rock of offense especially to many outside our circle. And the background conviction of the theory of sphere sovereignty is the doctrine of the so-called creation ordinances (*scheppingsordeningen*). That doctrine needs clarification!

Already in the lutheran and calvinist Reformations reference is made to *ordinations*, i.e., to structures and institutions that God himself would have bestowed upon the creation in the context of establishing a normative world order. No matter how badly damaged the world may be after the Fall, it would continue to be a (broken) expression of God’s creational will.¹⁸ In connection with the theory of sphere sovereignty the real question is therefore what we are to think of such a divine order of creation.

¹⁸ The idea of creation ordinances may be found in, e.g., the *Confessio Augustana*, art 16; in Melancthon’s *Apologia*, art. 16; and in Calvin’s *Institutes*, I, v, 5.

For a long time the doctrine of creation ordinances enjoyed a recognized place in the Christian church and especially in the churches of the Reformation. Then, in the nineteenth century, with the rise and influence of a neo-romantic, historicist philosophy of life, many Christian thinkers began to historicize the ordinances. What had grown and slowly basked to ripeness *in history* and did not seem to be in conflict with Holy Scripture was considered the expression of God’s will and was therefore to be regarded as an ‘ordinance’. People opposed the French Revolution and other middle-class or proletarian revolutions that followed it on the grounds that they had overthrown historical and thus divine institutions. In short, the doctrine of creation ordinances began to smell of conservatism and restoration politics.

It was only in the twentieth century, however, with the rise of national socialism in Germany and elsewhere, that the doctrine of creation ordinances received an exceptionally bad press, even in Christian circles. Everyone knows how the nazis idolized the German race, ‘folk’ culture, and national history. Hitler presented the new societal order as a product of God’s guidance in history, of *Gottes Fügung in der Geschichte*. In reaction, opposition arose to any notion whatsoever of divine ordinances anchored in the creation. Mobilized by Karl Barth, many young theologians suspected, and often not incorrectly so, that adherents of this doctrine were secretly engaged in natural theology, that they secretly espoused a kind of metaphysics of creation in which relations that had grown up historically, such as those of the petty-bourgeois family or of the capitalist money and labor markets or of a favored race were blown up into divinely ordained creational structures and aired as eternal metaphysical principles. And indeed, such [113] lapses did occur. But did the barthian theologians not throw out the baby with the bathwater?

In our circles it was especially Dooyeweerd who, following Abraham Kuyper and Kuyper’s student Willem Geesink, placed great emphasis on the value of the doctrine of creation ordinances.¹⁹ Once he said very boldly that if Groen van Prinsterer had lived in our time he would have recognized his sympathies for the historicism of the nineteenth century as a mistake. He would not only have protested against the rationalism of the Enlightenment: ‘Against the revolution the gospel!’ He would also have raised his prophetic voice against the irrationalistic and

¹⁹ See, e.g. Kuyper, *De gemeene gratie*, 3d ed., vol. 3, passim; Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, vol. 1, pp. 447-57; and Geesink, *Van ‘s Heeren Ordinantien*.

historicist spirit of *our* age: ‘Against historicism the divine creation ordinances!’²⁰

With the help of this doctrine of a divine world order, Dooyeweerd wished to express that the whole of created reality – not only nature but also culture, history, human society – is and remains subject to the will of God the creator, no matter how sinful man deals with reality or with the whole of society. He has – correctly, I believe – declined to genuflect before either barthian theology or the modern philosophy of a contingent reality, of a confluent history, of a makeable society, of a self-creating man. Somewhere there is a limit to human autonomy and autocreation. Somewhere our modern societal experts’ urge to control everything runs up against an impenetrable wall: the divine structural framework of the creation.

Within the Association Dooyeweerd’s and Vollenhoven’s emphasis on creation ordinances received a great deal of support. I think here especially of Zuidema. He took a certain pleasure in poking fun at all those left-radical Christians and progressive theologians who, as he put it in a deft play on words, had in their passion for social reform exchanged the *beginselen* (i.e., the principles or ‘beginnings’) of God’s creation order for the ‘*eindselen*’ (a term coined to stand for goals or ‘endings’) of God’s kingdom. That seemed like a good joke. Only many years later did I discover that Zuidema had joked too soon. For, what is the kingdom of God?

One of the deepest convictions of the calvinist reformation can be expressed as follows: The kingdom of God may not be viewed in a scholastic way as a higher, supernatural order of reality; it is the created, natural reality itself as brought by God to its redemption, renewal, and glorification. From the prayer of Psalm 138 that ‘the Lord... forsake not the works of [his] own hands’ and ever so many other scriptural passages, Calvin and his followers concluded that the new heaven and the new earth from the Apocalypse is no *creatio nova*, no *nouveauté*, but the renewed creation, purified by the judgment.²¹

Against this biblical and reformational background one can, I believe, rightly state that God’s kingdom is the creation itself in the light of its [114] messianic final end.

²⁰ Dooyeweerd, *Vernieuwing en bezinning*, p. 241. This passage has not been included in *Roots of Western Culture*.

²¹ Calvin even speaks of a ‘principle’ when discussing the inner coherence of the creation and its renewal, and so says regarding man as the image of God: ‘For although I confess that these forms of speaking are *synechdoches*, yet this principle cannot be overthrown, that what was primary in the renewing of God’s image also held the highest place in the creation itself’ (*Institutes*, I, xv, 4).

This view is even more powerfully stated in the thesis: Between the given order of the creation and the coming kingdom of shalom there is a relation of intentional identity.²² For the rest, I recognize that this thesis by no means resolves all theological and philosophical problems pertaining to creation and the kingdom of God.

In any case, such considerations eventually compelled me to abandon Zuidema’s vision of these matters. I have come to the conclusion that we must never take the biblical witness concerning God’s ‘statutes and ordinances’ (Psalm 119) in isolation from or in opposition to the sublime vistas of the prophets and apostles. There arises in that case as of itself an appalling, backwards-looking Christian conservatism that is blind to the dynamics of the creation. Precisely because of the messianic visions of the future, we have to turn our hearts and direct our attention forward. We have to decipher the *eindselen*, the eschatological symbols, in order to understand the *beginselen*, the protological ordinances. And vice versa! Only in such a ‘va et vient’,²³ or better, in the way of ‘expecting’ and ‘reflecting’ may we discover all that God intended with His fallen creation ‘from the beginning’.

I can alas not say that the idea of philosophy in creational-messianic perspective presented here has been typical during the last half century of the work in our circle. One conspicuous exception, however, I must not fail to mention: professor Mekkes. It was Mekkes who wrote: ‘To speak of creational ordinances as something in themselves is... impossible’ and who therefore spoke beautifully of ‘structures under the rainbow’. To prevent any misunderstanding Mekkes added: ‘but precisely this [rainbow] points towards its dynamic fulfillment’. Therefore he could also argue elsewhere in polemics with Dooyeweerd: [Man] is *subject to* the future; it is [the future] which, through History, *norms* the creation’.²⁴

In a world in which millions of people yearn for anchorage and in which the slums

²² Attractive in Nicholas Wolterstorff’s position is that he sees both: the creation perspective and the perspective of shalom, ‘Amsterdam’ and ‘Lima’. The weak side of his position to my mind is that the two perspectives have not been actually integrated: ‘The cultural mandate is insufficient as a grounding for the practice of scholarship. One meets as well the mandate to work for shalom’ (*Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, p. 172).

