A Trinitarian modal-spherical method of Apologetics: An Attempt to combine the vantilian method of apologetics with reformational philosophy

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1. Introduction

Although the reformational philosophy of Dooyeweerd and Stoker emerged in a reformed context, building on Kuyper and Calvin, their influence remained mostly bounded to the Dutch-reformed context. Van Til’s apologetic method on the other hand, coming from the same Neo-Calvinistic tradition, has mainly become influential in the Presbyterian-Reformed tradition of North-America, although causing controversies in many circles in its attempt to reform apologetics (Van Til 1971:91).

It is the church’s task to constantly listen to God’s Word, to obey His calling and to be open to God’s Spirit for ongoing reformation, thus being conformed to the image of Christ, also in apologetics. Van Til and Dooyeweerd’s correspondence in Van Til’s Festschrift mainly express their own approaches and differences, thus it seems it wasn’t their intention to revise their own positions. At first sight the divergence between Van Til and Dooyeweerd seems to be irreconcilable (Geehan 1971: 75-126). But Stoker’s complementary critique provides a possible way of synthesis, promising the advancement of the discipline of apologetics within the Neo-Calvinistic context (Stoker 1971:28-71).

Since the controversy between Dooyeweerd and Van Til caused or at least “strongly influenced” a tragic split in reformed circles, Stoker’s way of synthesis could also be fruitful in regards to an inner reconciliation.

Further, a closer investigation of the dialogue between the three thinkers might serve to clarify the relation between theology and philosophy and open up new possibilities of apologetic discourse, first advancing the discipline and testing it within the Neo-Calvinistic tradition.

Considering that only God and His revelation are absolute, apologetic method must remain open for future adjustments, always willing to listen and to respond to God’s integral Word.

1.1 Background and statement of problem

Dooyeweerd’s transcendental method served as one of Van Til’s main inspirations in the development of his method of apologetics (Van Til 1971:91-94). But even though both thinkers engaged in dialogue for years, they could neither find a consensus in terms of a method in apologetics nor in terms of theology or philosophy. By reading their discussion in
the form of correspondence in Van Til’s *Festschrift*, one encounters many divergences, which at the first sight seem to be irreconcilable. But is that so?

Dooyeweerd rejects any form of transcendent criticism in his (philosophical) transcendental method, but in dealing with Van Til’s (theological) apologetics, he reframes his position:

... I meant by transcendent criticism, the dogmatic manner of criticizing philosophical theories from a theological or from a different philosophical viewpoint without a critical distinction between *theoretical propositions* and the *supra-theoretical presuppositions* lying at their foundation... (Dooyeweerd 1971:75)

He recites Van Til, who in contrast to his own position, was against a pure transcendental method:

“the whole point of transcendental criticism is lost unless it is based upon transcendent criticism” (Dooyeweerd 1971:75)

Dooyeweerd sees the necessity of first defeating the dogma concerning the autonomy of theoretical thought and laying bare the central influence of different ground motives upon other schools of thought, while Van Til wants to start with a confession of faith (Dooyeweerd 1971:76).

According to Dooyeweerd, Van Til wants to solve the problem regarding the confrontation between the biblical and non-biblical ground motives within the boundaries of (temporal) thought and experience, i.e. he classically applies the analytical mode as the central reference point for consciousness. Dooyeweerd on the other hand, tried to reform classical ontology by stating that biblically the heart is to be seen as the concentration point for consciousness, the religious centre of human existence, which is inclined to its absolute Origin in God. Thence the ego has to transcend the modal diversity of temporal reality to find the supra-temporal meaning unity in God, for only God is absolute and the true Origin of everything created, including the logical/analytical function (Dooyeweerd 1971:77).

Thus Van Til’s theological and Dooyeweerd’s philosophical approaches seem to exclude one another (Dooyeweerd 1971:79). But how should the *Sachverhalt* be seen in terms of apologetics and its concern to combine both disciplines?

Dooyeweerd strongly criticizes Van Til’s so called rationalistic inclination. (Dooyeweerd 1971:84) Should this criticism be restricted to Van Til’s views of philosophy and theology and how does it affect his views on apologetics? Is there a way to positively consider and integrate Dooyeweerd’s insights in a Neo-Calvinistic method of apologetics? If yes, how should reformational philosophy (non-reductionist ontology) and reformed (covenantal-Trinitarian) theology relate to it each other?

Central questions must be answered concerning the relation between their controversy and apologetic method. Did Dooyeweerd and Van Til consider the objections of one another in terms of the co-operation of theology and philosophy or did their answers suggest the
restriction that either theology or philosophy shall reign over apologetics? May theology and philosophy only be treated as separate disciplines or is there legitimate room for the “hybrid-discipline” of apologetics, seeking to unify both? And how does this relate to sphere sovereignty as well as sphere universality?

Already by touching the surface of the controversy, reconciliation between the approaches of Dooyeweerd and Van Til seem to be possible concerning apologetics, provided there’s a way to integrate both, theological and philosophical approaches in a unified method of apologetics.

Stoker’s contribution to Van Til’s Festschrift provides positive and original suggestions for a methodological combination of both approaches, in a sense alluding to Van Til’s and Dooyeweerd’s methods, but in an original and positive way, in contrast to the correspondence between the two other thinkers, which sometimes seem to be too harsh and almost of offensive nature. The “problem” at stake in this investigation will be to draw upon the consequences of the interaction between the three thinkers, furnishing the basis for a revised method of apologetics.

Stoker’s critique draws upon the wider Neo-Calvinistic, Dutch-reformed tradition, thus his articulations are of internal nature and fit in with the intention of combining reformational (non-reductionist) philosophy and reformed (Trinitarian-covenental) theology in an unified method of apologetics.

Stoker’s treatment of the relation between faith, knowledge and the revelation of creation converges with Van Til’s position concerning the dependence of human consciousness on the Self-revelation of God (Stoker 1971:29). He reaffirms Van Til’s approach, while reinforcing the importance of God’s Word-Revelation in an integral sense, i.e. including the meaning diversity and totality by means of reformational non-reductionism. (Stoker 1971:29)

Hereby again the question concerning the threefold Word of God (creation, incarnated, inspired) as well as the abolishment of Greek thought is involved, which identifies Holy Scripture with the “supra-natural” revelation over against the inferior “natural” revelation. Stoker implicitly suggests a complementation to Van Til’s understanding of the Word-revelation, which should not be reduced to Holy Scriptures, but rather include the other forms.

What does this mean for apologetics? How should the dependence of human consciousness upon the Holy Trinity (acknowledged by Van Til) be worked out in terms of a Trinitarian ontology and of the relation between men and the meaning totality of created reality? By embracing a threefold understanding of the Word-revelation, in which sense and how deep would this affect the structures of presuppositional argumentations?

1 Further literature (see Bibliography) will be more specifically referred to at a later stage of the thesis, i.e. after a reformational evaluation of the problems surrounding Van Til’s method, based upon Stoker’s and Dooyeweerd’s comprised but systematic contributions to Van Til’s Festschrift and in the light of Van Til’s reactions to them. Further resources will extensively come into play by the time a revised Neo-Calvinist perspective of apologetics evolves out of the dialogue between the three thinkers.
Consequently, by regaining a deeper appreciation for the revelation of creation, would that justify the integration of the modal aspects of reality in the apologetic method, as a transcendental-empirical way of arguing presuppositionally?

It is notable that Stoker’s account for the revelation of creation and its dependence upon God positively integrates Van Til’s concern for the ultimate dependence of all things upon the triune God, while implicitly containing the non-reductionist reformational ontology. As Dooyeweerd, he also reinforces the importance of distinguishing between theoretical and pre-theoretical knowledge (also of great relevance in the debate concerning science).

Is this distinction of relevance for apologetics? Could it help to reconcile Dooyeweerd’s transcendental method with Van Til’s usage of transcendent critique in apologetics? This seems to be Stoker’s conviction, which should be further explored (Stoker 1971:35)

Stoker suggested a supplement to Van Til’s method and its main concern on God’s “ultimate” and unavoidable Self-revelation:

... Of interest is to note that you – as an apologist – primarily stress the ultimate meaning moment of anything in our created universe, whereas its cosmically specific or analytical meaning moment needs a stress too (of course presupposing its ultimate meaning moment), which you allow for, but do not especially elaborate. Here again I touch upon my special problem ...(Stoker 1971:46)

Stoker’s special problem is to be understood in terms of the non-reductionist ontology of reformational philosophy, which is derived from the biblical meaning of the heart. This insight was already anticipated above. But how should apologetics account for God’s integral revelation and relate to “peripherical” questions concerning life-spheres back to the “central” questions of the heart, i.e. men’s relation to God, his Creator?

Basically, Stoker’s special problem is a philosophical supplement to Van Til’s approach, able to capture and relate the radical diversity (C-content) and coherence of the cosmos to its ultimate purpose (P-Plan) which is found in God’s (A-architect) plan. The union of the P-A and P-C approaches should be seen as correlative and irreducible to each other (Stoker 1971:56-57).

The question follows, of how to concretely develop arguments concretely building upon such a foundation. The P-A context can be easily found in Holy Scripture, but the P-C cannot be directly derived from it. Stoker’s complementary approach would demand from apologetics a more dynamic interplay of God’s Plan of Self-revelation (P-A) and God’s Plan as the revelation of creation (P-C) (Stoker 1971:60-62). As already noticed, Stoker’s supplement is based upon a non-reductionist ontology, just as Dooyeweerd’s. Thence, instead of going into differences between them, a perennial articulation of reformational insights should remain the focus in terms of apologetics, methodologically integrating conclusions within the broader Neo-Calvinistic tradition.

Van Til agreed with Stoker’s suggestion of a philosophical supplement to his approach, but didn’t see it as his task to develop it further (Van Til 1971: 70-71). Therefore the task remains an obligation.
Finally, for a method of apologetics to be accessible to non-professional theologians and philosophers, it must be translated to common language and still be apt to capture its fullness of meaning. As truth is personally bound to Christ, it is neither a question of “theoretical” complexity or simplicity, but rather an accountable response to God’s integral revelation.

Consequently, the “problem statement” is defined in terms of a deeper investigation of the mentioned interaction between the three thinkers and mainly concerns the possibility of a revision of the Van Tilian method of apologetics.

1.2 Research aim
Dooyeweerd’s critique of Van Til’s (Dooyeweerd, 1971:81) rests upon his judgment of Van Til’s ontology and leaves the impression that the whole method should be reconstructed. But a closer reading of Dooyeweerd’s criticisms reveals essential insights for apologetics and a possibility of combination of their thoughts.

Stoker on the other hand, is positive in the suggestion of a philosophical supplement to Van Til’s method, while accepting its essence (Stoker, 1971:28).

The articulations of the mentioned three thinkers in Van Til’s Festschrift deliver problems concerning Van Til’s method as well as provide solutions (non-reductionist ontology) for a genuine reformational method of apologetics in a summarized form. Accordingly, the main objective of research is the integration of reformational insights in the Neo-Calvinistic method of apologetics and furnishing reformed apologetics with a reformational philosophical backup, able to capture the radical diversity, coherence and meaning totality of created reality.

Specifically, by means of a structural evaluation of the dialogue between the three thinkers and constructive criticism, methodologically integrating reformational insights and the opening up of new avenues of apologetic discourse, a Trinitarian, Modal-spherical method of apologetics (TMSA) will be introduced, as flowing from the interaction between the three thinkers.

Stoker delivers the main premises for the integration of further reformational insights in the Van Tilian method in his contribution to Van Til’s Festschrift, based upon a unified view of philosophy and theology.

Unlike Dooyeweerd, who aims a pure transcendental method, methodologically excluding all kind of transcendent criticism, Stoker postulates the importance of transcendent criticism in apologetics. While affirming the legitimacy of Dooyeweerd’s philosophical approach, he still reinforces the importance of Van Til’s theological approach for the discipline of apologetics.

His way of synthesis therefore aims at the combination of Van Til’s main focus on the transcendent P-A context with the philosophical, P-C context, which can be seen in terms of a
non-reductionist ontology (similar to Dooyeweerd’s transcendental method). Drawing consistently upon the consequences of Stoker’s suggestions “naturally” leads to a modal-spherical and Trinitarian method of apologetics².

### 1.3 Research questions

How can the Van Tilian method of apologetics be combined with reformational philosophy?

According to the Neo-Calvinistic worldview, it can be combined by means of a reformational ontology, which is based on the biblical meaning of the heart, which was rediscovered and “naively” articulated by Kuyper. Regarding his main vision, Strauss (2012:6) asserts:

In his lecture on “Sphere Sovereignty” in 1880, Kuyper bluntly confesses the kingship of Christ as the *incarnate Word* from which nothing in this world is to be stolen. In his “Calvinism” of 1898 he naively confronts the fundamental cosmological confession of the “ordinances of God” on the diverse terrains of life. Kuyper’s reformational starting point comes to the fore most clearly in his conviction that the Calvinist life- and world-view has to be rooted in the understanding of the human relationship to God. And such a life- and world-view will have to manifest a life encompassing character: “If such an action is to put its stamp itself upon our entire life, it must start from that point in our consciousness, in which our life is still undivided and lies comprehended in its unity, - not in the spreading vines, but in the root from which the vines spring.” That point is the “depths of our hearts” from which “the different streams of our human life spring and separate themselves” and where “all the rays of our life converge as in one focus…

Thus, the implications of the integralist biblical ontology of the heart (including a non-reductive understanding of man’s relations to God, of inter-subjectivity and of cosmic experience) appears to be the internal link missing in Van Til’s apologetics in order to represent a full-fledged reformational method of apologetics.

i. How does reformational philosophy and Trinitarian, covenantal theology correlate structurally?

ii. How should the transcendental ideas and consequently the ground questions of philosophy be generally seen in the Trinitarian framework and applied to apologetics?

iii. How does the Trinitarian framework and the modal spherical approach to apologetics specifically inter-relate and cohere?

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² Later the legitimacy and coherence of such a new approach to apologetics will reveal itself as grounded in the radically biblical and Trinitarian conviction, which underlies reformed theology and reformational philosophy.
iv. How should “peripherical” modal-spherical questions of temporal existence be related back to the central questions of the heart?

1.4 Methodology
Van Til', Stoker's and Dooyeweerd's contribution to Van Til’s Festschrift deliver material for a basic but systematic approach to Van Til’s apologetics as well as to the surrounding problems and divergences concerning the three thinkers.

The methodological restriction to the three thinkers in their interaction with Van Til’s method is justified by their shared neo-Calvinistic tradition and common convictions. This basic convergence opens up the way for an internal and constructive criticism of the apologetic method within the reformational framework, avoiding the favouring of any one of the thinkers while still taking their intentions seriously and estimating their contributions.

It is important to emphasize that the Gegenstand of research is the further development of the method of apologetics, and not the work of the three thinkers per se. Therefore, a literary study of their contributions in Van Til’s Festschrift serve as the basis for the methodological question concerning a truly Neo-Calvinistic apologetics.

Dooyeweerd develops his transcendental method based upon the non-reductionist Christian philosophy, which is derived from the biblical meaning of the heart and calls for an internal reformation of thought and the overcoming of non-biblical ground-motives among Christians.

Stoker captures the reformational “moments” of Van Til’s approach and suggests a philosophical supplement, which actually combines the (transcendental P-C) non-reductionist ontology of reformational philosophy with its (transcendent P-A) religious root.

Van Til seeks to reform apologetics. Inspired by Dooyeweerd’s transcendental method and by means of Trinitarian, covenantal theology he asserts that human knowledge is grounded in the triune God. The question remains why he didn’t integrate the central insight of reformational philosophy, concerning the biblical meaning of the heart, in his own ontology.

Further investigation of the Trinitarian and covenantal basis of reformational philosophy and reformed theology will function as the method of reconciliation of Van Til’s theological apologetics and the reformational philosophical approach.
1.5 Value of research

The field of investigation is of great practical relevance within the Christian community. The controversy between Van Til and Dooyeweerd is still an important subject among Christians who engage in dialogue with culture, science, worldviews, etc.

Unfortunately, the complexity of their ideas seem to be a barrier for the less “scientific” thinking world and even among scholars, who often times are inclined to “absolutize” the importance of either one of the positions³, instead of finding a way to appreciate and be challenged by both. Their relevance for the church will remain minimized as long as their specific contributions are on the one hand not understood in a more differentiated way and on the other hand not translated to a more comprehensible language, accessible and applicable for common people, who as equally important members of the body of Christ are also called to give an account of their faith and thence should profit from the advancement of Christian apologetics.

Thus the reconciliation of reformed theology and reformational philosophy in apologetics as well as the translation of mentioned contributions to common language is a question of response to God’s Word-revelation, of activating and developing the given potential in the Church, by means of which God redeems culture.

Viewed that Christ alone as the incarnational Word of God is the true convergence point for the diversity and coherence of the cosmos, God’s mission in the World and redemption of culture is internally connected to the ongoing reformation of the Church. Thence, the real purpose of apologetics can only be displayed by its attachment to the mission of the Body of Christ, practically equipping the people of God and providing answers for different struggles.

It seems that a reformational method of apologetics can benefit from integrating the anti-reductionist reformational ontology and its strength on accounting for the diversity and interconnections of integral reality. But how should this happen concretely?

1.6 Concept clarification

A Neo-Calvinistic apologetics depends on a non-reductionist combination of reformational philosophy and Trinitarian, covenantal theology. For its approach must be all-encompassing, so that the scope of any non-Christian worldview can be accounted for and confronted with the integral implications of the Gospel of Christ.

³ In the core, the favoring of the one and the disregarding of the other position seems to emerge from the mistaken choice between either Dooyeweerd (philosophical approach) or Van Til (theological approach) instead of a differentiated appreciation of the diverse but coherent interplay of both disciplines concerning apologetics. Stoker’s mentioned contribution to Van Til’s Festschrift offers a way of “reconciliation” and of absorption of both approaches in a perennial, unified method of apologetics. In that light the overemphasizing of either philosophy or theology is revealed to be mistaken. By overcoming this tension, a productive co-operation of both positions could be easier accomplished on a scholarly level. By exploring interconnections deeper, scholars can open up and develop more of the inherent potential to serve and equip the Church.
Therefore, as already asserted, an integral approach of apologetics should consider the different aspects of reality, which can be referred to in different ways (the different facets of life, ways of functioning, how entities function, different modes of being, etc.) and constitute the human horizon of experience.

Further, apologetics must deal with the limiting ideas (Grenzbegriffe) of theoretical thought (origin, diversity and totality), which are foundational presuppositions to any philosophy.

The way, in which philosophies account for these ideas, reflect the underlying life- and world views behind their theoretical articulations, their central power of life, which guides and directs their theoretical activity. Dooyeweerd accounted for them in his transcendental critique and showed how they are unavoidable for theoretical thinking as such.

Now concerning apologetic method, which consequences should be derived from them?

Consequently, an important task of the investigation will be to point out important interconnections between the transcendental ideas (Grenzbegriffe) and reformed apologetics, in such a way that it clarifies the relation between reformational philosophy and reformed theology.

Different concepts will function as “keys” in the disclosure of the Trinitarian interconnections between reformed theology and reformational philosophy, which are central for reformational apologetics:

*The Trinitarian Alternative to the Scholastic Dilemma* (Ive 2011):
Jeremy Ive’s article will serve to clarify the ultimate dependence of the entire cosmos (including men) upon the Triune God, the Trinitarian foundation within which reformational philosophy and reformed philosophy are rooted – as the basis for reformational apologetics.

*A Trinitarian interpretation of the transcendental ideas/limiting concepts* (Grenzbegriffe):
A close reading of Dooyeweerd’s usage of the transcendental ideas at the first steps of this transcendental critique (Dooyeweerd 1960) and its importance for apologetics will be provided in the light of Jeremy’s Trinitarian interpretation of the transcendental ideas (Grenzbegriffe) at his main Website ([http://jgaive.wordpress.com](http://jgaive.wordpress.com))

*A Trinitarian understanding of the different kinds of modal-aspectual relations, individuality functions (subject/object) and time aspects and implications for reformational apologetics*:
Basic explanations and diagrams out of Jeremy Ive’s Trinitarian interpretation of the Reformational Philosophies of Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd (Ive 2012) will provide a systematic way of developing a reformational method of apologetics, concretely applying the *insights* won out of the critical reflections of the interaction between Dooyeweerd, Stoker and Van Til and developing the Trinitarian modal-spherical method of apologetics.
Ground questions of philosophy and Trinitarian apologetics:
A close reading of Stoker’s treatment of the different nuances of Calvinistic philosophy (Stoker 1970), out of the perspective of Trinitarian apologetics, will help to reveal the interconnectedness between the ground-ideas of philosophy, the transcendental ideas, the Christian ground motive and the Trinity, helping apologetics to approach reality integrally.

Presuppositional apologetics:

Van Til understands presuppositional apologetics as the only truly reformed method of apologetics, as the only way to fully acknowledge God’s sovereignty methodologically:

…the Reformed apologist will frankly admit that his own methodology presupposes the truth of Christian theism… In spite of this claim to neutrality on the part of the non-Christian the Reformed apologist must point out that every method, the supposedly neutral one no less than other, presupposes either the truth or the falsity of Christian theism (Van Til 1976:128-129)

He begins with the Creator-creature distinction and then arguing that the truth of God’s Word-revelation must be presupposed in order for anything to make sense at all… He consistently applies the reformed confession on God’s absolute sovereignty on the one hand, and men’s ultimate dependence upon the God on the other hand:

to join the natural man in asking whether God exists and whether Christianity is true would be fatal… If we allow that one intelligent word can be spoken about being or knowing or acting as such, without first introducing the Creator-creature distinction, we are sunk. As Christians we must not allow that even such a thing as enumeration or counting can be ac-counted for except upon the presupposition of truth of what we are told in Scripture about the triune God as the Creator and Redeemer of the world. As a Christian believer I must therefore place myself, for the sake of the argument, upon the position of the non-Christian and show him that on his views of man and the cosmos he and the whole culture is based upon, and will sink into, quicksand. (Van Til 1971:91)

Trinitarian-covenantal theology:

Faith is either Trinitarian or it is not Christian at all. The confessions of the reformation were written in agreement with the four ecumenical creeds of the church. Consequently and in line with the Trinitarian belief of the church, Van Til points out the importance of the Trinity for every Christian approach:

Basic to all the doctrines of Christian theism is that of the self-contained God, or, if we wish, that of the ontological Trinity. It is this notion of the ontological Trinity that
ultimately controls a truly Christian methodology. Based upon this notion of the ontological Trinity and consistent with it, is the concept of the counsel of God according to which all things in the created world are regulated. (Van Til 1976: 128)

Van Til is in line with the basic reformational conviction concerning God’s self-revelation:

God for Calvin can only be known as he reveals himself – that is, as Trinity. Any attempt to get “behind” God’s Triune reality or posit a non-Triune essence is vacuous speculation – an empty idea flitting around the brain.⁴ (Ive 2006: 2)

This strong Trinitarian conviction led reformed theology to be associated with covenantal theology, its articulations basically reflecting the ontological Trinity:

Covenant theology sprang up naturally as the most consistent expression of Calvinism, in which the idea of the self-sufficient, ontological Trinity is the final reference point in all predication. It is this idea that lies at the center of covenant theology. The three persons of the Trinity have exhaustively personal relationship with one another. And the idea of exhaustive personal relationship is the idea of the covenant.⁵ (Karlberg 2004:105)

The idea of the covenant captures the all-encompassing relation between the ontological Trinity and human consciousness. This understanding is basic for reformed theology as well as for Van Til’s apologetics, holding that the covenant applies to every area of life:

The idea of the covenant is commonly spoken of in relation to theology alone. It there expresses the idea that in all things man is face to face with God. God is there said to be man’s and the world’s Creator. God is there said to be the one who controls and directs the destiny of all things… It is a part of the task of Christian apologetics to make men self-consciously either covenant keepers or covenant breakers… man’s mind is derivative. As such it is naturally in contact with God’s revelation. It is surrounded by nothing but revelation. It is itself inherently revelational. It cannot naturally be conscious of itself without being conscious of its creatureliness. For man, self-consciousness presupposes God-consciousness. Calvin speaks of this as man’s inescapable sense of deity (Van Til 1976: 62; 63; 115)

Modal aspects of reality and law spheres:

At the beginning of his treatment of the transcendental critique of theoretical thought, Dooyeweerd explains what modal aspects of reality are:

⁴ http://jgaive.wordpress.com/page/2/
…our theoretical thought is bound to the temporal horizon of human experience and moves within this horizon. Within the temporal order, this experience displays a great diversity of fundamental aspects, or modalities, which in the first place are aspects of time itself. (Dooyeweerd 1960:27)

Thence, modal aspects of reality constitute the temporal horizon of human experience. Human beings, as subjects, are subjected to the law-side of the created order. Therefore, modal aspects of reality are spheres of consciousness, correlative to the diverse law spheres of the divine created order.

Dooyeweerd’s modal aspects presuppose the doctrine of “Sphere Sovereignty” proclaimed by Kuyper, together with his reformational starting point; the biblical idea of the heart as the root of human existence. This idea is central for understanding the modal aspects as consequently based upon this radical biblical ontology, which gave rise to reformational philosophy:

In his lecture on “Sphere Sovereignty” in 1880, Kuyper bluntly confesses the kingship of Christ as the incarnate Word from which nothing in this world is to be stolen. In his “Calvinism” of 1898 he naively confronts the fundamental cosmological confession of the “ordinances of God” on the diverse terrains of life. Kuyper’s reformational starting point comes to the fore most clearly in his conviction that the Calvinist life- and world-view has to be rooted in the understanding of the human relationship to God. And such a life- and world-view will have to manifest a life-encompassing character: “If such an action is to put its stamp itself upon our entire life, it must start from that point in our consciousness, in which our life is still undivided and lies comprehended in its unity, not in the spreading vines, but in the root from which the vines spring.” That point is the “depths of our hearts” from which “the different streams of our human life spring and separate themselves” and where “all the rays of our life converge as in one focus.” (Strauss 1969:6)

Reformational philosophy:

It was in connection to that biblical view of men and the cosmos rediscovered by Kuyper, that inspired the next generations (Dooyeweerd, Vollenhoven, Stoker, etc.), to develop a radically biblical philosophy, which maintain the lordship of Jesus Christ over every sphere of the cosmos (every aspect of life) and that Christ came to the world to redeem the entire cosmos.

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6 For an illustrative overview and breve explanations of the modal aspects, check Basden’s list:
http://www.dooy.salford.ac.uk/aspects.html

7 Although there are differences among reformational philosophers, for instance regarding the ground-idea of philosophy, they basically share in the “all-encompassing” kuyperian and biblical vision just mentioned. Therefore, for sake of the advancement of the discipline of apologetics, the author of this thesis will not stick to
Due to his dissertation on Philosophy of the Law Idea, Marlet received the admiration of Dooyeweerd himself, who then wrote the foreword to the published version of it. Besides giving an accurate introduction of Dooyeweerd’s philosophy, Marlet’s non-reductive interpretation of Thomism as well as his comprised though masterful exposition of the *Philosophia in Ecclesia recepta* gained the sympathy of Dooyeweerd, who regarded Marlet’s contribution as of great importance in order to promote the dialogue between Rome and the Neo-Calvinistic tradition (Marlet 1954:V-VII). According to Friesen (he proves his statement), Marlet’s expositions of the development of Thomism, indeed caused Dooyeweerd to revise his position to the extent of acknowledging that Scholasticism isn’t *per se*. (Friesen 2011:1). Thus, viewed from the perspective of a radically Trinitarian apologetics, reformational in philosophy and reformed in theology, Marlet’s expositions must be considered. There are many ways through which other methods can be engaged via TMSA, for instance, the classical method of apologetics (as basically inspired by the Thomism) and Van Til’s pressuppositionalism (basically Augustinian) can be approached in a incarnational way, seeking their inner-reconciliation and transformation via transcendental philosophy (based upon the biblical non-reductive ontology). This could mean much for Christian apologetics. On the other hand, Radical Orthodoxy should also be introduced to TMSA, for it is a fruit of the same French strand of the movement endorsed by Marlet. The movement is deeply inspired by French theologian Henri de Lubac (several times quoted in Marlet’s dissertation), who transcended the dualistic split between nature and grace and plainly rejected the autonomy of the cosmos. Thence, following de Lubac and the revolution of neoscholastic dualism, RO holds that any dualistic opposition of faith and reason is a product of modernity. Radical Orthodoxy approach can also be described as that of a theological cultural criticism, whereby nihilistic postmodernity is confronted with the Gospel. (Smith 2005:42-45) Therefore, it might also serve to broaden the scope of TMSA and to expand its Neo-Calvinistic (philosophical) cultural criticism and prepare it for further applications.

1.7 Summary
At first sight the divergence between Van Til and Dooyeweerd seems to be irreconcilable. But on the basis of Stoker’s complementary critique of Van Til’s method, a way of synthesis is provided, promising the advancement of the discipline of apologetics within the Neo-Calvinistic context.

The reformational ontology, derived from the biblical meaning of the heart, provides the basis for a unified view of reformational philosophy and covenantal, Trinitarian theology, implicitly connecting the ontological Trinity to the diverse modal spheres of created reality.

The “specific differences”, but rather work within the broader reformational line and its adherence to a biblical ontology and to a non-reductionist understanding of reality: http://www.allofliferedeemed.co.uk/
Van Til's, Stoker's and Dooyeweerd's contributions in Van Til’s *Festschrift* deliver a basic but systematic approach to problems and solutions surrounding the Van Tilian method. This restriction of methodology seeks to clearly frame a genuine reformational method of apologetics, building upon the gospel of Christ\(^8\), faithful to the creeds of the church, without neglecting the task of ongoing reformation.

The apologist’s main task is the application of both theology and philosophy in the confrontation with unbelievers, aiming to bridge the gap between the natural man and the preaching of the gospel of Christ, doing justice to the multi-aspectual, existential and constitutive sides of created reality.

Just as Christ came to redeem the whole man, a Neo-Calvinistic method of apologetics should embrace a non-reductionist ontology and be willing to account for the diverse and coherent order of God’s creation.

Proclaiming that the triune God is the only source of unity in diversity, the only one in whom men find their ultimate purpose, meaning totality and life in abundance, by the integral redemption of men and the ongoing reformation of culture through the coming of the Kingdom and its fulfilment by the second coming of Christ and the consummation of the new Creation.

Hence, the implications of such a methodological revision need to be worked out systematically and tested in detail.

### 2. Dooyeweerd’s transcendental critique & Van Til

In order to do justice to the correspondence between Van Til, Dooyeweerd and Stoker in Van Til’s *Festschrift*, extensive quotes will be introduced for two reasons: (1) Let each one of the three thinkers speak for themselves as they interact with one another. (2) Drawing on consequences and insights won out of their interaction will provide the basis for a new method of apologetics. As Van Til claims that his work was initially and decisively inspired by Dooyeweerd (Van Til 1971: 92-93), it makes sense to begin with Dooyeweerd’s treatment of Van Til’s work.

#### 2.1 Dooyeweerd on Van Til

As previously mentioned, Dooyeweerd doesn’t reject transcendent criticism as such, but points out that the critical distinction between theoretical and supra-theoretical lacks in Van Til’s expositions and should be revised, especially when dealing with (structural) philosophical questions:

\(^8\) A biblical and integral understanding of the Gospel of Christ is concerned with the unity of the *Gestalten* of Word of God (Word of Creation, Incarnate Word, Inspired Word)
... I meant by transcendent criticism, the dogmatic manner of criticizing philosophical theories from a theological or from a different philosophical viewpoint without a critical distinction between theoretical propositions and the supra-theoretical presuppositions lying at their foundation... (Dooyeweerd 1971:75)

To start with theoretical propositions means to seek a central-reference point in creation in order to attain a totality view of reality, i.e. by means of the elevation of the logical function, instead of starting with the transcending self in its inclination towards the absolute Origin, in terms of a radically biblical and non-reductionist ontology. It suggests the logicism that was the scholastic weapon to depreciate “inferior nature” over against “supra-natural” grace, viewed as only accessible through “rational” theology (adaption of greek worldview). Thus, Dooyeweerd is pointing to the rationalistic tendency of absolutizing the logical aspect:

...I have explained in detail why I reject such a transcendent critique, which in scholastic theology has been repeatedly applied to condemn scientific and philosophical ideas that did not agree with traditional scholastic views... What is actually a complex of philosophical ideas dominated by unbiblical motives, may be accepted by dogmatic theology and accommodated to the doctrine of the church. The danger is that this complex of ideas will be passed off as an article of Christian faith... (Dooyeweerd 1971:75)

The question is not if or how transcendent critique is legitimate in the apologetic method and its task of calling unbelievers to repent and believe the Bible, but rather that a reformational apologist should be more critical in challenging the autonomy of theoretical thought, showing that it presupposes supra-theoretical convictions. Therefore Dooyeweerd’s transcendental critique should be integrated in apologetics, mostly when dealing with structural Grenzfragen, which are dealt with extensively in reformational philosophy and helps to uncover the disorder and dialectical tensions caused by apostate ground motives.

Scholasticism was subjected by Dooyeweerd to a radically biblical critique of theoretical thought, out of which the diversity and coherence of created reality can be grasped, which lead to the rejection of logic as being the central-reference point. By means of the transcendental critique it becomes clear that theoretical thinking is controlled by the direction of the heart, by a religious ground motive. Van Til should have distinguished between the theoretical and supra-theoretical to see that the self alone transcends time and functions as the central reference point of consciousness in its direction to God, the absolute Origin. (Dooyeweerd 1971:76).

Instead of applying the biblical ontology of the heart as it was developed by reformational philosophy (including the distinction between theoretical knowledge, knowledge of God, self knowledge), VanTil begins with the classical (theoretical knowledge) point of entry to reality, ending up with reductionisms regarding the central religious sphere of human existence. Both, Stoker and Dooyeweerd reject the notion of a Calvinistic metaphysics:
...You hold to a Christian theoretical metaphysics which, according to you, is to be derived from the Bible... you distinguish the merely theoretical knowledge of God from the ethical which combines this rational knowledge with loving. Only the latter is true in a rational ethical sense. In this way the central religious sphere of human existence and knowledge is reduced to the rational ethical aspect of human behaviour... (Dooyeweerd 1971: 459)

“Personally I (as Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd also do) restrict the meaning of the term “metaphysics” to that of “speculative philosophy”. In this sense Calvinist philosophy has no “metaphysics”.” (Stoker 1971: 456)

Dooyeweerd is aware that Van Til conveys biblical meaning in his usage of “classical metaphysics”, but nevertheless he pleas for the riddance of rationalistic absolutizations:

...I do not overlook that by “absolute rationalism” you understand the view that every fact has been pre-determined and pre-interpreted by God according to his rational providential plan, so that no single fact comes about by chance. Nor do I overlook that in another context you seek the origin of both rationalism and irrationalism, viewed in their historical forms, in the apostate belief in the autonomy of man over against God. But why do you speak then of the biblical Christian view as an absolute rationalism? Because you identify God’s providential plan with absolute rationality. But “absolute rationality” is an obvious metaphysical absolutization... (Dooyeweerd 1971: 459)

Such an absolutization affects the view on the nature and interdependence of Self-knowledge and true knowledge of God, which is not of a theoretical conceptual character:

“In his high priestly prayer Jesus says that this knowledge is eternal life in the love-communion with the Father and the Son.” (Dooyeweerd 1971: 77)

In consequence of such a tendency of absolutization, Van Til erroneously assumes that Dooyeweerd wants to answer to irrationalism and subjectivism without reference to biblical content. Dooyeweerd reacts to that assumption by means of the non-reductionist biblical ontology:

“I must remark that I have rejected both rationalism and irrationalism, both subjectivism and objectivism from the biblical view concerning the correlation and mutual irreducibility of law and subject.” (Dooyeweerd 1971: 79)

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9 It must be remarked that Dooyeweerd is stressing the importance of a philosophical critical attitude in order to biblically do justice to the radical diversity and coherence of created cosmic reality. Thus, although his criticism of Van Til’s philosophical ideas entails a sharp critique and rejection of “metaphysical Theo-ontological speculation”, is not to meant to be a “rebuke” of Van Til’s theological approach to apologetics. This will become clear through Stoker’s positive and differentiated reflections on Van Til’s method, in a later section of this thesis. Stoker’s strength as a philosopher of science will be manifested as a unifying bridge between Dooyeweerd’s philosophical and Van Til’s theological expositions in their critique of one another. Thus, the “decisive” consequences of their dialogue for a truly reformational method of apologetics are not at stake yet.
Dooyeweerd’s philosophical approach doesn’t refer explicitly to Holy Scripture because it is not a theological approach, but mainly concerned with the creation order by means of a careful investigation of structural data, found in the revelation of creation:

... In fact it was nothing but a result of my biblical conviction that the “state of affairs” in which the transcendental meaning-structures of our temporal horizon of experience reveal themselves are not founded in our subjective consciousness, but in the divine order of creation to which our subjective experience is subject. For this very reason they also cannot be dependent upon the religious conviction of the investigator, so that they may be discovered in a particular context by both Christian and non-Christian thinkers... (Dooyeweerd 1971: 80)

Thus, when influenced by scholasticism, theological thought is inclined towards a rejection of basic distinctions of a radically biblical, all-encompassing ontology:

“This tendency reveals itself first in your objections against my distinction between theoretical conceptual knowledge, and the central religious self-knowledge and knowledge of God.” (Dooyeweerd 1971: 81)

The scholastic train of thought confuses theology with philosophy, identifying Holy Scripture with “absolute reality” to be understood by means of “absolute rationality” and suggesting that philosophy should be “theoretically” derived from “supra-natural” revelation, instead of carefully examining the divine creation order by means of a transcendent starting point able to encompass the meaning totality of the cosmos”:

The Bible does not provide us with philosophical ideas, no more than it gives us natural scientific knowledge or an economic or legal theory. But theoretical thought needs a central starting-point which transcends the modal diversity of our temporal horizon of experience and must consequently be of a supra-theoretical character. It is only by virtue of its supra-theoretical character that this starting point can give central lead to our theoretical thought (Dooyeweerd 1971: 82)

Dooyeweerd is afraid that Van Til’s rationalistic terminology suggests the reductionistic distortion of identifying (supra) rationality (to start theoretically with the Bible) with reality:

... In your train of thought the matter seems to be quite simple. The Word-Revelation results from divine thought. It is mediated to man through ordinary language. Its content is thought-content expressed in words (wrongly identified with concepts). Consequently listening to Scripture, obeying the voice of God speaking through Christ in Scripture, means making every thought subject to divine thought expressed in

10 Van Til’s transcendent argument “against” non-Christian worldviews – that if they don’t start with the Christian worldview and the truths of the Bible, in the sense that without Christ as revealed to us by the Gospel, they will end up in self-destruction by absolutizing something in the created order is line with is in line with the outcome of the transcendental critique, although reversing its steps by means of theological inferences. Thence, the validity of a theological approach to apologetics is not being questioned by Dooyeweerd, but rather non-reductionistic, modal-spherical philosophy is at stake, which should be regarded as equally important for the foundation of a truly reformational method of apologetics as reformed, covenantal, Trinitarian theology.
scriptural concepts, so that man has to think God’s thoughts after him ... (Dooyeweerd 1971: 84)

Instead, obedience or disobedience towards God is an issue of the centre of human existence:

...The New Testament understanding of obedience is doing the Father’s will revealed in the gospel of the Jesus Christ, by believing with all our heart that we belong to him. There is no real obedience to the will of God that does not result from the heart, in the pregnant biblical sense, as the religious centre of our existence, which must be regenerated and opened up by the divine moving power of the Holy Ghost. It is exactly this central biblical condition that is lacking in your circumscription of obedience ... (Dooyeweerd 1971: 84)

God’s self-revelation in Holy Scripture is not theoretical (scientific) in nature, just as self-knowledge and knowledge of God aren’t theoretical in nature:

...true self-knowledge in its biblical sense, i.e. in its dependence upon true knowledge of God, cannot be itself of a conceptual character. The reason is that all conceptual knowledge in its analytical and inter-modal synthetical character presupposes the human ego as its central reference-point, which consequently must be of a supra-modal nature and is not capable of logical analysis. (Dooyeweerd 1971: 84-85)

Summing up, viewed from a non-reductionist perspective, God’s Self-revelation in Holy Scripture must be understood in relation to the centrality of the human heart. Therefore the message of the Bible can only be grasped by means of God’s transforming power:

God’s self-revelation in Holy Scripture as Creator and redeemer concerns the central religious relation of man to his absolute Origin. Its true meaning is therefore to be understood by man only if his heart has been opened up to it through the moving power of the Holy Ghost. (Dooyeweerd 1971: 86)

Hence, insights thereof could be implemented to reform the method of apologetics according to the biblical meaning of the heart. It is notable that Dooyeweerd’s criticism of Van Til mainly concerns rationalistic tendencies of the latter in contrast to the reformational ontology developed by the former. Indeed, it is Dooyeweerd’s intention to show the importance of his transcendental critique for a reformational apologetics:

...since this critique has been presented as the only critical way of communication between a really reformatory Christian philosophy and philosophical schools holding in one sense or another to the supposed autonomy of theoretical thought. It is this very method of communication which could be also of fundamental import for a reformational apologetics... (Dooyeweerd 1971:74)

Nevertheless, one shouldn’t take Dooyeweerd’s critique of Van Til in an absolute sense, for he himself acknowledges:
“The task of a transcendental critique, which makes this theoretical attitude as such a critical problem, is quite different from that of a theological apologetics. It does not aim at a defence of the Christian faith.” (Dooyeweerd 1971:76)

Seen from Dooyeweerd’s perspective, it is clear that Van Til’s “Calvinist metaphysics” needs to be replaced by a reformational ontology, for even though he conveys biblical meaning with classical language, language and schemes of thought aren’t neutral. Consequently, vestiges of the scholastic scheme led him to misunderstand Dooyeweerd’s intention and to downplay the differences between philosophy and theology, indirectly attempting to impose *theological* transcendent critique to Dooyeweerd’s *philosophical* approach. This doesn’t mean that transcendent critique is not legitimate for apologetics, but in terms of the relation between philosophy and theology, modal-spherical extrapolations *can be avoided by means of a radically biblical ontology, derived from the biblical meaning of the heart.* Apologetics should combine theology and philosophy, i.e. considering the mutual irreducibility and coherence of both disciplines, but without compromising their differences.11

Possibly as a reaction to Van Til’s “theological modal-spherical extrapolation” (i.e. trying to impose a theological method to philosophy), Dooyeweerd restricted himself to a defence of his own philosophical approach and to a critique of scholastic tendencies in Van Til’s ideas. Thus, his only “explicitly positive” suggestion for apologetics is the statement mentioned above, namely that the transcendental critique should be considered as a fundamental method of communication for a reformational apologetics. (Dooyeweerd 1971:74). Due to the “reactionary nature” of Dooyeweerd’s exposition, a closer reading is required in order to extract philosophical insights for reformational apologetics, without disregarding the fact, that Van Til’s approach also encompasses Trinitarian covenantal theology, which at its core is not affected by Dooyeweerd’s mentioned criticisms, although it is the basic presupposition of Van Til’s approach. The main problem is, that dealing with Van Til’s *theological* critique of his *philosophical* method, Dooyeweerd approached the subject in terms of *sphere individuality*, i.e. stressing the structural coherence of a biblical (philosophical) ontology in itself and at the same time its modal-spherical independence from *theology* in the development and the carrying out of the transcendental approach and that’s legitimate. But unfortunately, Dooyeweerd didn’t deal with *sphere universality*, the principle of correlation which is insolubly connected to *sphere individuality* (principle of irreducibility). But both sides are of central importance to a non-reductionist ontology, therefore a reformational apologetics must be understood in the light of both, the internal irreducibility and coherence of theology and philosophy, without compromising the differences of the disciplines as such.12

11 Later on, the interplay of the theological (transcendent) and the philosophical (transcendental) approaches in will be dealt with in detail, as the way of synthesis suggested by Stoker for the discipline of apologetics.
12 In fact, it is “by means of “sphere universality”” that Stoker accomplishes the synthesis between a theological and a philosophical approach, relevant for apologetics (see 4th chapter of this thesis).
2.2 Van Til on Dooyeweerd

Van Til’s reply to Dooyeweerd highlights the Selbstverständnis of an apologist, willing to defend the Christian faith:

... As a Christian believer I must therefore place myself, for the sake of argument, upon the position of the non-Christian and show him that on his views of man and the cosmos he and the whole culture is based upon, and will sink into, quicksand. If the unbeliever then points to the fact that non-Christian scientists and philosophers have discovered many actual states of affairs, I heartily agree with this but I must tell him that they have done so with borrowed capital ... (Van Til 1971: 91)

Considering the different tasks of a Christian philosopher engaging with other philosophical schools and of a Christian apologist confronting unbelievers, Van Til states:

... to join the natural man in asking whether God exists and whether Christianity is true would be fatal ... If we allow that one intelligent word can be spoken about being or knowing or acting as such, without first introducing the Creator-creature distinction, we are sunk. As Christians we must not allow that even such a thing as enumeration or counting can be accounted for except upon the presupposition of truth of what we are told in Scripture about the triune God as the Creator and Redeemer of the world... (Van Til 1971: 91)

Although one should point out the unity of God’s threefold Word (i.e. the revelation of Creation, God’s incarnate Word, God’s inspired Word), Van Til’s initial Creator-creature distinction is legitimate viewed from the perspective of a reformational discourse of apologetics, due to the fact that finite human beings need an absolute reference point of identification to account for their own existence and certainty/possibility of self-knowledge/awareness and that the reformational apologist has the task to vindicate the truths of God’s Word-revelation and therefore can’t speak only about “a God”. For instance in the case of a “practical” apologetic discourse, which entails the involvement of two or more, “common” or more or less “scientific” people, it is never a strict scientific question, but rather a question of time and empathy how to combine the Creature-creation distinction and transcendental criticism. Thence, the reformational apologetics must be not only in line with a biblical philosophical ontology, but also to the covenantal belief and identity of the body of Christ which is based upon the Trinitarian confession of the creeds of the Church:

In its response to what the Bible says is the actual state of affairs, the Christian church has written its creeds. In these creeds we have a response on the part of redeemed people of God to his revelation of sovereign grace to them and of his calling all apostate men to repent and submit themselves to Christ. In this creeds men who are been redeemed in principle by the death and resurrection of Christ in their place and
subsequently born again by the Holy Spirit, think God’s thoughts of mercy after him. (Van Til 1971:91)

Basically by stating that the regenerate Christian thinks God’s thoughts after him, Van Til is conveying nothing else than the reformational philosophical conviction, that by means of regeneration the heart is re-directed towards God, in Christ, by the work of the Holy Spirit. In fact, the reformational movement was an important inspiration to Van Til, who was willing to develop a method of apologetics in that line:

How I rejoiced when I found that men of great erudition and of deep penetration were pointing out that “logic” and “fact” can have no intelligible relation to another unless it be upon the presupposition of the truth of the “story” Christ has told us in the Scriptures. Or am I reading some of my apologetic views into the writings of this “revolutionary” group? Perhaps I am. I know that they are “doing” Christian philosophy, not apologetics. Even so I thought of their Christian philosophy as supporting my apologetic methodology. Did not their philosophy trace the intricacies of the entire history of “immanentist” thinking of apostate man and show that it was selffrustrative and destructive of intelligent predication? (Van Til 1971: 92-93)

Reflecting on Dooyeweerd’s second transcendental critique, he came to the conclusion that it doesn’t suffice for a method of apologetics, for it follows another intention:

…It will, you contend, furnish the foundation for a community of thought between truly philosophic minded people… with the community of thought (denkgemeenschap) restored we can expect to have intelligent dialogue between those who in their religious convictions may hold to opposing views. “This is due to the fact that this criticism”, i.e. that of the Philosophy of the Law Idea, “rests upon what is indeed the universally valid ontic structure of philosophic thought and not on a merely subjective prejudice… (Van Til 1971:93-94)

Van Til points out that such transcendental criticism can’t be the sole basis for reformational apologetics, for it doesn’t call unbelievers to repent and believe the Gospel, but ends up accepting opposite views, giving its main attention to a self-critical attitude in philosophy. He gives the example of a catholic scholar (Robbers) who became open to reformational philosophy, without feeling the need to listen to God and give up his basic unbiblical beliefs:

Apparently he has sensed the fact that the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea was not requiring that, as a condition for dialogue, he must give up his basic religious commitment. But now he realizes that your criticism is truly transcendental and not transcendent at all. (Van Til 1971: 94-95)

In line with the apologetic discourse, Van Til circumscribes reformational insights and combines them to Trinitarian, covenantal theology:

...I do not speak of the autonomy of theoretical thought but of the pretended autonomy of apostate man... Assuming this autonomy apostate man gives a rebellious covenant-breaking response to the revelational challenge that he meets at every turn. The face
of the triune God of Scripture confronts him everywhere and all the time. He spends the entire energy of his whole personality in order to escape seeing this face of God...
(Van Til 1971: 96-97)

Thus, in the confrontation with unbelievers, the ultimate presupposition stated by the apologist concerning the possibility of theoretical thought is different than Dooyeweerd’s:

When I try to win someone for Christ I therefore make the difference between the Christian and the non-Christian positions as clear as I can. The two positions are mutually exclusive. Mr. Jones and I have opposing views of man, of fact, and of the function of logic. For me the presupposition of the possibility of theoretical thought and experience is the truth of Christ’s words when he said I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. Committed as he is by his virtual confession of faith in human autonomy, apostate man is also committed to the idea of pure contingency. Accordingly he cannot distinguish one “fact” from another “fact”. (Van Til 1971:97)

Seen from the perspective of the reformational apologist, a critique of theoretical thought is ultimately useless if the unbeliever is not called to repent and believe the Gospel, giving his life to Christ:

I believe that whether we are Christian philosophers or Christian theologians we must tell all fallen covenant-breaking mankind everywhere that what they have in their hostility to the Creator-Redeemer of men sought in vain, is found in him who before Pontius Pilate witnessed the good confession. When any man searches for truth, without searching for it in terms of the answer that everywhere confronts him in the self-authenticating Christ, then he is, in effect, doing what Pilate did when he said, “What is Truth?” and then gave Jesus over to the “Jews” who had already repeatedly charged him with blaspheming because he made himself out to be the Son of God. (Van Til 1971:98)

Van Til sees the task of Dooyeweerd’s transcendental approach from the perspective of his own apologetic task, thus implicitly confusing the theology-proper with the philosophy-proper of the transcendental approach, creating an unnecessary contrast between their positions, for it was not Dooyeweerd’s concern to develop a method of apologetics:

You see then, Dr. Dooyeweerd, that I hold two points about Christian apologetics which apparently you do not hold. In the first place I believe that Christian apologetics, and in particular Reformed apologetics, is not really transcendental in its method unless it says at the outset of its dialogue with non-believers that the Christian position must be accepted on the authority of the self-identifying Christ of Scripture as the presupposition of human predication in any field. Then secondly, I believe that a Christian apologist must place himself for argument’s sake upon the position of the non-believer and point out to him that he has to presuppose the truth of the Christian position even to oppose it. (Van Til 1971:98)
Another example for the identification of Dooyeweerd’s philosophy with apologetics\textsuperscript{13} is the fact that Van Til implicitly argues that Dooyeweerd’s approach should be “directly” derived from Scriptures (theology), undermining the philosophical focus on the creation order:

I know very well, of course, that you constantly speak of creation, fall and redemption in your book. But what you say on the subjects seems to come into the picture too late and in the way of a \textit{Deus ex machina} into your main argument. You seem to me not to have given them their proper place at the outset of the argument, and you have \textit{not presented them as the presupposition of the possibility of analysing the structure of theoretical thought and experience}. You have, it appears, by your restriction, definitely excluded the contents of biblical teaching as having the basically determinative significance for your method of transcendental criticism (Van Til 1971:98-99)

Concerning Van Til’s premise and in line with the belief on the ultimate dependence of all things on the Triune God (including human consciousness), the point might be well taken that even if \textit{unconsciously}, the Trinitarian covenantal belief lies at the root of Dooyeweerd’s approach, but it is still a modal-spherical extrapolation to be willing to prescribe a theological methodology as the \textit{only legitimate} foundation for reformational philosophy in general (or specifically to Dooyeweerd’s philosophical transcendental critique), although, at the core of the matter is the biblical and reformational conviction concerning the unity and diversity of the integral Word-Revelation of God (Word of Creation, Incarnated Word, Inspired Word). Thus, it doesn’t make sense to tear their unity apart (as some “Christian” philosophers may be willing to do, in order not to listen to Holy Scripture), but nevertheless Van Til wouldn’t do justice to Dooyeweerd if he was aiming to criticize his scriptural belief, for according to Dooyeweerd’s conviction, he was being faithful to the integral biblical belief in his philosophical approach. Thence, Van Til’s objections to Dooyeweerd are to be understood from a theological-apologetic viewpoint, just as Dooyeweerd’s criticisms of Van Til are articulated from a philosophical perspective:

The significance of this fact is that on your view as a Christian one cannot understand the nature and structure of theoretical thought unless it is integrally related to the Christian story. The nature of theoretical thought is what it is as a means by which those who are what they are because of their relation to their Creator-Redeemer God can in some measure understand the \textit{magnolia dei}, and challenge all men to repent. (Van Til 1971:102)

As Dooyeweerd’s transcendental method doesn’t intend to show that a comprehensive view of reality is basically only possible by presupposing the unity and diversity ultimately rooted in the Triune God, it doesn’t suffice as a method of reformational apologetics:

\textsuperscript{13} Although Dooyeweerd’s philosophical method and religious criticism of the West functions as an cultural apologetics, nevertheless it is not apologetics \textit{per se}.
You are at the same time insisting that you can analyse the nature and structure of theoretical thought without any reference to that Christian story. You are seeking to show that you can analyse theoretical thought *as such* and show that it points to the Christian story. On this basis theoretical thought is not itself a part of that story. I cannot follow you at this point. I would say that the structure of theoretical thought cannot be seen for what it is in terms of the scheme of the natural man. In his dialogue with the natural man the Christian must show that theoretical thought as such is a nonentity. Theoretical thought is what it is only as it is seen to be operating as revelatory of the Christian story. (Van Til 1971:102)

Van Til accuses Dooyeweerd of lack of methodological *sincerity* in the sense that he is not willing to reveal his basic beliefs right at the first step of the transcendental critique:

“Whatever may be possible because of our faith we are now reasoning transcendentally. We must therefore not bring in Christian Truth at the first and second steps” (Van Til 1971:103)

Van Til’s objection is right in terms of apologetics, nevertheless he doesn’t do justice to Dooyeweerd, whose concern was to biblically-philosophically analyse the created law-order. Out of his theological perspective, Van Til stresses that every methodology should start with an absolute reference point, instead of starting with “structural data” as Dooyeweerd14:

If there is not to be a basic dualism between your religious convictions on this point and your process of rationalization you should proceed differently than you do in your Critique. To avoid dualism you should not start from the structure of theoretical thought *as such*. There is no such thing. There is no autonomy of theoretical thought *as such* (Van Til 1971:109)

He stresses that the transcendental method “ultimately” only makes sense within the Trinitarian, covenantal Christian framework:

Every item that man meets in his temporal horizon is already interpreted by God. It is the interpretation of the triune Creator-Redeemer God that every man meets in his every experience of anything. This is the “state of affairs” as it actually exists. (Van Til 1971:109)

Van Til points out that even by starting with “structural data”, Dooyeweerd still doesn’t reveal his “ultimate” Christian presupposition:

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14 Van Til is implicitly confusing the different ways in which absolute truth and relative truths are dealt with in theology and philosophy, as Stoker’s expositions will show in the next chapter – although Van Til is right in an absolute sense and the argument is valid in the apologetic confrontation with unbelievers, which suppress the truth and absolutize something in created – Van Til doesn’t do justice to Dooyeweerd’s intention and philosophical methodology, which structurally functions in a different way than Van Til’s theological approach.
Of course, I know, Dr. Dooyeweerd, that by theoretical thought, by the temporal world-order, and by naïve experience you mean what these mean in the Christian framework. But in your transcendental method you insist not only that they may but that they must be used without reference to the Christian framework (Van Til 1971:109)

Furthermore, he shows the importance of Trinitarian, covenantal theology for a true reformatoional apologetics, which also entails the preaching of the Word of God to unbelievers, and thus must go beyond transcendental criticism:

... Men have the requirements of their covenant-God clearly before them. It is not their “temporality” that should lead them to conclude by a process of reasoning that they need themselves to be supra-temporal and that they need an eternal God as an Origin beyond their supra-temporal selves. It was not Adam’s temporality that made it imperative for him to reason toward an eternal God. It was the eternal triune Creator-God who was clearly present to him in every item of the universe about him as well as in himself. This Creator-God spoke to Adam and by speaking to him set the whole of every bit of contact between himself and his creature in a covenantal configuration. Even fallen man is responsible for this original speech of God to Adam the covenant-head of mankind ... (Van Til 1971:111)

Even though Van Til doesn’t doubt Dooyeweerd’s biblical belief, he is convinced that Dooyeweerd’s method doesn’t do justice to the Trinitarian, covenantal biblical belief:

„I feel constrained to say, Dr. Dooyeweerd, that your transcendental method, based on your restriction, is not reformational either in its conception or in its consequences.” (Van Til 1971:112)

For in speaking about God, Dooyeweerd refers to “an absolute Origin” whether or not we call the Origin God. Such a definition is inacceptable to Van Til:

“Up to this point all is clear. Our transcendental basic idea must not have positive content. If it had positive content it would not be the universally acceptable presupposition of philosophical thought. (Van Til 1971:112)

The Christian confession can’t be satisfied with such a definition in order to become “acceptable” among Non-Christians. But Van Til doesn’t take into account that by going further, Dooyeweerd would be leaving the domain of philosophy and practicing theology (or apologetics). Nevertheless, Van Til’s observation is crucial for reformational apologetics:

“But now it also appears that such a contentless transcendental basic idea is not adequate for its task. Our transcendental basic idea needs content. It must have content in order to be the source of the dunamis that the human ego needs in order to
perform its unifying function. Here then at this third step is where at last you bring Christianity into the picture. You say to those who have followed you to the point where they may well agree that theoretical thought needs an absolute origin, that this Origin must be the God of the Christian framework. (Van Til 1971:109-110)

Van Til’s analysis of Dooyeweerd’s transcendental critique is of tremendous value for the discipline of apologetics, for it intrinsically deals with the limits of philosophy in addressing the “natural man”. Thus, stated in a positive way, reformational apologetics should rely upon the non-reductionist reformational ontology and its all-encompassing character, able to capture the radical diversity and coherence of created reality, but always keep in mind that a philosophical methodology (mainly focused on a “indirect knowledge of God”, as well as the Self-Knowledge and knowledge of Creation) shouldn’t be seen as a substitution of the inspired Word-revelation and the preaching of the Gospel, although it is equally important in the treatment of the revelation of creation and its fullness of meaning, which can only be grasped from the totality perspective of philosophy. Covenantal Trinitarian theology and reformational philosophy are to be seen as interdependent in apologetics, but nevertheless it is the Gospel that redeems. Consequently, neither theology nor philosophy redeem, for both of them imply imperfect human articulations. Thus, the apologist should combine both in the best possible way as simul justus et peccator, so that God himself might speak through the Gospel, the only power unto salvation (Rôm 1,16):

“You seem to sense that those who, among the immanentistic philosophers, have followed you to this point, will refuse to take this jump with you. They will gladly accept the idea of the indispensability of belief in an origin, but they will not believe that this Origin must be the Creator-Redeemer-God of the Bible. To them the absolute origin must be an apeiron, an indefinite, a featureless source of power. It must not, they are sure, it cannot be the God of Paul, of Luther, of Calvin (Van Til 1971:113)

2.3 Stoker’s complementary criticism of Van Til

In contrast to Dooyeweerd’s focus on defending his (philosophical) transcendental critique and pointing out Van Til’s scholastic tendencies, Stoker on the other hand, engages positively with Van Til’s ideas, constructively suggesting a way to combine theology and philosophy:

Your approach is primarily apologetical, i.e. theological, notwithstanding your penetrating criticism of theories concerning philosophy and empirical science. My approach – presupposing the validity of your approach – is primarily philosophical. The main point I wish to make is that a primarily philosophical pursuit of the problem of knowledge may contribute a necessary supplement to your theory and I will refer to such a pursuit as my special problem. (Stoker 1971:25)

Stoker agrees with Van Til that all problems of knowledge must be seen in the light of Holy Scripture, but instead of focusing the ultimate dependence of man’s knowledge on the triune
God (as Van Til), Stoker’s main concern is man’s knowledge, though presupposing the ultimate dependence stressed by Van Til. (Stoker 1971:26)

He points out that it is the function of faith (not logic!) that makes knowledge possible:

Man, however, *meets* knowingly the knowable by *trusting* it. In order to know, *faith* in the knowable (as met by knowing perceiving) is an indispensable necessity (“Faith” is taken here in a wide sense, a for instance, is also done by Bavinck). Faith, too, is an act of knowing, without which man, the knower, does not really meet the knowable. Faith is, in a specific sense, a surrender; only by surrendering himself to the knowable, i.e. by accepting it, can man responsibly fulfil his task of knowing. (Stoker 1971:28)

Regarding the relation between faith, knowledge and the revelation of creation, Stoker stresses that *knowing* doesn’t stop by thinking, but that it requires a “responsible” involvement and a *renewed meeting* with the *knowable* (God’s revelation):

Of fundamental significance is the *act of religious faith* directed as it is towards the revelation of God. To be able to observe and know creaturely “things” in their finitude and limitedness presupposes, in a principal sense, the ability to know God, the absolute, by the act of religious faith. The finite and the relative are what they are because of the absolute. This means that had man no possibility of religious faith, knowledge of finite “things” as finite and of relative “things as relative would not have been possible. This assertion is akin to your contention that without a revelatory consciousness of God, self-consciousness (and I may add: consciousness of “things”) would, in a principal sense, not be possible (Stoker 1971:29)

Vollenhoven writes elsewhere in a similar fashion about the relation between the heart, the function of faith and the law of God (revelation of creation) unto which men as subjects are integrally subjected to:

… When I thus consider faith the highest function in human existence, two things are implied: on the one hand that believing is only a function, and on the other hand that believing is the most important in the *scala* of functions … believing is only functional. That is to say: faith is not identical with heart, but is determined by the heart in its direction towards good or evil, i.e. in obedience to the law of love or not. In other words: the whole man is religious, and his life is a walk before the face of God in obedience or disobedience… (Vollenhoven 1950:2)

Even though man’s knowledge is basically founded on faith (opposite of autonomy), it is man that knows, thus knowledge entails a *human* as well as a *personal* factor:

The human factor concerns the creaturely, derived, incomprehensive “nature” of knowledge as well as the part man (with all his acts and functions) plays in forming knowledge. The personal factor concerns the specifically or individually personal character of knowledge as it differs from man to man. (Stoker 1971:29)”
Dealing with the radically different and irreducible acts of knowing and the knowable, man faces the \textit{mystery of revelation} at the root of his knowledge.\textsuperscript{15} The \textit{unity of revelation} requires one who reveals, something that is revealed, and someone to whom it is revealed. The unity of revelation at the base of man’s knowledge discloses the principal connectedness of knowing and the knowable, thereby at the same time leaving the radical difference between them intact. This is apparent when we consider that God reveals himself in his Word and works (our created universe); that he has created our universe and cosmos knowable; that he has endowed man with the acts and functions to know; and that he sets man his calling to know and to act upon it. Here again it becomes clear how enstatically man’s knowledge of the revelation of God (in his Word and his creation), as well as of the created universe itself, is interwoven with created reality itself (Stoker 1971: 30).

Accordingly, Stoker suggests his reformational philosophical approach (non-reductionistic ontology), based upon the revelation of creation, as a supplement to Van Til’s apologetics:

\begin{quote}
It is exactly this fourth type of revelation (presupposing the other types) that I require for a philosophical (as well as for a particular scientific approach to man’s knowledge)... Objections may be raised against calling this \textit{fourth type also a type of revelation}, because revelation is here used in an uncommon sense. For it is not a revelation of God himself to man, but a revelation of created reality (in an ultimate sense by God) to man. (Stoker 1971:30-31).
\end{quote}

In other words, Stoker suggests a supplement to Van Til’s approach, able to capture the irreducibility and correlation of law and subject\textsuperscript{16}:

\begin{quote}
“But as such this approach is not reducible to your approach and yet it is a truly significant approach too.” (Stoker 1971:31)
\end{quote}

Stoker reaffirms Van Til’s covenantal approach in terms of the \textit{unity} between call and answer determined by God’s covenant, yet he stresses that the revelation of creation also belongs fundamentally to God’s covenant (again reinforcing the biblical reformational ontology):

\begin{quote}
I only mention the \textit{order of law (wetsorde)} that God has determined for created reality as a whole) and all its “parts” and relations) – a truth which the “Cosmonomic Philosophy” (\textit{Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee}) rightly stressed so definitely. Man’s knowledge, as well as created reality, is radically subject to the laws concerned (Stoker 1971:32)
\end{quote}

He emphasizes the integral reformational understanding of the God’s Word-Revelation as constitutive to the order of creation, even after the fall:

\begin{quote}
... God’s created universe essentially remained the same universe notwithstanding the fall into sin and evil: for instance, man is yet man and knowledge yet knowledge. On
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{15} Stoker, Van Til and Bavinck agree that revelation is the key to man’s knowledge.

\textsuperscript{16} In line with Dooyeweerd (Dooyeweerd 1971:79)
the other hand, it can rightly be done only if created reality, man and his knowledge, be seen in the light of God’s Word-Revelation ... (Stoker 1971:33)

It follows, that man is not blind to the revelation of creation, but rather he is permanently confronted with the plan of creation (the revelation of creation).

... God created the universe according to his plan, and this plan, as revealed in created reality (including man himself), confronts man, the knower. The sinner yet has contact with this plan itself, but he does not fully meet it (i.e. the creaturely knowable) in a truly answering fashion; his presuppositions are wrong; he perceives (taking this in a wide sense) the knowable in wrong perspectives; he directs faith wrongly, he “derails” his thinking by forming wrong concepts, judgments, theories, and so forth; he thus perceives the knowable in accordance with wrong theoretical constructions; and so forth ... (Stoker 1971:33)

It is notable that Stoker’s account of the revelation of creation and its dependence upon God positively integrates Van Til’s concern for the ultimate dependence of all things upon the triune God, while implicitly containing the non-reductionist reformational ontology, i.e. indirectly suggesting a supplement to Van Til’s ontology:

Just as Dooyeweerd, he brings in the distinction between pre-theoretical and theoretical (scientific) thinking:

... I suggest we call it “pre-scientific” knowledge, but thereby keeping in mind that pre-scientific knowledge is basic and that science has historically, as well as principally, its origin in pre-scientific knowledge. Of special significance for us is that man’s life and world view (including his religious faith) essentially belongs to pre-scientific knowledge and forms its comprehensive content. In this significant sense the basic presuppositions of science belong to man’s pre-scientific life and world view (Dooyeweerd’s ground-motives. Emphasis GB); science obtains its own meaning from these pre-scientific convictions. (Stoker 1971:34)

Regarding pre-scientific presuppositions, Stoker compares Van Til’s transcendent criticism (proceeding from one’s own presuppositions) to Dooyeweerd’s transcendental criticism, which starts from acts and functions of knowing. Both methods follow opposite directions (proceeding from or proceeding towards the basic presuppositions concerned). (Stoker 1971:35)

Dooyeweerd’s method is totally transcendental in his method, exposing the direction of the human heart as controlled by a ground motive and showing how non-biblical ground motives fall into antinomies and dialectical tensions, whereas that’s only not the case in the biblical ground motive of creation, fall and redemption. (Stoker 1971:35)

Van Til’s method is (i.) transcendent, starting with God and his counsel, (ii) transcendental exposing the ultimate presuppositions of unbelievers and it becomes (i) transcendent again when criticizing the uncovered ultimate presuppositions. (Stoker 1971:35)
Stoker asserts the centrality of both approaches for apologetics, but also reinforces the legitimacy of Dooyeweerd’s philosophical approach, indirectly correcting Van Til’s critique of Dooyeweerd, which implies his apologetic perspective and is not absolute for philosophy:

... Both methods of criticism, the transcendent and the transcendental, are necessary and complement one another. But Dooyeweerd’s application of the transcendental method of human thought is primarily philosophic and your application of the method of transcendent criticism is, on account of your apologetic approach, primarily theological. Dooyeweerd with the use of the transcendental method stops at the directedness of the human heart towards God or apostatically towards a theoretical idol and his exposition of the religious ground motives (and their implications). Should he proceed any further, namely to an exposition of God and his counsel (something that he can hardly do with his transcendental method), his theory of knowledge would become theological... (Stoker 1971:36)

Conceiving Theology and Philosophy in terms of sphere individuality it becomes clear that neither Dooyeweerd’s philosophical critique of Van Til nor Van Til’s theological critique of Dooyeweerd can be taken in an absolute sense for apologetics, even though they are relevant and insightful. Stoker definition of both disciplines illustrates that point:

...Theology is the science of the revelation of God in his Word and in creation (or “nature”) concerning himself and his relation to all “things”. In the case of the non-Christian theology, theology is the science of that which is taken instead of God as the absolute, for instance, the “absolute” as in the case of the “god” of Aristotle or of Spinoza, and its relation to all “things”… Philosophy is the science of the totality as well as of the coherence of the radical diversity of the cosmos (or our created universe). (Stoker 1971:38-39)

Although Stoker does acknowledge the validity of Van Til’s criticisms in terms of what he sees as the important question, concerning the possible arising of the intermediate special sciences of a philosophical theology and a philosophical theology (Stoker 1971:43):

Because a theory of knowledge (taken in a wide sense) is an interscience, you, as an apologist (and thus primarily a theologian), have a full right to discuss critically philosophical as well as empirical-scientific contributions to the theory of knowledge and to demand that philosophers and empirical scientists should not only acknowledge theology’s contributions to the theory of knowledge, but should also presuppose and fully take it into account in their own researches (Stoker 1971:42)

In order to combine theology and philosophy in a non-reductionistic way, apologetics should consider the dynamic interplay of ultimate meaning moments (theological) as well as specific meaning moments (philosophical). Thus, reformational apologetics should combine covenantal Trinitarian theology with integral, modal-spherical philosophy:
In our created universe we find (a) a diversity of „things“ and (b) their coherence or relations. No “thing is separable from other “things”. The meaning of a “thing” is essentially constituted not only by (a) what it specifically is (its analytical meaning moment), but also by (b) its position in a (higher) perspective or context. Because cosmic diversity essentially coheres, (a) the analytical meaning moments and (b) the perspective or contextual meaning moments of a “thing” are inseparable. (Stoker 1971: 44-45)

Stoker points out that Van Til overemphasizes “absolute truth” at cost of “relative truths”:

...Of interest is to note that you – as an apologist – primarily stress the ultimate meaning moment of anything in our created universe, whereas its cosmically specific or analytical meaning moment needs a stress too (of course presupposing its ultimate meaning moment), which you allow for, but do not especially elaborate. Here again I touch upon my special problem... (Stoker 1971:46)

Stoker remarks that Van Til’s approach to the theory of man’s knowledge is integral, but basically theological and thus focusing its ultimate dependence on God:

… man’s knowledge (1) of God (including his knowledge of God’s counsel, creation, providence, revelation, grace, and so forth)... (2) (a) man’s knowledge of the created universe (including man himself and his knowledge) viewed in its dependence on God (and on God’s knowledge and his counsel) and thus seen as revelational of God... (2) (b) concerning problems to which you repeatedly refer, the theory of knowledge that you allow for and give significant comments upon, but do not especially elaborate as such (Stoker’s special problem – Emphasis GB). It is the theory of man’s knowledge of the (created) universe or cosmos (including man himself and his knowledge) according to its special or specific meaning (thereby presupposing its ultimate meaning, presupposing that it is revelational of God, that it is created according to the plan of God, and that God guides and rules it according to his providence). (Stoker 1971:48)

He also deals with the problematic rationalistic notions Van Til apply, such as concrete universal, rationality of God, absolute rationalism, and so forth, pointing out that these old terms have been form in answer to false problems, such as the identification of human rationality with reality, as if reality should conform to human conceptual knowledge. (Stoker 1971:53). Although, to do justice to Van Til, the core of his message must be understood:

“Your theory is, notwithstanding the terms you borrow from non-Christian philosophy, essentially neither humanistic, rationalistic, nor idealistic, but genuinely Calvinistic”. (Stoker 1971:53)

Basically, Stoker’s special problem is a philosophical supplement to Van Til’s approach, able to capture and relate the radical diversity (C-content) and coherence of the cosmos to its ultimate purpose (P-Plan) which is found in God’s (A-architect) plan. The union of the P-A and P-C approaches should be seen as correlative and irreducible to each other. (Stoker 1971: 56-57).
... the plan (P) of this building as a whole and every part thereof has its origin in the mind of its architect (A)… I call this the P-A context, view, or approach. But then I ask my friend to turn right and to tell me how many rooms, passages, stairs, windows, doors, there are, what their functions and purposes are, where they are situated, and thus to explain to me the contents (C) of the plan (P) according to which this building was built. I call this the P-C context, view, or approach (Stoker 1971: 57).

The P-A context can be easily found in Holy Scripture, but the P-C cannot be derived from it. Stoker’s complementary approach would demand from apologetics a more dynamic interplay of God’s Plan of Self-revelation (P-A) and God’s Plan as the revelation of creation (P-C). (Stoker 1971:60-62):

…According to Romans, as you rightly observe, „metaphysically“ all men know God, but the sinner represses this knowledge. To this I should like to add the observation that ontologically (or “metaphysically”) all men know the plan of the universe (including facts and their relations), but that unbelievers falsify it in some fundamental respect or other; and that this falsification ultimately is due not only to their repression of their knowledge of God, but also to their substitution of non-Christian ultimate presuppositions for the ultimate Christian truths. The unbeliever can do this because man is created as the image of God, has a sense of deity, and identifies something creaturely with God’s revelation therein. But doing so a veil is formed between him and the knowable universe, i.e. between him and the plan present in the universe; he accordingly sees reality in false perspectives… (according to the P-C approach) in a positive sense a result of the fact that common grace maintains the contact of man with the plan present in created reality itself, however much man as a sinner may veil and accordingly falsify it. (Stoker 1971:61-62)

The overemphasizing of the P-A by Van Til can be overcome by means of a non-reductionist ontology (P-C) and still maintain its absolute claim, although in a more differentiated way, and doing more justice to the specific moments of the revelation of creation:

All this means that you may still keep your ultimate criticism that whoever rejects (or does not acknowledge) the existence of God and his counsel, ultimately must fall back upon chance and brute facts, notwithstanding that according to the P-C approach non-Christian philosophers and particular scientists… may explicitly appeal to the order, or plan, of nature with which they are confronted and (according to their systems) may explicitly deny chance, brute facts, and even the autonomy of human reason. In other words… because of common grace – facts are a point of contact between them, i.e. so far as there is agreement (upon facts and their relations, i.e. on the plan itself of the created reality) between them, they agree upon what virtually belongs to God and because whatever they agree upon is inseparably seen either in the light of the fundamental biblical or of fundamental unbiblical presuppositions. In this sense you rightly hold that the ballet between them is of a totalitarian nature. (Stoker 1971:64)
Concerning Van Til’s method, Stoker agrees that the Christian pursuit to science is presuppositional, yet he adds that the same applies to the Non-Christian:

After all, science has historically and principally its origin in pre-scientific life and world view (including religious convictions), and this fact holds good for non-Christian science as well...What you contend concerning a Christian pursuit of science, namely that a circular reasoning is implied in the mutual involvement of starting point, method, and conclusions, holds good for a non-Christian pursuit of science as well (Stoker 1971:65)

The radical difference between both pursuits of science is that the Christian knowledge is based upon the Creator-Creature distinction, while the Non-Christian pursuit of knowledge is based upon absolutizations of something created (Stoker 1971:65-66).

Van Til’s P-A approach rightly affirms that every hypotheses must rest upon God and his counsel as the ultimate explanation of all things and that any hypotheses that exclude the existence of God is irrelevant from the outset, for every human (Christian and Non-Christian) hypotheses presuppose a pre-theoretical world and life view and therefore relate in a fundamental sense to a ultimate presupposition. (Stoker 1971: 67-68)

Consequently, every position which from the outset rejects God and his counsel ends up in relativism and reductionisms, unable to capture to radical diversity, meaning totality and coherence of created reality (Stoker 1971:68).

2.4 The three Gestalten of God’s Word

Although Van Til’s apologetic approach was inspired by reformational philosophy, it didn’t fully integrate its non-reductionistic ontology, which is derived from the biblical meaning of the heart, but rather maintained rationalistic terminology and some connotations (e.g. lacking the distinction between pre-theoretical and theoretical – and logic as the reference point of “metaphysics). Nevertheless, from a Trinitarian perspective, Van Til is right in stating that Dooyeweerd’s transcendental approach, which in its first steps is mainly concerned with cosmic knowledge and the inclination towards the absolute Origin, shows up to be insufficient as a method of apologetics, for it doesn’t do justice to the basic Trinitarian and reformational vision, that the whole cosmos is ultimately dependent upon the Triune God and that one can only talk about God as he reveals himself in His work as Trinity - according to the Father’s decree, in Christ, through Holy Scripture. Stoker clarifies the relation between Dooyeweerd’s and Van Til’s approach and shows how they complement each other, by means of combining reformational philosophy’s non-reductionistic approach to ontology and the meaning of the radical diverse and correlative creation as God’s revelation of creation with the Trinitarian covenantal reformed theology defended by Van Til. Thus, Stoker’s expositions imply the Trinitarian threefold Gestalten of God’s Word revelation. Consequently, as such an understanding shows up to be essential for Neo-Calvinistic apologetics, basic distinctions and insights won out of Van Til’s Festschrift must find their
way into Neo-Calvinistic methodology. In order to do so, Olthuis’ article on the Word of God and Science, which is comprise and clear in exposition, presupposing the same Trinitarian perspective and pointing to the three Gestalten of God’s Word, will help framing the main relevant points and building on the Neo-Calvinistic method of apologetics, putting Stoker’s supplement in practice (accepted by Van Til), reconciling Dooyeweerd’s and Van Til’s approaches and advancing the discipline of reformed apologetics.

Just as Stoker stressed in terms of the P-A and P-C contexts, so does Olthuis points out that a true reformational understanding of God’s Word must be integral (non-reductionistic):

…The problem of the relation of the Bible to science is of fundamental importance for any group of Christians who engage in theoretical work. (Inspired Word of God and theoretical thought)... Only when it is clear as to how we are to conceive of the Word of God, including the Scriptures, is it possible to go on and consider the relation of the Bible and science. For that reason, and since it is becoming increasingly clear that there is no consensus in regard to the nature of the Word, not to say that in general most Christians hold to view of the Word which itself minimizes the Word. (Olthuis 1968:1)

Through Holy Scriptures, the triune God reveals himself and how the cosmos (including men) is ultimately dependent upon Him. Thence, an integral and Trinitarian view of God’s Word revelation leads to the rejection of the dualistic split between revelation of Creation (philosophy’s main focus) and God’s inspired Word (theology’s main focus). There is no conflict between transcendent (based on Holy Scripture) and transcendental criticism (based on the revelation of creation). They go hand in hand in Trinitarian-covenantal apologetics, which encompasses both. God’s Word is trustworthy and consistent in its forms. Therefore, Van Til’s stress on the absolute authority of Holy Scripture in apologetics can’t be neglected:

…Confessing that the Scriptures are profitable for instruction, we turn to them to be instructed as to the nature of the Word of God. At this beginning point we can only appeal to the Scriptures. We cannot appeal to Reason in a rationalistic or neo-rationalistic way, nor to religious consciousness... Our appeal to the Scriptures takes the form of confession. We confess that it is in the Scriptures that we come to know Christ. We believe in Christ according to the Scriptures. In faith we bow before the Scriptures as the Word of God. That we cannot go behind or beyond the Scriptures to test their authority as the Word of God is not a problem to be acknowledged. If there was some higher authority by which to corroborate the Scriptures, the Scriptures would not be the Word or Canon for the new creation. At the outset of human action, including scientific endeavors, a man must confess in what he puts his first and final trust, he must choose whether he will live by the Word or some pseudo-word. (Olthuis 1968:1)
The Trinitarian perspective unmask[s] reductionistic positions regarding God's Word revelation and points to the coherence between reformed theology and reformational philosophy. The controversy between Van Til and Dooyeweerd apparently reflects such a reduction (Van Til overemphasizing the P-A and Dooyeweerd the P-C – although both hold together and one approach should not rule out the other. Stoker is the only one among the three who shows how it is possible to include both the P-A and P-C contexts). Similarly, Olthuis points to the common reduction of God's Word to either Christ (incarnated Word) or Holy Scripture (inspired Word) as another example of neglecting the unity of the Gestalten of God's Word:

Studying the Scriptures with a view to receiving the first beginnings from which one can formulate a doctrine of the Word it becomes shockingly clear that the Christian community has been and still is plagued by a tragic reduction of the Word of God. Today 'liberals' are concerned to maintain that only Christ is the Word—if they are even willing to grant that—and 'conservatives' fight to defend the fact that the Scriptures as well as Christ are the Word. (Olthuis 1968:1-2)

Consequently, the Trinitarian (and reformational) viewpoint helps overcoming those reductionisms (by integrating the revelation of creation besides the incarnated Word and the inspired Word). Such an integral understanding of God's Word is presupposed by Van Til's and Stoker's on the ultimate dependence of the cosmos (including men) upon the triune God:

Meanwhile the Scriptures are emphatic over against both liberal and conservative that "by the Word of Yahweh the heavens were made, their whole array by the breath of his mouth. ... He spoke, and it was created, he commanded and there it stood" (Ps. 33:6-9). The Psalmist further testifies that "He gives an order; his word flashes to earth: to spread snow like a blanket, to strew hoarfrost like ashes, to drop ice like breadcrumbs, and when the cold is unbearable, he sends his word to bring the thaw and warm wind to melt the snow. He reveals his word to Jacob, his statutes and rulings to Israel" (Ps.147:17-19). "Fire and hail, snow and mist, stormy winds fulfilling his word" (Ps. 148:8). And the words of Peter are to the point: "They are choosing to forget that there were the heavens at the beginning, and that the earth was formed by the word of God out of water and between waters ... But by the same word, the present sky and earth are destined for fire ..." (Peter 3:5-7; cf. Hebrews 11:3; Ps. 119:89-96) (Olthuis 1968:2).