²³ I just borrow the expression from Paul Ricœur. I take distance from its dialectical background, which is described by Ricœur himself as a ‘dialectic with postponed synthesis’ (*Histoire et Vérité*, p. 16). For the rest, I would recall that the symbolism of the apocalypse, particularly in Revelation 22, itself refers to the symbolism of the creation account.

²⁴ J.P.A. Mekkes, *Tijd der bezinning* (1973), p. 60; *Radix, tijd en kennen* (1970), p. 183. Already in *Scheppingsopenbaring en wijsbegeerte* (1961) we find the words: ‘The way of creation [is] the way of the Kingdom’ (p. 90). See also H.G. Geertsema, who in his paper ‘Higher Education as Service to the King’ starts (!) with ‘the Christian expectation’ and subsequently relates it to ‘the order of God’s creation’ (pp. 54-72).

of Bombay and Rio de Janeiro cry out for justice, the prevalent secular science speaks only of facts and the knowledge of the facts without a design for the future. In opposition to that we must dare to spell out Mekkes’s words again: ‘the future norms’. We must be mindful of the words of Levinas, who says that only the messianic triumph can overcome the brokenness of history, or the words of Adorno, who says that only the messianic perspective exposes injustice.²⁵ In our structural analyses of man [115] and society, of exchange rates and international finance, of human rights and political systems, we must speak in such a way of the creation order that people will come to recognize in the *Prinzip Schöpfung* the *Prinzip Hoffnung* and in ‘sovereign spheres’ not just creation structures but something like Kingdom structures. A theory of ‘sovereign spheres’ articulated as constellations of care or as fields of subservience or as resources of responsibility or as tokens of hope is more in keeping, I believe, with the messianic perspective than is a theory of ‘sovereign spheres’ in which people cannot help hearing only ‘law and order’.²⁶

It hardly seems necessary to show yet that the idea of philosophy in creational-messianic perspective is very closely connected to the previously mentioned concepts of transformational and worldview-oriented philosophy. For we discovered that transformation always takes place in and from a worldview context. And we also discovered that within the worldview context of reformational Christians, the creational-messianic perspective is an indispensable ingredient.

The theme of meaning: Depth-hermeneutics as an approach (4)

The fourth central theme within reformational philosophy is the theme of meaning. For that matter, a strong marginal note needs to be made here as well. All talk of the being of created reality in terms of ‘meaning’ is from Dooyeweerd’s stable, not Vollenhoven’s. Vollenhoven distinguished emphatically between the being of God, the being of the law, and the being of created reality, to be sure, because with Dooyeweerd he opposed in this way the classical scholastic doctrine of the *analogia entis*, the supposed analogy of being between God and what is created. Moreover, Vollenhoven described the being of the law as ‘obtaining for’ (*gelden voor*) and the being of created reality as ‘being subject to’ (*subjèct-zijn aan*); that is,

²⁵ See E. Levinas, *Totalité et infini*, p. 261 and T.W. Adorno, *Minima moralia*, § 153.

²⁶ Cf. Th. de Boer, ‘De filosofie van Dooyeweerd’, pp. 250-51.

he spoke of created reality's being subject *to* the laws ordained for it by God, i.e., to obtaining laws.²⁷ Nevertheless, to the best of my knowledge he always looked askance at the meaning-terminology that was coined to specify the ontological status of creation, afraid as he was of foreign elements creeping in.

In Dooyeweerd's philosophy of the cosmonomic idea, the notion of meaning occupies the central position, as we know. Whether he derived it from neokantianism or from phenomenology is not particularly important, for Dooyeweerd gave the idea of meaning a content of his own. By it he wished to express on the one hand that there is not an analogy but a boundary between God and created reality, precisely because the latter is subject to His laws and ordinances. He wished to express on the other hand that this created reality nonetheless refers beyond itself, yes, transcends itself in pointing in the direction of its divine Origin.

The most famous sentence from Dooyeweerd's *New Critique* is probably this: 'Meaning is the *being* of all that has been *created* and the nature even of our self-hood...'²⁸ It is this sentence in Dooyeweerd's *oeuvre* that initially won my admiration and later reduced me to perplexity. Initially admiration, because with this single sublime thesis Dooyeweerd was able to express the non-independence of reality and thus also implicitly the non-self-sufficiency of man and of human thought. But subsequently also perplexity, because this sentence simply ignores that in a world of prisons, hospitals, and cemeteries meaning is often far off. There are situations in which God's creatures are so tortured by anxiety, by pain, or by stifling loneliness that the word 'meaning' dies on my lips. If I should have to express the connection between being and meaning I would therefore dare to formulate at most: 'The being of all that has been created is meaning, but then meaning that is vulnerable and open to meaninglessness, malignancy, and madness'.²⁹

Not long ago my colleague Van der Hoeven wrote a striking account about the Christian thinker Paul Ricœur. He entitled it 'The problem of evil – crucible

²⁷ Vollenhoven, *Isagooge Philosophiae*, §§ 13-18, pp. 12-16.

²⁸ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique*, vol. I, p. 4

²⁹ Dooyeweerd recognizes the problem, to be sure, when he asks, 'Is sinful reality still meaning?' And then he acknowledges: 'Here we indeed touch the deepest problem of Christian philosophy'. But the answer follows, without restriction and without hesitation, on the same page: 'Sinful reality remains apostate meaning under the law and under the curse of God's wrath' (*A New Critique*, vol. 2, p. 33). The 'Why?' of the Crucified One and so many cross bearers finds no echo here.

for the authenticity and modesty of philosophizing’.³⁰ Indeed, if we as human beings or as Christians are aware of the demoniac character of evil in this world, then we also have an obligation to take it into account in our philosophizing. Thinkers like Dooyeweerd can teach us how transparent the creation is, yes that even the structure of theoretical thought points meaningfully to the glory of its Creator. On the other hand, thinkers like Dostoevsky or Ricœur must teach us the extent to which demoniac evil has penetrated to the basement vaults of human existence. Then our understanding fails. Then we experience no meaning, we grope in darkness.

Such an altered formulation about meaning and meaninglessness in God’s creation has philosophical implications. It touches especially the idea of ‘naive’, pretheoretical, everyday experience. Often Dooyeweerd speaks of the ‘givenness’, the datum character of naive experience. Philosophy and science would have to proceed from the datum of naive experience.³¹ I reject this thesis.

I, too, regard naive experience as fundamental for all theory. But I would never call it a ‘datum’, an unarguable *given* for science and philosophy, because naive experience is neither unproblematical nor innocent experience. Naive experience is *never naive!* If it is true that all human ‘meaning-experience’ is ambiguous and ambivalent and permeated by false appearance and illusions, then not only theoretical thought but also pretheoretical, ordinary experience is affected. The American philosopher Cornelius van Til has correctly taken issue with Dooyeweerd on this point.³² The everyday world, the world of *Alltäglichkeit* (to use a term from [117] Heidegger), cannot be a *datum*. It cannot be such because already at the level of ordinary experience people not only open but also close themselves to meaning; their doing so does not depend on their having attained the level of scientific reflection. In short, in the brokenness of our earthly existence, the understanding of meaning – at any level – is pervaded by misunderstanding, deception, and disillusionment.