Thus, the reformational vision overcomes both reductionistic liberal and conservative positions, advancing the biblical vision of the absolute sovereignty of God over the cosmos:

The Scriptures demand that in our reflection we take account of the fact that the world was created by the Word of God. "And God said, let there be ... and there was." Any discussion of the Word may not be limited to the Scriptures or even to Christ. God spoke and the world was formed. Nothing exists in itself or by itself. All things were created by God through the Word, and all things are reconciled by God through the Word. All things are upheld by the "word of his power" (Hebrews 1:1). God put his
Word to the world and called creation into existence and the same Word holds it to this day in place in Jesus Christ in whom all things cohere (cf. Gen. 1, Job 38, John 1, Ephesians 1, Colossians 1). The only continuity between God and his creation is the Word. Without this Word, the world would simply pass away. And the Spirit of the Lord leads and moves the creation according to the direction of the Word to the eschaton in which God will be all-in-all. (Olthuis 1968:2)

The Trinitarian understanding of God's Word Revelation constructively complements both Van Til's overemphasis of the scriptural Gestalt of God's Word and its main concern (P-A context) as well as Dooyeweerd's overemphasis of the divine creation order (revelation of creation):

...When liberals and conservatives alike, including men of science, ignore this plain testimony of the Scriptures, they emasculate their confession that Christ and the Scriptures are the Word. For without the Biblical view that the Word of God structures and directs creation, it is impossible to understand the meaning and purpose of the Written Word as the means by which, after the Fall, mankind could again see his place and task in the world. Further, without the Biblical view of the Word as the Law-Word for creation, it is impossible to do justice to the Word Incarnate as He in whom all things exist and cohere (cf. Eph. 1 and Col. 1). Isolating Christ from that Law-Word cannot begin to understand properly the confession of John 1 that all things were made through the Word and that without Him nothing was made. One cannot grasp the meaning of Hebrews 1 that the Son of God sustains the universe by His Word of power. (Olthuis 1968:2)

It is notable how the three Gestalten of God's Word revelation reflect the work of the triune God (the ultimate source of the unity and diversity of created reality). Thus, such a non-reductionistic view of the Word of God is a consistent expression of the Trinitarian belief:

The Christian Church must recover the fullness and unity of the Word of God. The Word of God is one But since man's fall, that Word also comes to us in Inscripturated and Incarnate forms. When mankind fell in Adam, it no longer heard and understood the Word. To make it possible again for man to hear and do the Word, and thus live, God gave the Scriptures to enlighten man as to his place, his nature and his task. Finally, in the "last days He has spoken to us in His Son" (Hebrews 1:1). The Word in its unity and in its forms is the Power of God to life. That Word is "alive and active. It cuts more deeply than any two-edged sword" (Hebrews 4:12). (Olthuis 1968:2-3)

Thus, it is by recovering the fullness and unity of the Word of God that apologetics can be truly reformational and non-reductionistic, i.e. without downplaying one or another Gestalt:

Since the Word is one, it is as illegitimate to play off its forms against each other (e.g., 'Do you go by the Law-Word or the Scriptures?') as it is to deny that all the
forms are the Word of God. In order to obey the Word of God Written it is necessary
to confess that the Word is not exhausted in the Scriptures. The Word of God is every
word that proceeds from the mouth of God. And since the Lord is faithful and His
words trustworthy, the words of God are the one Word. (Olthuis 1968:3)

The full-fledged reformational account on God's Word revelation reflects the integral work of
redemption in Christ, through the Holy Spirit and to the glory of God. This view implies that
the whole of creation is being addressed and transformed (re-created) since the incarnation of
Christ and the coming of the kingdom of God:

…The mystery of the Scriptures and of Christ and at the same time our joy and
salvation is the fact that in the Scriptures and Christ the Word of God takes on the
form of creaturely reality which is subject to the Word. In this way the Scriptures and
Christ are completely human (creaturely) and at the same time completely the Word
(divine). In this way the Scriptures and Christ are "handles" by which a fallen creation
can again see and obey the Word. The Word became flesh; it was Inscripturated and
Incarnate for our salvation. (Olthuis 1968:3)

It is crucial for a Neo-Calvinistic method of apologetics to be faithful to its Trinitarian
confession, but nevertheless integrating reformational philosophy and its non-reductionistic
(modal-spherical) ontology, which is derived from the biblical meaning of the heart, doing
justice to the (structural) radical diversity and coherence of created reality:

The Word of God or Law-Word is in its unity a coherent diversity. Many words of the
Lord, many "let there be's" make up the one Word. And man is to live by every word
which proceeds from the mouth of God, not only by the word for bread. The Word in
its diversity as law-order structures, directs and upholds creation. (Olthuis 1968:3)

Thus, Olthuis’ expositions are plainly in line with Stoker’s positive criticism and
philosophical supplement to Van Til’s apologetics. Van Til's stress on the ultimate meaning
moments and reformational philosophy's stress on cosmically specific and analytical meaning
moments are both to be considered and integrated within the Trinitarian framework
(covenantal in the response of God's people):

...Of interest is to note that you – as an apologist – primarily stress the ultimate
meaning moment of anything in our created universe, whereas its cosmically specific
or analytical meaning moment needs a stress too (of course presupposing its ultimate
meaning moment), which you allow for, but do not especially elaborate. Here again I
touch upon my special problem... (Stoker 1971:46)

By surrendering to God's Word (in the unity of its Gestalten), the reformational apologist
conceives the whole of created reality (including human existence) in accordance to his
Trinitarian confession, his heart being guided by the biblical ground motive (the key of
knowledge - creation, fall and redemption), so that he can insightfully experience the meaning coherence and ultimate purposiveness of life and the destructive unbiblical ground motives (including the apostate scientific attitude and the pretended autonomy, which is based upon the surpression of the truth - Rom 1) may be unmasked by the revealed truth of God, so that contemporary man may be confronted with the saving power of the Gospel - encountering God in Christ, through the work of the Holy Spirit:

How one responds to the diverse words of the Lord in his theorizing depends in the final analysis on his heart response to the Word in its unity. Only when one surrenders wholeheartedly to the Word is he able (in principle) to see the various words in their proper perspective, interrelation and unity. Outside of Christ one elevates one dimension and distorts by pretending as if it is the Word in its unity. (This is not to deny that much valuable work can be done and is done by non-Christian scientists. After all, they too are working within the creation formed and bounded by the Word. But having rejected the key of knowledge they will never understand the meaning of reality even though they discover many things. Modern scientists outside of Christ are like the Pharisees who knew everything and yet nothing about the Scriptures.) (Olthuis 1968:5)

Thus, Olthuis expositions on the three Gestalten of God's Word helps relating the implications of the interaction between Stoker, Dooyeweerd and Van Til to the Trinitarian foundation and belief which is basic to all of them. Besides that, it helps conceiving some of the basic presuppositions of Stoker's constructive criticism of Van Til. (e.g. his stress on the irreducibility and correlation of the theology and the philosophy, the P-A and P-C Contexts, how transcendental and transcendent criticisms can complement each other, etc…). Implicitly, both Dooyeweerd's and Van Til's approaches don't exclude each other, but rather complement one another (viewed from a Trinitarian perspective, which guarantees the unity and diversity of reformed theology and reformational philosophy in Neo-Calvinistic apologetics):

One can only know the Word since the Fall in surrender to Jesus Christ. And since Christ is known via the Scriptures, and since the Word for creation is known in this central heart sense via the spectacles of the Scriptures, the Bible is indispensable for science. At the same time, since the Scriptures are a republication in confessional form of the Word and not a republication in a theoretic form, the Scriptures are in no sense scientific textbooks. Scientists, driven by the Scriptural motives, are mandated to investigate creation realities and thus trace out the structures-for those realities. (Olthuis 1968:5)

Thence, to become truly reformational in apologetics means to be integral not only in regards to the modal-spherical structures (revelation of creation - P-C Context) of created reality (knowledge of the cosmos), but also concerning the incarnated and the inspired Word of God (knowledge of God and self-knowledge - P-A Context). Consequently, Neo Calvinistic apologetics "defends" the Gospel of Christ, which is according to Holy Scripture and applied
by Holy Spirit in the opening up and regeneration of the hearts of men, in order to fulfill the eternal decree of the Father and redeem the cosmos as a whole. Neo-Calvinistic apologetics must uphold both, the ultimate dependence of the cosmos upon the triune God as well as the biblical (modal-spherical) ontology developed by reformational philosophy, doing justice to the absolute sovereignty of the triune God and the diverse facets and relations of the reality.

Olthuis’ expositions on the Word of God clearly distinguish the three Gestalten of God’s Word, which were alluded to in the previous treatment of the interaction between Van Til, Stoker and Dooyeweerd, showing how this understanding is based upon the work of the ontological Trinity. In that light Stoker’s suggested philosophical supplement appear to be clearly Trinitarian and implicitly integrating Van Til’s approach in it, in a way that also absorbs the importance of Dooyeweerd’s approach. As man is created in the image of the triune God, the central three types of human knowledge (knowledge of the cosmos/creation, self-knowledge and knowledge of God) are ultimately dependent upon the mentioned three Gestalten of God’s Word. (Stoker 1971:29)

As Dooyeweerd’s method is mainly concerned with the structures of the cosmos (cosmic knowledge - only indirectly referring to the absolute Origin and to Christ as the convergence point for the diversity of the cosmos), reformational apologetics can’t rely solely on his transcendental method, for the triune God remains "unknown", for he can only become known as he reveals himself in Christ, who is preached in Holy Scripture (the work of the Holy Spirit). Thence, Van Til is right that the apologist must add transcendent criticism (based on God’s inspired Word) to reformational transcendental criticism. Dooyeweerd’s approach to reality might help to conceive the irreducible and correlative structures of reality, but it doesn’t substitute the preaching of the Gospel, which is in Holy Scripture. For salvation comes through the Gospel (Rom 1,16):

“You seem to sense that those who, among the immanentistic philosophers, have followed you to this point, will refuse to take this jump with you. They will gladly accept the idea of the indispensability of belief in an origin, but they will not believe that this Origin must be the Creator-Redeemer-God of the Bible. To them the absolute origin must be an apeiron, an indefinite, a featureless source of power. It must not, they are sure, it cannot be the God of Paul, of Luther, of Calvin (Van Til 1971: 113)

Nevertheless, the Trinitarian framework which shows up to be indispensable for reformational apologetics and is plainly in line with Dooyeweerd’s philosophical ontology and with Stoker’s constructive criticism of Van Til’s approach. At the same time it helps overcoming the controversy between Van Til and Dooyeweerd (at least in apologetics), reinforced by Olthuis’ elucidating remarks on the Word of God, in such a manner that also underlies the importance of Dooyeweerd’s stress on the central spheres of the ego and on the true biblical understanding of how (pre-theoretically) the Holy Scripture, being of supratemporal Origin, addresses the heart of men:
God’s self-revelation in Holy Scripture as Creator and redeemer concerns the central religious relation of man to his absolute Origin. Its true meaning is therefore to be understood by man only if his heart has been opened up to it through the moving power of the Holy Ghost. (Dooyeweerd 1971:86)

This biblical understanding of the central spheres of the ego, which is basic for the understanding of the transcendental critique of theoretical thought, is of crucial relevance for reformational apologetics, unmasking religious deifications of reason in its arrogant attempts to criticize Holy Scripture. The next sections will build on the foundations of a Trinitarian apologetics, further exploring the possibility of combining reformational philosophy and reformed theology, being faithful to the triune God and his integral Word revelation.

Thus, Olthuis elucidating expositions on the three Gestalten of God's Word suffice in conceiving the implications and consequences of the interaction between Dooyeweerd, Stoker and Van Til within a Trinitarian foundation. It also helps to conceive the correlation between reformational philosophy and reformed theology from a Neocalvinistic perspective, thereby reconciling Dooyeweerd and Van Til in terms of apologetics. This would indeed represent a considerable advancement of apologetics on Neocalvinistic grounds.

2.5 Provisional consequences for apologetics

Apologetics can legitimately combine reformational philosophy and reformed theology. Stoker's philosophical complement shows that it is possible due to the interconnection between ultimate meaning moments (P-A) and specific meaning moments (P-C), i.e. doing justice to the radical diversity and coherence of created reality as well as to the Self-revelation of the triune God, who clearly reveals his plan through his Word (avoiding the reduction of the whole of reality to the ultimate P-A context). Thus, Stoker’s supplement provides a way, by which reformational apologetics can become truly integral, fully acknowledging the three fundamental forms of knowledge (God, Self and World) and the unity of the integral Word-revelation of God (Word of creation, incarnated Word and inspired Word of God).

Nevertheless it must be remarked that Van Til’s criticism of Dooyeweerd entails confusions concerning the delimitation of the field of apologetics as well as in respect to the relation between theology and philosophy, therefore Stoker’s supplement helps to do justice, both to Van Til’s focus on the P-A as well as to the philosophical focus upon the P-C context.

Dooyeweerd’s criticism, although relevant and profound, overemphasizes sphere individuality at cost of sphere universality, creating the impression that reformational philosophy is irreconcilable with Van Til’s apologetics. He mainly stresses the radical difference between theology and philosophy, neglecting their coherence in apologetics. Although his philosophical approach is legitimate, as also defended by Stoker, Dooyeweerd’s reactions to Van Til’s theological criticism give less attention to the nature of apologetics as well as to God’s Self-revelation as Trinity, the transcendent root of the Christian faith which ultimately determines the reformational framework, regardless if
philosophy, theology or whatsoever scientific domain is concerned. Thence, the next section of this thesis will deal with the evolving method of apologetics, which is founded in the Trinitarian (covenantal) transcendent root of human existence and also encompasses the biblical ontology and its non-reductionistic approach to reality, willing to respect the radical diversity and coherence of the law spheres of creation, in order to address the totality of the horizon of human experience, opening up ways for the preaching of Gospel of Christ, for the glory of God.

But how does Van Til “rationalistic” terminology affect his method of apologetics? Viewed through Stoker’s positive treatment of Van Til, the missing distinction between conceptual knowledge, central religious knowledge and knowledge of God in Van Til’s work, consequently maintains the analytical aspect as the central-reference point for understanding reality, thus the radical diversity of created reality remains “inaccessible data”, which is referred by Stoker as the P-C context. Thence, although he conveys biblical meaning to his “Calvinist metaphysics”, the scholastic Nature-Grace scheme is preserved, “possibly” leading to a depreciation of the revelation of creation, due to the implicit dualistic prejudice of opposing “inferior” nature over against “supernatural” grace, conceived as only accessible in the light of Scripture, which is understood as the only trustworthy source of knowledge. Dooyeweerd’s criticism of Van Til is therefore well taken concerning his philosophical reliance upon the revelation of creation, unwilling to be reigned by “supernatural” theology in the development of his transcendental method. This doesn’t mean that the Christian philosopher shouldn’t listen to the inspired Word of God, but rather that the task of Philosophy is not the same than that of Theology, as Stoker defines:

*Philosophy* is the science of the totality as well as of the coherence of the radical diversity of the cosmos (or our created universe). *Theology* is the science of the revelation of God in his Word and in creation (or “nature”) concerning himself and his relation to all “things”. (Stoker 1971: 38-39)

Biblical Theology also implies human initiative and therefore it is not *absolute*, but that it also depends upon the supra-theoretical direction of the heart of the theologian towards the triune God, the absolute Origin, in order to perform its task biblically. God’s Self-revelation in Holy Scripture must be understood in relation to the centrality of the human heart in order to avoid the “scholastic” prejudice which identifies “rationality” theoretically abstracted from Holy Scripture with “reality”. Stoker agrees that without the (transcendent) P-A context stressed by Van Til, the (transcendental) P-C context becomes meaningless in an ultimate sense. (Stoker 1971:64) Even though he reinforces the need of an integral appreciation of the Word-revelation, for the P-C context can’t be directly derived from Scripture. The attempt to proceed in that way would have to entail “scholastic” theo-ontological speculation, which cannot lead to a biblical view, but rather ends up in an absolutization of the human subject. (Stoker 1971:60-62)

Thus, Van Til’s “Calvinist metaphysics” should be replaced by a reformational ontology in order to do integrate Stoker’s philosophical supplement, indirectly also doing justice to
Dooyeweerd’s transcendental approach. In this way, reformational apologetics can still maintain the Trinitarian covenantal essence of Van Til’s approach and its stress upon the ultimate dependence of man’s knowledge and experience upon the triune God, integrating the transcendental critique as a fundamental method for apologetics, as Dooyeweerd expected it could become (Dooyeweerd 1971:74).

Stoker’s philosophical supplement provides a way of combining reformational modal-spherical philosophy with Trinitarian covenantal theology as the foundation for a truly reformational method of apologetics:

... Both methods of criticism, the transcendent and the transcendental, are necessary and complement one another. But Dooyeweerd’s application of the transcendental method of human thought is primarily philosophic and your application of the method of transcendent criticism is, on account of your apologetic approach, primarily theological. (Stoker 1971:36)

Instead of always starting with a transcendental critique, exposing ultimate presuppositions of opponents by means of transcendental critique and being transcendent in the critique of uncovered ultimate presuppositions (Stoker 1971:35), the reformational apologetic method would dynamically consider the interplay of ultimate meaning moments (transcendent) and specific meaning moments (transcendental), being able to emphatically capture the multiplicity of motives and the diversity of struggles involved in the existential confrontation between the Christian and the Non-Christian, acknowledging the “unique” moment in which the interaction occurs as well as the integral Self-revelation of the Triune God, calling sinners to repent and to believe in Christ, who came into the World to redeem the root of men’s existence by the preaching of the Gospel, through the Holy Spirit and to the glory of God.

3. Towards a Neocalvinistic apologetics

After dealing with the reformational criticisms of Van Til’s apologetics in the last chapters, based upon a “perennial reformational reading” of Stoker’s, Dooyeweerd’s and Van Til’s expositions, a Trinitarian and modal-spherical methodology of apologetics naturally evolved, flowing from the structural interconnections between Trinitarian, covenantal theology and reformational philosophy. Coherently building upon the broader Neocalvinistic tradition and taking discussed insights into account, the Self-revelation of the Triune God as the transcendent root of creation appeared to be acknowledged as foundational for a reformational method of apologetics, just like the non-reductionist modal-spherical ontology developed by reformational philosophy should function as the philosophical supplement suggested by Stoker, which indirectly also absorbs Dooyeweerd’s philosophical

17 The term „Neocalvinistic apologetics” is used just like “reformational apologetics”, as a synonymous to Trinitarian modal-spherical apologetics.
objections to Van Til. Thus, Van Til’s Trinitarian, *transcendent* essence is maintained in the method of apologetics, nevertheless integrating reformational philosophy’s approach to the radical diversity and coherence of created reality.

This attempt can be seen as in line with Van Til’s intention, for he agreed with Stoker’s criticisms and suggestion of a philosophical supplement to his approach, even though he didn’t see it as he task to develop it further. (Van Til 1971:70-71). Therefore the task remained undone to a great extent, unfortunately even until these days (more than 40 years later).

### 3.1. The ontological Trinity as transcendent root of created reality

After acknowledging that the whole of created reality (including men) is ultimately dependent upon the Triune God, a closer treatment of the subject is required in order to coherently set up the relation between the *transcendent* root and the *transcendental* structures of created reality, which is of fundamental significance for reformational apologetics as the evolving Trinitarian modal-spherical method. The doctrine of the ontological Trinity is to be seen as a limiting idea, through which one can conceive the *radical unity* of the diversity of created reality. In “*The Trinitarian Alternative to the Scholastic Dilemma*”, Jeremy Ive delivers the *insights* which basically integrate Van Til’s Trinitarian perspective into the reformational framework, answering to the “*how*” to conceive the *transcendent root* of created diversity in Trinitarian and reformational terms. This might be called the “*first step*”. Consequently, the “*second step*” will deal with the “*how*” to conceive the *radical diversity* of coherent reality within the Trinitarian framework.

Dooyeweerd’s and Stoker’s criticisms on Van Til showed scholastic tendencies concerning his approach to created reality, uncovering the need but also providing a way of how to renew Van Til’s ontology by means of the non-reductionistic reformational ontology, which is derived from the central meaning of the heart. Nevertheless, in dealing with the “*insufficiency*” of Dooyeweerd’s transcendental method for apologetics, (for Dooyeweerd’s approach is not intended to be theological, but philosophical) Van Til, being faithful to the covenantal basis of God’s Self-revelation as Trinity, advanced the biblical notion that the entire cosmos (including man) is entirely dependent upon the Triune God. The Trinity is the sole basis for unity and diversity of the cosmos; therefore also the *transcendent* root of reformational philosophy and covenantal theology, the basis for Trinitarian apologetics:

Van Til develops Kuyper’s insights, arguing that the Trinity is the sole basis for understanding the unity and plurality of the world. He stresses that relationality is only possible and intelligible in the light of the unity and diversity of the Trinity: Thus, according to Ive, Van Til advanced the biblical understanding that individuality and universality are grounded in the Trinity:
In the Trinity, unity and diversity are equally ultimate. It is only through Christ, and illuminated by the Holy Spirit that relations are possible, and indeed knowable\(^\text{18}\). (Ive 2011:5)

This reflects the biblical ontology of the heart in its stress that law and subject are irreducible and correlated to one another, meaning that any attempt to define the subject and object in relation to one another involves the relation between the ultimate condition for their intelligibility (i.e. the subject- and law- side) and their particularity. In other words, Ive’s interpretation of Van Til reinforces the previously stated, that the cosmos is ultimately dependent upon the triune God.

It is in that sense that Van Til’s criticism of Dooyeweerd must be understood, i.e. that Dooyeweerd’s *transcendental* method presupposes the Holy Trinity as *transcendent* root: Despite Van Til’s “reductionistic ontology”, his Trinitarian *insights* capture what ultimately unifies reformational philosophy and reformed theology in terms of apologetics and its task of confronting the world with the Self-revelation of God through the Gospel of Christ.

The triune God himself, is by means of his own constitution the the ground for unity and diversity of created reality. According to Ive, Van Til argues that there are no eternal universals which exist alongside the triune God. Therefore, it is possible to conceive the Trinity as the ultimate ground for the cosmos (this implies that reformed theology and reformational philosophy are also to be seen as dependent upon the triune God):

> God as Trinity is unity in diversity. God does not need to create the world in order to express his diversity. He exists prior to, and apart from, creation in the mutual and complete relationships between the eternal Persons\(^\text{19}\). (Ive 2011:6)

The Holy Trinity also provides the basis for an integral understanding of God’s Word-revelation (Word of creation, incarnated Word and inspired Word of God) which encompasses the diverse and coherent modal-spherical relations of the created order and His covenantal relationship with mankind. Thus, any relationship of created reality can only be understood in an ultimate sense in the light of the Trinity:

> The original Adamic consciousness showed a full congruence between the covenantal relationship with God and the world, and the understanding and living out of

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\(^\text{18}\) *Van Til, ‘An Introduction to Systematic Theology (1949D)’: Ch. 3, B.*

\(^\text{19}\) *Ive thereby remarks: Van Til, ‘Christianity and Barthianism (1962 H)’10. 2: ‘The Reformation View of Christ’ where he draws on Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*. That the Christian faith describes God as ‘Father’, ‘Son’ and ‘Holy Spirit’, in other words using figures of speech derived from creation (‘father’, ‘son’, ‘wind’ or ‘breath’), does not mean that these relationships come into being after the act of creation. Rather, these created forms of expression are the means by which God authoritatively tells us how we are to speak of him.*
relationships, and their delineation in terms of subject-subject or subject object\textsuperscript{20}. (Ive 2011:6)

In terms of the Trinitarian unity in diversity it becomes clear that only an integral understanding of the threefold Word-revelation of God properly reflects the work of the Holy Trinity and the dependence of created reality upon God’s Self-revelation. Ive points out that such a Trinitarian worldview is based upon a biblical presuppositionalism, which is found in God’s revelation itself and is therefore not to be confused with speculative extrapolations:

> The world, rather, is where we see expressed the free and sovereign relationships of the Persons one with another. This last is a presuppositional belief made on the basis of Scriptural revelation, not something that can be extrapolated from one’s experience of the world. (Ive 2011:6)

Not recognizing the ultimate dependence of the cosmos upon the triune God, leads to an unbiblical view, unable to consistently convey the Christian message. Ive shows how the biblical vision stands and falls with a consistent Trinitarian belief of God:

> ...if one’s conception of the creator is a Unitarian one, one is forced to conceive of God either in continuity or discontinuity with the world: either the world is an extension of God’s being, or God is entirely separate from the world\textsuperscript{21}. (Ive 2011:9)

At this point, Dooyeweerd’s rejection of transcedent critique in his transcedental critique appears to be based upon his modal-spherical considerations concerning the delimitation of the fields of philosophy and theology. One can already question if he did justice to the ultimate dependence of the cosmos upon the Trinity. While Dooyeweerd’s distinction between theology and philosophy in scientific terms, is to be seen as a consequence derived from the biblical ontology of the heart and the different law sphere of creation, his rejection of transcedent critique doesn’t do justice to the transcendent vision implied in the self-revelation of the triune God, who reveals himself to be the transcendent root of created reality. On the other hand, Ive’s interpretation of Van Til converges with Stoker’s, in the sense that the difference between Van Til and Dooyeweerd are methodological at the core. Therefore, Ive indirectly shows how the Trinitarian vision can include both, Van Til’s theological and Dooyeweerd’s philosophical method, for Dooyeweerd himself allows the Trinity as a constitutive element of his reformational philosophy:

> By his mention of Son and Spirit, Dooyeweerd clearly indicates that it is to the Triune God of scripture, not to an unknown deity, that we are called to place one’s ultimate religious belief. (Ive 2011:10-11)

\textsuperscript{20} Van Til, ‘An Introduction to Systematic Theology (1949D)’: Ch. 3, B.

\textsuperscript{21} Ive refers to: 39 Vollenhoven, ‘Realisme en nominalisme (38v)’: 74; Clouser, Myth; Shults, Reforming the Doctrine: 132. Shults refers to Clayton and Peacocke, ed., In Whom We Live and Move and Have Our Being: Panentheist Reflections on God’s Presence in a Scientific World but also notes the ambiguity in the use of the term ‘panentheism’
Although there is the tendency to apply Holy Scripture in a rationalistic fashion, without reforming ontology according to the biblical meaning of the heart, nevertheless the unity of the threefold Word-revelation require that God and the cosmos can only be ultimately understood in terms his Self-revelation as Trinity and consequently of the covenantal constitution of the world, ultimately rooted in the inner-triune relations. This means, from a Trinitarian perspective, that the character of the world reflects the character of God. Accordingly, Jeremy Ive shows how a reformational (philosophical) understanding of individuality and relationality correlates the reformed covenantal (theological) understanding of the relationship between the triune God and the cosmos (including men):

The order of the world is the expression of the free covenantal love of the Persons of the Trinity for one another, which is then expressed in the sovereign engagement of all three Persons jointly in the world. In terms of this understanding, God is not in the first instance Creator, but a divine, self-contained community of love. (Ive 2011:7)

The Trinitarian vision stressed by Ive not only reinforces Stoker’s understanding of the P-A and P-C relations, but rather it deepens the biblical understanding concerning the work of the Persons of the Trinity in a perichoretic way. Each of the persons participates in each of the great acts: creation, redemption and transformation. While the Father leads in creation, it is in and through the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, while the Son is to the fore in redemption, through his incarnation ministry, death, resurrection and ascension, each of the other two Persons are intimately involved in that — the Father sending and the Spirit empowering. And while the Spirit is the direct agent of transformation, it is accoding to the 'measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ' to the praise and glory of the Father. Thus, such a Trinitarian vision appears to be the basic presupposition, both for reformed theology and reformational philosophy:

God is genuinely engaged in the world through the universal action of the Holy Spirit and the embodiment of the Son... The love between the three Persons of the Trinity and their joint love for the world is revealed as the basis for one’s belief in the original goodness of the world, and holds out to us the hope of redemption (Ive 2011:7)

Thence, in terms of reformational apologetics and its combination of reformational modal-spherical philosophy and reformed covenantal theology, the whole creation order (including all the aspects of the human horizon of experience) must be seen as reflecting the work of the Holy Trinity and the ultimate dependence of the entire cosmos upon the triune God. Ive stresses that this account of God as Trinity, which is central to Van Til, was inspired by the

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22 Ive develops this point further in another footnote: In terms of Dooyeweerdian/Vollenhovian modal analysis, love is ethically qualified. But the characterisation of the relations of the Trinity as loving involves all the modalities: the Persons proclaim divine status (pistical or faith modality), they give glory (aesthetic), they deal justly (juridical), effectively (economical), appropriately (social), truly (analytical), etc. with respect to one another. This is not to say that the Triune Persons are bound by laws, only that in their self-revelation, they set out a rich basis for the life of the world expressed in each of the modalities. (Ive 2011:7-8)
kyperian worldview. Just as Kuyper, Van Til sought to do justice to the philosophical implications of the Trinitarian belief. Christian philosophy should be Trinitarian and deeply rooted in the self-revelation and actions of God as creator and redeemer. Accordingly and reinforcing Stoker’s reconciliation of Van Til’s method with reformational philosophy, Jeremy Ive integrates those insights in combination with the non-reductive biblical ontology of heart, implicit in the three steps of Dooyeweerd’s transcendental critique. Thereby, he translates the transcendentals into Trinitarian terms, showing how created reality (including human existence) is rooted in the triune God:

...the irreducible plurality of the world and of society under the rule of Christ; the integrity of the individual subject before God; and the purposiveness of the world through the work of the Spirit (Ive 2011:8-9)

Such a Trinitarian account can lead to theo-ontological extrapolations, but nevertheless it is based upon God’s Self-revelation in Holy Scripture, as the only and distinctive way in which God wants be spoken of, distinguishing himself from idols:

When we speak of God as Trinity we are responding to God’s self-revelation supremely and definitively in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, and his incarnation, death, resurrection and ascension\(^{23}\). In revealing himself to us, God does not speak to us in anything other than a creation-bound way, but he uses that language sovereignty and definitively to tell us how we are to speak of him\(^{24}\). (Ive 2011:11)

As one can only speak of the true God in the way he revealed himself, it is meaningless for us to speak of a divine reality ‘beyond’ God’s Triune self-revelation. Ive’s Trinitarian vision is by no means scholastic, but rather thoroughly reformational, for it acknowledges that our theoretical knowledge of the Trinity is creation-bound. Nevertheless, by upholding the sovereignty of God’s self-revelation, our knowledge of God-in-himself is to be understood in the sense of a limiting idea (e.g. just as the transcendental ideas used by Dooyeweerd, which according to Ive, correlate to the work of the Trinity).

As a limiting idea, the doctrine of the Trinity presents us with an ‘as if’ in one’s discussion of God: it is not an attempt to speak of God as a metaphysical object beyond one’s senses. Rather, if, as Christians, we are to speak of God, it presents us with the way we are to speak of him to the exclusion of all other identifications of deity\(^{25}\) (Ive 2011:11-12)

Despite the risks of extrapolation and in the awareness that it is only the Holy Trinity which ultimately guarantees the unity and diversity of created reality, it becomes evident that; in order to be truly reformational, a method of apologetics must be covenantal and Trinitarian at its root, for its task involves not only the radical diversity and coherence of the modal spheres

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\(^{24}\) Ive refers to: Vollenhoven, ‘Hoofdlijnen der logica (48f)’: 82-83. For Van Til, we are always ‘thinking God’s thoughts after him’[Van Til, ‘A Survey of Christian Epistemology (1969 F)’: Ch. 5]

of created reality, but mainly the opening up of ways, so that the Gospel can be preached. In order to properly convey the Gospel message, reformational apologetics must be radically Trinitarian. To begin with God as creator and redeemer without taking his revealed triune identity into account, unavoidably leads to an inadequate account of creation and redemption. Thus, reformational apologetics must be “unapologetically” and consistently Trinitarian:

To talk about God as Trinity is no more or less creation-bound than talk about any other doctrine of God, or indeed than any other characterisation of God, be it in positive or negative terms. It does, however, provide us with a rich and fruitful way of understanding God’s relationship with the world, safeguarding both his transcendence of the world, and his engagement with it. (Ive 2011:12)

After looking at the doctrine of the Trinity as the limiting idea concerning what ultimately constitutes the cosmic reality, concentrating on the coherence of the diversity of created reality, ultimately depending upon the triune God, the question arises concerning the inverse side of the Sachverhalt, namely, how to conceive the radical diversity of coherent reality within the Trinitarian framework. Ive’s reference to the Trinity as “limiting idea” in a subtle way anticipates the next step in building up the Trinitarian modal-spherical method of apologetics, which combines Van Til’s covenantal Trinitarian method with reformational philosophy.

### 3.2. Transcendental ideas & reformational apologetics

After a brief survey of the four religious ground motives of western culture, used by Dooyeweerd to illustrate the necessity of a radical transcendental critique of philosophical thinking (Dooyeweerd 1960:36), he deals with the transcendental ideas, the presuppositions, which are foundational to any philosophy, also called the limiting concepts (Grenzbegriffe) of theoretical thought. Thus, apologetics must also deal with them, in order to bring in the distinctions missing in Van Til’s approach and answering to Dooyeweerd’s objections:

... I meant by transcendent criticism, the dogmatic manner of criticizing philosophical theories from a theological or from a different philosophical viewpoint without a critical distinction between theoretical propositions and the supra-theoretical presuppositions lying at their foundation... (Dooyeweerd 1971:75)

In order to accomplish this task within the Trinitarian framework, a comparison of Dooyeweerd’s usage of the transcendental ideas with Jeremy Ive’s Trinitarian interpretation of them will furnish the basic insights for the evolving Trinitarian, modal-spherical method of apologetics.

Regarding the limits and possibility of philosophical dialogue, Dooyeweerd states that the
central influence of the religious motives upon philosophical thought are mediated by a threefold transcendental basic idea, which is foundational of any philosophical reflection and which alone makes such reflection possible. Such a basic transcendental idea is related to three basic transcendental problems, containing three transcendental ideas:

it contains first a transcendental limiting idea of the whole of our temporal horizon of experience with its modal diversity of aspects, including a view of the mutual relation between these aspects; secondly, an idea of the central reference point of all synthetical acts of thought; and, in the third place, an idea of the Origin, whether or not it is called God, relating all that is relative to the absolute. (Dooyeweerd 1960:36-37)

Jeremy Ive gives a Trinitarian interpretation of the transcendental ideas. (1) The idea of totality is that there is a purposiveness to events which makes it possible to speak of them. One can’t deny the actual purposiveness of events, for even its denial implies that an intelligible account of it is possible. Thereby, even the denial confirms the purposiveness. More specifically, Ive relates the transcendental idea of totality which he circumscribes in terms of the purposiveness of events, to the work of the Holy Spirit. His role in the event of creation, in the work of the regeneration of human hearts and in the transformation of the universe. (Ive 2012:126)

The limiting idea of the totality of the human horizon of experience is correlated to the all-encompassing work of the Holy Spirit. Driven by the biblical ground motive, reformational philosophy irreducibly investigates the law-spheres of created reality, which are subjected to the transformational operation of the Holy Spirit, beginning in the root of human existence and extending itself to the regeneration of men’s culture and the entire cosmos. Therefore it is the Holy Spirit, who ultimately applies the Gospel of Christ to the hearts of men, liberating his world and life view from absolutizations and redeeming all the law-spheres, so that men can flourish by the grace of the Gospel and the Kingdom of God continues to come to men through the process of ongoing reformation (re-creation) and overcoming the Kingdom of darkness. Although the struggles remain until Christ’s second coming, it is granted to men to experience the purposiveness of all events in the light of the work of the Holy Spirit, opening up the hearts and redeeming men integrally, i.e. casting light upon all the spheres of life so that he can see and experience God’s work of recreation. Thus, the work of Holy Spirit is the transcendent source for men’s experiencing and grasping the transcendental diversity of the modal aspects of reality, calling and leading to the redemption of the whole of life. Thus, reformational philosophy gives a structural account of the work of the triune God.

Second, there is a basic order of the world in the way that the many different kinds of relation harmonise with one another. No one kind of relation can provide the basis for its own harmony with all the other kinds of relation. More specifically, from a Christian perspective, this transcendent Coherence is provided by the eternal Son of
the Father, through whom all things come into being and in whom they hold together. (Ive 2012:1)

Accordingly, the Son of God is the central reference point of all synthetical acts of thought, as he came into the world to identify himself with fallen men and to redeem the cosmos at its root (including men). That’s why Stoker pointed out that Dooyeweerd’s Christology, which states that Christ is, according to his human nature, the religious concentration-point of the meaning totality of the created cosmos, should be regarded as significant for a theological philosophy (Stoker 1971:43). The biblical ontology of reformational philosophy entails in itself implicit expositions of the interconnections between its limiting concepts (Grenzbegriffe) and the ultimate source of the cosmos (including men) in the triune God. It is only by accepting Christ and his Gospel that the attempt of reformational philosophy becomes effective, for in an ultimate sense, human beings can only experience the richness and meaning coherence of created reality through regeneration. Nevertheless, in terms of the delimitation of the domain of philosophy, Dooyeweerd is justified in not going as far as Van Til, or else his approach would become theological, as rightly pointed out by Stoker (Stoker 1971:36). Thence, Van Til clearly went too far by stating that Dooyeweerd’s approach could only be reformational if it allowed transcedent critique (Van Til 1971:112). Dooyeweerd on the other hand, could have avoided such misunderstanding if he had more explicitly appealed to the Trinitarian interconnections between his approach and Van Til’s, as elucidated by Jeremy Ive, whose explanations are clear and convincingly, derived from Holy Scripture. Thus, according to Ive, the transcendental idea of Origin is the transcendent ground upon which all things depend. The triune God is the definitive Origin upon from which the whole of creation derives its being. More specifically, Ive affirms that it is the Father who is the Origin of creation, redemption and transformation through his decree:

As all things are ordained by the Father, and are redeemed through his love for the world in general and for humanity in particular, so all as his creatures are called to render him his praise (Ive 2012:1)

Viewed from a Trinitarian perspective, Van Til is justified by rejecting Dooyeweerd’s usage of “a Origin, whether or not it is called God”, for the reformational vision entails that every speech about a God that is not the triune God, who reveals himself to us in Christ, through the Holy Spirit is a vacua speculatio meteorica. Nevertheless, it is Dooyeweerd’s intention to respect the modal-spherical boundary of philosophy, so that he shouldn’t be charged of being unbiblical, for on the other hand he affirms that the biblical ground motive underlies his approach, implicitly reinforcing the Trinitarian foundation of his thought. Dooyeweerd’s

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27 Ebd.
28 Ebd.
29 In the light of Ive’s Trinitarian explanation of the transcendental ideas it also becomes clear, that the biblical ground motive of creation, fall and redemption, is correlated with the work of the Trinity, for just as the three-fold transcendental ideas, as limiting concepts of the human horizon of experience (subject- side), i.e. subjected to the ultimate source of their existence in the Triune God. Consequently, the question arises concerning the question of the ground idea of philosophy, which led to different answers and nuances of Calvinistic Philosophy.
expositions speak for itself, where he step-by-step shows the attitude of theoretical thought, that only the self transcends the temporal order of creation in its inherent inclination towards his absolute Origin. Although he develops his approach philosophically, it clearly reflects that every act of men is a response to the divine revelation of his Creator, who confronts him always and everywhere. Thus, every human attempt to give an account of the relations of his existence and the cosmos is a religious response, according to the either apostate or regenerated direction of his heart, in obedience or disobedience to God, his Creator. Again, in the light of Trinitarian belief, the theological and philosophical approaches should be treated in a unified fashion by the Trinitarian modal-spherical apologetics, for even though reformational philosophy basically deals with the structural investigation of the radically diverse and coherent Grenzfragen, covenantal theology deals with the Kernfragen of God’s Self-revelation as Trinity, in Christ, through the Holy Spirit and to the honor of God.

Seen in the light of Trinitarian belief, Dooyeweerd’s transcendental critique can be fruitfully read and integrated in Trinitarian apologetics. As suggested by Stoker, such a philosophical supplement helps apologetics to become truly transcendental (at all its steps), without giving up its transcendent critique, uncovering absolutizations and opening up the way for the preaching of the Gospel of Christ, calling men to repent and believe, so that he begins to see that the God that confronts him everywhere is the triune God.

The direction of the heart determines how the transcendental ideas are dealt with:

Though such a transcendental basic idea is a general and necessary condition of philosophical thought, the positive content given to it is dependent upon the central basic motive which rules the thinking ego. (Dooyeweerd 1960:37)

Not integrally bowing to the Trinity as the ultimate foundation for the cosmos (including man), worldviews emerge out of the apostate direction of unbiblical ground motives, leading to self-destructive dialectical tensions as a result of absolutizations of the relative:

The radical biblical basic motive unmasks any absolutization of the relative, and may free philosophical thought from dogmatic prejudices which impede an integral view of the real structures of human experience. (Dooyeweerd 1960:37)

As the creation order is indissoluble, even when men transgress it, he can’t avoid it, but rather is constantly confronted with it. Thence, as the transcendental basic problems are part of the inner structure of theoretical thought, they have always to be accounted for:

(Stoker’s Creation Idea, Dooyeweerd’s law-idea and Bavinck’s (and Van Til’s) revelation Idea). The Trinitarian interconnections uncovered by Ive implicitly disclosures the insight that also the different nuances of Calvinistic philosophy is based upon the focus on one of the threefold Idea, although in the light of Trinitarian belief, they should be seen as interdependent. The Trinity as the ultimate source of the cosmos and Christian thinking also encompasses an integral understanding of the Word of God (Creation, Incarnated, Inspired), leading to the appreciation of the unity and diversity of its Gestalten. (More in a later section)
For the three transcendental basic problems of philosophical thought which it has formulated cannot be evaded by any philosopher who wishes, indeed, to think critically. The reason is that they originate in the inner nature of the theoretical attitude of thought itself, which is one and the same for every thinker. (Dooyeweerd 1960:39)

The usage of the transcendental ideas should be seen as part of the philosophical supplement suggested by Stoker, in order to become thoroughly transcendental in its philosophical perspective, maintaining its Trinitarian covenantal theological approach in a unified view of philosophy and theology for the discipline of apologetics, where the radical diversity and coherence of the cosmos is acknowledged to be ultimately dependent upon the Trinity as its transcendent root. Thus, the transcendental presuppositionalism of reformational philosophy, viewed from the Trinitarian perspective suggested by Ive, complements Van Til’s presuppositional apologetics, at the same time integrating Stoker’s philosophical supplement and Dooyeweerd’s transcendental method:

Those who participate in such a discussion should penetrate to each other’s supratheoretical presuppositions in order to be able to exercise a truly immanent criticism of each other’s philosophical views. (Dooyeweerd 1960:39)

Consequently, by integrating non-reductionist reformational ontology, Trinitarian apologetics becomes modal-spherical, i.e. approaching human existence out of a totality perspective in being truly critical and doing justice to the multi-aspectual horizon of human experience:

As a simul justus et peccator, the apologist should nevertheless be aware of the danger of identifying his own subjective rationality with reality. Even though Non-Christians don’t know the ultimate truth, which is only encountered by the opened heart which subjects to God’s Word-Revelation in Christ, through the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit, no man possess the monopoly of truth concerning the revelation of creation, but rather all men are equally confronted with it and called to responsibly act upon it. Thus, in engaging with Non-Christians in dialogue, the reformational apologist should not confuse ultimate truth with relative truths, but rather call non-Christians to responsibly listen to God’s Word-Revelation. Thus, reformational apologetics should make use of the transcendental method, which can be a fruitful avenue of entering into dialogue, in a constructive way which seeks to do justice to the multi-aspectual facets of the cosmos (including human existence). Thus, the transcendental method reinforces the fact, that both, the Christian and the Non-Christian, when involved in dialogue, must listen to the revelation of creation (the creation order):

We have emphatically established that every state of affairs which is founded in this structural temporal order is a transcendental datum for every philosophical theory, and that each philosophical total view of experience is to be tested by these data.

(Dooyeweerd 1960:41)
Thus, it is the task of the apologist to engage in *dialogue* with Non-Christians in such a way, that modal absolutizatations are unmasked and apostate men are confronted with God’s Word-Revelation and consequently with the only source of *liberating* truth and of Self-knowledge:

This truly absolute standard of truth is not to be found in man, but only in the Word of God, in its central sense, which uncovers the source of all absolutizatations and which alone can lead man to true knowledge of himself and of his absolute Origin. (Dooyeweerd 1960:41-42)

### 3.3. The central spheres of the ego

After dealing with the transcendental ideas as foundational for Trinitarian apologetics, it is elucidating to refer to them as *foundational supra-theoretical presuppositions* (Dooyeweerd 1971:75) of the ego, as they are internally related to the central relations of the ego.

As already mentioned in the first section of this thesis, the biblical ontology of Dooyeweerd’s transcendental critique cautiously considered the irreducible but yet diverse central relations of the ego, consequently applying the Creature-creature distinction in all its steps, clarifying the relations between theoretical knowledge (bound to time, to the order of creation, just like the other aspects of reality), true self-knowledge and knowledge of God. Recalling:

…true self-knowledge in its biblical sense, i.e. in its dependence upon true knowledge of God, cannot be itself of a conceptual character. The reason is that all conceptual knowledge in its analytical and inter-modal synthetical character presupposes the human ego as its central reference-point, which consequently must be of a supra-modal nature and is not capable of logical analysis. (Dooyeweerd 1971: 84-85)

This means at the first place, that a clear view of the central relations of the human ego denounces every absolutizatation of the temporal, uncovering the religious starting point of the ego, i.e. demonstrating that human life is religious at its core, for the driving force of a person’s ground motive rules and leads his whole life. Thus, the reformational transcendental critique opens up the possibility of liberation of the central spheres of the ego, in the confrontation of the integral biblical ground motive with self-destructive, apostate ground motives. The central spheres of the ego, presupposed in the expositions below are the following: (1) The self’s relation to the modal diversity of the temporal order (Dooyeweerd 1960: 21). (2) The self’s relation to others: intersubjectivity (Dooyeweerd 1960: 22). (3) The religious relation to the Origin of the self (Dooyeweerd 1960:23). 30

(1) The first central relation of the ego in Dooyeweerd’s transcendental critique is important to show that the concentric direction of the ego cannot be found within the temporal order,

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30 PS: Notice that the whole interaction between Dooyeweerd, Stoker and Van Til constantly allude to these central relations of the ego, for they are the fundamental relations of human consciousness.
but rather the ego has to transcend time in its strive after unity of meaning (the central reference point has to be all-embracing):

The mystery of the central human ego is that it is nothing in itself, i.e., viewed apart from the central relations wherein alone it presents itself. But the first of these relations, namely, that of the selfhood to the temporal horizon of our experience, cannot determine the inner character of the ego, except in a negative sense. The central unity of the selfhood is not to be found in the modal diversity of the temporal order. (Dooyeweerd 1960:21)

(2) The second central relation of the ego, although of central importance in human experience, in the process of becoming aware of oneself (man, as the image of God “encounters” God in facing other men, who are also made in the image of God), cannot serve as central reference point for the ego. Dooyeweerd states that experience and the interpersonal relation cannot be contrasted to one another:

For experience itself implies an interpersonal relationship between one ego and another. This relation belongs to the central sphere of our experiential horizon and eliminating it amounts to annihilating self-consciousness. My selfhood is nothing without that of yours, and that of our fellow-men. (Dooyeweerd 1960:22)

(3) Only the relation between the self and God can give the ego its concentric direction, for the ego needs a supra-temporal reference point that transcends the modal diversity of time, in order to attain unity and totality of meaning, which is necessary to relate to and to “responsibly” give an account of every entity and event he experiences in his way (relative and absolute, the cosmos, creatures, God31):

...there is a third central relation which points above the human selfhood to its divine Origin. This is the central religious relation between the human ego and God, in whose image man was created... it can only be this religious relation from which philosophical thought in its theoretical attitude can acquire the concentric direction upon our selfhood. (Dooyeweerd 1960:23)

Consequently, only by acknowledging the central religious sphere of human existence as the driving force for the other two central relations is it possible to liberate theoretical thought and to redeem “science” from absolutizations, which are self-destructive and impede from attaining meaning totality. This insight is central for a true reformational apologetics, for it unmasks the true state of affairs, that all self-reflection is driven by a religious ground motive and the absolutizing nature of apostate philosophy:

31 PS: More will be said when dealing with the transcendental ideas (limiting concepts, Grenzbegriffe)
Thus a philosophical self-reflection which is not directed upon the central religious relation will be obliged to seek the ego within the temporal horizon of our experience in order to avoid this nihilistic result. Thereby it abandons the critical attitude and devises an idol of the central ego by absolutizing one of the modal aspects of our temporal consciousness. (Dooyeweerd 1960:24)

The ego is subjected to a central law of religious concentration, i.e. man is radically religious. Although apostate thinking attempts to deny its religious presuppositions and that it is only through an absolute reference point (the idea of origin) that the coherence within the radical diversity of created reality can be grasped, nevertheless, the religious nature of the self can’t continues to manifest itself, because the ego is bound to the law of religious concentration:

But even in this apostate manifestation, the religious character of the selfhood as the point of concentration of human nature continues to reveal itself. Even in its absolutizing of the relative, the thinking and acting ego transcends its temporal horizon. It is subjected to a central law that we may call the religious concentration law of our consciousness, by which it is obliged to transcend itself in order to find the positive meaning of itself. (Dooyeweerd 1960-24-25)

Summing up the importance of Dooyeweerd’s usage of the central spheres of the ego in his transcendental critique, it is notable that it unmasks the self-destructive nature of the unbiblical ground motives, denouncing absolutizations of the temporal and opening up new possibilities of engagement in apologetics, i.e. so that Christian apologetics can positively engage with non-Christians, identifying with their different “peripheral” modal-spherical struggles as well as “central” life questions, aware that they always relate to the central spheres of the ego. Every encounter between Christians and Non-Christians can be an opportunity of integral liberation, for the whole of human life occurs Coram Deo. Thus, it is the task of the reformational apologist to identify with the whole of human existence and preach the Gospel of Christ. Encounters with Non-Christians are not only confrontations between the biblical and the non-biblical ground motives, but also to be seen as the encounter of two creatures, which are both made in the image of God, and thus share in the same existential horizon of experience, both being ultimately dependent upon the triune God. The Gospel must be preached so that men becomes truly aware of himself, and his destiny can be “found” in the midst of diverse motives of experience, being consciously confronted with the triune God and his plan of redemption in Christ, through the Holy Spirit.

Reformational apologetics identifies with the whole of man’s existence, biblically clarifying and delimiting the central relations of the ego, opening up the way for the preaching of the Gospel. Only by means of the opening up of the heart, can the Holy Scripture be understood. In it, man encounters God himself, who calls him to repent and to believe. God’s calling to

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32 The relevance of the reformational critique of theoretical thought is of tremendous importance in contemporary western culture and it’s absolutized scientific ideal. Besides uncovering the uncritical attitude of the later, it unmasks its religious presuppositions and denounces its unsustainable ideal of autonomy.
“perfection” (to be conformed to the image of Christ) is a task for man’s entire life. But without this opening up of the heart, men cannot understand Holy Scripture:

God’s self-revelation in Holy Scripture as Creator and redeemer concerns the central religious relation of man to his absolute Origin. Its true meaning is therefore to be understood by man only if his heart has been opened up to it through the moving power of the Holy Ghost. (Dooyeweerd 1971:86)

3.4. The Ground ideas of philosophy & apologetics

As already remarked above, the question concerning the ground idea of philosophy, which found different answers and gave rise to different nuances in Calvinistic circles, if seen from a Trinitarian perspective, for instance in the light of Ive’s Trinitarian expositions of the transcendental ideas, also appears to be intrinsically linked to the work of the Holy Trinity, which according to the Trinitarian reformational vision, is to be seen as the ultimate ground for the existence, unity and diversity of created reality. Man as being created in the image of God, reflects God’s character; notice for instance the central spheres of the ego as they are related to the transcendental ideas (basic presuppositions for any philosophy) or/and Stoker’s basic a prioris. Viewed from a unified view of reformational philosophy and reformed (covenantal) theology, the Triune God is the absolute Origin upon which the whole cosmos depends upon, therefore every cosmic relationship is conceivable within the Trinitarian framework. After seeing the triune God as the transcendent root of the cosmos, even Dooyeweerd’s transcendental approach to the Christian ground motive of creation, fall and redemption appear to be a reflection of the integral the work of restoration of the Trinity.

Stoker’s expositions on the different answers to the ground question of philosophy among Calvinistic circles are elucidating, showing how the “specific stress” of each of one of the nuances basically reflect the same threefold transcendental Idea. Even though Calvinistic philosophers usually chose one of the three main ideas as the ground idea of philosophy (Stoker; creation, Dooyeweerd, Vollenhoven; law Bavinck; revelation), in the light of the Trinitarian interpretation of transcendental structures, the three ideas appear to be mutually interdependent and ultimately reflecting the work of the Trinity, their transcendent root. In other words, in the light of Trinitarian belief, the different “ground ideas” of Calvinistic philosophy presuppose each other, while their meaning coherence is rooted in the work of the triune God. The Holy Trinity is viewed by a Neo-Calvinistic method of apologetics as the ultimate source of the cosmos and its most basic presupposition. This implies an integral understanding of God’s Word revelation (Creation, incarnated, inspired) and should lead to the appreciation and observation of the unity and diversity of its Gestalten. (see 2.5)
The revelation idea as answer to the ground-question about the cosmos as cosmos showed to be important for many reasons, for instance by distinguishing between different types of revelation, the relation between the knowability of the cosmos and the human ability to know the cosmos showed up to be dependent upon the unity of revealer, revelation and the receiver of revelation. Consequently, the mystery of creation and all its formations can only be “unlocked” by revelation. In-self-sufficient creatures ultimately depend on God’s revelation:

It is a problem regarding i. the knowability of the cosmos; ii. the ability of the human being to know the cosmos; and iii. the relationship between both. This is because all revelation (including in this fourth form) presupposes someone who reveals, something that is being revealed, and somebody to whom is being revealed. Can the cosmos, in its fundamental nature and meaning, be regarded as revelation? We can hardly improve on H. Bavinck’s answer to this question 85a: “The whole world is itself imbedded in revelation; revelation is the presupposition, the foundation, the secret of the entire creation and all its formations. The deeper science digs, the better it observes revelation spread like a foundation under every creature. In every moment of time, the pulse of eternity can be felt beating; each point in space is filled with God’s omnipresence; the transitory is being carried by the In-transitory and all becoming is rooted in being. (Stoker 1960:45)

The quest of the ground idea of philosophy was approached by Calvinistic philosophers with the intention of attaining an all-encompassing scope, capable of doing justice to the specific structures of the divine creation order and to the diverse cosmic relationships, as well as the relations between God, man and cosmos. Three main answers were given:

…when asking what the cosmos is (in other words, what its fundamental nature and meaning could be), the philosopher is confronted with the question which of all these te-al a prioris of the cosmos is the most encompassing for his / her philosophical task. An examination of the nuances of Calvinistic Philosophy reveals in my opinion only three answers to the principal key question, namely those of the Philosophies of the Revelation Idea, the Cosmonomic Idea and of the Creation Idea… (Stoker 1960:44)

As it was always the reformational conviction that the cosmos (including man) is ultimately dependent upon the triune God, Calvinistic philosophers always sought to listen to God’s ultimate Self-revelation in Christ through Holy Scripture. For that reason the Revelation Idea emerged as the first main answer, as a consistent outcome of the Calvinistic concern of being faithful towards God’s sovereignty and his ultimate Self-revelation. The distinctions made between different types of revelation became crucial in order to understand human knowledge as dependent upon his religious’ heart commitment, distinguishing theoretical from pre-theoretical knowledge and conforming to the biblical ontology in theory and life praxis. Stoker points out to four types of revelation, but especially to the fourth one and its important contribution for a Calvinistic epistemology. Emerging from the intersection
between philosophy and theology, it’s an all-encompassing understanding of God’s relation to the cosmos and it allowed Christian philosophy to be developed by starting with the ultimate dependence of the cosmos upon the triune God (later on going beyond the Revelation Idea):

H. Bavinck and V. Hepp enable us to distinguish between four revelation ideas... d. God’s revelation of the cosmos — matter, plant, animal and human being — to human beings. This issue might have a theological side. But – when looked at closely – it is a philosophical issue. For all creatures, the particular revelation that comes to us in the person of Christ is founded on these very same presuppositions.” And elsewhere: “In the selfconscious God introduced the human being, the world and Himself to the human being... This revelation is therefore not of the greatest importance only to religion, but also to Philosophy, especially the Theory of Knowledge. (Stoker 1970:44-45)

That’s why Stoker views the revelation idea as central for a Calvinistic epistemology, for it is through the confrontation with God’s Word revelation (and seeing God in the face of the other – man being made in the image of God) that man becomes ultimately self-conscious. By facing God’s revelation, man’s heart being religiously inclined towards his absolute Origin, makes him become aware of life’s meaning and its ultimate purposiveness. Thence, the philosopher’s encounter with God’s Word revelation precedes his adherence to a philosophical system. Therefore Stoker views creation as basic for philosophy, for an integral understanding of God’s Word revelation leads to the recognition of creation as revelation:

The revelation idea is in my opinion the principal key to understanding our knowledge of the cosmos (including our knowledge of ourselves; and also our knowledge of God) but not of the cosmos as cosmos in its creaturely dependent nature and meaning. In my opinion the cosmos as cosmos is a creation (of God), and therefore it is the creation idea that supplies Philosophy with the principal key to the understanding of the cosmos. A deeper or higher vision of creation cannot be philosophical in nature anymore. (Stoker 1971:45)

Although every discipline’s foundation demands a philosophical articulation, every philosophy presupposes a responsive understanding of God’s Word revelation. That’s why Stoker sees that philosophy must rely upon theology’s contribution regarding the ground question of man’s existence, which is ultimately dependent upon the Self-revelation of the triune God (also in Holy Scripture – the Gegenstand of Theology). Without entering into details regarding philosophy of science and the delimitation of the realms of philosophy and theology, one can nevertheless affirm on a perennial reformational basis, that an account of God’s Word revelation precedes philosophy, therefore by acknowledging God’s self-revelation (creation, in Christ and in Scripture – as the work of the Spirit) as data, apologetics usage of reformational philosophy and the transcendental approach presupposes the ultimate dependence of the cosmos upon the triune God. Thence, apologetics reaffirms Stoker’s
concern regarding the interplay of theology and philosophy as necessary for a deeper understanding of the cosmos (including man) as it is related to God’s Word revelation:

Of course, Theology can offer a deeper vision of creation when it posits, for instance, that creation is Self-revelation of God to Himself through his works. But Philosophy being Philosophy cannot reach that far. The cosmos as cosmos (and with that also its fundamental nature and meaning) is a creation (of God). We place “of God” in parentheses because the philosopher has to presuppose and accept that God is the Creator of the cosmos but that the action of creating (and recreating) in my opinion falls outside the ambit of Philosophy, and is an issue for Theology. (Stoker 1971:45)

Therefore, as man is religiously inclined towards his absolute Origin (God), constantly standing before him and facing the cosmos as the revelation of creation, in an ultimate sense, the ideas of creation and of revelation presuppose each other. As self-knowledge and knowledge of God are interdependent, so also the ideas of revelation and of creation, for even though the central spheres of the ego are mutually irreducible, they are coherently correlated to one another. Viewed from a Trinitarian perspective, the revelation idea relates to the ultimate purposiveness of the cosmos, the creation idea to God as the absolute origin of the cosmos and the law idea to the meaning coherence of temporal reality, which is sustained and restored (recreated) through the work of Christ. Consequently, the three main answers of Calvinistic philosophy regarding the ground question of philosophy are ultimately rooted in the triune God:

This created cosmos (as it exists) is a ‘being’, a ‘reality’ with a self-stance (or own presence), an ‘earthly’ created universe that embraces (if you will: encompasses) revelation as well as law. This is why we firstly encounter here in the cosmos, in creation, the Word of God which we read daily (the given revelation of God of Himself and his relationship with all things). And also, in a special sense, the Creation (or ‘nature’) revelation of God, and with it also his presence, his omnipresence and immanence, are with us. (Stoker 1970:46)

Creation functions according to God’s law order, and man as created in the image of God, is equipped with the ability to know, meeting God’s revelation of creation everywhere. Here again it seems clear that the three ideas hold together (seen from a Trinitarian perspective):

The Word and Creation Revelation of God is here with us as fanerosis (content of revelation), in a creaturely manner in creation or created cosmos. It is only in this particular sense that created cosmos (as field of philosophical inquiry) speaks of revelation. In the second place, we are aware of a revelation (from God) to human beings of the cosmos, based on the knowability of the cosmos and the ability of human beings to know, which both find their origins in God. (We shall return to this point later.) And this knowability of the cosmos as well as the ability of the human being to know is totally creaturely — cosmic — in nature. (Stoker 1970:47-48)
As a consequence of a Trinitarian and integral understanding of God’s Word revelation, reformational apologetics acknowledges the work of Christ (the inauguration of his kingdom and the beginning of new creation) as a reality which can’t be denied, but rather constitutes the basis for inter-subjectivity and human experience in the world (self-knowledge and its dependence upon knowledge of God – as well as the central relation of the ego towards other egos and the ego’s relation towards the cosmos), so that by the preaching of Christ as the only way of reconciliation between God and man, the restoration of fallen creation takes part (new creation already not yet) through the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of man, which extends to the whole of human life (including cultural, for as Christ redeems the whole man, the restoration include the three central as well as all the peripherical modal-spherical relations of the ego). Further, acknowledging Christ’s kingdom as a reality also implies the Anti-Christ’s kingdom (the central religious driving force behind apostate ground motives), for worldviews which deny the redemptive work of Christ are rooted in the work of the Anti-Christ (1 Joh 2:19-22), the lie, which inspire apostate men to reject the work of Christ and to suppress the truth in unrighteousness (Rom 1):

The creation idea, i.e. created cosmos (as ‘earthly created universe’), lapsed into sin and evil. We are aware of this in everything around us, but – according to God’s Word – the cosmos has in principle been redeemed and recreated through the reconciliatory death of Jesus Christ, in other words, it is impossible to remove the fruit and action of redemption and recreation out of this cosmos. This is why — and this is philosophically momentous — there rages (according to Augustine) in this very cosmos of ours a battle between the Realm of Light and the Realm of Darkness; and for this battle — insofar as it is cosmic in nature (note how the battle at times can rage for instance in a person’s heart) — the philosopher should take cognisance of it. (Stoker 1970:48)

As the anthropocentric account of the philosophy of the law idea (starting from human’s horizon of experience) considers the fall into sin and its redemption through Christ (Christocentric view of the cosmos – anthropocentric cosmology), it also presupposes that creation preceded the law. Consequently, the apostate or Christian attitudes towards God’s redemptive work in Christ through the Holy Spirit indicate two distinct responses to the integral Self-revelation of the triune God, the absolute origin, towards which man religious impulse is inclined, even though the faith function is misdirected if the heart is controlled by an apostate ground motive. Therefore, reformational apologetics must uphold that all three different nuances of Calvinistic philosophy (Revelation Idea, Creation Idea and Law Idea) are to be seen as ultimate dependent upon the work of the Triune God and that the Christian ground motive of creation, fall and redemption is the subjective reflection of the work of the triune God, i.e. the work of the Holy Trinity (viewed from the perspective of the subjective human horizon of experience). Even though reformational philosophers and theologians often times differ in their account concerning the ground idea of philosophy, this shouldn’t be the case for reformational apologetics, for it seeks to combine both disciplines in an unified
fashion, and beyond (Christian) theology, it seeks to confront the “natural” man with the Gospel of Christ (the apologist’s tasks always implies to be a witness of the saving power of the Gospel). Stoker’s account of the creation idea, helps seeing the other mentioned ground ideas within a Trinitarian framework (reflecting the Christian ground motive). Thus, reformational apologetics holds to the Trinity as the most encompassing Christian idea:

We contend that the creation idea can offer us the encompassing unity of the philosophical field of inquiry, including revelation and law insofar as we can discover it in the cosmos as products of the creative work of God. If someone argues that there can be only one solution, namely that an ordained plurality of principles, each possessing independent meaning (my emphasis), should form the foundation of Philosophy, we do not at all deny the plurality of principles. The philosopher should presuppose that God governs, ordains, redeems, recreates, finalises, and so on. The philosopher is always concerned about this cosmos — philosophy’s particular field of investigation or inquiry — and we suppose this cosmos as creation of God (in its radical difference from God and in its fundamental dependence on God) to be a unity of its own thereness, to possess a (God-given) fundamental nature and meaning. In other words, the creation idea provides our practice of Philosophy also with revelation as outlined, as well as the law, and therefore — in philosophical perspective — with the most encompassing stipulation of this cosmos as cosmos, in other words, of philosophy’s actual field of inquiry. (Stoker 1970:48)

It is clear then, that from a Trinitarian and integral perspective, as Stoker says, the revelation idea mainly relates to self-knowledge and knowledge of God, but it doesn’t provide insight into the modal structures of created reality. Therefore, as Stoker says, the importance of the revelation idea is the principal key for Epistemology and Gnoseology:

We now return to the Philosophy of the Revelation Idea. According to this approach, revelation is the actual mystery of the cosmos, the principal key that can unlock the cosmos as cosmos. Revelation exposes something to somebody by communicating with it, or put differently, somebody receives a revelatory communication from somebody else. Revelation is therefore, we contend, the principal key for a Calvinistic Theory of Knowledge (or Gnoseology), and should be presupposed by a Calvinistic Theory of Knowing (or Epistemology). But knowledge (we are referring to human knowledge) is part of the cosmos, and is connected and intertwined with the rest of the cosmos, in the same way that for instance, molecular processes, plant growth and animal instinct form part of the cosmos, and are connected and intertwined with the rest of the cosmos. We can see from this that creation in this sense includes revelation, that the creation idea is a more encompassing philosophical ground-idea of

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33 Christian theology as a scientific discipline isn’t necessarily apologetic, for its understanding presupposes faith and its field of enquiry encompasses God’s Self-revelation and the life of faith (as well as its essence, norms, structure, purpose, etc.)

34 see Dooyeweerd’s expositions above, where he rightly points out that subjective “rationality” can’t be identified with reality, for the divine creation order exist independently from human’s subjective convictions
the cosmos than the revelation idea. We can also see that the knowable of the cosmos presupposes the cosmos, that the cosmos (as creation) is more encompassing than its knowability (as fanerosis or ‘content of revelation’). That the revelation idea as principal key is of fundamental importance for a Calvinistic Gnoseology (and by implication for a Calvinistic Epistemology). (Stoker 1970:49)

Viewed from a Trinitarian perspective, Stoker’s method rightly points out that revelation is the final key of knowledge and not the Gegenstandsrelation, as Dooyeweerd’s approach seems to suggest:

...perceiving or discerning- as a partial act of knowing - involves an encounter between the knowing / knower and the knowable. It also respects from the very beginning (de origine) the heterogeneity of the knowing act and the knowable (in a special case of, for instance, the act of perceiving a flower and the flower itself); the knowing / knower with his or her thought — also as a partial act of knowing and as medium in the hands of the knower / knowing — succeeds in eliciting still further revelation from the knowable; knowledge (and knowing) finally amounts to vocation-fulfilling replying to the possibilities (tasks, problems) discovered in and with the knowable. The final key of knowledge (including scientific knowledge) cannot be discovered in synthesis (by the human selfness of the logical with the non-logical, as propounded by Dooyeweerd with his transcendentalanalysis of thought in the case of theoretical — i.e. scientific — knowledge), but rather in revelation, in the given-ness of the revealed, and the encounter with, reception and exploitation of this given-ness by means of the knowing ability of the human being (Stoker 1970:49).

As already noticed, it is possible to reconcile philosophical differences through a Trinitarian framework, able to capture the broader reformational vision and its different philosophical nuances. Such a perennial approach to apologetics opens up a way for a positive engagement between reformed theology and reformational philosophy. Although such a perennial perspective might be seen as problematic if applied to the separate domains of philosophy and theology, with a tendency of ruling out the basic differences of the disciplines, nevertheless it seems to be the best way of further developing reformational apologetics, for important contributions from many sides can be considered. It is crucial for reformational

35 Nevertheless, this doesn’t reduce the importance of Dooyeweerd’s approach, but rather it shows that the functional (cosmic) perspective gained from the „law idea“ - (starting with man’s subjective horizon of experience and the revelation of creation), can be still expanded. By putting both approaches (Stoker’s and Dooyeweerd’s) within the Trinitarian perspective and taking an integral understanding of God’s Word revelation into account, it becomes clear that both contributions are important. Apologetics should function within the Trinitarian framework, for it encompasses the three ground ideas of philosophy, the Christian ground motive, the central and peripheral spheres of the ego, the supratemporal presuppositions of thought (transcendental ideas), etc. It isn’t based upon unwarranted speculation on God’s being, but rather it is restricted to God’s trustworthy Self-revelation in his inspired Word – and correlated to the other Gestalten of God’s Word revelation, so that the reformational vision makes it possible to conceive the cosmos (including man) as ultimately dependent on the triune God (the transcendent root of creation), nevertheless doing justice to the radical diversity and coherence of created reality and its transcendental structures – based upon the non-reductionistic ontology, which is derived from the biblical meaning of the heart. Thus, Trinitarian apologetics integrates main insights from different nuances of Calvinistic Philosophy.
apologetics to overcome the controversy between Van Til and Dooyeweerd, because the strict separation of both approaches (the either Van Til or Dooyeweerd in apologetics) suggests an unbiblical contradiction between theology and philosophy, which is rooted in an unbiblical view of God’s Word revelation, depreciating one or the other Gestalt of God’s Word, instead of conceiving their unity and diversity as the sovereign and trustworthy work of the triune God. Contributions from the different nuances of Calvinistic Philosophy can be highly esteemed by reformational apologetics, without losing sight neither of specific differences nor of the common vision shared. Accordingly although indirectly, Stoker emphatically points out the fundamental importance of the “law idea”, which serves as an example of perennial view, which should be adopted by reformational apologetics:

The ‘law idea’ fulfils a fundamental role in every nuance of Calvinistic Philosophy. But this does not mean that all Calvinistic philosophers in this respect share the viewpoint of the Philosophy of the Cosmonomic Idea. Concerning the law idea, all Calvinists accept inter alia what God’s Word reveals to us about the law (or rather the cosmic order / ontic-order) of God; that God as absolute sovereign Legislator and Sovereign has given the law for all of the cosmos, with no exception; that the law may neither be absolutised nor subjectivised; that the law (or cosmic-order) of God constitutes a distinctive boundary between God and the cosmos (matter, plant, animal and human being) that cannot be transcended by the cosmos (including the human being); that there is a coherent diversity of laws; that the law (or cosmic-order) applies to the cosmos, and that it constantly applies, even when human beings transgress the (normative) cosmic-order; that human freedom and responsibility presuppose the cosmic-order; that science (including Philosophy) has the task of discovering and examining the cosmic-order as far as possible (in other words, within the given creaturely boundaries); that the principle of ‘sphere sovereignty should be respected not only in the practices of daily existence but also in the context of science and scholarship; and that this principle finds its grounds in the ontic order ordained by God for the cosmos in its diversity; and so on. Our mutual differences of opinion should be understood against this shared background. (Stoker 1970:50-51)

Basically, Stoker’s critique of the law-idea as ground idea of philosophy also entails a theological critique, for his approach implies a reformed theological understanding of God’s Self-revelation, i.e. he doesn’t begin with the subjective human horizon of experience, but presupposing God’s inspired Word Revelation as “structural” data.36 As we have seen throughout different stages of this thesis, the Trinitarian framework encompasses both, reformed theology and reformational philosophy, doing justice to God’s integral Word revelation and its Gestalten, consequently touching upon how the different facets of God’s Word can rapidly be misrepresented by an unbalanced view with regards to the relation between theology and philosophy. (e. g. theology’s overemphasis of God’s Self-revelation in

36 Recalling Stoker’s contribution to Van Til’s Festschrift, that’s the reason why Stoker says that his philosophical supplement (P-C) to Van Til’s approach (P-A), presupposes the truth of Van Til’s approach, which Stoker calls “theological”, in contrast to Dooyeweerd’s “philosophical” approach.
Holy Scripture in a depreciating tendency towards the revelation of creation – on the other hand, philosophy’s overemphasis of the revelation of creation - the “structures/laws” of creation – neglecting the fundamental importance of God’s Self-revelation for human experience). In that sense, viewed from a Trinitarian and reformational perspective, Stoker’s criticism on the “primacy” of the law-idea is welcome, for by considering that Dooyeweerd’s transcendental ideas are rooted in the integral work of the ontological Trinity, Dooyeweerd’s anthropocentric cosmology appears to be ultimately dependent upon the triune God. This also implies that the “law-idea” shouldn’t be seen as the sole “boundary” between God and the cosmos (as also Vollenhoven strongly develops), for the law idea, just as the revelation idea and the creation idea – reflects the work of the Holy Trinity. Consequently, the suggested Trinitarian vision encompasses the three ideas as interdependent although irreducible, as ultimately dependent upon the triune God – conceivable as the reflection of the work of the ontological Trinity.

The ‘modes of being’ / the modalities are subject also to the will and law of God…iii.

Concerning Vollenhoven’s law-idea, we limit ourselves to a discussion of his doctrine of the tripartite being, namely that of God, of the law (as validation) and of the cosmos. In my opinion, he stretches the law idea by attributing to a law of God and to the cosmos a different ‘being’. In opposition to his view, we argue as follows. In our opinion, only two forms of being, namely the absolute, totally self-sufficient “Being” of God, and the in-selfsufficient, creaturely, totally dependent on God “being” of the cosmos… The cosmos (as creation) embraces the law (order) as well as the idions. This explains why the creation idea as philosophical ground-idea is more encompassing than the law-idea. (Stoker 1970:52-53)

Stoker’s objection against the primacy of the law-idea in philosophy is related to the structuralistic tendency of identifying God’s legislation with the creation order, in a way that limits God’s sovereignty over creation. Therefore, the law-idea furnishes an important anthropocentric view of the cosmos, but that nevertheless can be expanded by a theocentric view, fully taking God’s integral Word revelation and his Self-revelation into account:.

The creation law as building plan (as council for creation, the building work of God) seems to me too one-sided and a stretching of the law-idea. I have to leave this to the theologians, however. What strikes me here (in the same way as the structural laws do), is the conflation of order (plan) and law; I would have distinguished between them. God’s law-giving / legislation (as a deed) has to do with God and is not part of

37 See the section on the Trinitarian interpretation of the transcendental ideas.

38 At this point it isn’t important to go more into the details of Vollenhoven’s ideas, for it suffices to understand that by working with the law-idea as ground idea, one overemphasizes one of the three ground ideas, which ultimately hold together within a Trinitarian perspective. Thus, the strict separation between God, law and cosmos is based upon an overemphasis on the revelation of creation (knowledge of the cosmos) – without taking the reality and clarity of God’s Self-revelation in Christ, through the Holy Spirit, fully into account, which imply the reality of the work of Christ and the coming of God’s Kingdom, as well as the work of the Holy Spirit through the Church, through the preaching and living out of the Gospel, the anticipation of New Creation, etc..

39 Stoker claims that the creation idea is more encompassing than the two other ideas.
creation. The view that the religious law is ‘pure law’, a unitary law, can only be associated with an anthropocentric cosmology. The human being, in our opinion, is indeed the apex of the cosmos, but not its centre. (Stoker 1970:56)

Thence, the Trinitarian framework solves the question concerning the ground-idea of philosophy in an unexpected way, encompassing the different nuances of Calvinistic philosophy and doing justice to the Trinitarian belief, which is the most basic and distinctive feature of Christianity. Being radically Trinitarian also means to be radically Christian:40

Let me put it clearly: It is obvious that all Calvinistic philosophers accept revelation, law and creation the way they are pre-scientifically revealed in God’s Word, and that the particular ground-idea of the cosmos (the revelation-, law- and creation-ideas) find their origins there. The problem that we are dealing with here is: which of these three aspects (revelation, law and creation — accepted by all) should be regarded as the most encompassing and therefore the actual ground-idea of Calvinistic Philosophy? (Stoker 1970:56)

By conceiving philosophy and theology within the Trinitarian framework and conceiving the three mentioned “ground-ideas” of philosophy as reflection of the work of the Triune God, the reformational apologist confesses not to have any of the Gestalten of God’s Word revelation at his disposal as a “neutral” source of knowledge upon which he can build up a “system”. In contrary, as truth can only be encountered by men by listening and surrendering to God’s sovereign Word revelation, so reformational apologetics must stress that the cosmos (including men) ultimately depend upon the work of the triune God and that the only way in which men can encounter truth is through the Gospel, responding to God’s redemptive work in Christ, through the work of the Holy Spirit, who opens up and regenerate the hearts. Thus, in order to reconcile reformational philosophy and reformed theology in apologetics, both disciplines are to be conceived in apologetic methodology as radically Trinitarian:

We have to take into account that God’s Word is no scientific textbook, and that it does not provide any scientific terms and formulations; in other words, we have to philosophically delineate (within the clear boundaries of scientific possibilities) these ideas (in our opinion) as boundary ideas in interaction with Theology… Dooyeweerd’s conception of the law, and my conception of the creation, both find their origins in our pre-scientific faith in God’s Word revelation. (Stoker 1970:57-58)

In dealing with Stoker’s and Dooyeweerd’s defenses of their “ground-ideas” from a Trinitarian perspective, it becomes clear that not only the law-idea presupposes the creation idea (Stoker’s emphasis), the fall into sin and redemption through Jesus Christ, but also that creation idea presuppose the same Christian ground motive as the reflection of the work of

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40 The broad scope of the reformational vision, being non-reductionistic and rooted in the Trinitarian belief, also enables the overcoming of confessional boundaries and a positive engagement among different confessions, remaining radically biblical and faithful to the reformed confessions, while contributing to the Church in general (the invisible church).
the triune God. Thus, their choice is rather a matter of nuance, which is nevertheless ultimately dependent upon the Triune God. On the one hand, Stoker wants to reinforce the Christian character of his philosophy and the fact that the law idea presupposes creation (God as the lawgiver), Dooyeweerd wants philosophy defined by the most basic structures of thinking in order to enable the dialogue between different schools regardless philosophy’s origin as a response to God’s revelation of creation – the law-idea presupposing creation):

The ground idea is a pre-condition for each philosophical system (Dooyeweerd’s emphasis). We find a law-idea at the foundation of every philosophical system, and not a creation idea. In opposing this view, I would in the first place reply that not all Philosophies presuppose a law-idea. In the second place, the Christian character of our Philosophy should be visible exactly in its ground-idea, which is the case with the creation idea as ground-idea, whereas the law-idea (as ground-idea) is not specifically Christian because (according to Dooyeweerd) it is the ground-idea of all philosophical systems. We can say about this: A philosophical system gets its name from its ground-idea. (Stoker 1970:58)

In order to best reflect the biblical ground motive, in contrary to Stoker’s and Dooyeweerd’s positions in this regard, Trinitarian apologetics should reinforce the interdependence of the three main Calvinistic answers to the ground idea of philosophy, for it allows to absorb contributions of the different nuances in the light of the work of the Trinity and takes the three Gestalten of God’s Word fully into account:

...The creation idea is inadequate to serve as ground-idea of Christian Philosophy because its content should reflect the Scriptural, religious ground-motive of creation, fall into sin and redemption (whereas the creation idea only mentions creation — H.G.S.). In opposition to this, it can be said that exactly the same objection would count against the law-idea as ground-idea. Furthermore, the creation idea answers the question what this world is that we are living in and to which we belong; and closer examination of this very creation, we discover ‘in Your light’, fall into sin and evil, and with the redemptive death of Christ in creation also in principle redemption and recreation. It is this very creation that was created ‘good’, that fell into sin and evil, and will also be delivered and recreated. (Stoker 1970:58)

Stoker acknowledges the importance of the law idea’s treatment of the irreducibility and correlation of law and subject, i.e. its non-reductionistic ontology, approaching the diverse facets of human experience, its transcendental critique making an internal and non-reductionistic criticism of other philosophical systems possible, unmasking absolutizations and extrapolations of reason, etc. The law idea is basic in dealing with diversity of structures:

It counts in favour of the law idea that in its focus on the origin and meaning of the law and on its relationship with the subjectivity (in other words, that which is subject to the law — H.G.S.), it acknowledges right from the beginning the boundary
character of the philosophical ground-idea, and also presents us with a criterion, flowing from its critical focus on the preliminary questions (‘voorvragen’) about the law (the cosmic order) and its subject. It presents us with a fundamental distinction between different viewpoints and approaches in Philosophy; not only between Christian Philosophy (which, as true transcendental Philosophy respects the immanent cosmic boundaries) and the non-Christian Philosophy (which, as Immanence-Philosophy and therefore speculative metaphysics, are inclined to transcend the boundaries), but also within the Immanence Philosophy itself. Rationalism absolutizes nature and ethical laws and, for example, whereas Irrationalism reduces the law to a subordinate function of individual creative subjectivity. (Stoker 1970:58-59)

Nevertheless, in mainly dealing with Grenzfragen, the law-idea’s account (excluding the creation idea) of the absolute Origin stops at “a Origin”, unable to directly respond to God’s Self-revelation as Trinity, for it holds to the primacy of human’s horizon of experience. Stoker on the other hand, stresses the importance of having a theocentric view in Calvinistic Philosophy (which includes creation and God’s Scriptural revelation as structural data):

In fundamental sense, delimitation (setting boundaries) should be viewed as a negative stipulation (‘this boundary may not be transgressed’), that one should rather begin with a positive stipulation or distinction, and use that as a point of departure for understanding the boundary as limit. Secondly, the distinction between God, the totally self-sufficient, the absolute, totally wise, totally good, omnipotent and sovereign Creator, and the totally in-self-sufficient creaturely cosmos, depending in everything on God and determined by God’s ontic order, in other words, the cosmos as creation, is a positive distinction between both of them. A negative limitation flows from this perspective: the cosmos (matter, plant, animal and human being) cannot transcend its in-self-sufficient and law-subjected creatureliness; and God is not creaturely in any sense. This perspective allows us to distinguish just as keenly between a Calvinistic Philosophy that respects the creatureliness of the cosmos as a totality and its radical diversity, and other Philosophies that regard the cosmos or something in the cosmos as independent and in opposition to God, in the process absolutising it. (Stoker 1970: 59-60)

Concerning the relation between the different nuances of Calvinistic Philosophy, the reformational apologist should hold to the Trinitarian framework in order to conceive them within the broader reformational tradition, in an unified vision of philosophy and theology, absorbing important contributions from the different nuances, in the light of God’s integral Word revelation and in terms of the continuity of the Church and its ongoing reformation:

And we have to keep in mind that we have been dealing here only with nuances of our commonly held Calvinistic Philosophy, a circumstance that compels us to participate in maximal mutual cooperation as well as in a mutual struggle about our differences. (Stoker 1970:63)
2.6 A short application of the Trinitarian modal-spherical method

Applying the principle of *Besserverstehen*, one can say that Van Til and Stoker, in their usage of *transcendent* criticism, intuitively grasped the correlation between the constitutive root of human existence in the triune God and what Dooyeweerd calls the biblical ground-motive of creation fall and redemption. The triune God is the true Origin, who constitutes and coherently guarantees unity and diversity by means of his Providence. This insight is of great importance for reformed apologetics in order to become truly reformational in its approach.