All these considerations bring me necessarily to a unique conception of Christian philosophy in terms of a depth-hermeneutics. Some years ago in a special issue of

³⁰ J. van der Hoeven, ‘The Problem of Evil – Crucible for the Authenticity and Modesty of Philosophizing: In Discussion with Paul Ricœur’, *South African Journal of Philosophy* 5, 2 (1986): 44-52.

³¹ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique*, vol. 1, pp. 83-85; vol. 2, pp. 429-35.

³² C. Van Til: ‘There is no naive experience as a primary datum any more than that there is anything like theoretical thought as such’ (*Jerusalem and Athens*, p. 109).

Philosophia Reformata the keen young Korean scholar Jong Doo Kim characterized Dooyeweerd’s thought as a hermeneutical philosophy. I am of the opinion that in particular Dooyeweerd’s transcendental critique, including his idea of the supratemporality of the heart, obviates such an interpretation. Kim has, however, shown convincingly that Dooyeweerd made the problem of the comprehension of meaning (*Sinnerfassung*) so central in his writings that there are in any case many starting points for a hermeneutical reinterpretation of his work.³³ Well then, such a hermeneutical reinterpretation could, I believe, actually lead to the development of a Christian depth-hermeneutics in its own right.

What are we to understand by ‘a Christian depth-hermeneutics in its own right’? I can only sketch its outlines here. First, it is ‘hermeneutics’ because at both the theoretical and the pre-theoretical levels the meaning-character of reality *eo ipso* appeals to human meaning-experience in terms of understanding and interpreting. Then, it is ‘depth-hermeneutics’ because it will have to thrust through to the negativeness and nihilism hidden behind the given, positive phenomena. It is, finally, ‘in its own right’ because it operates from a Christian pre-understanding. Every ‘understanding’ (*Verständnis*) is – just as hermeneutical theory since Heidegger and Bultmann correctly asserts – necessarily imbedded in a ‘pre-understanding’ (*Vorverständnis*).³⁴ We can accordingly not do otherwise than interpret reality philosophically from *our* pre-understanding, a Christian or (more concretely) reformational worldview.

Such a depth-hermeneutics is no small assignment! In one of his last writings the late professor. M. C. Smit warns correctly against the coercion of hermeneutical thinking.³⁵ According to him historical-hermeneutical ‘understanding’ (*Verstehen*) is friendlier than causal-scientific ‘explaining’ (*Erklären*), to be sure, but at the end of the day both are equally ‘totalitarian’. For the hermeneutical way of thinking seeks to interpret everything from the all-encompassing context of a given structure, tradition, or spirit of an age. Is that feasible? Fathoming the suffering in this world is highly necessary if we are to be able to stand by people who are suffering. But one

³³ J.D. Kim, ‘Wissen und Glauben’, pp. 55, 86, 139, etc.

³⁴ See M. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, §§ 7, 31-33 and R. Bultmann, *History and Eschatology*, ch. 8.

³⁵ I refer here to an untitled lecture of 1980 by M. C. Smit, which has recently appeared as ch. 9 under the title ‘Bedenkingen tegen de objectief-wetenschappelijke en historisch-hermeneutische denkwijzen van deze tijd’ in *De eerste en tweede geschiedenis: Nagelaten geschriften van Meijer C. Smit*.

who would make that suffering understandable by fitting it into place in an orderly way in an encompassing horizon of understanding will perhaps have saved a universal hermeneutics, but he will also have betrayed his fellow man. A depth-hermeneutics after the reformational style is a difficult assignment. It means, namely: eyes open but lips sealed before the bitter puzzle of God’s good creation.

In other words, our concept of depth-hermeneutics represents a departure from ‘totalitarian’ hermeneutics. Our concept means the denial of a universal horizon of understanding. It means in particular the denial of a universal history of understanding, in which – as Hans-Georg Gadamer asserts – the ‘life-world’ or horizon of an original writer or agent and that of a current interpreter would in some way or another coalesce and fuse in the concentration upon the object to which the available texts, documents or other vestiges refer.³⁶

I believe that this so-called ‘fusion of horizons’, which would occur time after time in our dealings with foreign or past phenomena and which would take place within an all-embracing ‘effective history’ (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) that includes the interpretandum and the interpreter, can only be achieved to a certain extent. A universal horizon of understanding? As soon as we focus on a crucial phenomenon from the past or present – take the rise of Christianity, take the philosophy of the Enlightenment, take the class struggle, take the problem of rich countries and poor countries – between the interpreters there unavoidably arises a ‘conflict of interpretations’ (P. Ricœur), an irreconcilable conflict that ultimately has to do with error, with sin, with worldview contradictions and religious antithesis. The so-called ‘fusion of horizons’, performed by the supposed universality of language, rests in fact on confusion. It obscures what is really going on, to wit: trying to convince each other from conflicting perspectives.³⁷

Is it still necessary to draw the connection between our concept of depth-hermeneutics and the original idea of transformational philosophy? ‘Understanding our world’ (I allude to the title of Hendrik Hart’s latest book) is always a controversial act of hermeneutical re-interpretation because it is based on transformation from conflicting worldview horizons. Viewed in a broader context,

³⁶ H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 271-74, 340-41. Cf. also L.D. Derksen, *On Universal Hermeneutics*, pp. 107-79.

³⁷ See J. Klapwijk, ‘The Universal in Hans-Georg Gadamer’s Hermeneutic Philosophy’; and H. Vander Goot, *Interpreting the Bible*, pp. 15-17.

every act of interpretation results from a choice, a power play, a struggle of the spirits. Hermeneutical interpretation in the deep sense of the word means, indeed, transformational appropriation from different perspectives on life.

The statute of man: The eccentric starting point (5)

A retrospect on half a century of reformational philosophizing cannot fail to mention the subject of philosophical anthropology. At the founding of the Association there was already a significant difference in the view of man between the founders. Dooyeweerd came out with the notion of the temporality of man in his functional existence. But man would transcend this temporality in the central, religious unity of his person – biblically speaking: in his ‘heart’.³⁸ [119]

Vollenhoven endorsed the idea of the heart as the central, religious selfhood of man in which all his functions have as it were their point of connection: in fact, that idea can already be found in Kuyper.³⁹ However, Vollenhoven had objections – very serious objections – to the idea of the supratemporality of the heart. It savored of a kind of dualism, a scheme of higher and lower, as if man’s heart were closer to God than the sum of all his functions (biblically speaking: the body). To obviate any such misconception Vollenhoven preferred to speak of the ‘heart and [its] mantle of functions’, which we can perhaps best think of as an inner/outer scheme in which the heart as prefunctional source gives direction – for better or worse – to all functions and to all outer actions of man.

One attains a good view of this difference, however, only in conjunction with the more far-reaching philosophical considerations that were at stake for each of these thinkers. Dooyeweerd’s notion of the supratemporality of the heart was related to his philosophy as transcendental philosophy. (I shall return to this.) Vollenhoven’s notion of the heart as the ‘inner man’ was related to his philosophy as covenantal philosophy, i.e., to his conception that the entire man is part of history: a history of God’s revelation and of the way in which man responds to it religiously. Given this covenantal intercourse of God with his people in the whole of salvation history, in which the heart of the One was able as it were to touch the hearts of the others,

³⁸ For this supratemporal but to Dooyeweerd’s mind not static character of the human heart see Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique*, vol. 1, pp. 30-33; and *In the Twilight of Western Thought*, p. 19.