Although Jeremy Ive’s dissertation concerns a Trinitarian comparison of the philosophies of Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven, took in a broad sense it is directly applicable to a reformational apologetics, because of the link between Trinitarian and reformational thinking.

When we contemplate the following diagram\(^\text{41}\), it becomes how a modal-spherical discourse opens up many possibilities of apologetic interaction with unbelievers, who share in the same existential horizon of experience with believers, differing only in the direction of their heart (in Adam or in Christ), so that the interaction of the apologist with unbelievers can be integral, in a way that by acknowledging the multi-aspectual facets of human existence, he can be truly emphatic (in the central as well as peripheral spheres the ego), encountering and respecting his fellow human being as a full person, without reducing existence to one or a few facets, but rather giving an account to the whole of life, making use of the riches of creation and the diversity of possibilities, led by the Spirit and with a sense of wisdom, finding the right time, making use of the right means and opportunities to preach the truth of the Gospel so that men may be encountered by the triune God:

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\(^{41}\) *Ive, Jeremy author: although the diagram is part of a Trinitarian comparison of the philosophies of Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven, the modalities are part of the broader reformational view and an should be a important component of the Trinitarian modal-spherical method of apologetics*
The importance of the modal aspects of reality (peripheral spheres of the ego) can’t be neglected by reformational apologetics, for it provides a unique and non-reductionist way of approaching relationality and individuality, engaging with unbelievers in a wholesome way:

...the principle behind the process of distinguishing of the different kinds of relation is that no one kind of relation is capable of providing a fully adequate description of the world and is irreducible to any other kind of relation. Only by taking into account the full range of these mutually irreducible kinds of relation, and giving them their proper consideration, can we truly live and think in a way that expresses the richness of the way that God created the world, and, in particular, how he provides for the true flourishing of human relations... (Ive 2011:190-195)

In order to be truly emphatic in discourse, the apologist should take the time aspects into account, insightfully choosing the right time and approach among the various possibilities:

“With respect to the theoretical attitude, both philosophers provide lists of time aspects which correspond to each of the modalities. Each time aspect describes an irreducibly different kind of time...” (Ive 2011: 200)

Individuality, relationality and time should be dynamically considered by Trinitarian modal-spherical apologetics in order to integrally engage with the many facets of human existence:

“These three loci (individuality, relationality and time seen in the light respectively of the Ideas of Origin, Coherence and Providence) need to be seen as distinct, yet dynamically inter-dependent.” (Ive 2011: 217)

As the transcendental Ideas of Origin, Coherence and Providence are the basic presuppositions of any philosophy and ultimately rooted in the work of the triune God, the Trinitarian modal-spherical method of apologetics makes use of them in order to show that only the Christian account of reality ultimately makes sense. As the transcendental ideas are basic to any thinker (unavoidable), reformational apologetics should make use of them in
many ways. Dooyeweerd’s transcendental critique should be applied in connection to the work of the Holy Spirit, so that the P-C context (specific meaning moments) are set in relation to the ultimate meaning moments (P-A context). It is crucial for the reformational apologist to proceed in that way in order to give an integral testimony of his faith in the Self-revelation of the triune God. Thereby he can coherently demonstrate how creation reflects the character of the Creator (the triune God) and, point out how the radical diversity and coherence of the cosmos perfectly makes sense within the Christian framework. The reformational apologist can present those connections in many ways. Due to the interconnections between reformed theology and reformational philosophy, there are plenty possibilities of dealing with Grenzfragen and Kernfragen of cosmic reality and the ultimate meaning of human existence, which can only be unlocked by revelation as the key to Self-knowledge and true knowledge of God, both being essential in giving the ego a concentric direction towards cosmic reality, so that human life which was affected by sin at its root, can be restored by the integral saving power of the Gospel, by trusting in God’s redemptive work in Christ, through the transformational work of the Holy Spirit. In dealing with the dynamic interplay of individuality, relationality and time, i.e. considering the central and peripheral spheres of the ego, reformational apologetics being open and non-reductionistic in its approach, can still develop several other ways of combining reformed covenantal theology and non-reductionistic reformational philosophy, i.e. by forming “ultimate” questions regarding the transcendental ideas and showing how only the Christian worldview can provide wholesome answers which brings about hope, healing, restoration, meaning, peace, ultimate joy and fulfilment of goals, destiny, etc… Another diagram out of Ive’s dissertation illustrates this dynamic Trinitarian approach to reality: (Ive 2011: 222)

Faith is the leading function of a human being, although it is only one among others, which all together form the human horizon of experience. A truly reformational discourse of apologetics should speak to the whole man, i.e. approaching reality from the many facets (aspects, functions) of human existence. Such a totality view of reality is provided by the non-reductionist ontology of reformational philosophy. Reformed theology on the other hand, speaks of the inevitable Self-revelation of the sovereign triune God and the human call, to
respond to His revelation. A method of apologetics in the spirit of the Reformation should combine both, giving an account for the Christian faith and calling unbelievers to repent and believe the Gospel, the only way of life and of finding unity in the diversity of created reality. The apologist should take the multi-aspectual avenue of discourse to refer back to the triune God, who holds everything together, alone can deliver man integrally, by directing the centre of human’s existence to his true Origin, redeeming him by the power of the Gospel of Christ, through the Holy Spirit and to the honour of God.

Accordingly, the apologist can uncover the modal-disorder caused by the apostate faith of the unbeliever, by means of immanent and transcendential criticism to open up the path for the preaching of the Gospel, the power of God from which the unbeliever tries to flee by suppressing the truth in unrighteousness (Rom 1). Without cutting off the possibilities of refuge behind modal-absolutizations at the outset, the unbeliever may reject to listen to any sort of transcendent criticism and appeals of/to the Gospel. This doesn’t mean that apologetics should be reduced to hasty debates, which mainly aim to win the arguments instead of winning the person for Christ. This being the case, apologetics often times implies a long process of companionship between the apologist and the unbeliever. One could say that there are many kinds of arguments, which can cost more of one’s time (social priority, economic time management, etc) to be displayed, i.e. the ethical concern and identification with the afflicted, concerning their different struggles (e.g. psychic weakness, social isolation, economic instability, distorted aesthetic values, etc.) as well as cultural-formative initiatives and engagement in different projects, fighting for instance for public justice, for the protection of life, for more solidarity in public life concerning the abandoned and the helpless, etc... Or simply enjoy the good creation of God in a healthy and balanced way. Avoiding excesses and abuses, although rejoicing on the richness of relations and possibilities and exploring the totality of God’s given potential and talents. That’s what it means to honour God in every duty and aspect of life, implicitly growing in wisdom and working for progress, flourishing and advancing the different occupational spheres of life. As the Gospel of Christ always demanded living testimonies of perseverance and sacrificial love, so does the task of apologetics demand more than theoretical arguments. Instead, the wisdom of God by the regenerating power of the Gospel, teaches to be emphatic and to know what’s to be done Coram Deo (Col. 1), so that the hearts are opened up for the preaching of the Gospel and the kingdom of God may come to us.

4. Provisional conclusions

4.1 Dooyeweerd’s criticism of Van Til & reformational apologetics
(Breaking away from rationalism – Biblical ontology and apologetics)

Dooyeweerd points out to the scholastic tendency in Van Til of absolutizating the logical
aspect. Apologetics should be critical in challenging the autonomy of theoretical thought, showing that it presupposes supra-theoretical convictions. The apologist should distinguish between theoretical and supra-theoretical knowledge (knowledge of God, central religious knowledge and knowledge of the revelation of creation). In order to be ontologically biblical and to show that human existence is religiously grounded, the reformational apologist must approach created reality from a supratemporal reference point. That’s the only way to attain theoretical access to the meaning totality of cosmos. As it regards the constitution of the creation order, this state of affairs can be seen by everyone, independently of subjective conviction. Thus the reformational ontology should be presupposed by the reformational apologist. (see page 2.1)

Apologetic method should radically break away from rationalism (including its terminology, that suggests a non-biblical ontology), emphasizing the supra-temporality of true Self knowledge, knowledge of God and of creation, which can only be attained through the opening up of the heart. (see 2.1)

The influence of scholasticism, due to its rationalistic tendency, blocks the insight into the non-reductionist structures of reality, in which logic is only one of the aspects of the human horizon of reality. Consequently, theology and philosophy tend to be confused and a “scholastic” usage of the inspired word of God in Scripture, which is mainly concerned with the relation between God and men, closes up the insight into a true biblical ontology and totality view of the cosmos and its different spheres, which require a deep “listening” to the revelation of creation in itself, in order to disclosure their structure in meaning, driven by the biblical ground motive… A theoretical approach of created reality via Holy Scripture fails in this regard. In its best it gives only a coherent “faith perspective” on reality, showing that the unity of creation is only possible through the Self-revelation of the triune God. But a biblical ontology demands a transcending central point of reference in order to do justice to the radical diversity of created reality. In this regard, Dooyeweerd is right in stating the fundamental importance of his transcendental critique for reformational apologetics. (see page 2.1)

Dooyeweerd uncovers that a rationalistic understanding of God’s Word-Revelation consequently leads to the identification of absolutized rationality with reality underlining that obedience or disobedience towards God mainly concerns the religious centre of human existence. The biblical understanding of the heart should lead to a radical break with rationalism (including terminology) and a non-reductionist ontology.

Neo-Calvinistic apologetics should always use the inspired Word-Revelation of God in relation to the centrality of the human heart, so that the idolatrous usage of “reason” is unmasked and the transforming power of the Gospel can be communicated to the religious ground of human existence, preaching the message of the Bible, hoping that the hearts are opened up by the Holy Spirit. (see page 2.1)

42 In that view, the created analytical sphere is still absolute – besides God – a biblical ontology regards only God as absolute, and logic as relatively bound to the temporal order of creation.
God’s self-revelation in Holy Scripture as Creator and redeemer concerns the central religious relation of man to his absolute Origin. Its true meaning is therefore to be understood by man only if his heart has been opened up to it through the moving power of the Holy Ghost. (Dooyeweerd 1971:86)

4.2 Van Til’s response to Dooyeweerd & reformational apologetics (The Self-revelation of the triune God – Apologetics beyond transcendentalism)

Van Til’s reaction to Dooyeweerd reflects his emphasis on the transcendent root of human existence and on the apologetic task. The latter must directly refer to the Self-revelation of the triune. Further, Van Til stresses the fact that transcendental critique doesn’t suffice for apologetics, for God in Holy Scripture, who alone makes human consciousness possible...the self-destructive presuppositions of autonomous men must be uncovered by the apologist, so that the Gospel can be preached, the only power unto salvation of men (Rom 1:16).

Van Til’s “calvinistic metaphysics” theologically begins with the Creator-creature distinction as the only possibility of escaping the dilemma of self-refutable rationalism and/or irrationalism. In order to be biblical, he rejects Dooyeweerd’s transcendental account of “a contentless Origin” from a theological perspective. He’s in line with the reformational vision, that it is a vacua speculatio meteorica to speak of “a God” that’s not the triune God, as revealed in Holy Scripture. Reformational apologetics shouldn’t only be ontologically non-reductionist, but also be faithful to the covenantal and Trinitarian belief, which characterizes the identity of the body of Christ and is expressed in its creeds (i.e. ecumenical creeds and reformed confessions). The apologist’s task is not only to do justice to the revelation of creation, but also develop his work by listening and asserting the truth of the inspired Word of God. Van Til therefore reinforces the reformational conviction, that one’s heart must be regenerated by the Gospel in order to understand the ultimate meaning of reality. (see 6-7)

It is important to remember that Van Til’s method of apologetics was inspired by reformational philosophy, even though its “translation” to apologetics required the integration of theology:

How I rejoiced when I found that men of great erudition and of deep penetration were pointing out that “logic” and “fact” can have no intelligible relation to another unless it be upon the presupposition of the truth of the “story” Christ has told us in the Scriptures. (Van Til 1971:92).

In order to be truly reformational in the discipline of apologetics he had to go beyond the intention of Dooyeweerd’s transcendental critique and its focus in restoring the dialogue between different philosophical directions, for the task of apologetics aims at the preaching of the Gospel, the confrontation of the Self-revelation of God in Holy Scripture with apostate men (Van Til: 1971:92-102). In order to accomplish this, the apologist must call the
unbeliever to repent and give up his unbiblical belief. And that’s only possible by the preaching of the inspired Word of God (the *Gegenstand* of theology) – even though this doesn’t mean that theology (scientifically speaking) has a privileged access to God’s Word-revelation, which is supratemporal in its origin and therefore not theoretical (scientific), and therefore integral in essence and absolutely sovereign over the life of human beings (the very power of God’s Word-revelation creates, re-creates, sustains and ultimately directs the whole of reality towards its final purpose). Therefore, the translation of reformational insights to apologetics implies that one must speak of the pretended autonomy of apostate man (not only the autonomy of theoretical thought) and stress the fact that the Christian and the Non-Christian positions are mutually exclusive. In an ultimate sense, Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life is the One who makes human experience and theoretical thought possible (John 14:6). Therefore, reformational apologetics must stress the fact that any philosophical enquiry is incomplete as long as relative truths of the creation order are not seen in the light of the Self-revelation of the triune God, who is the ground of human existence and holds everything together by means of his work of Creation (and recreation), his all-encompassing plan and providence. Men can only grasp truth if they are willing to listen to the Christ of Scripture, i.e. the self (subject) must subject to the will of God (including his creation order). By holding to the integral Word-Revelation of God, the reformational apologist is only being radically driven by the biblical ground motive if he gives an account of his faith in accordance to the contents of the inspired Word-Revelation of God. Aware that his existence is grounded in the Triune God as he learned from God’s Self-revelation in Holy Scripture, Van Til legitimately rejects a strict separation of philosophy and theology (the exclusion of transcendent critique) in his methodology. (see 2.2)

Due to the unbreakable unity of the integral Word-Revelation and its *Gestalten*, the apologist must stress the fact that structural data only makes ultimate sense when understood in the light of the Gospel, or else he would be suggesting that absolute truth is accessible via autonomous reason (see 2.2-2.5):

> You are at the same time insisting that you can analyse the nature and structure of theoretical thought without any reference to that Christian story. You are seeking to show that you can analyse theoretical thought *as such* and show that it points to the Christian story. (Van Til 1971:102)

Consequently, it is the task of reformational apologetics to confront philosophical systems with its insufficient knowledge concerning the ultimate meaning of the cosmos and of existence, which is a religious mystery which can only be unveiled by revelation, received by the Self through the opening up of the heart. The sovereign power of revelation can’t be controlled by men, for as a dependent, self-insufficient creature, he only receives it and responds to it.

Thence, reformational apologetics must go beyond transcendental criticism and confront

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43 These conclusions were derived from the theo-philosophical interaction between Van Til, Stoker and Dooyeweerd in Van Til’s Festschrift. This subject was dealt with in the first sections of this thesis, and functioned as the basis for the emerging of TMSA.
Non-Christian worldviews with the preaching of the Gospel. As creatures of God, human beings have a covenantal consciousness and thus can meaningfully be approached with the transcendent critique of Scriptural revelation. Men can’t escape the triune covenant-God who confronts apostate men everywhere in their existence. Following the reformational dictum that one can only speak of God, the absolute Origin, in terms of his Self-revelation as Trinity, covenantal apologetics should make use of the modal-spherical, non-reductionistic ontology of reformational philosophy, but nevertheless acknowledging that a “purely philosophical” approach and a contentless transcendental idea (speaking of “a Origin”) isn’t enough (for apologetics), seeking also to be faithful to Holy Scripture, trusting the power of the Gospel, as the Self-revelation of God and his plan, by means of which men receive salvation and the forgiveness for their sins, in Christ, through the Holy Spirit and to the glory of God. (see 2.1-2.5).

4.3 Stoker’s complementary critique of Van Til
(Reconciling reformational philosophy and Van Til’s theological approach)

A closer reading of Dooyeweerd’s and Van Til’s criticisms on another in the Festschrift (applying key insights from Stoker’s contribution to unlock the possibility of combining both approaches), lead to a deepening of understanding of the discipline of (Neo-Calvinistic) apologetics itself and casts a light on the relation between philosophy and theology from an apologetic perspective… Consequently, the question is answered concerning the possibility of being non-reductionistic in apologetics, meaning that the reformational apologist should hold to a non-reductionistic ontology, able to disclose the radical diversity and coherence of created reality, but also to an integral understanding of God's Word-Revelation, i.e. the revelation of Creation, the incarnated Word and the inspired Word. Thus, by acknowledging that "Truth" is radically personal, the apologist must emphatically listen to the integral Word-Revelation of God, in order to capture the “right time” and the “right mode” of speech at each specific situation where he is called to give an account of his faith (1 Pet 3:15), being led by the Spirit, with the heart and eyes wide open so that Truth of the Gospel can be powerfully displayed in the midst of the dynamics of life. Preaching the inspired Word of God, the reformational apologist, who is driven by the force of the biblical ground motive, emphatically obedient to God’s Word-Revelation, relates the preaching of the Gospel to the centrality of the human heart, which must be opened up by the Holy Spirit, who liberates the transformational power of the Gospel.

Stoker shows, by means of constructive criticism, that Van Til’s approach can be combined with the non-reductionistic ontology of reformational philosophy, by pointing out that Van Til’s theological method of apologetics mainly stresses the ultimate dependence of man’s knowledge on the triune God, which should be supplemented by reformational philosophy

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44 As already stated above, indirectly in many different ways, the radical critique of reductionism, breaking away from “apostate” dualism and its depreciation of creation, is central for the understanding of the Kuyperian vision.

45 In order to grasp truth, man (subject) must subject to God’s will and creation order.
and its focus on the radical diversity and coherence of the cosmos. Acknowledging the supratemporal character of central religious convictions, by integrating non-reductionistic ontology in its approach, a reformational discourse of apologetics should always take into account, that a struggle with other worldviews is always a heart struggle between (supratemporal) ground motives, which control the heart and directs the faith function in order to express that same driving motive in all spheres of life. Life is always a matter of faith, for self-insufficient human beings can only respond to the revelation of his Creator, which surrounds him everywhere. In order to respond, man must trust and surrender to revelation (the knowable): (see page 13)

Man, however, meets knowingly the knowable by trusting it. In order to know, faith in the knowable (as met by knowing perceiving) is an indispensable necessity (“Faith” is taken here in a wide sense, a for instance, is also done by Bavinck). Faith, too, is an act of knowing, without which man, the knower, does not really meet the knowable. Faith is, in a specific sense, a surrender; only by surrendering himself to the knowable, i.e. by accepting it, can man responsibly fulfil his task of knowing. (Stoker 1971: 28)

Consequently, in confronting Non-Christians with God’s Word-Revelation, truth concerning the ground of human existence can’t be attained by a neutral usage of “rationality”, because it is the faith function that directs theoretical knowledge:

The knowledge about God in which religious self-knowledge is implied, is not primarily gained in a so-called theological way. That which is very inadequately called “theology,” is a theoretical knowledge obtained in a synthesis of the logical function of thought and the temporal function of faith. It is a knowledge which itself is entirely dependent on the cosmonomic idea from which the thinker starts” (Dooyeweerd 1969: NC-II:562-563)

By breaking away from scholastic tendencies, the apologetic discourse becomes highly personal, calling human beings to listen to revelation as they are confronted with the central question “Who am I?”:

Because we are utterly responsible for what we assert, it is impossible to answer this question with a rationalizing commonplace, no matter how orthodox it may sound. Yet, on the other hand, if in this pressing responsibility (in spite of all “contingency” as emphasized by modern philosophy) I meet the ground of my existence, then it will be impossible that the answer I give concerning my innermost being will not be propelled by the same motive from which these grounds are being moved. In giving an answer to the question about who I am, I cannot but give an account of that motive… That is to say that I have the sense of logical distinction, which helps me in taking my responsibility. I am to take my responsibility. That is to say that the motive drives me and calls me to such activity that the dynamics of this motive is transmitted into the whole reality of life that is concretely mine. (Mekkes 2010:18-19)
4.4 Trinitarian modal-spherical apologetics (reformed & reformational – The unity of philosophy and theology in apologetics via Trinitarianism)

Thus, by philosophically supplementing Van Til’s (theological) Trinitarian-covenantal method of apologetics, a modal-spherical approach evolves, distinguishing between theoretical knowledge and supratemporal religious convictions. By means of a biblical ontology, the integral meaning of faith and knowledge are restored, uncovering absolutizations of the relative and avoiding theoretical (including theological) extrapolations. Thence, a Trinitarian modal-spherical apologetics can be truly non-reductionistic, relating God’s Self-revelation in Holy Scripture to the centrality of the human heart, but nevertheless acknowledging the limits of creaturely knowledge, which is not only ultimately dependent on the triune God, but also relatively driven by a supratemporal religious ground motive. Thence, the distinction between theoretical knowledge, self-knowledge and knowledge of God are central to reformational apologetics:

…true self-knowledge in its biblical sense, i.e. in its dependence upon true knowledge of God, cannot be itself of a conceptual character. The reason is that all conceptual knowledge in its analytical and inter-modal synthetical character presupposes the human ego as its central reference-point, which consequently must be of a supramodal nature and is not capable of logical analysis. (Dooyeweerd 1971: 84-85)

4.5 God’s Word revelation & Trinitarian modal-spherical apologetics

God’s integral Word revelation as it relates to the central spheres of the ego, is implied in Stoker’s understanding of the “fourth type of revelation” (the revelation of creation), which opened up the possibility of reconciling Trinitarian theology with reformational philosophy in the discipline of apologetics (Stoker 1971:30-31), in other words, laying the foundations so that a non-reductionistic ontology may be integrated in apologetics, capturing the irreducibility and correlation of law and subject while still giving testimony of God’s Self-revelation in Holy Scripture. (see 2.2-2-5). Trinitarian modal-spherical method of apologetics is covenantal at its core, acknowledging God’s revelation of creation as part of God’s all-encompassing covenant, not inferior to God’s inspired Word. Thence, from a covenantal perspective, both (scientific) philosophy and theology are acknowledged in apologetics as equally basic, but nevertheless, in practice, “insufficient” per se, for in the “midst of life”, human beings as creatures of God, are ultimately dependent upon the integral Word-Revelation of the triune God and relatively driven by the force of a religious ground motives. Consequently, for a reformational methodology of apologetics, besides the combination of both theology and philosophy, it will always remain crucial, that one can only rely on God himself and the saving power of the Gospel (Rom 1:16). A reformational method of apologetics therefore “merely” remains a responsible attempt to do justice to the integral
Word-revelation of God, faithful to the Self-revelation of God in Holy Scripture and in the proclamation of the Gospel, always listening to the revelation of creation and the unfolding process of history, remaining methodologically open for adjustments.

4.6 The unity of the transcendent (theological) & transcendental (philosophical)

Stoker’s comparison of Van Til’s (theological) and Dooyeweerd’s (philosophical) approach showed that both approaches differ in terms of direction (Stoker 1971:35), nevertheless, due to the Trinitarian interconnection of both theological and philosophical approaches, it becomes conceivable for a reformational methods of apologetics to make use of both, im Wechselspiel.

... Both methods of criticism, the transcendent and the transcendental, are necessary and complement one another. But Dooyeweerd’s application of the transcendental method of human thought is primarily philosophic and your application of the method of transcendent criticism is, on account of your apologetic approach, primarily theological. Dooyeweerd with the use of the transcendental method stops at the directedness of the human heart towards God or apostatically towards a theoretical idol and his exposition of the religious ground motives (and their implications). Should he proceed any further, namely to an exposition of God and his counsel (something that he can hardly do with his transcendental method), his theory of knowledge would become theological... (Stoker 1971:36)

By conceiving theology and philosophy in terms of sphere universality it becomes clear that both are equally basic for apologetics, which should be transcendent and transcendental in its approach. Even though if philosophers may claim, that theology doesn’t deal with God himself, but rather reflects on subjective faith, it is the task of the reformational apologist to reply, that due to the integral understanding of God’s Word-Revelation, God’s Self-revelation in Holy Scripture is clear and trustworthy (just like Christ, the incarnated Word of God and God’s revelation of creation), and therefore also philosophy must listen to Holy Scripture and that it is “non-sense” to tear apart the unity of the Gestalten of God’s Word-revelation. Even though theology is fundamentally dependent on philosophy to articulate itself, every philosophy is ultimately dependent upon its attitude towards God’s Self-revelation in Holy Scripture, just as towards the creation order or Christ and his Kingdom, prophetically anticipated in the Old Testament, preached by Christ himself, and since the outpouring of the Holy Spirit proclaimed through the Body of Christ, which constantly lives Coram Deo and is governed by God and his Word-revelation.

By means of the supplement suggested by Stoker, it becomes possible to integrate both the concerns of Van Til’s critique on Dooyeweerd as well as criticisms of the latter on the former (in apologetics), even though it is unavoidable that a new method of apologetics consequently
arises, for even though Van Til was sympathetic about Stoker’s suggestions, the implied task wasn’t further developed. Due to the Trinitarian covenantal belief underlying reformational philosophy and reformed theology, it is possible to consistently and internally overcome Van Til’s overemphasis on absolute truths at cost of relative truth by means of the integration of the non-reductionistic ontology of reformational philosophy, directly suggested by Stoker and indirectly also reconciling Neo-Calvinistic apologetics with Dooyeweerd:

...Of interest is to note that you – as an apologist – primarily stress the ultimate meaning moment of anything in our created universe, whereas its cosmically specific or analytical meaning moment needs a stress too (of course presupposing its ultimate meaning moment), which you allow for, but do not especially elaborate. Here again I touch upon my special problem... (Stoker 1971:46)

Stoker made this reconciliation possible by “informing” Neo-Calvinistic apologetics with an integral understanding of God’s Word-revelation, leading to a unified vision of philosophy and theology in the discipline of apologetics; capturing the radical diversity of created reality and proclaiming the Gospel, God’s Self-revelation in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Basically, this supplement “opens up” Van Tilian apologetics for the radically biblical philosophical ontology:

… man’s knowledge (1) of God (including his knowledge of God’s counsel, creation, providence, revelation, grace, and so forth)... (2) (a) man’s knowledge of the created universe (including man himself and his knowledge) viewed in its dependence on God (and on God’s knowledge and his counsel) and thus seen as revelational of God... (2) (b) concerning problems to which you repeatedly refer, the theory of knowledge that you allow for and give significant comments upon, but do not especially elaborate as such (Stoker’s special problem – Emphasis GB). It is the theory of man’s knowledge of the (created) universe or cosmos (including man himself and his knowledge) according to its special or specific meaning (thereby presupposing its ultimate meaning, presupposing that it is revelational of God, that it is created according to the plan of God, and that God guides and rules it according to his providence). (Stoker 1971:48)

4.7 Trinitarian (covenantal) theology and the root of human existence

Even though Trinitarian modal-spherical apologetics acknowledges the importance of a radically biblical reformational ontology, it still maintains its Trinitarian covenantal (theological) a priori, which is based upon the Creator-creature distinction, for as previously stated, even a philosophical ontology is ultimately dependent upon the transcendent root of human existence, the triune God and his integral Word-Revelation (revelation of creation, incarnated Word and inspired Word).
The Trinitarian modal-spherical method of apologetics emerges informed by Stokers philosophical insights, which show that it is possible to combine reformational philosophy with reformed theology, due to the interconnection between ultimate meaning moments (P-A) and specific meaning moments (P-C), so that the radical diversity and coherence of created reality as well as to the Self-revelation of the triune God remain Gegenstand of the apologetic enterprise, relying on God’s plan through his Word (without reducing created reality to the ultimate P-A context). Such a procedure makes it possible for Neo-Calvinistic apologetics to be truly integral, and thereby fully acknowledging the three fundamental forms of knowledge (God, Self and World) and the unity of the integral Word-revelation of God (Word of creation, incarnated Word and inspired Word of God), consequently integrating Stoker’s suggestions to apologetics, which were accepted by Van Til, as it is clear in his response to Stoker’s contribution to his Festschrift:

You want “the revelation of the created universe” included with the other three forms of revelation of which you speak in one comprehensive covenantal relationship between God and man. Nothing could suit me better. (Van Til 1971:72)

Van Til acknowledged his overemphasis on the P-A context and was open for a further development of his method of apologetics, even though he left the task open to others. Therefore, the evolving Trinitarian modal-spherical approach attempts to accordingly build on the foundations of Neo-Calvinistic apologetics, integrating the basic insights won out of the interaction between Van Til, Dooyeweerd and Stoker in Van Til’s Festschrift:

You say I stress the P-A approach. Then you ask me to turn right and explain the detailed relations of the facts of the universe operating on God’s plan. Well Dr. Stoker, I leave that to you. I have tried to learn from you as you have discussed these details in your various writings. But I cannot do what you have done (Van Til 1971:73)

By stressing both, the importance of sphere individuality (Dooyeweerd’s account) and sphere universality (Stoker) in the relation between Van Til’s theological approach and his philosophical views, the reconciliation of Neo-Calvinistic apologetics with reformational philosophy is brought upon, even though some revisions of the Van Tilian method become unavoidable, as Stoker points out, in case his suggestions are accepted by Van Til:

Should you accept my suggestion of a supplement to your theory, you will probably have to re-phrase several of your observations, especially in the cases of some of your criticisms on non-Christian theories; but in substance you will not have any need to change your views. (Stoker 1971:70)

This means, that by integrating reformational non-reductionist ontology in the Trinitarian modal-spherical approach, God’s Self-revelation as Trinity is nevertheless viewed as the transcendent root of human existence, which ultimately determines the framework of every

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46 According to Stoker, the „other three forms of revelation“ are already fully developed in Van Til’s approach, thus his philosophical supplement to Van Til’s approach mainly concerns the “revelation of creation”, as the form of revelation which Van Til “allows” but yet without developing it extensively (Stoker 1971:30)
Christian method, regardless if philosophy, theology or whatsoever scientific domain is concerned. Therefore, Van Til’s transcendent critique (first and third step of his approach) is maintained but complemented by the transcendental critique of reformational philosophy in its transcendent steps, thus doing justice to the P-A and P-C contexts by employing a unified view of covenantal Trinitarian theology and non-reductionistic reformational philosophy. Such a dynamic interplay of transcendental and transcendent critique is essential for a reformational apologetics, which is based upon a unified view of philosophy and theology:

Your criticism of knowledge, however, is (i). a transcendent critique criticism, starting with God and his knowledge of himself and of his counsel; but it is (ii). Transcendental in your criticism of opposing philosophical and empirical scientific theories by exposing their ultimate presuppositions of brute facts, chance, and human autonomy; and it again becomes (i). a transcendent criticism when criticizing the presuppositions concerned. Both methods of criticism, the transcendent and transcendental, are necessary and complement one another. (Stoker 1971:36)

Thus, Stoker explicitly points out the way, through which Neo-Calvinistic apologetics can make use of the transcendental critique of theoretical thought, so that it becomes foundational for reformational apologetics, as it was Dooyeweerd’s intention (Dooyeweerd 1971:74):

Through the use of the (ii) transcendental criticism of human thought, Dooyeweerd (a). starts from the distinction between the analytical and non-analytical aspects of cosmic reality, proceeds to man’s selfhood (or heart) that brings about a synthesis between the analytical and non-analytical aspects, and he thence demonstrates that the human heart is directed either towards our triune God or loses itself apostatically in the diversity of created reality, and he (b). critically investigates philosophic theories (or systems), exposes the presuppositions on which they are based, proceeding to the religious ground-motives that function as the ultimate motives of the systems concerned; he furthermore demonstrates how systems, motivated by non-Christian “ground-motives”, fall into antinomies and dialectical tensions, whereas this is not the case with Christian philosophy on account of its religious “ground-motive” of creation, the fall and redemption (Stoker 1971:36)

Thence, Dooyeweerd’s approach doesn’t necessarily lead to the exclusion of transcendent criticism from apologetics, but rather has the potential to strengthen its methodology. In practice, the Neo-Calvinistic apologist can show, that his transcendent criticisms (derived from the Holy Scriptures), is supported by the transcendental critique of theoretical thought. Starting with God and his knowledge of himself and of his counsel (Van Til’s first step) as correlative to the direction of the human heart towards the absolute Origin (Dooyeweerd’s second step and third step) and transcendently criticizing concerned presuppositions, calling unbelievers to repent and believe the Gospel, but “going beyond” transcendent criticism at that point and giving an philosophical account on how “apostate ground-motives” lead to antinomies and dialectical tensions (Dooyeweerd’s third step), thus integrally approaching unbelievers and showing how the Christian faith, through its ground motive coherently
embraces the whole of human existence, unmasking absolutizations and redeeming all spheres of life.

By integrating Stoker’s supplement regarding the revelation of creation, Van Til’s main concern in stressing Holy Scripture not only receives a philosophical backup, but it notably presupposes an integral understanding of God’s Word-Revelation (revelation of creation, incarnated Word and inspired Word). From such a perspective it becomes biblically clear, that neither theology has the right in depreciating the revelation of creation (Dooyeweerd’s preoccupation concerning Van Til’s scholastic tendency – terminology and possible influence on his scheme of thought) nor philosophy has the right to depreciate the absolute authority of the inspired Word, for both disciplines are ultimately dependent upon the triune God and his integral Word-revelation. Consequently, Trinitarian modal-spherical apologetics, by acknowledging the legitimacy of emphasis, both in Dooyeweerd’s and Van Til’s approaches, doesn’t favour either one or the other, but rather combines both in the unified view of philosophy of theology, as the foundation of Neo-Calvinistic apologetics, methodologically reconciling Dooyeweerd and Van Til via Stoker.

4.8 Transcendent root and transcendental method – The Coherence between the work of the Trinity and transcendentalism. The Gospel via Philosophy

Because the whole of created reality (including men) is ultimately dependent upon the triune God, Trinitarian modal-spherical apologetics relates the radical diversity of created reality (approached by the transcendental method) to the triune God, who is the ultimate source for the unity in the diversity of the cosmos, coherently stating with Dooyeweerd that the supratemporal meaning unity of the modal aspects of reality are founded in God himself. The transcendental ideas, which are the basic supratemporal presuppositions of any philosophy, are conceived within the Trinitarian framework, as reflecting the work of the ontological Trinity. Following Ive’s (2011) expositions on the covenantal basis of God’s Self-revelation as Trinity (in Holy Scripture), it is stated that relationality is only possible in the light of the unity and diversity of the Holy Trinity, who ultimately makes creaturely relations possible and knowable to men. (see 3.1-3.5) It is in that sense that Van Til’s criticism on Dooyeweerd must be understood, i.e. that every transcendental method presupposes a transcendent root, for there can’t exist any eternal universals alongside God (there are no principles beyond God). As the persons of the Holy Trinity are related to each other (as we learn by faith, through his trustworthy inspired Word), it is possible to understand and speak of every kind of relationality in the created order. Thus, the apologist (following the task of the Church) must preach the inspired Word of God in order to make Non-Christians aware of their covenantal consciousness. The philosophical objection that such a Trinitarian approach can lead to “speculation” is answered by means of an integral understanding of God’s Word-revelation and the equal trustworthiness of its Gestalten. Thence, the reformational vision must be held by the Neo-Calvinistic apologist, that his belief relies on the ultimate Self-
revelation of God in Christ, through the Holy Spirit (and the inspired Word of God) (see 2.5-3.6):

The world, rather, is where we see expressed the free and sovereign relationships of the Persons one with another. This last is a presuppositional belief made on the basis of Scriptural revelation, not something that can be extrapolated from one’s experience of the world. (Ive 2011:6)

Not recognizing the ultimate dependence of the cosmos on the triune God leads to a view, which is rejected by the reformational apologist, whose task is to preach the Gospel of Christ:

Some reformational thinkers have tended to focus on God’s action as creator and redeemer and have tended to play down the need to set this fully within the Trinitarian context... However, if one’s conception of the creator is a Unitarian one, one is forced to conceive of God either in continuity or discontinuity with the world: either the world is an extension of God’s being, or God is entirely separate from the world. (Ive 2011:9)

Although it is important for apologetics to entail a philosophical ontology according to the biblical meaning of the heart (for theology depends on philosophy to approach every Grenzfrage and articulate itself), nevertheless it still must stress the reliability and unity of the threefold Word-revelation of God and that the cosmos is ultimately dependent upon the triune God. The world therefore reflects the Triune God in its covenantal constitution. Thence, Trinitarian apologetics combines reformational philosophy and reformed covenantal theology, seeking to do justice to the diverse aspects of the human horizon of experience, but nevertheless relating the diverse facets of the cosmos (including human experience) to its meaning unity, which is ultimately found in the Triune God. He confronts every human being everywhere with his Word-revelation and commands the Church to preach the Gospel, so that men may repent and receive salvation, the forgiveness of sins, through the transformational work of the Holy Spirit, redeeming human existence and creation as a whole. Trinitarian apologetics regards reformational philosophy as deeply rooted in the Self-revelation and actions of God as the creator and redeemer, and its non-reductionist account on the irreducibility and correlation of law and subject as under the rule of Christ. (see 2.5-3.6).

After conceiving the doctrine of the ontological Trinity as the “limiting idea” in regards to the ultimate meaning of cosmic reality (including men), it became possible to understand the transcendental ideas as the basic (supratemporal) presuppositions which regulate theoretical thought, within the Trinitarian framework, thus building on the foundation of a Trinitarian-modal spherical method of apologetics. Viewed from a reformational perspective, theoretical thought is understood as a deepening of integral experience, “guided by” and giving an account on the ground motive of the thinker. Nevertheless, as human beings are bound to the creation order (God’s creation, plan, providence), their thought is bound to the temporal law order of created reality, to which they are subject and can’t avoid. Therefore, the transcendental ideas are limiting concepts (Grenzbegriffe), on which every thinker has to give an account of. As stated above and reinforced by Stoker, Dooyeweerd’s transcendental
critique shows that (and how) only the Christian ground motive gives an integral account on these supratemporal presuppositions, while every unbiblical ground motive ends up in idolatrous absolutizations, leading men to lose themselves in temporality, disintegrating human experience and ultimately self-destructing. Thence, Ive’s Trinitarian account on the Grenzbegriffe helped showing the interconnection between reformed covenantal theology and reformational philosophy, which together form the basis of the Trinitarian modal-spherical method of apologetics. It must be noticed that the transcendental ideas are to be understood in connection to the central spheres of the ego (God, self, world), as ontic limits which can’t be transcended by men’s thought, and that men’s “functioning” within his temporal, modal-aspectual horizon of experience is religiously determined and driven by his heart direction.

4.9 Grenzbegriffe & the peripheral spheres of the ego (cosmic experience)

Thus, “temporally” speaking, it is through faith, as man’s “highest” (leading) function, that selfhood cosmically expresses itself, religiously guided by a ground motive (in the interdependence between Self-knowledge and knowledge of God), giving meaning to one’s existence and directing the whole of one’s life in all peripheral (cosmic, modal-spherical) relations (aspects of reality - different ways of knowing and experiencing the cosmos. (see 3.1-3.5). It is important to remember, that as the transcendental ideas are the basic presuppositions of theoretical thinking, having to do with human cosmic experience, consequently they are to be seen as supra-temporally rooted, but nevertheless finding expression through the peripheral multi-aspectual cosmic relationships of the ego.

4.10 The Trinitarian interpretation of the Grenzbegriffe

Neo-Calvinistic apologetics should conceive the transcendental ideas, which are the basic supratemporal presuppositions of any philosophy, within the Trinitarian framework, as they reflect the work of the ontological Trinity. Following Ive’s expositions it became possible to conceive relationality, individuality and time aspects in a dynamic fashion, enabling the reformational apologist to be truly emphatic in his approach, seeing and proclaiming that reality can only be understood in the light of the unity and diversity of the Holy Trinity.

The doctrine of the ontological Trinity functions as “limiting idea”, granting regenerated men insight into the ultimate meaning of cosmic reality (including men). Consequently, the transcendental ideas as basic (supra-temporal) presuppositions are to be understood in the light of the all-encompassing Work (creation, plan, providence, recreation, etc.) of the triune God as he sovereignly sustains and rules over the world, leading everything towards its ultimate goal.
The limiting idea of the totality of the human horizon of experience (knowledge of the cosmos) reflects the all-encompassing transformational work of the Holy Spirit. All the law-spheres of created reality are subjected to the transformational operation of the Holy Spirit (the coming of the Kingdom), through the liberating power of the Gospel, which began at the root of human existence through Christ’s redemptive work, (applied by the Spirit) extending to the regeneration of men’s culture and of the entire cosmos. It is the Holy Spirit who ultimately applies the Gospel of Christ to the hearts of men, liberating his world and life view from absolutizations and redeeming all the law-spheres. It is granted to men to experience the purposiveness of all events in the light of the work of the Holy Spirit, the transcendent source for the understanding of the meaning totality of cosmic experience. The idea of diversity (coherence), the central reference point of all acts of thought (knowledge of self and of the world - within time) is correlative to the work of the Son of God, who came into the world to identify with fallen men and to redeem the cosmos (including men) at its root. Thus, according to his human nature, Christ is the religious concentration-point for the meaning totality of creation. Consequently, it is only by trusting Christ and believing the Gospel that man can come to truly know himself as well as his ultimate purpose and the meaning of life.

47 The transcendental idea of Origin is seen by Trinitarian apologetics as correlative to the work of the Father, who is the transcendent ground upon which all things depend. In an ultimate sense, he is the Origin of creation, redemption and transformation through his decree. By conceiving reformed theology and reformational philosophy within the Trinitarian framework, Neo-Calvinistic apologetics seeks to give an non-reductionistic account of faith in the confrontation with Non-Christians, dynamically allowing the interplay of transcendental and transcendent criticism, relying upon God’s integral Word-revelation, aware of the radical diversity and coherence of created reality and giving testimony that the whole cosmos (including men) are ultimately dependent upon the sovereign work of the triune God. A Trinitarian interpretation of the transcendental ideas help to understand the non-reductionistic, reformational (philosophical) account on the central and peripheral spheres of the ego coherently in accordance to the Self-revelation of the triune God (in his integral Word-revelation), making it possible to integrate central insights from reformational philosophy into Neo-Calvinistic apologetics. By legitimately combining reformational non-reductionist (modal-spherical) philosophy with Trinitarian covenantal theology, the discipline of apologetics can be truly advanced in the Neo-Calvinistic context, for besides the important reconciliation of Van Til and Dooyeweerd (in apologetics) via Stoker (contestable if viewed only in terms of sphere individuality, without taking sphere universality into account), new possibilities are opened up in the apologetics, further avenues of discourse becoming explored in apologetic confrontations. As Stoker and Ivé’s contributions “indirectly” shows, a Trinitarian modal-spherical method of apologetics is able to preserve the essence of Van Til’s method, nevertheless constructively complementing it with central features of reformational philosophy. Van Til’s transcendent account on the ultimate dependence of the cosmos upon the triune God (men’s response only in obedience or disobedience towards God’s Word) is presupposed but further developed by means of a

47 This conclusion is a re-statement of Stoker’s insights and contribution to Van Til’s Festschrift. Its content and revelance for reformational apologetics was previously dealt with in this thesis.
transcendental (structural) treatment of the same questions which were dealt by Van Til transcendently. In other words, to become non-reductionist in reformational apologetics means that its approach might thoroughly allow (in every step) the dynamic interplay of transcendent and transcendental criticism, giving philosophical and theological answers to all the basic questions, which are ultimately conceivable within the Trinitarian framework. The Trinitarian framework helps overcoming the favouring of either theology or philosophy in regards to the basic questions of apologetics, uncovering such separationism of theology and philosophy (in apologetics) as religiously motivated by a unbiblical (dualistic) ground motive (or at least suggesting such dualism) in the depreciation of God’s integral Word-revelation, i.e. failing to acknowledge the unity and trustworthiness of its Gestalten, which imply that they are ultimately interdependent, to be conceived in meaning coherence. (see 2.5)

Driven by the Trinitarian conviction, Neo-Calvinistic apologetics applies reformational philosophy when dealing with radically diverse and coherent Grenzfragen of the cosmos, and applies covenantal theology when dealing with the Kernfragen of God’s Self-revelation in Christ, through the Holy Spirit, so that fallen men become aware of their covenantal consciousness and of the triune God, the creator and redeemer who hold everything together and makes human experience possible, sustaining men and the cosmos by his work and integral Word-revelation. Thus, reformational apologetics opens up an integral way of preaching the Gospel, seeking to do justice to the entire horizon of human experience, empathically interacting in different ways, “seeing” through a non-reductionistic perspective and identifying with men’s different struggles, just like Christ redeem the whole man and to renew all the spheres of life. (see 2.5-3.6)

By conceiving the Grenzbegriffe (limiting concepts, transcendental ideas) of Dooyeweerd’s transcendental critique of theoretical thought within the Trinitarian framework, holding to an integral understanding of God’s Word-revelation, it should be kept in mind that the supratemporal presuppositions (transcendental ideas) which are basic for the transcendental critique, refer to the central spheres of the ego, which should (besides the modal aspects of reality) be considered in a Neo-Calvinistic method of apologetics. This is basic for the understanding of Dooyeweerd’s distinction between the central kinds of knowledge and the biblical meaning of true self-knowledge as it depends upon true knowledge of God:

…true self-knowledge in its biblical sense, i.e. in its dependence upon true knowledge of God, cannot be itself of a conceptual character. The reason is that all conceptual knowledge in its analytical and inter-modal synthetical character presupposes the human ego as its central reference-point, which consequently must be of a supra-modal nature and is not capable of logical analysis. (Dooyeweerd 1971: 84-85)
4.11 Trinitarian apologetics and the central spheres of the ego

These distinctions help apologetics to become philosophically reformational and to break away from the elevation of “reason” as the only mode through which “truth” can be grasped. By escaping such reductionisms of knowledge, allowing the central spheres of the ego to be considered in their irreducibility and correlation, it is possible for apologetics to integrally do justice to the fullness of selfhood and to the different relations (peripherical and central) in which human beings are placed in, in their being-in-the-world Coram Deo, as creatures who were made to respond to God’s Word-revelation. The reformational criticism of autonomous reason clearly shows that human life is religious at its core, pointing out that a person’s ground motive directs the whole of human life within temporal reality. By developing a biblical ontology and unmasking idolatrous absolutizations of the temporal, the usage of reformational philosophy in apologetics is crucial in advancing and “defending” the biblical understanding of reality, liberating the peripherical as well as central relations of the ego, still remaining faithful to the Trinitarian confession of the Church and preaching the Gospel in an integral way. As mentioned before, the transcendental critique also serves as the supplement for Van Tilian apologetics, so that by integrating it in the apologetic method, it is possible to maintain both, transcendental and transcendental criticisms, although by becoming thoroughly transcendental, the philosophical backup of apologetics (just as Stoker’s P-C) helps criticizing unbiblical systems from the inside (something transcendental criticism can’t).

The transcendental critique makes it clear in its steps, through the analysis of the central spheres of the ego, that (i) the concentric direction of the ego can’t be found within the temporal order, (ii) experience and interpersonal relationship remain a mystery if took in an absolute sense, for they presuppose each other, they can’t help in establishing the synthesis between the logical and the non-logical aspects (iii), pointing to the religious inclination of the ego towards its absolute Origin, the relation between the self and God, which points above the human selfhood. It is only this religious relation from which the human ego acquires its concentric direction in order to experience the totality of meaning of cosmic reality. (see 2.5-3.6).

The reformational vision restores the fundamental place of religion, uncovering the disintegrating direction of apostate thought, revealing that thinking and experience are not a “neutral” matter of choice, as men’s pretended autonomy suggests, but that philosophical systems are dependent upon the ground motive of the thinker (the direction of the heart), human beings as creatures being responsible for their account of the integral Word-revelation of God, who meets men everywhere and sovereignly sustains the whole creation, calling men to encounter the knowable by trusting it, to see his Creator in the face of the other, who as Him is made in the image of God. As life is religious, man can’t escape God, but he is rather structured to respond Him, constantly called to listen and to receive God’s Word-revelation:

Even in its absolutizing of the relative, the thinking and acting ego transcends its temporal horizon. It is subjected to a central law that we may call the religious
concentration law of our consciousness, by which it is obliged to transcend itself in order to find the positive meaning of itself. (Dooyeweerd 1960:25)

4.12 Reconciling Van Til and Dooyeweerd via Stoker in apologetics – Going beyond Stoker’s supplement to apologetics via Ive’s Trinitarianism

After reconciling Dooyeweerd’s and Van Til’s approaches via Stoker’s positive contribution in Van Til’s Festschrift, a Trinitarian modal-spherical approach emerged, in an attempt to do justice both to non-reductionistic (modal-spherical) reformational philosophy and covenantal reformed theology. Through Ive’s expositions, it become conceivable for apologetics to view both disciplines within a Trinitarian framework, doing justice to the reformational vision which upholds that one can only speak of God as he revealed himself as Trinity, even though the reformational apologist should acknowledge that by stressing the Trinity as the transcendental root of created reality, he only arrives at the ultimate source of unity of the cosmos (Van Til’s P-A), thus still needing the biblical ontology developed by reformational philosophy in order to approach the radical diversity of the cosmos (including men’s entire horizon of experience) from a non-reductionistic perspective, constantly listening to God’s Word-revelation in the process of on-going reformation. Ive’s expositions showed that the supratemporal presuppositions basic to thought, which concern the central spheres of the ego, reflect the work of the Trinity, coinciding with Van Til’s stress and Stoker’s “agreement” that human experience is ultimately dependent upon the triune God. The Trinitarian foundation appeared to be the basis for a unified view of reformational philosophy and reformed theology in the discipline of apologetics, consequently presupposing an integral understanding of God’s Word-revelation (reflecting the work of the ontological Trinity). By conceiving men’s experience as ultimately dependent upon the triune God (P-A), the transcendental critique and its philosophical focus on the modal-spherical structure of the cosmos, showed up to be important from a viewpoint that is anthropocentric cosmological, but nevertheless relative (P-C context has to do with the radical diversity of the cosmos), but rather pointing beyond itself, to the absolute Origin, the triune God, who can only be understood by means of His Self-revelation in Christ, through the preaching of the Gospel, and the work of the Holy Spirit who applies the work of Christ to the hearts of men. Thence, the Trinitarian vision also functions as a corrective in case of overemphasis of either philosophy or theology in apologetics, for by stressing God’s integral Word-revelation (revelation of creation, Christ as incarnated Word, Holy Scripture as God’s inspired Word by the Holy Spirit), both the theological tendency of overemphasizing God’s Self-revelation in Holy Scripture as the ultimate source of unity of the cosmos (P-A) while depreciating God’s revelation of creation (P-C), implicitly viewed as inferior to Scripture (based upon unbiblical nature-grace dualism) is rejected, as well as the philosophical overemphasis on the intracosmic (P-C) revelation of creation (relation between the self and the cosmos) without considering God’s Self-revelation in Holy Scripture and the supratemporal presuppositions which are basic in order to biblically grasp the religious relation between the self and God.
As Christ came to redeem the whole man (in his central relations – God, self and cosmos as well as in his peripherical relations – the modal aspects of reality), it is crucial for apologetics to be willing to listen to God’s integral Word-revelation. In order to be constantly listening to the Word of God, a reformational method of apologetics must remain open for revision. A perennial understanding of the reformational tradition and its ontology based upon the biblical meaning of the heart is crucial in apologetics. For instance, being-in-the-world always demanded from the Church that it must constantly hear to God’s Word in order to fulfil its cultural mandate within each specific moment. The Gospel must be preached in a way that is comprehensible within the “life world” of our contemporary audience, always faithful to the Gospel which is presented in the inspired Word of God. The trustworthiness of the different *Gestalten* of God’s Word revelation implies the upholding of Holy Scripture, for regardless how less the “world” may find it acceptable or how sophisticated a philosophical system may be, Holy Scripture reveals the words and the work of Christ, for it is inspired by the Holy Spirit, who applies the Gospel to the hearts of men. The unmasking of absolutized “reason” as based upon a self-destructive and apostate heart direction underlies not only the fact that human beings are radically religious, but consequently also the fact that truth is radically personal and can only be grasped by those, whose hearts have been opened up by the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, a “sincere” acceptance of God’s ultimate Self-revelation in Christ in Holy Scripture doesn’t necessarily leads to a biblical attitude towards the revelation of creation. The controversy between Dooyeweerd and Van Til emphatically shows how important it is for apologetics to adapt an integral understanding of God’s Word-revelation, in order not to be one-sided (sometimes even regressive/reactionary) in approach, but rather perennial and reformational in a broader sense, so that different contributions can be understood in terms of the continuity of the Church and its on-going reformation.

Reformational apologetics seeks to identify with the whole of man’s existence, biblically approaching the central and peripherical relations of the ego, upholding that the entire cosmos is ultimately dependent upon the triune God, who ultimately revealed himself in Christ, within the dynamic unfolding of history, displaying His glory within temporal reality and leading the world towards its goal by inaugurating the new Creation through the preaching of the Gospel and the coming of Christ’s kingdom. The church is called to integrally fulfil its calling, by overcoming unbiblical ground motives and listening to God’s Word-revelation, aware of its dependence upon the work of the Holy Spirit, who alone can open the hearts. Consequently, in an ultimate sense, apologetics neither relies on philosophy nor on theology as sciences. Scientific knowledge is theoretical, but true self knowledge and knowledge of God are supratheoretical):

God’s self-revelation in Holy Scripture as Creator and redeemer concerns the central religious relation of man to his absolute Origin. Its true meaning is therefore to be understood by man only if his *heart* has been opened up to it through the moving power of the Holy Ghost. (Dooyeweerd 1971:86)
4.13 Ground idea(s) of Calvinistic Philosophy and Trinitarian apologetics

Stoker’s expositions on the different answers to the ground question of philosophy among Calvinistic circles are elucidating, showing how the “specific stress” of each of one of the nuances basically reflect the same threefold transcendental Idea.

In other words, in the light of Trinitarian belief, the different “ground ideas” of Calvinistic philosophy presuppose each other, while their meaning coherence is rooted in the work of the triune God. The Holy Trinity is viewed by a Neo-Calvinistic method of apologetics as the ultimate source of the cosmos and its most basic presupposition. This implies an integral understanding of God’s Word revelation (creation, incarnated, inspired) and should lead to the appreciation and observation of the unity and diversity of its Gestalten.

That’s why Stoker views the revelation idea as central for a Calvinistic epistemology, for it is through the confrontation with God’s Word revelation (and seeing God in the face of the other – man being made in the image of God) that man becomes ultimately self-conscious. By facing God’s revelation, man’s heart being religiously inclined towards his absolute Origin, makes him become aware of life’s meaning and its ultimate purposiveness. Thence, the philosopher’s encounter with God’s Word revelation precedes his adherence to a philosophical system. Therefore Stoker views creation as basic for philosophy, for an integral understanding of God’s Word revelation leads to the recognition of creation as revelation.48

It is notable that even though Stoker chose the creation idea as the ground idea of Christian philosophy, he acknowledged that philosophy must rely upon theology’s contribution regarding the ground question of man’s existence, which is ultimately dependent upon the Self-revelation of the triune God, thus confirming the basic Trinitarian vision, leading to the conclusion, that the ideas of creation, law and revelation are to be conceived as interdependent, as a threefold idea - correlative to the threefold cosmonomic idea, the Christian ground motive and God’s integral Word revelation, which ultimately reflect the work of the ontological Trinity - thence, the ontological Trinity is to be seen as the most basic presupposition of reformational apologetics.

Reflecting on the importance of the law idea in the light of the Trinitarian interpretation of the reformational vision also leads to the same conclusion, for by starting with the law idea and the human’s horizon of experience, considering the fall of creation into sin and its redemption through Christ (Christocentric view of the cosmos – anthropocentric cosmology), ultimately points out to the presupposition that creation precedes the law and that human beings as creatures of God, can only respond (apostatelly or faithfully) to the Self-revelation of the triune God and his Word revelation - His redemptive work in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, reformational apologetics must uphold that all three different nuances of

48 See also the first chapters of Calvin’s Institutes.
Calvinistic philosophy are to be seen as ultimate dependent upon the work of the Triune God. (see 2.5-3.6)

Reading Stoker’s account of the creation idea from a Trinitarian perspective helps to conceive the other mentioned ground ideas within the Trinitarian framework and to reinforce how important it is for reformational apologetics to hold to the Trinity as its most important transcendent presupposition, and the biblical non-reductionistic ontology (derived from the biblical meaning of the heart) as its basic modal-spherical (cosmic) view. His expositions again help going beyond the Van Tilian approach, implicitly showing how indispensable reformational philosophy is for apologetics, for even though he holds to the Trinitarian basis and the integral understanding of God's Self-revelation, just like Van Til, stressing the ultimate dependence of the cosmos upon the triune God and his Word revelation, he nevertheless clarifies the limits of theology, pointing out how theology depends on philosophy to understand the Grenzfragen and meaning totality of created reality, implicitly elucidating the relation between philosophy and theology and how important it was for reformational philosophy to emancipate from reformed theology (although reformational apologetics must conceive both disciplines as interdependent). (see page 61)

Viewed from a Trinitarian perspective, Stoker rightly points out that revelation is the final key of knowledge and not the Gegenstandsrelation, as Dooyeweerd affirmed, for the latter mainly has to do with cosmic experience (subject side) of God’s revelation of creation. (see 2.4 and 3.5)

Stoker’s criticism on the “primacy” of the law-idea is in line with the Trinitarian conviction that Dooyeweerd’s transcendental ideas are rooted in the integral work of the ontological Trinity, consequently Dooyeweerd’s anthropocentric cosmology ultimately dependent upon the triune God. The “law-idea” shouldn’t be seen as the sole “link” between God and the cosmos, for the law has to do with the second transcendental idea and the work of the Son of God, just like the creation idea with the transcendental idea of referring to creation's absolute Origin (the work of the Father) and the revelation idea ultimately reflects the work of the Holy Spirit, being correlative to the transcendental idea of (cosmic meaning) totality. (see 3.5)

Stoker’s objection against the primacy of the law-idea in philosophy is in line with the Trinitarian vision which rejects the tendency of identifying God’s legislation with the creation order, in a way that limits God’s sovereignty over creation. Such a Trinitarian view goes beyond the philosophical contributions of the law idea by complementing its anthropocentric view of the cosmos with a theocentric view, which takes the importance of the Self-revelation of the triune God and his integral Word revelation fully into account (see 3.6)

Thus, Stoker’s expositions on the different nuances of Calvinistic philosophy help advancing Trinitarian apologetics in its understanding of reformational philosophy and reformed theology as they are both rooted in the Trinitarian belief and give testimony of the sovereign work of the triune God. The Trinitarian framework shows up to be able to capture the
reformational vision in an all-encompassing way, so that divergences within reformational circles can be conceived in a perennial way, maintaining the reformational approach open for revisions, but nevertheless radically biblical and confessional, so that differences are recognized, although unnecessary separations are reconciled by a perennial Trinitarian reading of the broader Neo-Calvinistic tradition, which aims to be radically biblical and always listening to God's Word revelation, in order to be open for the work of the Holy Spirit and obey to God's call for on-going reformation of the Church - in the process of being conformed to the image of Christ. (see 3.1-3.6)

4.14 Modal-spherical apologetics and the dynamic interplay of individuality, relationality and time

Finally, after conceiving that and how it is possible to combine reformational philosophy and reformed theology within the Trinitarian framework, showing how such Trinitarian vision encompasses both, advancing the discipline of apologetics in the Neo-Calvinistic context and letting the Trinitarian modal-spherical method of apologetics, once again the importance of the biblical ontology (derived from the biblical meaning of the heart) must be stressed. For it took a while to conceive reformational philosophy as ultimately dependent upon the triune God, "rehabilitating" the importance of Van Til's theological contribution in a way that makes it possible to "reconcile" Dooyeweerd and Van Til in apologetics by means of a perennial reformational reading, instead of ending up in an unbalanced way, either-or favouring of Dooyeweerd's philosophical or Van Til's theological approach. After showing that such a reconciliation is indeed possible (in apologetics), in a dynamic interplay of both approaches, letting a new method of apologetics evolve and adding new features to it, which are intrinsically linked to the subjects dealt with by Stoker, Van Til and Dooyeweerd - ultimately presupposing the triune God as the transcendent root of human existence and applying the biblical ontology of reformational philosophy, conceived within the Trinitarian framework - again, and this time even more specifically intending to elucidate the importance of the modal aspects of reality in apologetics - to be truly reformational and Trinitarian in apologetics means to be modal-spherical in discourse, for the modal-spherical discourse opens up many possibilities of apologetic interaction with unbelievers, for human beings in their being-in-the-world share the same horizon of experience, differing only in the direction of their heart (in Adam or in Christ).

A method of apologetics can only be truly reformational by acknowledging the multi-aspectual facets of human existence, being truly emphatic (in the central as well as peripheral spheres the ego), encountering and respecting his fellow human being as a full person, giving an account to the whole of life, using the diversity of possibilities of creation, led by the Spirit and with a sense of wisdom, using the right means in the right time, preaching the Gospel so that men may be encountered by the triune God
The importance the modal aspects of reality (peripheral spheres of the ego) can’t be neglected by reformational apologetics, for it provides a unique and non-reductionist way of approaching relationality and individuality, engaging with unbelievers in a wholesome way. In order to be truly emphatic in discourse, the apologist must insightfully take the dynamic interplay of individuality, relationality and time into account, constantly listening to the Word of God, open hearted and filled with the Holy Spirit.

Just as individuality, relationality and time should be dynamically considered by Trinitarian modal-spherical apologetics in order to integrally engage with the many facets of human existence, due to the interconnections between reformed theology and reformational philosophy and the plenty possibilities of dealing with Grenzfragen and Kernfragen of cosmic reality and the ultimate meaning of human existence, which can only be unlocked by revelation as the key to Self-knowledge and true knowledge of God, it is crucial that the reformational apologist constantly walks in the light, honest before God, worshipping in spirit and in truth, so that as he himself stands in the truth, he can also see what's the right thing to do in each specific situation (Phil. 1, Col. 1), in order that by executing his apologetic task he is ultimately trusting the triune God and not himself.

It is crucial to be faithful to God so that true knowledge of God and self-knowledge can be gained and increased, for both are essential in giving the ego a concentric direction towards cosmic reality. The apologist himself must be a testimony of the saving power of the Gospel, so that by proclaiming that the sinner's only hope is to be restored by the integral saving power of the Gospel, by trusting in God’s redemptive work in Christ, through the transformational work of the Holy Spirit, the reformational apologist can truly and emphatically consider the central and peripheral spheres of the ego, identifying with the various struggles of the sinners, being open and loving in approach, but nevertheless faithful to God's integral Word revelation and preaching the full Gospel.

Trinitarian apologetics is modal-spherical in its discourse, for the biblical ontology, which is derived from the biblical meaning of the heart, enables the reformational discourse of apologetics to speak to the whole man, i.e. approaching reality from the many facets (aspects, functions) of human existence.

4.15 Preparing to introduce the Trinitarian modal-spherical apologetics to the broader Christian context - The philosophia in Ecclesia recepta & apologetics

Reformed theology on the other hand, speaks of the inevitable Self-revelation of the sovereign triune God and the human call, to respond to His revelation. The Trinitarian modal-spherical method of apologetics dares to claim that both, reformational philosophy and reformed theology are to be conceived in unity, as both of them ultimately reflect the work of
the triune God in His covenantal relationship to the Church, the Body of Christ. It was this all-encompassing covenantal relationship of the triune God to his Church, which brought about the Reformation and the "renewed" life of faith Coram Deo, which sought to give the triune God all the glory, who alone was to be seen and trusted as sovereign and autonomous. The life produced by the Reformation and the strong belief in the sovereignty of God, were the basic inspiration which later gave rise to Neo-Calvinism and reformational philosophy. That’s the consensus within the Neo-Calvinistic circle. (See 3.1-3.6). In the next section of this thesis, the mentioned consensus will be challenged in the light of Marlet’s well-known dissertation on Dooyeweerd’s Philosophy of the Law-Idea as well as Glenn Friesen’s article on Marlet’s dissertation. This will also appear to be an important point of entry in order to conceive the reformational vision within a broader perspective, i.e. opening up the possibility of engagement with the broader Christian context. Thence, by doing so it is intended to introduce and make the Trinitarian modal-spherical method of apologetics accessible to confessional Christianity as a whole (according to the ecumenical credos), for to be reformational means to be radically Trinitarian, and to be radically Trinitarian means to be radically Christian. Consequently, in order to be truly biblical, i.e. faithful to the Self-revelation of the triune God and his commandments, a reformational method of apologetics must find ways of positively and biblically engaging with Christianity as a whole. To remain restricted to the reformed context, avoiding the dialogue with other Christian traditions is not only a sign of unloving narrowness and theological arrogance, but also of unfaithfulness as the Body of Christ and its integral call. Such a tendency is sharply and clearly criticized by the Lord himself, who earnestly rebukes morbid traditionalistic views (John 8:38-44). As it always was the claim of the Reformation to be a movement ad fontes, i.e. representing the true and confessional belief of the universal Church. In the same way, reformational apologetics must live out its task in engagement with broader Christianity.

After conceiving the reformational vision within a broader context of Christianity, it will be crucial to test and to set Trinitarian modal-spherical apologetics in contrast to other methods.

5. Introducing apologetics to the philosohia in Ecclesia recepta

The dissertation of the Jesuit Fr. J. Marlet to the Philosophy of the Law Idea (Marlet 1954) provides the perfect basis for the introduction of reformational apologetics to broader Christianity in such a way that considers reformational philosophy’s contributions as a genuine development of the universal Church⁴⁹. It is important to notice from the beginning,

⁴⁹ The intention isn’t to ignore differences between Christian traditions, but to place reformational apologetics within the broader context of Christianity, which confesses the same basic faith on the Triune God, expressed in the ecumenical credos of the Church. This scope is the only appropriate attitude of reformational apologetics, for in order to be faithful to the triune God and the cultural mandate, apologetics must strive to find its way in becoming accessible to the universal “invisible” Church, participating in the struggles of Body of Christ which lives Coram Deo. Similar examples of addressing main-stream Christianity in line with the confessional belief of the ecumenical credos can be found, for instance in N.T. Wright’s work (Simply Christian, Surprised by
that although Marlet’s dissertation basically deals with Dooyeweerd’s Philosophy of the Law Idea, from the allusions and references of his elaborations, he also considers Vollenhoven (Marlet 1954:133) and also Stoker (Marlet 1954:73) as adherents of the “new” Calvinistic philosophy. Therefore, Marlet’s *perennial* reading of reformational philosophy is in line with the intention of this thesis, mentioned right from the beginning, i.e. advancing reformational apologetics according to the coherence of its broader Kuyperian vision (biblical ontology, according to the meaning of the heart), instead of focusing specific differences among its exponents (e.g. Dooyeweerd and Stoker). Consequently, by uncovering the internal coherence between reformational philosophy and the *philosophia in Ecclesia recepta*, as articulated by Marlet, the opportunity emerges according to the provided basis, not only for reformational philosophy, but also for reformational apologetics to be conceived within the broader tradition of the universal Church (making it accessible to main-stream Christianity – going beyond the limits of the reformed tradition – although preserving its reformed identity). Recalling that the intention of this thesis is to translate insights into reformational apologetics, Marlet’s dissertation will be primarily approached in a way that fits and clarifies the Trinitarian framework of apologetics, which was worked out so far, opening up new avenues of apologetic discourse and further building on its integral foundation. Later on, such a *perennial* reformational approach with its integral Trinitarian framework (open to main-stream Christianity), will enable the engagement of other methods of apologetics from a truly biblical and reformational perspective, taking the radical diversity and coherence of created reality into account as it reflects the work of the ontological Trinity, which is the ultimate source of the unity and diversity of the cosmos and at the same time represents the most basic presupposition of the Christian belief. The Trinitarian belief is expressed through the all-encompassing covenantal relationship between the triune God and the Church.

5.1 Dooyeweerd’s reception of Marlet

First of all, it was Dooyeweerd himself, who provided the basis which justifies the claim that Marlet’s dissertation can function as a way of introducing reformational apologetics to a context that not only exceeds the reformational and the reformed, but also the Protestant context (remaining reformational and Trinitarian). As Friesen remarks:

Hope, Evil and the justice of God, etc.) or the “Radical Orthodoxy” movement. The latter will be introduced to Neo-Calvinistic apologetics in the next section of this thesis, as an example of a theological critique of culture, which was inspired by similar sources then Neo-Calvinism, and can function in reformational apologetics as a complement to the Neo-Calvinistic transcendental approach of cultural apologetics, providing a radically Orthodox platform for reformational apologetics to engage with, putting the Trinitarian modal-spherical method of apologetics (based on the interaction between Stoker, Van Til & Dooyeweerd) and its Trinitarian (covenantal) combination of theology and philosophy into practice.
In his 1964 lecture to the Association for Calvinistic Philosophy (Dooyeweerd 2007)\textsuperscript{50} Herman Dooyeweerd says that recent Roman Catholic theology expresses ideas that come very close to his own philosophy… He says that Roman Catholic theology is now moving in a direction opposed to scholasticism; it has now raised the following ideas: (1) it speaks about man’s radical corruption (2) it opposes any split between a domain of philosophy belonging to natural light of reason and a domain of theology belonging to the divine light of revelation (3) it denies the autonomy of thought (4) it affirms the religious center of man. (Friesen 2011:1)

It is notable that ten years before the mentioned lecture of 1964, it was Dooyeweerd who wrote the foreword of Marlet’s published dissertation, where he expressed his appreciation of Marlet’s contribution. First, he praises Marlet’s accurate introduction to his philosophy, which in itself is only possible due to sympathy of spirit\textsuperscript{51}:

> Der Verfasser hat in der Tat von den Grundlinien der Philosophie der Gesetzesideee eine vorzügliche Übersicht verschafft. Dass er diese Zusammenschau in gedrängter Form zu geben verstanden hat, wird man besonders zu würdigen wissen und ist vielleicht kennzeichnend dafür, dass er sich wirklich den Geist dieser Philosophie an geeignet hat. (Dooyeweerd 1954:V)

Secondly, Dooyeweerd recognized Marlet’s importance in opening up new ways of interaction between recent developments in Roman Catholic thought and reformational philosophy:


Thirdly, he praises Marlet’s masterfully comprised exposition of the *philosophia in Ecclesia recepta* and accepts Marlet’s corrective interpretation of (Neo) Thomism, being compelled to confess that such (positive) developments haven’t been sufficiently taken into account by his reformational philosophy – and that Marlet opened up a new perspective to him:

> Im vierten Kapitel zeichnet er einen – trotz seiner Gedrängtheit – meisterhaften Grundriß der “philosophia in Ecclesia recepta”, wobei er besonders die jüngsten Strömungen in der scholastischen Philosophie beleuchtet, die bisher zu wenig im


\textsuperscript{51} The way Dooyeweerd refers to “Marlet’s spirit” in the treatment of the Philosophy of the Law Idea, strongly remembers Dooyeweerd’s notion of ground-motive. It seems that he is stating that Marlet is driven by the same biblical ground-motive. Recalling his previous critique of the scholastic ground motive as unbiblical, that’s a strong statement which reveals Dooyeweerd’s humble attitude and openness towards the revision of his own account on Scholasticism.
Gespräch berücksichtigt wurden, und eine mir wenigstens – neue Sicht eröffnet auf die Bedeutung des Natur-Gnade-Themas und die thomistische Seinslehre. (Dooyeweerd 1954:V–VI)

Although Dooyeweerd reinforced that the last word on the subject haven’t been spoken yet, he was flattered by Marlet’s conclusion that his reformational philosophy is at its core, absolutely in line with the *philosophia in Ecclesia recepta* and affirmed that it has always been his intention to develop a philosophy, which is of basic ecumenical-Christian character:

> Es ist hier nicht der Ort, und es wäre auch verfrüht, bereits eine endgültiges Urteil über diese interessante Deutung abgeben zu wollen. Wohl kann ich sagen, dass die Folgerung des Verfassers, die Philosophie der Gesetzesidee als christliche Transzendentalphilosophie sei in ihren Grundzügen ganz in Übereinstimmung mit dem, was die „philosophia in Ecclesia recepta“ von Anfang an gemeint hat, mich in besonderem Maße getroffen hat. Diese Folgerung stimmt jedenfalls insoweit ganz überein mit meiner eigenen Ansicht in dieser Sache, dass ich von vorneherein der Philosophie der Gesetzesidee eine ökumenisch-christliche Grundlage zu geben beabsichtigt habe (Dooyeweerd 1954:VI)

Hereby, the same previously mentioned intention of introducing reformational thought (now the Trinitarian modal-spherical method of apologetics-TMSA) to a broader Christian context is expressed, seen as a fruit of the (Neo) Calvinistic reformation, but nevertheless accessible to main-stream Christianity:

> Deshalb habe ich auch in der neuen englischen Ausgabe meiner ersten Trilogie ausdrücklich die Bezeichnung “kalvinistische“ Philosophie zurückgewiesen, obwohl ich nicht aufhöre, sie als eine Frucht der kalvinistischen Reformation zu betrachten (Dooyeweerd 1954:VI)

Dooyeweerd concludes the foreword to Marlet’s dissertation by stating its important contribution in bringing forward the dialogue (understanding) between Roman Catholic and reformational thought, but at the same time aware that although there is convergence regarding the main features of a Christian-ecumenical transcendental philosophy, this in no way should mean a obliteration of the differences between both traditions on spiritual grounds, pointing to the Calvinistic understanding of the relation between God and man and the fact, that on this regards, Calvinists won’t neither agree with Marlet’s or with Rome:

> So mag den dieses Buch als ein besonders bedeutungsvoller Beitrag zum gegenseitigen Verständnis zwischen dem römisch-katholischen und reformatorischen Denken begrüßt werden. Dem Verfasser ist dabei natürlich vollständig bewusst geblieben, dass ein Übereinstimmen in den ökumenischen Grundzügen einer christlichen Transzendentalphilosophie keineswegs ein Verwischen der Unterschiede im geistigen Nährboden beider Denkrichtungen bedeuten soll. Ebenso wenig wird er sich wahrscheinlich dem Gedanken hingeben, dass man seine Sicht auf die

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52 Including Stoker, Vollenhoven and others which Marlet mention as related to Dooyeweerd’s philosophy.
Thus, it follows that by opening up for positive engagement with broader Christianity doesn’t mean that the reformational apologist must ignore his own tradition, but rather that his main concern must be the cultivation of the reformational attitude of actively engaging the process of the Church’s on-going reformation, constantly listening to God’s integral Word revelation, so that by standing in the service of Christ and His Body implies a being guided by God’s Word and Spirit according to God’s plan and providence, which demands a wisdom and empathy that exceeds one’s own limits (and the limits of one’s ecclesiastic denomination) in order to recognize (positive) developments among other Christian traditions as in the world in general, for any (theological) confession hasn’t got God’s sovereignty and His work of cultural redemption at its disposal, just as little as the coming of the Kingdom can be reduced to the scope of traditionalism.

Viewed from the Trinitarian perspective worked out so far, integral in its understanding of God’s Word revelation, non-reductionist and reformational in philosophy, reformed and covenantal in theology, it should have become clear how important it is for mainstream Christianity to get to know the reformational movement and its project of internal reformation of Christian thought (and life) – the massive impact it can have on the integral Christian life and on the Church’s cultural mandate of living Coram Deo and reflecting the imago Dei in the world. As the non-reductionist approach of reformational philosophy is unfortunately still unknown (or misunderstood – even among Protestants), one can understand that Dooyeweerd was flattered by Marlet’s expositions which placed him within the broader context of the philosophia in Ecclesia recepta, showing great affinity in terms of the transcendental philosophy and revealing a similar “reformational” attitude of surrender to the triune God in an attempt to obey God’s integral Word revelation even though the price to pay many times entail the correction of one’s own position (tradition). Therefore, just as Dooyeweerd was positive about the engagement with a movement which exceeds the reformed circle (remaining faithful to his Neo-Calvinistic tradition), so should also TMSA be open and empathic towards other traditions, presupposed they are willing to listen to God’s integral Word revelation. Thus, important insights from Marlet’s dissertation will be pointed out, fulfilling two tasks; (1) Opening up the possibility of positive engagement with broader Christianity and (2) adding further features to the Trinitarian modal-spherical method of apologetics and complementing it, in case this appears to contribute to the clarification of subjects related to the further development of TMSA.
5.2 Engaging (Neo) Thomism through Marlet’s lenses

5.2.1 Contra autonomous reason - On *christiana philosophia perennis*, biblical ontology and the Augustinian-Thomistic grace-nature-scheme

Recalling the four main points of convergence between (Neo) Thomism and (Dooyeweerd’s) Neo-Calvinistic philosophy:

1. it speaks about man’s radical corruption
2. it opposes any split between a domain of philosophy belonging to natural light of reason and a domain of theology belonging to the divine light of revelation
3. it denies the autonomy of thought
4. it affirms the religious center of man. (Friesen 2011:1)

It is notable that they all relate to the biblical ontology, which is derived from the biblical meaning of the heart, resulting in a non-reductionist approach to creational structures and revealing the religious basic structures of human beings and their ultimate dependence upon the triune God. Marlet agrees on the role of supra-temporal ground motives as the religious basic structure of human beings (creatures of God), grounded in creation, fall and redemption in Christ. Marlet’s agreement with Dooyeweerd on the religious basic structures is a consequence of the participatory ontology, upheld by (Neo) Thomism (similar by Neo-Calvinism), which is grounded on revelation (not in Greek philosophy)\(^\text{53}\):(Marlet 1954: 108)

Marlet refers to recent developments in (Neo) Thomism as an Augustinian tendency, giving rise to the openness required for a true transcendental critique (Marlet 1954:77).