³⁹ See A. Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, pp. 20, 45-46.

Vollenhoven systematically rejected the notion of the supratemporality of the heart.⁴⁰

Given this background, it is actually strange that within the Association many have been inspired by both Dooyeweerd’s transcendental and Vollenhoven’s covenantal approach to man, as if they were not opposing views. Perhaps this twofold consideration is significant. At least, I would not be surprised if the real anthropological challenge for the Association in the coming decades turned out to lie in the problem of how Dooyeweerd’s abstract and transcendental approach, which is of importance for the discussion with modern humanist philosophers, can be reconciled with Vollenhoven’s concrete and historical approach, which seems to me to be of much more importance for a serious dialogue with Jewish scholars.

At this point I have to recall the surprising fact that in modern hermeneutical philosophy, to which I referred earlier, man indeed occupies a central place as a historical *and* transcending being. Can hermeneutical philosophy therefore help us in overcoming the divergence between positions as of Vollenhoven’s and Dooyeweerd’s? I must warn against such a serious misconception!

We all know the fundamental thesis of the early Martin Heidegger to the effect that human existence is the point of departure of all hermeneutical interpretation. In human existence in its original connectedness to the world, primarily man’s self-understanding and implicitly also his understanding of the world would be at stake: the idea of human existence, implying *Selbstverständnis* and *Weltverständnis*, would be the key in keeping with which man and world are to be accounted for. Yet because and [120] to the extent that the starting point and ultimate guide (*Leitfaden*) is sought in human self-understanding as the source of all meaning, the net result when all is said and done is a closed and, again, totalitarian hermeneutical universe.⁴¹ In short, this starting point is unsuitable as a reconciling formula for the anthropological controversy between Vollenhoven, Dooyeweerd, and their respective adherents.

One thing however remains intriguing. In the existential-phenomenological and hermeneutical tradition the term ‘existence’ is taken literally. The term ‘existence’ is the key to interpreting man’s position in the world. Man is extroverted, someone who is open and accessible, someone who goes outside himself and seeks the center

⁴⁰ See Vollenhoven, *Isagoogè Philosophiae* §§ 113-34, pp. 74-98; and also especially ‘Problemen van de tijd in onze kring’.

⁴¹ Cf. Heidegger, *Sein and Zeit*, pp. 38, 313-14, 426.

of his life outside himself: man would be ‘ek’-sistential and ‘ek’-centric. Thus do we arrive at the concept of an ‘eccentric’ anthropology. But let us not take the concept of eccentric anthropology in the purely phenomenological or existentialist sense of man’s openness to time and directedness to the future. Let us use it in that radical, religious sense in which Vollenhoven says somewhere: ‘... the center of our life lies outside ourselves’.⁴²

A reconciling formula for the Vollenhoven-Dooyeweerd controversy must be sought, I believe, in this religious eccentricity. Calvin provides a possible starting point. Directly in the beginning of his *Institutes* Calvin in fact raises the question of human self-understanding, the question of how man can know himself. The answer that he gives, a *locus classicus*, is eccentric through and through: ‘Again, it is certain that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God’s face, and then descends from contemplating Him to scrutinize himself’.⁴³

It is known that these words of Calvin’s concerning the primordial and radical connectedness of man to God were dear to heart not only to Vollenhoven but also to Dooyeweerd. What I want to notice, however, is that such an eccentric vision, taken in itself, may be found in a non-Christian context as well, especially amongst Jewish thinkers. Martin Buber had it in mind when he spoke of ‘the apriori of connection’. Emmanuel Levinas testifies to it when he speaks of ‘the exceptional conjunction of finite man with God’.⁴⁴ In short, that man can understand himself only in confrontation with a divine ‘Thou’ is not a Christian monopoly or a calvinist *exclusivum*.

Anyone desiring to appropriate Calvin’s words in their authentic Christian sense should read them in the context of the entire argument of the *Institutes*. And that context is historical through and through! For Calvin teaches that the connection between the knowledge of God and man’s self-knowledge was implanted by nature and that since then it has been corrupted by the Fall of man and is imprinted anew in the children of God. Yes, Calvin takes express notice of ‘how God works in men’s hearts’ throughout the whole of history: the times of law and gospel, of

⁴² Vollenhoven, *Isagoogè Philosophiae*, p. 96.

⁴³ Calvin, *Institutes*, I, i, 12.

⁴⁴ M. Buber speaks of ‘das Apriori der Beziehung; *das eingeborene Du*’ (*Das Dialogische Prinzip*, p. 31). E. Levinas refers to ‘la conjonction extraordinaire de l’homme fini et mortal et d’un Dieu infini et “absolument autre”’ (‘Religion et idée de l’infini’).

Christ and church, etc., etc. I only want to say that this Christian, classically [121] reformational reflection on the eccentric starting point of all hermeneutical activity does not carry us out of time, no, it guides us into time, into the mysteries of the past, present, and future, yes, of the messianic perspective.⁴⁵

In short, two lines of thought are of importance to us. First, we must retain (see section 6) Dooyeweerd’s transcendental approach to man. In this transcendental approach Dooyeweerd makes clear that man is never completely absorbed into the multiplicity of his functions. As a person he is one. Next, we must also take Calvin seriously in his speaking of the particular character of man’s self-knowledge before the face of God. Calvin shows that man is historical and on the move even in his deepest self-consciousness. Unity and historicity go hand in hand.

Beyond the consideration of man’s historicity lies an even more far-reaching question, that of human *finitude* and *mortality*. Thus I can also say that the fundamental *unity* of man goes hand in hand with his finitude and mortality, and that this unity must not be taken at the expense of his finitude and mortality.

I know that in speaking of man’s finitude and mortality we are touching upon a long neglected chapter from the history of philosophy. But the doctrine of the ‘immortal soul’ cherished since the Greeks is not only highly speculative, as is widely agreed nowadays, but also highly unscriptural. The Bible teaches bluntly that ‘it is appointed unto men once to die’ (Heb. 9:27) and that God only has ‘immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto’ (I Tim. 6:16). There is no immortal human soul. Mortal man can count on nothing else, and need not count on anything else, than that entirely personal word of Jesus uttered at the grave of his friend from Bethany: ‘Lazarus, come forth’ (John 11:43).

Given this background, it has to be said then that human self-consciousness, the transcendental unity of the human person, cannot be *concentrically* anchored in the so-called supratemporality of the human heart. It can only be hidden *eccentrically* in an apriori relation: a relation of transcendental openness to the eternal God, as He has become manifest in the Son of Man. In other words, man’s ek-centricity is centered in the holy unrest of the Son of Man who carries mankind with him on his way from the Cross of shame to the Kingdom of shalom.

⁴⁵ This historical approach is maintained by Calvin throughout the first three books of his *Institutes*. See also the title of II, iv and, for the messianic perspective, III, ix and III, xxv.