Marlet gives some hints on the “Augustinian” core of the new Catholic movement, such as Karl Rahner’s recognition of the insufficiency of philosophy and man’s desire for religious insight, Scheler’s emphasis that thinking is enveloped by religious worldview (leading to a transformation of natural theology), Gilson’s Thomistic-Augustinian criticism of rationalistic tendencies within his Roman catholic circles and de Lubac’s attempt of developing an incarnational philosophy. (Marlet 1954:75-79) Although (Neo) Thomism still speaks of

\(^{53}\) At the next step of this thesis, Radical Orthodoxy will also be introduced to reformational apologetics, for it is a movement which is inspired by the work of the same Roman Catholic movement, participatory in ontology – sharing a similar integral perspective and opposition towards dualism. For the sake of brevity and in order to remain within the scope of apologetic methodology, the introduction will be restricted to James K.A. Smith “Introducing Radical Orthodoxy”. Two main reasons can be given to justify the legitimacy of this restriction: (1) Smith’s introduction to RO (RO = abbreviation of Radical Orthodoxy) received the appraisal and approval from John Milban himself (one of the founders of the movement) – therefore the quality of Smith’s portrait of RO in the mentioned book suffices for the sake of the envisioned questions of apologetic methodology (opening up new avenues of development and interaction). (2) As James K.A. Smith is at the same time a reformed theologian and a reformational philosopher and due to the shared Neo-Calvinistic tradition, his way of engaging Radical Orthodoxy facilitates the approximation of the movement from the intended Trinitarian-modal spherical perspective of apologetics.
nature and grace, there isn’t a dualistic split, but rather nature presupposes grace. There is no autonomy of reason, for it must rely on the redeeming function of faith: (Marlet 1954:83)

Recent ecclesiastic documents\textsuperscript{54} reinforce the ultimate primacy of divine revelation as well as the unity between philosophy and revelation as part of the (Roman) Catholic heritage. Their main concern is the defence of a genuine and dynamic Christian philosophy\textsuperscript{55} (remaining Thomistic) which relies on the reality of a faith experience of truth, being constantly guided to new knowledge.: (Marlet 1954: 87-88)

Following de Lubac\textsuperscript{56}, Marlet mentions the essence of the \textit{christiana philosophia perennis}:

\begin{quote}
... dem traditionsmäßigen, wesentlich christlichen Charakter der Philosophie, als “der Synthese aller Erkenntnisse im Lichte des Glaubens“. (Marlet 1954:91)
\end{quote}

This is in line with the Trinitarian understanding of God’s Word revelation, which implies that in order to truly understand the creation order (revelation of creation), philosophy must rely on divine revelation, for the finite creation is ultimately dependent upon the infinite. The meaning coherence of the diversity of created reality can only be found in the Creator. Therefore, the participatory ontology stressed by Marlet emphasizes the Creator-creature distinction (just like Van Til and Stoker), consequently presupposing the unity of philosophy and theology, reason and faith, God’s integral Self-revelation and man as capable receiver, who only has his being as a gift from the Creator. Man is ultimately dependent on God.

On the basis of Gilson’s Augustinian-Thomism, Marlet points to the unity of theology and philosophy. He defines theology as “faith rendition” with the (ecclesiological) function of redeeming philosophical though. But he also reinforces the distinctiveness of both disciplines, which are irreducible to one another, and that the use of reason in the transcendental light of the virtue of faith is something completely different then to derive philosophical conclusions from articles of faith. That’s in line with Trinitarian apologetics, which relies on God’s Self-revelation, the unity (in diversity) of His Word and consequently also of theology and philosophy.\textsuperscript{57}

According to Marlet, true Thomism is a religious philosophy. It was due to the rationalistic Zeitgeist that many within Thomistic circles were lead away from it. Thence, the intention of (Neo) Thomism is to reintegrate Christian Philosophy into the Christian organism. (Marlet 1954:93)

\textsuperscript{54} Marlet refers to the Humani Generis from 1950

\textsuperscript{55} (Neo) Thomism’s stress on both; constancy and dynamics is characteristic for a non-reductionist ontology, also important to Neo-Calvinism. Danie Strauss’ reformational account on the basic questions of cosmology are elucidating in showing how a biblical ontology encompasses both sides (law-side and subject-side) of the cosmos – allowing cosmology to overcome the \textit{either or} dilemma of constancy or dynamics, individuality or universality, conceptual knowledge or concept transcending knowledge. (Strauss 2009: 60)

\textsuperscript{56} “la synthèse de toutes les connaissances, opérée sous la lumière de la foi”; H.de Lubac, Sur la philosophie chrétienne.NRT 63 (1936), p-245.

This position clearly reflects the non-reductionist ontology stressed right from the beginning of this thesis, for it implies the irreducibility and correlation of law and subject in its distinction between the existential (subject side) and the scientific-technical (law-side). (Marlet 1954:93)

Friesen rightly points out that the similarity between Neo-Calvinism and (Neo) Thomism isn’t a mere coincidence, but rather due to a source shared by both movements:

Marlet’s comparison of this new theology with Dooyeweerd’s philosophy could have been even stronger had he investigated the reliance of both the new Catholic theologians and Dooyeweerd on the Christian theosophy of Franz von Baader. The convergence of ideas between the new theology and Dooyeweerd is a result of their common inspiration by Baader’s ideas. (Friesen 2011: 38)

This “new” integral perspective of Thomism, which non-reductively links the existential to the scientific, presupposing the distinction between the law- and the subject-side of the cosmos, on the other hand biblically transforming the nature-grace motive by stressing that nature presupposes grace, can fruitfully be adopted by Trinitarian modal-spherical apologetics as a mode of discourse, which enables the Neo-Calvinistic apologist to engage other methods of apologetics from the inside out, in such a way that encompasses their perspective in a transformational way – opening up the possibility of their internal reformation. Illustrations of such a reformational perennial engagement with other methods of apologetics will be given at a later stage of the thesis. By now it is important to retain, that such a non-dualistic interpretation of the nature-grace motive opens up the possibility of constructively criticizing and engaging dualistic tendencies in Christian apologetics, as well as Christian thought in general. As the ground question of human existence (existential side) can only be answered by the Self-revelation of the triune God, a philosophical approach (stressing the structures of creation – focusing the revelation of creation) is insufficient, for the scientific side depends on faith. The ultimate meaning for the cosmos (including man) can only be found through God’s full-fledged Word revelation. In that sense, (Neo) Thomism is in agreement with the TMSA’s understanding, in which philosophy is seen as dealing with technical (scientific) Grenzfragen of the cosmic order (focusing the revelation of creation – presupposing faith) and theology as dealing with the existential Kernfragen of human existence – questions that are intrinsically bound to the incarnation of the Son of God (incarnational Word of God) as it is revealed in Holy Scripture (the inspired Word of God – the work of the Holy Spirit – its understanding is also only possible by faith – the opening up of the heart through the Holy Spirit). Thus, Marlet’s christiana philosophia perennis is welcome to TMSA (TMSA = Trinitarian modal-spherical apologetics).

As TMSA, (Neo) Thomism also stresses that any philosophy that claims to be autonomous is in clear opposition against the work of integral redemption of the triune God and His Word revelation. Christian philosophy (just as theology and apologetics) can’t pretend that the cosmos is a “pure” cosmos, as if the incarnation of God’s Word and the creation of the Church, through which God connects himself to creation, had never happened. Any
philosophy that claims to be autonomous isn’t indifferent at its core, neither without (religious) presuppositions. (Marlet 1954:94)

5.2.2 (Neo) Thomism on Christian theology and philosophy

Marlet saw this perspectival turn (Umkehrung der Perspektive) within Roman Catholicism as indispensably necessary for (Christian) philosophy, as a moment of reflection on the concreteness of man and his cosmos, in order to come into grips with its own and deepest (conscious and unconscious) theological presuppositions. (Marlet 1954:94)

According to Marlet, the starting point for the convergence of the (Neo) Thomistic movement regarding the nature of Christian philosophy is the basic conviction that philosophical thought is enveloped by a theological a priori, in the sense of a revelational a priori relating to the reality of the incarnation and testifying that all things consist by Christ (Col. 1:17). Just as every philosophy presupposes a traditional interpretation of the world, so the Christian. Thus, Marlet is in line with the radical Christian pressupositionalism, stressed by TMSA. (Marlet 1954:95-96)

Marlet explicitly distinguishes his (incarnational) understanding of theology as God’s movement towards humanity and the revelational theology of the Church, which displays the fullness of meaning of the revelational Word in the unfolding of time from Dooyeweerd’s (strict scientific) understanding of theology as theoretical knowledge obtained in a synthesis of the logical function and the function of faith58 (Marlet 1954:96)

The suffix “logy” of theology implies exactly what Marlet doesn’t want theology to be, namely a (scientific) way of thinking which implies human initiative. Nevertheless, as Friesen correctly points out:

Marlet’s reference to a theological basis of philosophy is not intended in a theoretical-theological sense. (Friesen 2011:34)

Rather, Marlet’s theological a priori aren’t to be understood as formal and inner-scientific presuppositions (the way Dooyeweerd restricts his use of the term theology), but as concrete and supra-theoretical presuppositions, similar to the religious ground motives pointed out by Dooyeweerd59. (Marlet 1954:96)

58 That which is very inadequately called “theology,” is a theoretical knowledge obtained in a synthesis of the logical function of thought and the temporal function of faith. It is a knowledge which itself is entirely dependent on the cosmonomic idea from which the thinker starts” (NC-II:562-563).

59 Although the (logy) suffix stands in opposition to the meaning conveyed to theology, the ecclesiological strength of Marlet’s theology is admirable and is similar to Stoker’s view mentioned before. It is in the sense of “faith rendition” and incarnational movement of God towards humanity (via the Body of Christ) that is basic for TMSA in its combination of a deepened Trinitarian reformed (covenantal) theology and non-reductive (modal-spherical) reformational philosophy. One can cogitate the possibility of completely substitute the usage of the “rationalistically biased” (understood as scientific – in contrast to common experience) terms theology and
Unfortunately, Friesen’s treatment of Marlet’s theology basically (and pre-maturely) ends with the ambiguous usage of the term just mentioned:

And yet there is an ambiguity here. Marlet sometimes refers to the root-unity as a theological root unity. In that way, ‘theology’ is used to refer to ontical conditions, and not theoretical presuppositions. But at other times, Marlet refers to theology as a theoretical discipline, as when he contrasts Dooyeweerd’s supposedly Calvinistic ideas on the sovereignty of God with the responsible actions of human. (Friesen 2011:35)

TMSA absorbs Marlet’s incarnational (transformational) understanding of Thomism as a way of constructively interacting with Neo-Thomistic philosophy from a Neo-Calvinistic perspective. It is important to go beyond Friesen and notice, that Marlet emphasizes (as Dooyeweerd) the relative peculiarity of the meaning sphere, which is the domain of philosophy (i.e. revelation of creation). He agrees that Holy Scripture (God’s inspired Word revelation) doesn’t give insight into the structures of creation order, for Holy Scripture isn’t there in order to solve immanent-philosophical questions. (Marlet 1954:97)

Similar to TMSA, Marlet sees the interplay between Christian theology and philosophy as the necessary way of redeeming reason (including philosophy), the liberation of the natural from the sinful, a baptism, which brings about self-comprehension – man’s revelation to himself. (Marlet 1954:98)

The (Neo) Thomistic project of transformation of philosophy through the Christian religion corresponds (according to Marlet) to Dooyeweerd’s (therefore also the framework of TMSA) intended task of reforming philosophical thought, thereby revealing man to himself. (Marlet 1954:98)

philosophy – simply replacing them by faith and reason – thereby underlying the biblical ontology which understands every sphere of life as important – having to be directed to bring glory to God. For the biblical-reformational perspective is clear in underlying that the core human existence (the direction of the heart), the life of religion, man’s being-in-the-world and inter-subjectivity are pre-theoretically determined by man’s worldview, the religious driving force of his heart. Therefore, as scientific thinking hasn’t got a privileged place before God, the risen question concerning the replacement of theology and philosophy by faith and reason should be further explored. Nevertheless, the main task of this thesis was (is) to overcome “traditional” controversies and advance the discipline of apologetics through a radically biblical and Trinitarian perspective.


Although via the Thomistic paradigm TMSA follows the reformational (Augustinian) paradigm.

As already mentioned before, Marlet’s account on (Neo)Thomism must be read in terms of its distinctive Augustinian-Thomistic features, such as: its participatory ontology, its transformational understanding that nature presupposes grace as well as its account of natural revelation and reason (corresponding to the reformational understanding of the revelation of creation) and its integral (Trinitarian) understanding of God’s Word revelation, which is in line with the Trinitarian framework, worked out so far as the TMSA.


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Marlet gives an account of (Neo) Thomistic (non-dualistic) understanding of the biblical view on pre-theoretical experience (prior to dualism), which is in line with TMSA’s account on the three central spheres of the ego. (Marlet 1954:99)

In order to understand the perspectival turn within Roman Catholicism, represented by the recent convergence between the French and the German traditions, the introduction of a certain distinction became necessary; namely, (1i) philosophy as terminological development and (2i) philosophy as a moment of reflection on the totality and the concreteness of human existence. (1ii) Philosophy, took in its scientific form (Gestalt) and function (Funktion) and (2ii) philosophy in its existential function (existentieller Funktion) from the center of personhood (similarly to the meaning of the “heart” in Neo-Calvinistic’s biblical ontology – Emphasis by the writer, i.e. from the personal participation in God’s grace. Both sides are to be understood as limiting views (Grenzenbetrachtungen). True philosophy concretely reflects theoretically-scientifically, taking both moments into account. It has always been the stress of the (different Roman Catholic) traditional nuances, to always consider both sides, although with different emphasis on each side. For example, the Augustinian line gives greater emphasis on the existential, while the scholastic’s Aristotelian-Thomistic lays stronger stress on the scientific function: (Marlet 1954:101)

Christianity redeems the originally-sinful philosophy. This philosophy stresses both the constitutive and the existential in its interplay with the theological, being ultimately dependent upon the Creator. Christianity didn’t mere develop the term “Person”, but the mystery of personhood was resurrected through Christianity – man received a revelation of himself. Being (das Sein) received its concrete fullness of meaning via the creation idea:63 Thence,Marlet’s distinction between the existential and the constitutive parallels some distinctions, which were previously integrated in TMSA. Those correlations are due to the similar biblical ontologies shared by Neo-Thomism and Neo-Calvinism.

5.2.3 TMSA and the transformational usage of (Neo) Thomistic philosophy
Remarkably, Marlet’s account on apostate tendencies of (continental) philosophy in its absolutizing either of the existential or of the technical (scientific) corresponds to Van Til’s criticism of the same tension, created by a dialectical ground motive. By ignoring the fundamental importance of the Creator-creature distinction, apostate (philosophical) systems lead to the unsurpassable “irrationalistic-rationalistic” dilemma, which destroys the possibility of knowledge. In that sense, the dilemma between irrationalism and rationalism, which is stressed by Van Til, should be read in terms of Marlet’s transcendental account on the functions of philosophy and the absolutizations of the technical or/and the existential : 

The dilemma that confronts the non-Christian methodology in general, and that of modern phenomenism in particular, is therefore that either one must know

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63 Marlet describes the development of the philosophy of the Church as a transformational process, through which apostate philosophy (prior to Christianity) is gradually redeemed through the incarnational Self-revelation of the Triune God through his Church. Through this reforma
everything or one cannot know anything. One assumption is that unless one knows the terms or objects of propositions in the fullness of their relationships, one does not know them at all. A second assumption is that the terms of propositions are not merely unknown but ultimately unknowable in all their relationships. And what is called scientific knowledge is a cross between knowing everything about nothing and knowing nothing about “everything”. (Van Til 1976: 156)

Consequently, it is by means of the Creator-creature distinction, that the Christian position reveals itself as the only way of overcoming the irrationalistic-rationalistic dilemma:

The true Christian apologist has his principle of discontinuity; it is expressed in his appeal to the mind of God as all-comprehensive in knowledge because all-controlling in power. He holds his principle of discontinuity, then, not at the expense of all logical relationship between facts, but because of the recognition of his creaturehood. His principle of discontinuity is therefore the opposite of that of irrationalism, without being that of rationalism. The Christian also has his principle of continuity. It is that of the self-contained God and his plan for history. His principle of continuity is therefore the opposite of that of rationalism without being that of irrationalism. (Van Til 1976:153)

It is important to notice, that although Van Til’s account on irrationalism and rationalism doesn’t fully represent the non-reductive ontology of reformational philosophy (P-C context pointed out by Stoker), it does in fact represent the reformational position with regards to the ultimate meaning moment of human existence as ultimately dependent on the triune God (Stoker’s P-A context). Therefore, by setting Van Til’s exposition in the context of Marlet’s account of the existential and the technical functions of philosophy – the Trinitarian conviction previously elaborated once again is confirmed, namely, that the ground questions (Kernfragen) of human existence can only be answered by God’s incarnated (Jesus Christ) and inspired (Holy Scripture) Word revelation (both are primarily the Gegenstand of theology), and that philosophy, with its focus on God’s revelation of creation, is mainly concerned with Grenzfragen (P-C context) of the cosmos. In order to go beyond the specific meaning moments of the cosmos (P-C context) and speak of man’s ultimate dependence on the triune God (P-A context), philosophy has to be informed by the revealed Gospel of Christ (Jesus Christ as the incarnated Word of God, as he is revealed in Holy Scripture, God’s inspired Word revelation). Due to the radical diversity and coherence of the entire cosmos upon the triune God (taking the results of the transcendental critique into account), the question must be answered, if Trinitarian apologetics should still speak of the relation between theology and philosophy - or if it would be better to simply speak of the relation between faith and reason. This would underline that scientific knowledge can’t be equalized with true knowledge, thereby re-stating that truth can only be attained by the Self-revelation of God and the opening up of the human heart through the Holy Spirit, consequently also revealing man to himself and towards the cosmos. Although the favouring of “faith and
reason” over against “theology and philosophy” seems to perfectly integrate the biblical ontology developed by reformational philosophy, the former distinction (theology and philosophy) not only encompass the scope of traditional Christianity (which can be reformed from the inside out – following Marlet & reinforcing the continuity of the Body of Christ and the perennial & transformational character of Christian philosophy), but it also serves to take the scientific Gegenstand of both disciplines into account. Consequently, the integral (Trinitarian) understanding of God’s Word revelation would imply that in terms of its theoretical articulation – in the treatment of cosmic Grenzfragen, theology depends on philosophy (needs to be redeemed by a true Christian philosophy) – philosophy on the other hand, must be informed by the Gegenstand of theology (Christ as incarnated Word, according to Holy Scripture) in order to be redeemed and obtain answers to the Kernfragen of human existence. This “transformational” understanding reflects Marlet’s non-dualistic account of the nature and grace motives, wherein nature presupposes and is directed towards grace, integrating both the law- and the subject- side of the cosmos in a non-reductive ontology. Thence, (Neo) Thomistic philosophy clearly presupposes the Creator’s absolute sovereignty. (Marlet 1954:102)

Marlet’s incarnational approach should be adopted as a mode of discourse of TMSA, honouring the continuity and coherence of the philosophia in Ecclesia recepta. Nevertheless, the Trinitarian-reformational paradigm showes up to be the most all-encompassing and biblical one, relating the basic presuppositions of philosophy and theology to its transcendent root; without compromising the radical diversity and coherence of reality. Thus, the Trinitarian reformational paradigm enables the philosophy of the Church to finally transcend its Greek philosophical heritage (without forgetting its importance). By absorbing Marlet into TMSA, a mode of discourse is opened up, which may be use to confront other Christian apologetic methods on the level of a biblical ontology (creational, incarnational, inspirational).

5.2.4 Philosophy in God’s Church and its relation to theology

Further, the importance of Marlet’s expositions on the relation between Christian philosophy and theology can’t be neglected by TMSA. His position is insofar crucial for reformational apologetics, for it implies the distinctions between the central spheres of the ego (Origin, the self and the cosmos), which is decisive for a truly biblical and modal-spherical understanding of the relation between theology and philosophy.

In the theoretical, the perspectives of theological and philosophical thinking follow separate directions (are driven towards separate directions). Philosophical thought starts from consciousness, expressing the faith intuition according to the totality of the human (participatory) existence, bethinking oneself of the structure of personhood as responsive structure. Its formal Gegenstand is the reality of the human person-in-community.

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As not every one is a philosopher or a theologian, apologetics shouldn’t be restricted to a special scientific meaning. Although scientific knowledge may be a legitimate deepening of true knowledge of the cosmos, apologetics must be faithfull translated to the pre-theoretical realm of human existence and inter-subjective interactions.
concentrated around men. Philosophy beholds the cosmos by circulating this centre, and God constitutes the infinite horizon, (a perspective) out of which, seen from man’s perspective, still doesn’t reveal man’s own personality. The philosophical intuition lives in its totality in the concept of being (Seinsbegriff), which shapes the fullness of intuition in the expressible. The content of being, as transcendental, isn’t really abstract. It’s maximal and unactual universality didn’t originate from its abstract character, but rather from the un-distinguishability (confusion), by which it (Sein) expresses itself. The ideas of God, self and cosmic contexts (Marlet alludes to Dooyeweerd’s transcendental ideas) on the other hand, are “partial intuitions”, each of them regulating and connecting a conceptual context. (Marlet 1954:105)

Theological thinking starts from the same fullness of knowledge, but expresses the (faith) intuition (starting) from Christ’s consciousness. Theology is the development of Christ’s consciousness in the Holy Spirit, opened up to his members (the Church) in faith. (Marlet 1954:105)

In theology, faith organizes itself, becoming a science of faith. Theological thinking is a constantly “listening to” and “expressing of” God’s Word and a proclamation of revelation: an inferring from, describing itself, moving within the data of faith. (Marlet 1954:105)

The ground for the continuity between the theological concept and the concept of revelation, already in its first conceptual expression, is that revelation itself is a reality. Conceptual thinking is firstly only touched by the light of revelation, because it essentially belongs to the temporal totality structure. (zeitlichen Strukturganzen). Due to their structure, human terms have a disposition of expressing revelation, although they aren’t only “longing for this service”, because they carry the sinful denial of service within them. Therefore, the terms have to go the way of activation and integration, the whole path of creation to Christ. In all their elements, they have to be brought into continuity with the reality and the terminology of revelation. Only afterwards, can they be transformed into the expression of the divine revelation in Christ. Marlet quotes Thomas Aquinas, who wrote about bringing philosophical argument into the service of faith, which doesn’t mean to mix wine with water, but rather to transform water into wine. Human knowledge is thereby transformed into divine knowledge. Thus, in the light of Marlet’s expositions, not only Thomas’s Augustinianism is defended (participatory ontology – against autonomy), but also an incarnational account of philosophy is given, which reflects the same Trinitarian vision, upon which reformational philosophy and reformed theology are radically grounded on. Thus, by adopting Marlet’s incarnational and transformational vision of (Neo) Thomism, while still remaining radically (Neo) Calvinistic, a promising avenue of apologetical discourse is provided for TMSA, also in the sense that other methods of apologetics can be integrally approached from the perspective of TMSA, opening up a way of engagement, which can eventually lead to the reconciliation of the Trinitarian modal-spherical presuppositional approach with classical apologetics. Presupposed there is openness towards transcendental criticism (as Marlet has shown), a deep reconciliation and further development of those methods would be truly a result of a radically biblical view. (Marlet 1954:106)
Further, Marlet gives an incarnational account on the nature of theoretical thought and the Church’s theological function of proclaiming Christ and, encompassing the integral relation between Christ, theology and philosophy, paralleling TMSA’s understanding of God’s Word revelation and supplementing its non-reductive philosophical account with the incarnational.

For many centuries, the spirit of God prepared categories in Israel, through which the incarnated Word would reveal the fullness of being human to man himself. He prepared an idea of God and man, in the god-human thinking of Christ, which would be brought to the highest degree of service towards the vivid Word of God. It is in this sense, that there’s an intimate relationship between theology as faith rendition and proclamation of the whole Christ (Christus totus) and the philosophical thought of man. This relationship doesn’t consist merely in the Christian consciousness (including it) to be demonstrated by means of theological analysis, but rather expressively in the theoretical itself. Theology as faith rendition continues thinking God’s Word in space in time as the function of the Church, integrating the (further) developing human thinking into the incarnational Word of God. Thereby, thinking is redeemed towards self-understanding as Christian philosophy, striving to serve as perfectly as possible the proclamation of the eternal Word, in this respect carrying the character of the “eternal” (perennis). (Marlet 1954:107)

This eternal core and this dynamic character of Christian philosophy as a “spiritual philosophy, is in the spirit of Augustin’s “Deum et animam”, in which man as the imago Dei can’t be thought of only in terms of human reason, but must also be seen in the light of God’s revelation. (Marlet 1954:107)

Marlet therefore sees the philosophia in Ecclesia recepta as a vivid and religious philosophy, aware of its concrete Christian a priori, in the interplay with theology as “faith rendition”, through which it is progressively redeemed and liberated so that it can fully develop its own character. Grace is morally necessary for philosophy in its concrete and existential consummation, because it is firstly theoretical thought and therefore entails a specific moment of personal participation, which can only be accomplished by moral activity. (Marlet 1954:107)

Marlet therefore, believes that the basic features of the philosophia in Ecclesia recepta are almost identical with those of the Philosophy of the Law idea. (Marlet 1954:108)

For this philosophy is willing to be Christian, as a Christian transcendental philosophy, which is conscious of its Christian revelational a priori, by which she is enveloped, though preserving its own (philosophical) structure. As theoretical thought begins by human initiative, (Christian) philosophy discovers itself through (God’s Word) revelation, its essence being redeemed by reflecting on the concrete self in Christ, being directed towards the divine Origin in the heart. (Marlet 1954:108)

Marlet illustrates his incarnational (and transformational) interpretation of the traditional philosophy of the Church as analogous to God’s inspiration of Holy Scripture –Scriptural terminology as categories are not the “rule of truth” in themselves, but rather they only become it when they are used by the divine Word in the preparation or the realization of the
incarnation. It is not due to the suitability of human categories that they are used, for usually even the contrary is the case, as the church fathers stressed – in allusion to the apostle Paul (1 Cor. 1:27). Thence, it is in the Holy Spirit that the certain usages (of words) are (transformed and) made suitable. (Marlet 1954:110)

Instead of taking the substance-position or the function-position in an extreme fashion, Marlet believes that a (Christian) personalistic philosophy (Personsphilosophie) should stick to the unity of substance and relationality, the self and its relations, without reducing the one to the other. It is the mode-of-being of the Self, to be beyond (transcend) itself, thereby being by itself. Thus, Marlet holds to a similar position as Ives on individuality, relationality and time as pointed out in 3.6. (Marlet 1954:115)

The strand of the (Neo) Thomistic movement, which was influenced by phenomenology, pointed out that das Sein is to be seen as a conjunction which essentially encompasses the totality of reality, on the other hand Existenz is the being’s becoming (Vollzug des Seins). Being (das Sein) realizes itself as constitution (that’s where the constitutive meaning of Sein comes from) – placing the Self to itself in relation to Origin and expression (Ursprung und Ausdruck). This interplay leads to further distinctions in terms of principle of existence; the structural totality as actus primus (exignitiantia identificationis) and being’s becoming as actus secundus (identification) is the consummation of the structural totality, as the loving expression (derived) from the Origin. This Sein as encompassing the totality of reality, as the concrete in its ultimate concretion, is for Thomas the first, which is captured by the intellect. Thus, Sein is the “encompassing” (Das Umgreifende) for Thomas.(Marlet 1954:121) This „encompassing“ can’t be conceptually encompassed (it transcends conceptuality), rather, one has to direct himself towards the idea of being (Seinsidee), which encloses the communication between conscious individual existences, which are opened up towards the world and addressed in the fullness of meaning by the Transcendent. (Marlet 1954:121)

That’s the basis for the personal structure of Sein. According to his substantial core, man is person. Marlet draws upon Lotz’s, whose elaborations (again) are very close to Dooyeweerd’s. The biblical meaning of the heart is pointed out, as the deep structure of the person (prior to action), as the ground of the soul (Seelengrund) also called the heart – is the place where the entire power of the soul has its root. Resounding Augustine, Lotz speaks of the restlessness as the essential characteristic of the heart; this restlessness is a consequence,
expression and revelation of the directness of the heart towards God, who created the ground of our soul (Seelengrund) or the heart, for Himself. (Marlet 1954: 122)

Marlet’s transformational (Neo) Thomism is similar to the (Neo) Calvinistic reformational vision presupposed by TMSA, in its understanding of the direction of man’s heart as a response to God’s original (creative Word) love (urwörtliche Liebe Gottes) and stressing that man’s responsibility is an immutable structure of being, which is given to him (by God). Man’s being (das Sein des Menschen) is responsive actuality, thus, the creature only consists by being addressed by the love of the Father through the Word, which the communicated being responsively receives. This response consists in the vivid consummation of existence, the reality of his being is “granted” (verliehen) to him as he responds. Therefore, there is nothing in the creature’s existence, which isn’t based on this mode of response. In this cooperation of transcendence and concrete existence, man encounters God, as the Lord’s servant (adjutor Domini): (Marlet 1954:123)

The Thomistic understanding of personhood encompasses in its expressed elaborations (above), the character of the concrete and in its conceptual totality the relation between subjective existence and structural constitution (implicitly the law- and subject- sides). . (Marlet 1953:123)

Thus, Marlet showed that the (Neo) Thomistic notion of Sein as concrete fullness, the person-structure of Sein as well as the distinction between law- and subject- sides are grounded in the Christian-philosophical tradition of the Church and that the Thomistic views are also part of that heritage:

Wir haben dargelegt, dass die Auffassung des Seins als der konkreten Fülle, die Personstruktur des Seins und die Unterscheidung im Sein zwischen Gesetzes- und Subjektseite, in der christliche-philosophischen Tradition begründet sind und auch die thomistischen Anschauungen als deren Erben bezeichnen. (Marlet 1954.125)

Further, Marlet points out, that although Thomistic philosophy was originally informed by Greek (philosophical) sources, its deepest essence is sustained by faith in the Christian revelation. Only based on that faith was it possible for thinkers of recent times to further develop Thomistic thinking. (Marlet 1954:125-126)

Marlet sharply opposes the opinion which regards the Thomistic Sein as a mere philosophical abstraction, as an idea which is merely conceptual, as a concept which stands for an autonomous and supra-temporal reality. Such an (mis)interpretation (of Thomism) is based upon rationalistic tendencies within the scholastic tradition. This rationalism is partially consequence of the further effect of the Greek worldview and partially to be ascribed to the character of modern philosophy, as an atmosphere which led scholasticism to a new flourishing. According to Marlet, this (rationalistic) atmosphere is decisive for Dooyeweerd’s critique of Thomism, who (unfortunately) draws a one-sided picture of Thomism, based on a rationalistically biased interpretation of Thomas by A.D. Sertillanges (Marlet 1954:126)
The idea of being (Seinsidee) is a transcendental idea in the Thomistic sense, an expression which approximates the existential-concrete in the word-bonded (wortgebunden) theoretical-conceptual. The existential-concrete content of being (Seinsinhalt) is therein essentially contained and at the same time, really intuitively contained, but in itself capable of a certain development, thereby showing itself abstractly, without doubt improperly abstract, but still abstract. It is exactly this development, which is articulated in the word “Sein”. It is (only) its essential and thereby uniform un-distinguish-ability (Ununterschiedenheit) in each individual expression which gives the idea of being (Seinsidee) the appearance of a certain conceptual unity. But its real unity is the concrete-existential unity itself. (Marlet 1954:127)

Thus, Marlet believes to have sufficiently demonstrated, that within (his interpretation of) Thomism, every ground for the allegation that in the concept of being, the whole of reality is reduced to a common denominator (including God and creation/creature) becomes invalid, although the originally sinful rationalism (erbsündlicher Rationalismus) remains a danger, for it aspires an autonomous usage of the analytical (function) as a thinking instrument of revaluing and overstretching it in order to become an autonomous authority. Marlet opposes the accusation against Thomism as an autonomous synthesis-philosophy, referring to its understanding of the analytical as equivalent to the Neo-Calvinistic modal-spherical understanding of the analytical. Thus, notwithstanding the admitted rationalistic strands of Thomism, Marlet gives a modal-spherical account on the Seinsidee, which parallels TMSA’s position on individuality, relationality and time (inspired by Jeremy Ive – see 3.6):


In the light of the revelation of creation, fall into sin and redemption in Christ, the idea of being (Seinsidee), understood as a transcendental idea, with its essential distinction between constitution and existence (equivalent to Neo-Calvinistic law- and subject sides), is characteristic for the entire Christian-philosophical tradition, in which Thomas takes a central

place. According to Marlet, Dooyeweerd’s Philosophy of the Law Idea, which is a conscious Christian initiative, perfectly fits within the traditional philosophy of the Church.

Die im Lichte der Offenbarung von Schöpfung, Sündenfall und Erlösung in Christo, als transzendentale Idee verstandene Seinsidee, mit der für sie wesentlichen Unterscheidung zwischen Konstitution und Existenz: als Gesetzesidee also und ihr entsprechende Subjekttidee, ist bezeichnend für die ganze christliche Tradition der Philosophie, in der Thomas von Aquin eine zentrale Stelle einnimmt, und in die sich die Philosophie der Gesetzesidee durch eigene bewusst christliche Initiative wie von selber einfügt. (Marlet 1954:129)

Marlet finishes his dissertation by pointing out that the main differences between both philosophies (movements) is due to the (theological) Calvinistic understanding of the relation between God and man. But as it isn’t the scope of this thesis to evaluate specific (theological or philosophical) differences, but rather by means of a perennial reformational interpretation, set up the philosophical and theological foundation of TMSA and integrate it in a Trinitarian framework, the intended task of providing a basis for a Trinitarian and reformational understanding of (Neo) Thomism is accomplished. The established philosophical convergence on grounds of the biblical ontology, derived from the meaning of the heart is promising for TMSA. By integrating Marlet’s transformative understanding of the relation between philosophy and theology (in apologetics), new avenues of discourse are opened for TMSA. Later, ontological insights therefrom will appear to be of tremendous value, enabling TMSA to approach other methods of apologetics in a transformational way.

Marlet’s incarnational approach should be adopted as a mode of discourse of TMSA, honouring the continuity and coherence of the philosophia in Ecclesia recepta. Nevertheless, the Trinitarian-reformational paradigm showes up to be the most all-encompassing and biblical one, relating the basic presuppositions of philosophy and theology to its transcendent root; without compromissing the radical diversity and coherence of reality. Thus, the Trinitarian reformational paradigm enables the philosophy of the Church to finally transcend its Greek philosophical heritage (without forgetting its importance). By absorbing Marlet into TMSA, a mode of discourse is opened up, which may be used to confront other Christian apologetic methods on the level of a biblical ontology, seeking to do justice to God’s integral (creational, incarnational, inspirational) Word Revelation.

5.2.5 Marlet’s Thomism & the provisional consequences for TMSA
Indeed, Marlet’s incarnational account of (Neo) Thomistic philosophy and theology foundationally complements the “creational” account of reformational philosophy in the

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70 For Marlet, Thomism as the Church’s “traditional” philosophy (conscious about its Augustinian side) is taken to be the Philosophia in Ecclesia recepta. It is in that “broad sense”, that Marlet interprets Dooyeweerd’s philosophy (as well as Stoker, Vollenhoven, and others of the movement – who are seen as members of the same school of thought. Therefore, although Marlet’s dissertation “by name” (namentlich) deals with Dooyeweerd’s philosophy, from his references to other Neo-Calvinistic philosophers it becomes clear – that his usage of “Philosophie der Gesetzesidee” encompasses Neo-Calvinistic philosophy in a broader sense (including Stoker, Vollenhoven, as a fruit of Kuyperian Neo-Calvinism - Marlet 1954:19-35)
Trinitarian sense of TMSA\textsuperscript{71}, fruitful way (due to his “Augustinian-Thomistic” participatory ontology) of building on the philosophical-theological foundation of TMSA, in a \textit{perennial reformational} fashion, opening up the possibility of approaching other methods of apologetics from the non-reductive perspective of TMSA, in a transformational way which seeks to deeply reconciling them on grounds of the non-reductive biblical ontology (without depreciating traditional nuances)\textsuperscript{72}. In fact, establishing the philosophical coherence of (Neo) Calvinism and (Neo) Thomism on biblical transcendental grounds truly approximates the possibility of revising for instance (Van Tilian) presuppositionalism (inspired by Augustinian Neo-Calvinism and (Thomistic) classical apologetics in the light of God’s integral Word revelation. Nevertheless, before demonstrating how such transformational engagement of TMSA with other apologetic nuances is possible, Radical Orthodoxy will be briefly introduced, for besides being a fruit of the French strand of the (Neo) Thomistic movement endorsed by Marlet, its theological-philosophical cultural criticism provides TMSA a supplementary insights to its cultural criticism derived from Dooyeweerd’s (philosophical) transcendental method. Thus, the scope of TMSA would thereby “finally” be broad (accessible to broader Christianity – faithful to tradition, but without traditionalism ) and deep enough (i.e. covering up the central and the peripheral spheres of the ego and addressing culture as well as individuals from an integral and radically Trinitarian perspective) doing justice to the all-encompassing covenantal relationship between the triune God and the Church, proclaiming the Gospel of Christ and anticipating the glory of the life to come.

5.2.6 The Gospel as Meta-narrative and man’s religious basic structure – Engaging popular arts (popular culture) via the Trinitarian modal-spherical method of apologetics (Anticipating Radical Orthodoxy)\textsuperscript{73}

RO’s stress on the Gospel as metanarrative parallels Van Til’s stress on Christian philosophy as part of the Christian story. As Smith points out, for Milbank and co. meta-narrative stories are not situated within the world, but rather, the world is situated within those stories, which (ultimately) define reality. Thence:

...reality functions as a metanarrative, not in the sense of a story based on, or unfolding foundational reason … but in the sense of a story privileged by faith, and

\textsuperscript{71} The creational relating to the revelation of creation and the incarnational to Christ as God’s incarnated Word. As it has been stated many times in previous sections, both \textit{Gestalten} (incarnation and creation are to be conceived in unity with Holy Scripture and the work of integral transformation through the Holy Spirit). One cannot doubt how problematic the simple assumption would be, resulting from a strict favoring either of the creational or the incarnational disregarding their unity, which is based on the sovereign work of the Triune God.

\textsuperscript{72} Based on the biblical ontology, derived from the biblical idea of the heart – as it was already present in Baader’s thought – a common source shared by both movements. See Glenn Friesen’s extensive treatments \url{http://www.members.shaw.ca/jgfriesen/Mainheadings/Baader.html}

\textsuperscript{73} RO, besides being a movement, worth introducing to TMSA due to its theological-philosophical strength, is inspired by the same (Neo) Thomistic movement Marlet was part of (although only the French strand).
seen as the key to the interpretation and regulation of all other stories.\(^{74}\) (Smith 2005:241)

Marlet’s stress that Christian philosophy should explicitly presuppose the work of the triune God (See 5.2.1 and 5.2.2) clearly resounds Van Til, who in his answer to Dooyeweerd, pointed out an apparent contradiction of Dooyeweerd’s method, reinforcing that the meaning of the cosmos can’t be unlocked unless the Christian story is presupposed (the cosmos can’t be understood per se):

For Kant time involves *pure contingency*. For you it is what it is in relation the Christian story of creation-fall and redemption. The significance of this fact is that on your view as a Christian one cannot understand the nature and structure of theoretical thought unless it is integrally related to the Christian story… Yet you are at the same time insisting that you can analyze the nature and structure of theoretical thought without any reference to that Christian story. You are seeking to show that you can analyze theoretical thought *as such* and show that it points to the Christian story. I cannot follow you at this point. I would say that the structure of theoretical thought cannot be seen for what it is in terms of the scheme of the natural man. (Van Til 1971:102)

Although Van Til equalization of the possibility of analysis of the creation order (P-C) to man’s ultimate dependence on God’s Self-revelation (P-A) was rightly opposed (as it was done by Stoker as well as by Dooyeweerd – recalling their *Festschrift* interaction), nevertheless he makes a good point in that it isn’t necessary\(^{75}\) for Christian thinkers to separate the revelation of creation (Dooyeweerd’s transcendental method) from God’s integral Word revelation (the Christian story\(^{76}\)). Especially in apologetics this separation isn’t biblically justifiable, for the apologist’s task is to open up the way for the preaching of the Gospel. Further, as everyone is driven by a religious ground motive (guided by a certain meta-narrative), the Christian should never be ashamed of presenting the story of the Gospel, which is the only power unto salvation (Rom 1, 16), but rather give an faithful account of the Gospel meta-narrative, which drives his heart and integrally transforms him through the

\(^{74}\) Milbank, TST 285-86

\(^{75}\) In fact, the Trinitarian account of the Gestalten of God’s Word clarifies their unity (although distinct).