In this eccentric starting point, in this statute of man as temporal but transcending openness to the eternal One, lies for me also the clue for our conception of depth-hermeneutics. The idea of the supratemporal heart is replaced by the notion of man’s eccentricity, i.e., the ek-sistential struggle of man the wayfarer for an ever deeper understanding of God and, correlated to that, his struggle for an ever truer *Selbstverständnis* and *Weltverständnis*.⁴⁶ On this basis we might perhaps even assert that in the [122] *Gottesfrage*, that is, in the question ‘Who is God?’ lies the ultimate mysticism and motor of the entire process of transformational understanding. And this pertains then not just to humanity as a whole in its uncertain passage towards the future, it touches also the seeking and probing of the individual, finite person.

Critique of knowledge: The transcendental-hermeneutical turn (6)

As we look back we can say that in at least one area of central concern Dooyeweerd clearly scores higher than Vollenhoven: in his attention to a transcendental critique of knowledge. Without exaggeration it can be said, I believe, that to the extent that there has been transcendental reflection within the Association – and has there ever! – it has been inspired and dominated by Dooyeweerd. People such as Mekkes, Marlet, Van Riessen, Strauss, and Geertsema⁴⁷ found their starting point in this regard in Dooyeweerd and his *New Critique*.

I do not mean to imply that Dooyeweerd’s position in this matter has not been challenged. On the contrary. Penetrating questions were put to him in the course of the years, from inside and outside the Association. I will mention a few. Zuidema raised the question: Does this transcendental critique not seek to show in a generally valid way that philosophy cannot be generally valid? Geertsema has posed the question: Is there not an odd shift in the transcendental critique from abstract and theoretical assertions to concrete and biblical ones? Mekkes asked himself: Do we not need a critique of the transcendental critique? De Boer asks: Is this transcendental

⁴⁶ According to John Kraay this is really what the later Dooyeweerd also had in mind: ‘The heart of man is *nothing other than* the ek-sistent self-transcendence toward God, fellow-man, and cosmos’ (‘Successive Conceptions in the Development of the Christian Philosophy of Herman Dooyeweerd’, p. 35). Yes, according to Kim, in Dooyeweerd man’s heart is his ek-sistentiality, ‘wie sie geschichtlich, gesellschaftlich vermittelt ist’ (Wissen and Glauben’, p. 131). Although perhaps too free as interpretations, in some ways these are, it seems to me, necessary corrections.

⁴⁷ See J.P.A. Mekkes, *Tijd der bezinning*; M.F.J. Marlet, *Grundlinien*; H. van Riessen, *Wijsbegeerte*; D.F.M. Strauss, ‘An Analysis of the Structure of Analysis’; and H.G. Geertsema, *Transcendentale openheid*’.

critique not caught in the vicious circle of witnessing appeal and autonomous argument?⁴⁸ To be honest, it would not be at all difficult to lengthen this list of questions with a series of others. Yet that does not detract from the fact that there is something in this transcendental theory that continues to fascinate me.

What fascinates me, remarkably enough, is *not* what Dooyeweerd found to be the core of the matter, namely, that his transcendental critique would have laid bare the ‘inner point of contact’ between religion and theory.⁴⁹ It remains a question (even in terms of Dooyeweerd’s own ideas about the nature of philosophy) whether philosophical reflection must ever be considered capable of such a *tour de force*. On that score it needs to be noticed, as I mentioned in another part of my presentation (see section 2), that *between* religious motivation and theoretical argumentation something else as well is in play (even, for that matter, in Dooyeweerd himself!): the concrete historical framework of a worldview conviction.⁵⁰

No, the fascinating thing about Dooyeweerd’s transcendental enterprise [123] to my mind is that he took the above-mentioned primary thesis of his *New Critique*, namely, that ‘meaning is the being of all that has been created’, and attempted to apply it to theory and science. In other words, if indeed the whole of created reality has meaning-character and forms as it were a window upon the Eternal (however steamed up and dirty the glass may be), then science cannot be left out as if it were a piece that has been knocked out of the frame or even as a fleck etched into a transparent pane. If the *solī Deo gloria* eventually will be written even upon the harness of the horses – I refer here to the prophet Zechariah (Zech. 14:20) – then will man’s intellectual harness be by definition an exception? Making the structure of theoretical thought transparent – that is for me the greatness of Dooyeweerd’s transcendental critique.

And yet transcendental criticism of theoretical thought seems to me to be part of a broader transcendental task. One can ask whether Dooyeweerd did not perhaps allow himself to be drawn too far by his neokantian opponents when he attributed such an exclusive importance to his transcendental critique of scientific theory. Husserl and

⁴⁸ See Zuidema, ‘Transcendentale problemen’, pp. 3-4, Geertsema, ‘Transcendentale openheid’, pp. 48-49; Mekkes, ‘Bijdrage’; Th. de Boer, ‘De filosofie van Dooyeweerd’, pp. 252-53. Cf. in this regard Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique*, vol. 1, pp. 56-59.

⁴⁹ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique*, vol. 1, p. 38.

⁵⁰ For this reason I also share De Boer’s view that the Christian-religious ground motive, as it is presented by Dooyeweerd, must be regarded as a ‘hermeneutical guideline’ (‘De filosofie van Dooyeweerd’, pp. 248, 251, 258, 260).

many neokantians took the standpoint that the transcendental critique of scientific reason is the only way of access to the whole of the knowledge of reality. And viewed through *their* eyes, this standpoint would indeed be entirely justifiable: for it was also scientific reason that constituted the whole of reality!

What reasons, however, did Dooyeweerd have repeatedly to call the transcendental critique of reason the only way of access to his entire philosophy, yes, even ‘the very beginning’ of all philosophical reflection?⁵¹ Does reason, theoretical reason, have then no subservient function or form of service to render in a larger whole? On the Christian standpoint does ontology not precede epistemology, just as Vollenhoven always emphasized? Is it in fact not clear from the opening pages of his *New Critique* that Dooyeweerd’s transcendental critique of knowledge admittedly presupposes some cosmology? Is it not clear that his three transcendental basic questions cannot do without an ontological exposé of naive experience and theory, of the ‘intermodal cosmic coherence’, etc., etc., if they are to be open to meaningful formulation? Thus I find that transcendental epistemology and cosmology are caught in a vicious circle. And I conclude that the exclusive key position that Dooyeweerd ascribed to his transcendental theory of knowledge was concretely and historically determined, that it was forced upon him by his neokantian opponents.⁵²

Only by getting this concrete and historical constellation – Dooyeweerd’s polemics with neokantians – clearly into focus can we free ourselves of it and clear room for a broader transcendental reflection. Perhaps Van Riessen’s book *Wijsbegeerte* may be called a first step in this direction. For Van Riessen by no means restricts himself to the three well-known basic questions from Dooyeweerd’s transcendental critique, which concern the boundaries and presuppositions of theoretical thought. With an appeal to both ancient and modern philosophy, to Socrates and to Jaspers, he posits expressly that there is no phenomenon in connection with which the philosopher does not, in wonderment, inquire into its boundar[ies] and presuppositions. Hence he trenchantly calls philosophy’s field of inquiry ‘the field of all boundary problems’.⁵³

Indeed, if creaturely reality is not self-contained, if it refers forward and beyond itself dynamically, then creaturely reality conveys the scholar who seeks to follow it

⁵¹ Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique*, vol. 1, p. 38.

⁵² Mekkes, *Tijd der bezinning*, pp 14-31, 81-82.

⁵³ Van Riessen, *Wijsbegeerte*, p. 26.

in this hermeneutically to the area of boundaries. Then not only the question ‘How is theoretical thought possible?’ but also the question ‘How is human language possible?’ or ‘How can human freedom articulate itself?’ or ‘How is a just social praxis possible?’ leads to transcendental reflection. In the continuation we shall call this broadened and more dynamic transcendental reflection ‘transcendental hermeneutical’ reflection.⁵⁴

When I look back over the whole terrain of the Association’s work during the last half century, I believe that this ‘transcendental hermeneutical’ turn can clearly be seen to have taken place in one person in any case: the person of Mekkes. Especially in his *Tijd der bezinning* (1973) Mekkes describes philosophy as transcendental in the broader, dynamic sense of the word, as a thinking in the direction of ‘the boundary area’.⁵⁵

It is instructive to notice how Mekkes proceeds to elaborate this theme. He resolutely turns against the transcendental epistemology of the neokantians, who sought to anchor philosophy in theoretical reason as an archimedean starting point. With almost equal vigor he turns against Dooyeweerd, who as he sees it was inveigled by the neokantians into elevating now from his own side the religious self to an archimedean point, to a supratemporal anchorage of all theories. He turns against such ‘traditional’ theories of knowledge of a kantian or dooyeweerdian cut with the steely argument that it does not befit us to speak of an archimedean point, ‘simply because humanly speaking there is nothing to “anchor”’.⁵⁶

And then indeed there occurs in Mekkes something like a transcendental-hermeneutical turn. He joins the young Heidegger in speaking of the dynamic ‘point of contact’ of the hermeneutics of reality.⁵⁷ However, where can we find this point of contact, from which all authentic understanding starts? It is naturally not in

⁵⁴ I take distance here from the language used by K.-O. Apel. Apel speaks of a ‘transcendental-hermeneutical synthesis’ which would be proper to the pre-theoretical constitution of the *Lebenswelt* (Heidegger, Wittgenstein) and which would found the kantian synthesis of apperception. See Apel, *Transformation der Philosophie*, vol. 1, pp. 246, 308. I reject however the notion of pre-theoretical ‘synthesis’ and prefer the notion of ‘systasis’, i.e., the oneness (*één-zijn*) of man and world, subject and object, in pre-scientific experience. Transcendental hermeneutical reflection can for the rest not be called pre-scientific, because and insofar as it is explicitly engaged in tracing man’s transcendental openness.

⁵⁵ Mekkes, *Tijd der bezinning*, pp. 19-25, 57. That transcendental-hermeneutical reflection occurs elsewhere as well needs no argument. Naturally, perspectives change. One may think of Heidegger and his idea of the ‘abyss’, of Levinas and his idea of ‘the infinite’, of M. Polanyi and his idea of a ‘tacit dimension’

⁵⁶ Mekkes, *Tijd der bezinning*, p. 39; cf. pp. 48, 66, 73.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 39, 43, 46, 55, 58.

the static, so-called supratemporal self à la Dooyeweerd that Mekkes finds this point of contact. Yet he also does not find it in the dynamic autocreativity of the human ‘ek’-sistence à la Heidegger. He localizes it ultimately in the dynamics of the creative Word, of the Lord who became a servant and in whose fellowship we may [125] have a part, suffering and struggling, on the way to the future.⁵⁸ In short, Mekkes comes very close to my view of man’s eccentricity.

A word of caution I must still add here. As we saw, the new, transcendental-hermeneutical reflection has a broader scope than the traditional, transcendental-critical reflection (in its almost exclusive concern with the structure of theoretical reason). Yet in its own turn it naturally cannot permit itself, out of reaction, to pass over the problem of the structural conditions of the phenomenon we call theoretical science. Given the scientization of the modern world, to which we referred before, reflection on the phenomenon of science, which Dooyeweerd initiated with such tremendous power of conviction, remains for us an urgent task of the moment, a *Gebot der Stunde*.

What the outcome of this reflection will be we can only surmise. It will, I believe, lead to a different formulation of transcendental questions than we were accustomed to in Dooyeweerd. I have two suggestions to make in this regard. First, it has to be seen whether a transcendental-hermeneutical reflection on the eccentricity of man will not require a major overhaul of the transcendental idea of totality. Besides that, we shall have to see whether a transcendental-hermeneutical reflection on the creational-messianic perspective does not lead us to the idea of (final) destination (Kant: *das Ende aller Dinge*) as a transcendental *presuppositum* of all theory.⁵⁹

There is something I must add at this point. A broader, transcendental-hermeneutical reflection has in its own turn relevance for a transcendental critique of theoretical thought, if it is true that so-called naive experience is not simply a datum for science (see section 4). Hermeneutical disclosure of the transcendental presuppositions of naive experience and, with that, of the worldview motives of such experience, touches science itself, since science takes this world of naive experience as its own empirical basis.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 46, 58.

⁵⁹ J. Klapwijk, ‘Geloof en rede in de theologie van Troeltsch en Pannenberg’, pp. 81-82. See also W. Pannenberg, *Grundfragen systematischer Theologie*, pp. 142-51.

⁶⁰ Karl Popper’s well-known notion that the perception of the empirical facts is already theory-laden must mean, as I would re-formulate it, that the perception of the empirical facts –

Take the world-wide problem of racial discrimination and apartheid, pose in connection with it the nettlesome transcendental question whether the behaviors and judgments of people involved in societal intercourse are experienced as bound to universal moral principles or ‘human rights’ and, if so, what such experience might be anchored in. Naturally, such a depth analysis of human experience in terms of a transcendental hermeneutics also touches every theory of what is going on in modern society.⁶¹ Thus it has relevance, too, for a transcendental critique of theoretical thought.

In short, if worldview motives are indeed determinative, in the transformational sense, for both theoretical thought and its objects (*Gegenstand*), then a transcendental critique of theory needs to account for both. And [126] the latter cannot be accomplished, I believe, without transcendental-hermeneutical reflection.

History and Western culture: Philosophy ‘in loco’ (7)

From a transcendental critique of knowledge to the subject of history and culture – that is a leap from the most abstract to the most concrete, from the hidden presuppositions to the everyday context in which the philosopher together with all his fellow men may experience his responsibility. How did the theme ‘history’ or ‘history and culture’ fare amongst reformational philosophers, especially within the Association for Calvinist Philosophy?

To my mind, the Association has in the past been marked by something of a love/hate attitude towards history. A loving concern for history was inherited, as it were, by reformed philosophers from Groen van Prinsterer and Kuyper, who had both steeped themselves not only in church history and the nation’s history but likewise in the spiritual developments of modern times.

The hatred came from an entirely different quarter. In the years following the Great War Europe was inundated by neoromantic, vitalistic, and historicist literature, a literature that gushed exaggeratedly about the traditional cultural community and

even apart from science – is in any case worldview-laden. At the same time, I assume that an element of theory has been integrated into practically every modern worldview – think of evolutionism or of historical materialism. In Popper too as it turns out the ‘theory’ that is said to be presupposed in observation amounts more generally to a ‘point of view’. It can, so he holds, be a theory but also a general expectation or a myth. See Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, p. 47.

⁶¹ Cf. J. Klapwijk, ‘Science and Social Responsibility’, pp. 87-89.

about the creative will to live but especially about history, i.e., about the historical mutability of the whole of cultural life. This rising historicism was a protest against the rather rigid structural analyses of the neokantians and husserlian phenomenologists of that day. It was also squarely opposed, however, to another trend of thought: to the kuyperian neocalvinist doctrine of divine creation ordinances.

Within the Association it was deemed necessary from the outset to throw up a dam if not against history then against the historicist adoration of history. Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven hated historicism. They hated the historicist ideas of a Dilthey, a Troeltsch, a Spengler, who presented all phenomena in reality as ‘caught up in becoming’, as historically determined and thus as changeable and relative. Historicism, that ‘fatal illness of our “dynamic” times’, appeared to undermine in the long run every settled conviction, every sense of norm, every conception of a divine creation order.⁶²

In fact, our predecessors of half a century ago faced a twofold problem: Just what is historicism precisely? And what theoretical means will avail to throw up a dam against it? The answers that were forthcoming differed considerably! Vollenhoven regarded historicism as a form of subjectivizing, Dooyeweerd viewed it as a form of absolutizing.

I begin with Vollenhoven. Proceeding from the ‘triad’ of God, law, and cosmos, he termed the last two of these correlative: the law ‘obtains’ for the cosmos and the cosmos is ‘subject’ to the law. Historicism was for Vollenhoven a large-scale levelling of this correlation, a subjectivizing of the law, a reduction of the fixed norm to what becomes of it in a multiplicity of concrete situations. And the dam he sought to throw up against this rising flood consisted in a normative conception of *comprehensive* history. [127] What Vollenhoven had in mind was a history that extends to the whole of human life in all its modal aspects and articulations, yes that even pervades its religious, covenantal core, the human heart, which all the while is fully bound to God’s laws and connected to his Word.

Dooyeweerd approached the problem of historicism in an entirely different way. Proceeding from the multiplicity of modal aspects, he weaved historicism and ever so many other isms he found in the history of philosophy on the same loom. Historicism would be the enlargement and absolutization of a single modal aspect, to wit, the

⁶² Dooyeweerd, *Roots*, p. 61.

historical. Historicists would thus have a tendency to reduce all other aspects to this aspect. And the dam that Dooyeweerd sought to throw up against this all too popular way of looking at things was a very constricted but also normative conception of history: a *modally* limited history, which he defined as the process of cultural development.⁶³

To my feeling the work of the Association suffered as a result of these differences and debates. And when after the Second World War Meijer Smit obtained a chair in the philosophy of history, the confusion really only increased. Originally a defender of the idea of modal history (1949), Smit before long made a giant turn that carried him even beyond Vollenhoven’s idea of *comprehensive* history, and he came out at what I shall now simply call a conception of *total history*. The whole of created reality, not just human reality, would be historical. In many respects Meijer Smit found supporters in Mekkes and in K.J. Popma, because they too proceeded from something like a ‘history of the creation’ with Christ as its center and meaning.⁶⁴

My survey is not yet complete. If Dooyeweerd perhaps espoused a too constricted view of history, he nevertheless was able to compensate for that and to expand his conception in two ways. To start with, Dooyeweerd sketched the modal-historical process of development as the basis for a kind of *intermodal* history, which he called the ‘opening process’ or ‘proces of meaning-disclosure’: the normative modal aspects would simultaneously or successively ‘open’, ‘disclose’ or ‘unfold, or ‘deepen’ their meaning towards the higher spheres within the modal system. In addition to that, Dooyeweerd founded this modal and intermodal process in a kind of *religious* history, in connection with which he referred to the struggle between the two cities in Augustine and to the internal dynamics and [128] dialectics of non-

⁶³ For Dooyeweerd’s conception of history, see in particular *A New Critique*, vol. 2, part 1, chs. 3 and 4; see further his *Roots of Western Culture*, ch. 1, §§ 14-25; and *In the Twilight of Western Thought*, chs. 3 and 4.

With regard to Vollenhoven’s conception of history, see especially his *Isagooge Philosophiae*, §§ 113-34, pp. 74-98. In ‘Problemen van de tijd in onze kring’ Vollenhoven notes that he ‘already in 1929 in a debate with Dooyeweerd openly differed with him in opinion regarding the modal character of history’. Naturally, it remains a question whether Dooyeweerd’s conception of history, substantively speaking, is not more than modal. In Dutch he preferred to describe this modal history not as ‘cultural development’ but more broadly as ‘development of civilization’ (*beschavingsontwikkeling*). Compare, e.g., *A New Critique*, vol. 1, pp. 267, 362-65 with *De Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee*, vol. 2, pp. 187, 296-300; see also p. 143.

⁶⁴ With regard to Mekkes and his ‘hermeneutics of history’, which is directed towards the entire ‘history of creation’, see especially *Radix, tijd en kennen*, e.g. pp. 226, 230. With regard to K.J. Popma and his conception of ‘creation history’, see *Evangelie en geschiedenis*, e.g. pp. 233-34, 306. See also the more extensive analysis by J. Klapwijk, ‘Geloof en geschiedenis’.

Christian ground motives as direction-setting for the previously mentioned processes of historical development and historical disclosure.⁶⁵

Because Dooyeweerd had more than one arrow on his bowstring, his construction perhaps still makes the strongest impression. In all the others the boundaries of history blurred, as they did in historicism too. Moreover, their philosophies of history often came to look suspiciously like theologies of history. And the question of the point of connection with the historian’s field of research was systematically evaded. Dooyeweerd at least was able to lend credence to the idea that practicing historians, to avoid being overwhelmed by their material, consciously or unconsciously apply a criterion of selection, though there may be differences of opinion with Dooyeweerd concerning its modal character.⁶⁶

Fifty years after its founding, the Association faces as perhaps its most urgent task, as I see it: profiling its view of history and culture. The spirit of historicism, if I am not mistaken, is more virulent than ever. And Dooyeweerd’s antidote – the idea of a restricted, monomodal history – is of no avail. Do not forget that since the forties there has been a veritable explosion of historical subdisciplines: besides the traditional political, military and diplomatic history we have economic history, social history, cliometrics, the history of ideas, the history of mentalities, psychohistory, and much more. In the face of so much diversity, Dooyeweerd’s monomodal conception of history can no longer be convincing.

But Dooyeweerd’s intermodal approach to history – to concentrate on that now – is also anything but convincing. The question ‘How (even in a secularized world) the entire unfolding process is possible in all normative meaning-aspects’ has so many romantic-organismic, progressivistic and universal-historical connotations that it must be considered a speculative product of the German idealist metaphysics of history (as one encounters it time and again in Abraham Kuyper, too, for that matter) rather than an outgrowth, as Dooyeweerd would have it, of an authentically ‘Christian philosophy of history’.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ For the idea of a religious ‘history’, see *A New Critique*, vol. 2, pp. 268, 363 and in particular 294 (‘the course of the history of the world is a struggle between the civitas Dei and the civitas terrena’). For the idea of a religious dialectics, see vol. 1, p. 64.

⁶⁶ For the many objections that can be raised against Dooyeweerd’s conception of history, see J. Klapwijk, ‘Een voorlopige standpuntbepaling t.a.v. de geschiedfilosofie van prof. dr. H. Dooyeweerd’. See also C.T. McIntire, ‘Dooyeweerd’s Philosophy of History’, in *The Legacy of Herman Dooyeweerd*.

⁶⁷ *A New Critique*, vol. 2, p. 297. For Kuyper’s hegelian view of history, see Kuyper, *Lectures on*

Is there really any such thing as a universal-historical opening process? On the contrary, countless cultures have vanished from the earth so without trace that history seems to have as many gaps and holes as a Swiss cheese. Is there really any such thing as a continuous deepening of meaning in history? On the contrary, wherever meaning-perspectives so much [129] as blink open, pharaohs and führers stand ready to nail history shut again with an iron fist. Is there really any such thing as a simultaneous differentiation and disclosure of the meaning-aspects of culture? On the contrary, reality turns out otherwise; hypertrophy and atrophy go hand in hand.

One who looks about him today finds countless examples of hypertrophy and atrophy. Is the expansion of Western science not occurring at the expense of a languishing morality? And think of the problem of overdevelopment and underdevelopment to which Bob Goudzwaard, among others, has called our attention. Is there not a structural interdependence between the growth-related problems of the overdeveloped West and the burden of debt and accompanying pauperization in so many Third World countries?⁶⁸

I do not mean to suggest that Dooyeweerd had no eye at all for such problems. More than once he writes of the ‘poignant *disharmony*’ in the so-called opening process.⁶⁹ He also expressly rejects the humanistic belief in progress and reminds us of the struggle for the good direction of the opening process.⁷⁰ Still, all that does not detract from the fact that Dooyeweerd continued to espouse the basic idea of a universal-progressive process of disclosure that in one way or another eventuates, as it turns out, in modern *Western* culture. No, Dooyeweerd’s conception of history is in some respects stamped more by a German idealist than by a Christian way of looking at things. And so it acquires – C.T. McIntire has also called attention to this – Western, sometimes even ethnocentric features, despite Dooyeweerd’s quest as he grew older for a less Occidental, more ecumenical Christian perspective.⁷¹

Calvinism. The book is organismic through and through (‘so truly as every plant has a root, so truly does a principle hide under every manifestation of life’, p. 189); is permeated with the belief in progress (‘Protestantism succeeded it and hence occupies a spiritually higher standpoint,’ p. 186); and is based on the idea of a universal, Western oriented history (‘there is but one world-stream, broad and fresh ... and [it] has steadily continued in course from East to West,’ p. 32).

⁶⁸ B. Goudzwaard, *Aid for the Overdeveloped West*, chs. 1 and 5; and *Capitalism and Progress*, chs. 2-3. See also N. Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, chs. 2-4.

⁶⁹ *A New Critique*, vol. 2, p. 361; cf. pp. 334-37.

⁷⁰ *A New Critique*, vol. 2, pp. 263-65, 363-65.

⁷¹ For Dooyeweerd’s Western oriented, sometimes even nationalistically tinted and yet, in its intention, normative view of culture, see *A New Critique*, vol. 2, pp. 266-68, etc. In his *Roots* in particular, the ‘Occident’ is very central (ch. 1, §§. 3, 17-25), as the following passage illustrates: ‘A truly

In earlier sections I called for a transformational and hermeneutical interpretation of our created and disfigured reality from a creational and messianic perspective. What I have just done is to mark the difference between such a creational-messianic perspective and the so-called Western-oriented idea of unfolding. That difference is not negligible.

Naturally, the creational-messianic perspective, as I see it, is also focussed on unfolding, on the full unfolding of the meaning of the creation, and thus also of the meaning of history. But this creational-messianic perspective belongs in my opinion to the worldview context, the hermeneutical horizon for the Christian understanding of reality. That protological-eschatological perspective of meaning-disclosure guides but also trans-[130]cends all theory. That perspective can neither be constructed theoretically (in terms of a speculative idea of cultural disclosure) nor be realized practically (in terms of a revolutionary program for societal change).

In fifty years' time the world has changed drastically. Transportation technologies and communications media have thrown it open at a tremendous tempo. We are confronted with a diversity of cultural traditions, from Latin America to the Far East. We are facing a global encounter, not a global unfolding of cultures. However, the encounter of cultures has really yet to begin. Here there can be no thought of a hegemony of western culture or western Christianity, but at most of the biblical rule – as Van der Hoeven once remarked – that ‘the elder shall serve the younger’ (Gen. 25:23).⁷²

The idea of transformational philosophy is grafted to this world situation. Transformational philosophy taken in the Christian sense presents itself in all modesty as a philosophy *in loco*: a philosophy ‘at the spot’. It does not install itself beforehand in some supposed universal process of culture or of Western development à la the high-flown model of Hegel and his followers. It takes the concrete historical cultural situation, including its intellectual heritage, as its hermeneutical starting point and the creational-messianic perspective as its

scriptural view of history... knows that the great antithesis between the ground motive of the divine revelation of the Word and the ground motive of the apostate spirit operates [in history] in the power struggle for the future of western civilization’ (p. 108). Yes, Dooyeweerd at one point even calls the Dutch national character, in view of its calvinistic bent, its humaneness, its sober life-style, and the like, a ‘normative type’ of historical disclosure and differentiation (p. 82). See also the striking analysis by C.T. McIntire in ‘Dooyeweerd’s Philosophy of History’, especially pp. 104-5, together with the nuanced criticism of S. Griffioen in ‘De betekenis van Dooyeweerd’s ontwikkelingsidee’, pp. 105-7.

⁷² Thus J. van der Hoeven in an article with the telling title, ‘Ontwikkeling in het licht van ontmoeting’ [Development in the light of encounter], p. 159.

transformational guideline. It strives purposefully for a general philosophical view of reality, but it seeks to attain this primarily via a mastering of philosophical problems as they come up in ‘local’ Western, Oriental, African, Latin American, and other situations and secondarily via an encounter of these cultures along the difficult path of cross-cultural communication. In the future Christian philosophizing can no longer be a Western affair! And the future in question has already begun!

For a community like the Association for Calvinist Philosophy, the members of whom come from different continents and cultural circles, the idea of a philosophy *in loco* could mean that in the future we will have to face a diversity of problems, use a diversity of categories, and be open to a diversity of ‘local’ theories, or at least theories in which the local situation and background are clearly recognizable. That is the only way to avoid ethnocentricity and to come close to the people. In fact, this diversity is already in evidence within the Association and in a periodical like *Philosophia Reformata*. Do we not observe that reformational philosophizing takes on a different profile in the Anglo-Saxon world and in our work amongst ‘linguistic philosophers’ than it does in continental Europe amidst ‘existential’ or ‘metaphysical’ philosophers?

Let us not hesitate in the coming decades to allow one another the necessary room for diversity. With our transformational philosophical task we can only hope to come as close to the people once again as in the thirties, when Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd were able in and from their ‘local’ situation to reach the minds and hearts of many. In short, with a view to its world-wide mission and for the sake of its fruitfulness, reformational philosophy must proceed to develop in alternative forms. What continues to bind us is the perspective we have received, our communal [131] calling, and the on-going discussions within organizations such as the Association for Calvinist Philosophy.

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