\(^{76}\) At this point, Van Til’s account of the Gospel as the sole meta-narrative (Christian story) from which the cosmos (including man) attains its ultimate meaning coherence is in line with Radical Orthodoxy. James Smith’s introduction to RO will underline this similarity – (1) offering a further fruitful way for TMSA to engage with the broader Christianity and, (2) complementing its foundation of cultural critique – building on its intention of integrally combining reformational philosophy and Trinitarian covenantal-theology. Due to the fact that Van Til’s method mainly dealt with epistemology, right from the beginning the claim was made, that reformational apologetics should also entail a biblical ontology. This was first provided through the reconciliation of Van Til’s theological approach with reformational philosophy (via Stoker). Consequently, after uncovering the fact that the “renewed” (Neo) Thomistic understanding of the philosophy in Ecclesia recepta as well as the RO movement are inspired by similar (radically Trinitarian) sources as Neo-Calvinism, while maintaining the unity of Christian philosophy and theology, it seems more then justifiable to take RO’s theological-philosophical criticism of secular cultural seriously into account. Thus, the Scopus of the TMSA in terms of its philosophical and theological foundation, as well as its field of interaction, from a radically Trinitarian and orthodox perspective, while still remain radically reformed (covenantal) and reformational.
power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit applies the work of redemption and unites believers with Christ, reconciling them with God in Christ – so that regenerated men (as the Body of Christ) reflects God’s image in the world.

The way one interprets the meta-narrative of the Gospel depends on the direction of the heart of the hearer and on the work of the Holy Spirit:

God’s self-revelation in Holy Scripture as Creator and redeemer concerns the central religious relation of man to his absolute Origin. Its true meaning is therefore to be understood by man only if his heart has been opened up to it through the moving power of the Holy Ghost. (Dooyeweerd 1971:86)

Besides such correlative usage of meta-narratives and grounds motive, Dooyeweerd provides an insightful analogous illustration reflecting the same state of affairs (that of the religious basic structure of men); that of a famous symphony, which can be re-interpreted according to the freedom and creativity of the artist (Dooyeweerd refers to Marlet’s biblical interpretation of Thomism), whose only restriction is his commitment of remaining faithful to the spirit of the original piece of art (Dooyeweerd 1954:VI). This analogy reflects the fact stressed by reformational philosophy, that the religious ground motive (direction of the heart) determines how man responds to God’s Word revelation, be it the radical diverse and coherent revelation of creation (and anything related to man’s cosmic experience), the incarnation of the Son of God as the convergence point of the diversity of the cosmos and redeeming man’s inter-subjectivity in his relation towards God, himself and the other (s), who reflect the imago Dei and reconciles man with the absolute Origin, his Creator and Redeemer. Accordingly, (Neo) Thomism (together with reformational philosophy) recognizes that there is only one ontic basic religious structure which constitutes human beings, which is grounded in the revealed reality of creation, fall in redemption in Christ, the work of the ontological Trinity (Marlet 1954:108). Therefore, a new avenue of discourse for TMSA is opened up - the insight concerning the correlation between meta-narratives, ground motives and popular culture (including arts, e.g. Dooyeweerd’s example of the symphony) shows up to be a truly biblical and reformational way of engaging popular culture. “Pieces of art” are always inspired by a religious ground motive, giving expression

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77 Anticipating Radical Orthodoxy’s approach to “secular” post-modern culture by a similar articulation by Van Til.
78 God the Creator and redeemer – as self-knowledge and knowledge of God are inseparable; man already encounters God’s reflection in the face of the other, so that self-awareness and cosmic (finite) experience points beyond itself to the infinite, almighty triune God.
79 Although the hearts are driven either by the biblical or by an apostate ground motive.
80 In “secular” society, popular culture often times functions as a substitution for religion, thus it is probably the main platform/field of interaction of “post-modern” man, the place where he seeks identity and fullness of meaning, enjoyment of life and the connection to others. Kuyper recognized this tendency of nihilistic post-modernism in its idolatrous usage of arts, seeking to imitate the Gospel of the Reformation and to substitute the true Christian religion with a false meta-narrative. In this cold, irreligious and practical age the warmth of this devotion to art has kept alive many higher aspirations of our soul, which otherwise might readily have died, as they did in the middle of the last century. Thus Kuyper do not underestimate the aesthetical movement of his time. But he emphasizes what in the light of History should be discountenanced is the mad endeavor to place it higher than, or even to make it of equal value with the religious movement of the 16th century (Kuyper
to a meta-narrative which is always in line or in opposition to the Gospel (and the ground motive of creation, fall and redemption). Presupposing that man shares in the same religious basic structure, (1) the cosmos (including man) as creaturely insufficient, pointing towards the Creator, (2) the fall into sin expressed in the brokenness of creation and all the relations therein, and man’s need for redemption finds its expression in every piece of art, (3) for the hearts are religiously inclined, striving to transcend the misery of temporal existence. Kuyper’s explanation of the function of arts serve to illustrate how to read arts, its promises and anticipations of “redemption” in the attempt of elevating the hearts of men beyond the struggles of temporal existence, confronting popular culture with the Gospel via TMSA:

But if you confess that the world once was beautiful, but by the curse has become undone, and by a final catastrophe is to pass to its full state of glory, excelling even the beautiful of paradise, then art has the mystical task of reminding us in its productions of the beautiful that was lost and of anticipating its perfect coming luster … art as a gift of the Holy Ghost and as a consolation in our present life, enabling us to discover in and behind this sinful life a richer and more glorious background.

(Kuyper 1983: 155)

1983:143) Nowadays (more than 100 years later) this state of affairs was even intensified, through the further development of popular culture and technology. Internet and movies are examples of ways, through which ground motives and meta-narratives are expressed. Nevertheless, the terrific technological progress and shifts in cultural life represent a promise for non-reductive Neo-Calvinism and its strength in addressing the Gospel to all spheres of man’s life.

81 The ultimate meaning of the finite is in the infinite – this is to be understood as reflecting the transcendent self, in its inclination towards the absolute Origin.
82 Including popular arts – every “piece of art” is grounded on a certain (religious) meta-narrative, be it an absolutization of temporality/creation, any other idol or the true God. Also, every “story” is driven by a religious ground motive – the “life melody” or symphony which inspires man to creatively and freely interpret the “art of life” given him by God. Thus, the basis provided enables TMSA to preach the Gospel to popular culture & arts.
83 Similarly to the suggested non-reductive (transcendental and transcendent – based on the biblical heart-ontology) usage of arts, ground motives, metanarratives, etc. are provided for instance by Vanhoozer:

(1) Whereas poetry imaginatively explores various human possibilities under the rule of play, religious language adds the dimension of commitment. Unlike poetry, that is, religious language calls for a decision. Moreover, religious language involves belonging to a specific community with a particular social and ethical stance.

(2) Religious language is a modification or intensification of poetic language; not just any human possibilities are displayed, but only “limit possibilities.” Religious language is “odd” because it speaks not of commitments tout court, but of total commitments or ultimate concerns, which Ricoeur calls “limit-experiences.” These limit-experiences may be positive (e.g., wonder, joy, love) or negative (e.g., guilt, anxiety, mortality), but in either case they refer to a dimension that, though part of our experience, is not of our own making and is beyond our control.11 These extreme experiences - the dread of a sickness unto death, the ecstasy of a new-found love - may lead to a radically new perspective on the “real” world. Religious language discloses a religious (= “limit”) dimension in the heart of ordinary experience, a previously unknown depth in our everyday living: everyday activities such as eating and drinking may be done “to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). (Vanhoozer 1990:121)

Further, to establish such a connection between the Gospel, arts, metanarratives and ground motives does perfect justice to the integral understanding of the Gestalten of God’s Word revelation, stressed by TMSA, pointing to the opening up of the heart and the re-direction of the function of faith towards the truine God, who is the true absolute Origin. It is by this re-direction (guided by the Holy Spirit) that faith on the true God leads to self-understanding. Thus, implying the unity (intended by Van Til) between Christian story and Christian philosophy, and true self-understanding as only attainable through God’s self-revelation, Vanhoozer stresses "To speak well of God one must first let God present himself. To move from faith to understanding, however, one must think through the implications of God’s self-presentation". (Vanhoozer 2010: )
5.3 Introducing Radical Orthodoxy to Trinitarian modal-spherical apologetics

Radical Orthodoxy is a theological movement, which seeks to unapologetically confront nihilistic postmodernity with the Gospel, in order to recover a Christian alternative of culture (using pre-modern sources, although without being regressive). The movement is deeply inspired by French theologian Henri de Lubac, who transcended the dualistic split between nature and grace and plainly rejected the autonomy of the cosmos. Nature always presupposes grace. Thence, following de Lubac and the revolution of Neo-Scholastic dualism, RO holds that any dualistic opposition of faith and reason is a product of modernity. (Smith 2005:42-45)

Resounding Marlet’s emphasis on the Augustinian tendency of New-Thomism, Radical Orthodoxy, which is a fruit of it, relies on Augustine for its post-secular theology, as a crucial source for a criticism of postmodernity and the recovery of a Christian alternative, which is not contaminated by the pretentious secular worldview. In a certain sense, the contemporary cultural stage parallels Augustine’s own time, for today the Church is once again facing religious pluralism, giving witness of the Gospel in the midst of a “pagan world”. Thus, RO re-states Augustine’s project in “The City of God” and the importance of Christian Platonism for a theological ontology. (Smith 2005:46-47). Radical Orthodoxy is a deeply ecumenical program, which transcends confessional boundaries and seeks to rethink tradition as the main condition for theological reflection. Its critique of modernity isn’t merely reactionary, for it seeks to save it. RO’s account is transformational in Marlet’s sense, for it seeks to look again at things and reconsider them (in the light of faith), therefore it also fits into the paradigm of TMSA. RO can also be described as a theological sensibility, shared by many contemporary theologians with a certain hermeneutic disposition and metaphysical vision. It embraces all those who hold to a basically orthodox theology, contributing to shape Christian practice in a post-secular world. Thence, RO reads contemporary culture through the lenses of the

Vanhuoozer is another reformed scholar who actively interacts with Radical Orthodoxy. See also Transcending Boundaries in Philosophy and Theology Reason, Meaning and Experience, with contributions of Graham Ward (RO), Charles Taylor and others.

84 As previously mentioned, see Friesen 2011. De Lubac is also one of Marlet’s sources – influenced by Baader.
85 RO(Milbank) sets a contrast between the french and the german strand of the (Neo) Scholastic movement. It seems that Marlet’s account is stronger in this respect, for he holds to the unity and distinctiveness of the constitutive and the existential (relating to the law and subject side of the cosmos). Reading RO through Marlet’s non-reductive ontology lenses. RO seems to unbalancedly overemphasize one side at cost of the other.
86 RO’s “plea” for a Christian Platonism differs insofar from Marlet’s account, in that Marlet accounts for the unity between both lines, i.e. affirming the same participatory ontology stressed by RO, but nevertheless claiming that Augustine’s philosophy was further developed and complemented by Thomas.
87 Similarly, Marlet’s incarnational account: the ultimate primacy of divine revelation as well as the unity between philosophy and revelation as part of the (Roman) Catholic heritage. a genuine and dynamic Christian philosophy (remaining Thomistic) which relies on the reality of a faith experience of truth, being constantly guided to new knowledge: (See point 5)
Christian meta-narrative (Smith 2005:63-67). As showed in the previous section, this reading of culture in terms of the Christian meta-narrative is correlated to the Trinitarian and reformational vision presupposed by TMSA.

RO’s project, although truly contemporary, is deeply committed to tradition, convinced of the importance of the insights given by the Spirit to the early Church. Therefore, in a philosophically sophisticated fashion, RO builds on the deep theological sources of the Christian tradition, willing to confront contemporary culture (its different areas) with the Gospel. (Smith 2005:68-69) Again, TMSA’s integration of Marlet’s transformational understanding of the *philosophia in Ecclesia recepta* in its perennial reformational reading is applicable to Radical Orthodoxy as well, seen that Radical Orthodoxy’s inspirational sources coherece with those of Marlet. Therefore, Radical Orthodoxy is to be seen as a ramification of Marlet’s incarnational perspective (see point 5) and for that reason, it should be adopted by TMSA as a mode of discourse. Its theo-philosophical cultural criticism can be combined with the religious-philosophical criticism developed by reformational philosophy. TMSA therefore, just like in the case of Marlet, doesn’t have to agree with RO *in toto*, although it should be open for an interaction with it. Due to the significant agreements between the involved movements dealt with in this thesis, on the level of transcendental philosophy, sufficient reason has been presented to justify the claim that the emerging Trinitarian modal-spherical apologetics should be regarded as a radically Trinitarian, reformed and reformational method, which is nevertheless broad enough to encompass broader Christianity and engage in a constructive way with different nuances of apologetics (in its combination of theology and philosophy).

RO’s critique of modernity goes beyond both, liberalism and fundamentalism, denouncing the former of accommodating theology to the apostate paradigm of modernity and the latter of being reactionary in an anti-modern sense, remaining by a mere negation in the grip of modernity. In contrast to those dualistic tendencies, RO seeks to overcome apostate modernity by recovering a true Christian alternative version of it. Further, by questioning the dualisms of modernity (including that of faith and reason), RO eliminates the distinction between secular and sacred, thereby destroying the “pretentious” notion of secular, in the hope of dismantling the theoretical foundations of secularity so that again space for the Christian story can be opened up in the public sphere (Smith 2005:70-74). Thus, RO’s cultural criticism is of tremendous value for TMSA to engage the problems of secularism.

In its radical opposition of autonomous ontology, RO firmly stresses that existence is only possible by participation in God’s being. Therefore, the materialistic and ultimately nihilistic nature of (apostate) postmodern ontology is sharply opposed by a participatory ontology, which alone can grant the world meaning, wherein the immanent and material is suspended from the transcendent and immaterial. Thus, Christianity is removed from finite positivism and from nihilism, for it regards that every created reality is nothing in itself (completely in line with Neo-Calvinism – even more than Marlet)\(^8\) sphere of creation participates in the

\(^8\) RO is in this regard, apparently in stronger agreement with the Neo-Calvinistic and reformational conviction concerning the relation between Creator and creature than Marlet. Also Baader, as previously aluded to, accepted this paradigm (inspired by Baader, derived from the principle of the Reformation – subjectivity must
primal gift of the Creator (Smith 2005:74-75). Another reason why RO is so valuable for TMSA is that it goes beyond Marlet in the sense of the clarity, through which it stresses the importance of participatory ontology in Thomism. To absorb this insight is insofar important for the reformational community as a whole, because it again denounces the misconception that Thomism and/or Scholasticism are necessarily dualistic and in favour of autonomy. Therefore, although Marlet’s expositions imply such a participatory ontology, his focus was transcendental philosophy and its relation to theology, ecclesiology, etc. (See point 5).

RO on the other hand, seems to focus stronger on a theo-philosophical cultural criticism. Thus, TMSA should be open to absorb the focus of both (Marlet and RO), for they complement each other. The reformational and Trinitarian paradigm on the other hand, guarantees the radically confessional identity of TMSA as Neo-Calvinistic (reformed and reformational). Nevertheless, the “openness” of TMSA (as a method of apologetics) towards a incarnational and transformational usage of classical philosophy, doesn’t imply that the Neo-Thomistic paradigm is acknowledged as a definitive one. But rather, the radically Trinitarian nature of its biblical paradigm suggests, that even the nature-grace scheme will be consequently dropped after the process of transformation which it ongoes, when radically and transcendentally confronted with the Trinitarian-reformational paradigm of TMSA.

RO incarnational stress that created reality must be investigated as such (as created) in the light of the cross, reflects the same perspectival turn mentioned before by Marlet, which brings about the transformation of natural theology by stressing that reason is enveloped by a worldview. Thereby the material is viewed as suspended in relation to transcendence: God himself appears in the flesh in order to redeem it. Consequently, this incarnational understanding of the revelation of transcendence, together with a participatory ontology, leads to a renewed appreciation of sacramentality, liturgy and aesthetics. (Smith 2005:75-77). Such regained value of embodiment, reflects the fundamental doxological core of theology in the same sense stressed by TMSA and the sources it relies on, for according to a biblical ontology – starting from the centre of existence, theology as “faith rendition” is much more than “logical” and “sensitive” (the two modes of knowing, which were mostly absolutized in western culture) encompassing all the peripheral and central spheres of the ego, i.e. a heartfelt surrender towards God’s integral Word revelation which brings about the redemption of the whole creation (including man) at its root. Thence, the reality of the redemptive work of Christ represents in the “already not yet” eschatology of the Church, the beginning of the New Creation and the anticipation of the Glory to come. In order to proclaim God’s Kingdom and victory in Christ, TMSA should therefore be open for RO’s project (common sources of inspiration of RO and Neo-Calvinism suffice as legitimization), for its theological cultural criticism unmasks cultural idols and provides genealogical accounts of the nihilistic assumptions of the dominant (apostate) secularism (Smith 2005: 79-80) of society in a way

be redeemed by faith). Nevertheless, it isn’t clear how RO applies participation to soteriology. Marlet overstretches it – so that it becomes synergistic. Baader is in line with the reformation.

89 It should be kept in mind, that the discussions are mainly related to the discipline of apologetics. This implies that a mere philosophical or theological treatment of the subject would probably lead to different conclusions, for then the subject would be approached from a different perspective. That’s why the evaluations of this thesis are to be restricted to apologetics.
that attempts to be integral in the scope of the preaching of the Gospel (as TMSA). Thus, RO and Marlet are to be considered by TMSA’s perennial reformational reading as complementary. RO goes beyond Marlet in its stress on participatory ontology. On the other hand, Marlet’s non-reductive biblical ontology supports the modal-spherical reformational vision. Thence, the openness towards the incarnational understanding of theology and philosophy endorsed by Marlet and RO enables TMSA to reinforce the continuity of the *philosophia in Ecclesia recepta* and to constructively engage with broader Christianity. RO’s participatory ontology leads to a revitalizing of the idea of a biblical metaphysics, whereby at the same time denouncing the modern onto-theological idolatry of submitting God to a concept of being that is anterior to His Self-revelation. Similar to Marlet’s account on Thomas, although distinctively nuanced, RO’s re-reading of Thomas participatory ontology (non-autonomous) and Scotus’s univocal ontology (as the autonomous system, which opened up the way for the apostasy of modernity – leading to nihilism) helps casting a new light on the traditional philosophy and theology of the Church (prior to apostate rationalism). Further, RO’s transformational account of (Augustinian) Platonism (Plato & participatory ontology) (Smith 2005:98-108) parallels Marlet’s account of (Aristotelian) Thomism. In fact, the incarnational approach (redeeming the humanely) underlies both. Recalling Marlet’s distinctions on how each of these traditional lines can be understood in terms of the unity of the existential and the technical functions, reflecting the non-reductive biblical ontology (irreducibility and correlation of law and subject), both accounts, the Neo-Calvinistic reformational and the Neo-Scholastic incarnational (transformational), should be **perennially and non-reductively** conceived within the Trinitarian framework of TMSA, for it encompasses both traditional nuances, going beyond them (creational, incarnational, inspirational) in radical agreement with God’s integral Word revelation, which reflects the work of the triune God and the ultimate dependence of the cosmos upon Him. Further, the Trinitarian framework does justice to the central and peripheral relations of the ego, the transcendental ideas and the biblical ground motive, also giving an emphatic account of the dynamic interplay of individuality, relationality and time aspects within human experience.

Thus, RO’s postmodern critical Augustinianism helps unmasking modernity’s parody – the Church in disguise, in a transformational way. (Smith 2005:127-131) TMSA on the other hand, due to its reformational modal-spherical philosophical foundation, is concerned about sphere sovereignty and the limiting of power. As founders of RO reject sphere sovereignty, the domains of the Church and of theology are consequently overstretched by the movement, resulting in a non-reformational view of politics (Smith 2005:159). Further, RO’s view on theology can only be agreed from a reformational point of view in terms of theology as “faith rendition”, the Church’s function of proclaiming the Gospel (dealing with the ground question of existence, the existential). Nevertheless, a similar tendency (as by Van Til), of reducing the P-C to the P-A context, is evident in RO’s (reductionistic) account on the possibility of a Christian philosophy. Due to his full-fledged biblical ontology (based on the biblical meaning of the heart), Marlet’s view on the relation of theology and philosophy is better nuanced. This supports the claim that RO and Marlet are to be read by TMSA in a complementary way. Therefore, TMSA should integrate Marlet’s non-reductive and modal spherical ontology and on the other hand RO’s cultural criticism and stress on participatory
ontology. Further, RO’s usage of metanarratives can be combined with the reformational understanding of ground motives in the approach of popular culture (e.g. popular music 5.2.9). Thereby TMSA can approach broader Christianity in a constructive way. Further, reading classical “philosophy” through the “incarnational” lenses of Marlet and RO provides TMSA with a mode of discourse which can be helpful in engaging classical philosophy in a biblical and incarnational way, opening up the possibility of transforming it from within.

But just as Marlet, RO portraits Aquinas according to his participatory ontology⁹⁰ as an opponent of autonomous reason and reality (Smith 2005:159). Smith elucidates this point:

In other words, faith and reason are but two varying intensities along a continuum of divine illumination. To know (anything), then, is to participate in divine knowledge. As such, the “light of faith” is for Aquinas simply a strengthening of the intellectus by a further degree of participation in the divine light… Revelation, then, is not so much the deposit of a positum as an “augmentation of human intellect… Not even reason is autonomous. Rather, as Augustine earlier asserted, it operates only on the basis of an “inner [divine] illuminatio”. Thus, in this new Aquinas, there is no neutral space for secular knowledge or an autonomous philosophy (Smith 2005:160-161)

RO restates Augustine’s project in the City of God, in which the empire (now the secular state) functions as an enemy of the Church (and the Gospel). Secular politics is a parody of true politics (fellowship of the saints), and the ( secular) city a parody of the New Jerusalem. (Smith 2005:132-137)

On the so called postmodern turn, RO criticizes the attitude of some Christian scholars, who are not radical enough in their case for Christianity, allowing apostate philosophy to determine their way of theorizing and framing the Gospel. (Smith 2005:138-140). Thereby Radical Orthodoxy’s criticism of postmodernism implicitly correlates the reformational detection of the religious ground motives which are leading forces of culture, denying that neutrality in human existence and culture. Accordingly, Christian scholarship is supposed to be thoroughly guided by the Christian “meta-narrative” (RO), the Christian ground motive (Dooyeweerd). Thus, reinforcing what was stated at 5.2.9., RO’s project of confronting secular culture with the Gospel is welcome to TMSA as well as some of its modes of discourse. Nevertheless, in the perennial reformational way which is firstly committed to the Trinitarian belief and all-encompassing framework. Thereby, RO and Marlet are read in a complementary way, just like on the Neo-Calvinistic side, Van Til and Dooyeweerd could only be reconciled via Stoker. Further, it was Jeremy Ive’s contribution which brought about the clarification regarding the Trinitarian framework. Therefore, such a perennial reformational reading reinforces not only the continuity of the Christian tradition, but also the priority of the Trinitarian belief as the most basic Christian presupposition. It is in this perennial sense that TMSA attempts to combine RO’s theo-philosophical cultural criticism with the religious-philosophical cultural criticism of the Neo-Calvinistic tradition.

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⁹⁰ Smith doesn’t seem to know Marlet as a source, for in a same manner as many in the reformational community, his reading of Aquinas is based on late-scholastic sources (a rationalistic interpretation), which don’t fully do justice to the Thomistic position. See Marlet in the previous section of this thesis.
RO uses contemporary context as a catalyst for the recovery of a confessional theory and practice, stressing the affinity between Christianity and postmodernism (faith precedes ratio):

…this affinity is neither an identification of the two nor an accommodation of one to the other but rather the discernment of an opportunity afforded by the contemporary situation. Postmodernity’s critique of modern epistemologies may represent a chink in modernity’s armor that provides both an opportunity to launch an internal critique of modernity and an occasion for the church to be alerted to its complicity with modernity. RO is an alternative version of modernity. (Smith 2005:141)

Radical Orthodoxy remarkably denounces the abandonment of participatory ontology (influenced by Scotus) as the beginning of the modern (apostate) crisis:

Scotus and co launched modernity by creating the space for an autonomous ontology – and the Reformation did nothing to disturb this situation. Jacobi and Hamann, however, did disturb this post-Scottish legacy in two ways. First, they insisted that no finite thing can be known, not even to any degree, outside of its ratio to the infinite and second, they asserted that “if the truth of nature lies in its suprarational ordination, then reason is true only to the degree that it seeks or prophesies the theoretical and practical acknowledgement of this ordination which, thanks to the fall, is made possible again only through divine incarnation – Jacobi and Hamann do not struggle with a reason/revelation duality. True reason anticipates revelation. (Smith 2005:151)

Thus, concerning the importance of participatory ontology as a basic premise of Neo-Thomistic rejection autonomy and opposition against autonomy of thought, Radical Orthodoxy is to be seen as an important complement of Marlet’s expositions in order to be able to constructively engage with (Neo)Thomism from the Trinitarian-reformational perspective of TMSA. Just as Marlet, which previously (see point 5) appeared to provide good ways for TMSA to approach (Neo) Thomistic philosophy and consequently broader Christianity (for Thomistic thought is still a great reference point for main-stream Christianity), so does the integralist approach of RO appear to fulfill a similar function. Therefore, the radically biblically and Trinitarian transformational mode of apologetic discourse attempted by TMSA is certainly strengthened by the interaction with RO.

Radical Orthodoxy’s incarnational understanding of revelation parallels Marlet’s (also incarnational), confronting the root of autonomous philosophy with the Gospel of Christ:

Rather than allowing supposedly secular sciences to establish the methodological rules for confessional reflection, and rather than allowing a secular, autonomous philosophy to determine what it means to know or to be, RO seeks to theorize the nature of knowledge and being out of the resources of revelation alone… allowing the Christ event to restructure just what it means to know or to be. (Smith 2005:153)
Besides being positive regarding the core of Radical Orthodoxy, Smith also criticizes its view on the relation between philosophy and theology (as previously done from the perspective of TMSA), based upon his reformational non-reductionist outlook:

Philosophy, then, is first equated with autonomy and then rejected on that basis in favor of theology. But this would seem to confuse the formal structure of philosophical theorizing (regarding, say, foundational questions of being and knowing) with a particular direction the philosophical enterprise has taken (under the aegis of the dogma of theoretical autonomy). In this sense, Milbank’s account of philosophy is reductionistic...(Smith 2005:155)

Smith points out Milbank’s confusing of the particular direction (Western) philosophy has taken with the structure of philosophical investigation as such, stressing the possibility of a Christian philosophy, ruled and reformed by the central biblical basic-motive. (Smith 2005:155). Here again, Marlet’s transcendental account (informed by the same tradition) supplements RO, serving as a corrective in terms of modal-spherical, non-reductive thinking.

Such a reductive view is also displayed in RO’s account of apologetics (it’s rejection per se):

RO recognizes that its critique of the autonomy of reason spells the end of apologetics. For Milbank, persuasion isn’t the same as demonstration, for demonstration requires a common, universal reason, which doesn’t exist, but rather a person’s reason relies on his religious commitment. A Christian perspective can only be persuasive as it is intrinsic to the Christian logos itself, not via apologetic mediation of a human reason that is regarded to be universal (Smith 2005:180).

Nevertheless, what seems to exclude apologetics in principle, is based on the same reductionism, which unnecessarily and confusingly reduces philosophy to theology (again, reducing the P-C to the P-A context), neglecting their radical diversity and coherence (notice the outcome of the interaction between Dooyeweerd, Stoker and Van Til, as well as the relation between philosophy and relation within the Trinitarian framework previously developed) for RO functions as a cultural apologetics, fulfilling the church’s task God commanded via the Apostle Peter: Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have (Peter 3:15).

Accordingly, Smith affirms that Radical Orthodoxy’s theological-philosophical cultural criticism parallels recent reformed apologetics, confronting culture with the Gospel:

It is its refusal of apologetics that allows RO to get beyond the methodological fixation (that characterizes so much of contemporary theology) to actual witness and proclamation – to the articulation of unapologetic Christian theory and practice… a certain story is being told, a certain act of persuasion is underway employing the grammar of the Christian faith, expounding the theology which relates anthropology to the body of Christ, the Eucharistic body to the civic and social bodies. The result is an ontology and politics that are unapologetically Christian. (Smith 2005:182)
RO pleads for the opening up of political spaces for confessional voices, stressing that the secular sustains a nihilistic and irrational variant of the theological discourse:

If the secular project has sought to marginalize confessional voices because they are theological – and therefore not rational – then the unveiling of secular reason’s own theological commitments undercuts the very project of the secular. This should level the playing field in such a way that distinctly confessional voices are no longer muted, because if that were the case, all voices would be muted. (Smith 2005:183)

Radical Orthodoxy’s unified view of materialism and transcendence equals to the ultimate dependence of the finite on the infinite. Participatory ontology presupposes that there is no being in itself, therefore implying that neither culture nor individuals are to be “left for themselves”, but rather, the task of the Church is to bring the Gospel to every context, proclaiming the Kingdom of God everywhere (including in politics). As the process of modernity’s emancipation from the Church also implies a break away from participatory ontology, an apolitical attitude of the Christians is thereby unmasked as unbiblical, for it allows an alternative (non-Christian, secular theology) to dominate the public sphere. Instead, Radical Orthodoxy challenges such idolatry of public life: Therefore, the shape of RO’s (theological) participatory ontology is non-reductive and incarnational (similar as Marlet’s), stressing that matter only “is” insofar as it participates in or is suspended from the transcendent Creator and on the other hand affirming that the transcendent significantly inheres in immanence. (Smith 2005: 189-192)

It should have become clear how Marlet and Radical Orthodoxy are inspired by the same “reformational” spirit, as they share similar sources. Friesen reference to Baader sets the record right concerning the philosophical contributions of Christian theosophy (pointing to a common source which indirectly inspired both, the Neo-Scholasticism endorsed by Marlet, consequently also RO), helping to better understand the life that the Reformation produced. This “life” is also the main inspiration of Dooyeweerd’s philosophy, as we could notice e.g. in his foreword to Marlet’s dissertation. Whether or not Marlet’s (and Radical Orthodoxy’s) account of Aquinas is correct, the rationalistic tendencies within Thomism were (and still are) a reality acknowledged by Marlet, so that its Neo-Calvinistic critique is legitimated. As Baader himself relied on protestant thinkers91 (implicitly on the life the Reformation produced), and Baader was an important source for De Lubac (one of RO’s main inspirations). Thus, although TMSA is still to be seen as a fruit of the life the Protestant reformation produced, it can be enriched by an interaction with strands of the (Neo) Thomistic movement, which were inspired by similar sources than reformational philosophy.

91 The fact that Baader mainly dealt with protestant thinkers is clearly emphasized by Wilhelm Reuter, who dedicated part of his review of Baader’s collected works to liberate rigorous Protestants from the prejudice of not wanting to read Baader because of his Romanism. There, he emphasizes that Baader is a true example for the fact that the visible Church is indeed distinct from the invisible, for Baader’s Paulinian type is evident and most of his reflections are based upon his positive engagement with protestant authors: Für strenge Protestanten will ich nur noch bemerken, dass Baader's Katholizismus, ausser bei Erwähnung des Fastens... sich sehr wenig merklich macht: unterscheidet er doch bestimmt die unsichtbare Kirche von der sichtbaren; ist es doch der Paulinische Typus, dem er vorzugsweise folgt; sind es doch meist protestantische Schriftsteller, an die er seine Reflexionen knüpft. (Reuter, 1851:59)
By justifying the legitimacy and identity of TMSA as a fruit of the life of the Protestant reformational produced, reformational apologetics should nevertheless be viewed in terms of the coherence and continuity of the history of the Church, its confessions and in the light of the incarnational understanding of the Philosophia in Ecclesia recepta (e.g. as elaborated by Marlet and RO). Thereby, by stating the importance of Baader as a common source of inspiration for Neo-Thomism and Neo-Calvinism, the main intention is to illustrate and legitimize the biblical inspiration of TMSA as a new Trinitarian-reformational method of apologetics, which although radically Trinitarian and confessional, remains open to broader Christianity and for a constructive and transformational (incarnational) engagement with other traditions (which are neither reformed nor reformational at their core as TMSA).

Nevertheless, besides the agreements with Radical Orthodoxy, Smith points out what can’t be accepted from a Trinitarian, modal-spherical (Neo-Calvinistic) perspective; the lack of the doctrine of sphere sovereignty, which ends in a totalitarian (reductionistic) view of the Church, with a tendency of re-introducing a theocratic ecclesiology. (Smith 2005:254-259) At this point, RO doesn’t do justice to the radical diversity and coherence of created reality.

Although the abandonment of participatory ontology among many Protestants appears to be unbiblical, nevertheless, the Trinitarian vision of the Reformation was decisive in order to develop Neo-Calvinistic ontology, which structurally reflects the work of the triune God. As already ascertained by viewing Marlet within the Trinitarian framework, participatory ontology presupposes the work of the triune God – in other words, recalling that Marlet asserts that Thomism’s transcendental analogical Seinsidee was developed by the transformation of “classical” philosophy via creation idea (implying the work of the

92 Although Baader was Roman Catholic, as stressed before, his theosophy wasn’t only faithful to Thomistic philosophy, but also to Boehme’s protestant theosophy, which was based upon the reformational return to the radically Augustinian view, that faith precedes and redeems rationality. Thus, Boehme follows Luther in his view of subjectivity, which is fulfilled by justifying faith, breaking away from “dead” authority and leading back to vivid faith, where God himself (not natural reason) is the impulse giving principle, by grace, through the Holy Spirit Hoffmann also speaks of Baader’s theosophy (following Boehme) as a “new sort of speculation”, which was of a depth that was incomprehensible for the “rationalists”, Baader’s contemporaries.

93 As previously mentioned, a revision of RO is possible – as Marlet’s acceptance of sphere sovereignty – a development that can be traced back to Baader, who is a common source of Neo-Calvinism and Neo-Thomism.
ontological Trinity), acknowledging its Christian theological a priori. (Neo) Thomism presupposes the ontological Trinity as its basic presupposition; therefore, the radical Trinitarian paradigm of TMSA, worked out from a Neo-Calvinism perspective, absorbs RO’s participatory ontology (as well as Marlet’s non-reductive ontology) in its covenantal vision (stressed by Van Til in terms of the ultimate dependece of the cosmos upon the triune God - P-A - non-reductively articulated in the biblical ontologies of Stoker and Dooyeweerd).

Smith’s concludes his introduction to Radical Orthodoxy with an invitation, expressed in the headline of the last section of the book: “Taking Radical Orthodoxy to Church”, suggesting that the core themes of RO can be translated into proposals for worship and discipleship. Quoting a greater part of Smith’s conclusions are important, for it not only basically summarizes his introduction to Radical Orthodoxy, but rather the proposed insights from Radical Orthodoxy clearly translates Van Til’s statement of the importance of linking a radical Christian account of philosophy to the clear preaching of the Gospel, consequently the confrontation of secular culture with theology not only as possible, but from the perspective of a participatory ontology – it is also necessary. Thence, Radical Orthodoxy’s (theological) cultural apologetics complements Dooyeweerd’s (philosophical) cultural apologetics via his transcendental critique of theoretical thought. As stressed in previous sections, Stoker’s constructive criticism of Van Til opened up a way for the reconciliation of both (Van Til and Dooyeweerd) in apologetics. Jeremy Ive’s expositions showed how the Trinitarian framework encompasses both, reformed theology and reformational theology. Olthuis’ (1968) account on the Gestalten of God’s Word revelation helped conceiving the Word of God in its integrality (faithful to the Trinitarian belief). Finally, Marlet’s dissertation showed how it is possible to introduce TMSA to broader Christianity, remaining radically Trinitarian and confessional and doing justice to both reformed theology and reformational philosophy. Therefore, TMSA is open to exceed the boundaries of theological traditions, seeking positive engagement, listening to Word of God and obeying the call of on-going reformation. RO’s theological project builds on the foundation for TMSA’s theological cultural criticism, as a mode of discourse (besides its philosophical cultural criticism), which combines theology as meta-narrative and biblical non-reductive philosophy, integrally doing justice to the radical diversity and coherence of the cosmos. Smith summarizes (1,2,3,4 – Emphasis of the writer):

“(1) If we are desiring creatures, then our worship and discipleship should be directed toward forming and directing that desire to find its telos in God, countering the malformations of desire effected by the state and the market. (2) If the claims of secular modernity and its institutions are in fact theological and antithetical to the claims of the gospel, then we must develop in the saints, through effective modes of Christian formation, a critical awareness of the pseudo-theologies lurking behind seemingly neutral phenomena. (3) If we are working from a participatory or creational ontology, then our worship should reflect the rich sacramental and aesthetic heritage of the church, affirming that God meets the whole person in a full-bodied revelation. (4) If the church is a unique polis, then the saints should be formed in such a way that relativizes their allegiances to the state, market, or any other antithetical polis that seeks their ultimate allegiance.” (Smith 2005:261-262)
Thus, by reading RO and Marlet as complementary to each other, a integralist basis is provided for TMSA’s apologetic discourse and implied constructive engagement with the intersection between philosophy and theology in the (Neo) Thomistic tradition. Thereby the attempted transformational approach of TMSA is further elucidated, providing new and refreshing perspectives for the discipline of apologetics to engage with, as well as innumerable possibilities of interaction\textsuperscript{94}. After viewing reformed theology and reformational philosophy within the Trinitarian framework (inspired by Jeremy Ive’s work and the interaction between Stoker, Dooyeweerd and Vil in Van Til’s Festschrift), Marlet’s transcendental insights into the convergence between reformational philosophy and the *Philosophia in Ecclesia recepta* strengthened the conviction that a perennial reformational reading of theo-philosophical discussions (as applied in the evaluation of the interaction in Van Til’s Festschrift (see point 2 and 3) is the appropriate one in a truly reformational method of apologetics, which seeks to be biblical in an integral sense and to do justice to the disciplines of philosophy and theology. Therefore, the breve elaboration on Radical Orthodoxy, by complementing Marlet’s expositions on Neo-Thomism, also helped broadening the spoke of TMSA in its attempted biblical openness towards broader Christinity and the tradition of main-strem Christianity.

6. Applying the Trinitarian modal-spherical method of apologetics

6.1 TMSA, participatory ontology & uprooted (apostate) philosophy

RO’s stress on participatory ontology remarkably uncovers the nihilism of apostate philosophy, perfectly fitting into TMSA as a mode of theo-philosophical cultural criticism:

Radical Orthodoxy articulates a radical (i.e. root-targeted) critique of secular modernity… by calling into question its attendant epistemology… But ultimately, for RO, the unwarranted epistemology of secular modernity is generated by an ontological framework that must be called into question, an ontology grounded in the univocity of being that grants an autonomy to things such that it is supposed that the world can be properly understood in itself – that is, without reference to its transcendent origin, the Creator… the root of both RO’s critique of secular modernity and the articulation of its alternative theological vision are found at the level of ontology. In opposition to the ontology of immanence produced by the shift to the univocity of being, RO proposes a participatory ontology that understands transcendence as an essential feature of material reality. (Smith 2005:185)

Accordingly and fitting into TMSA’s claim that the Kernfragen of human existence are ultimately theological (the Gospel as meta-narrative) RO’s participatory ontology also

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\textsuperscript{94} One can mention, for instance the innumerable ammount of material available on Radical Orthodoxy, e.g. in: \url{http://www.calvin.edu/~jks4/ro/}
unmasks the pretension of modernity’s “being in itself”, showing how it leads to self-destruction. Heidegger’s pretension of developing a ontology of the self by starting with the autonomous self (without the Creator-creature distinction) is a perfect example of such a nihilistic (apostate) philosophy. (Heidegger 1991:279-283) 95. Although he acknowledged, that it was his theological origin which led him to his way of thinking (“Ohne die theologische Herkunft wäre ich nie auf den Weg des Denkens gelangt” - (Heidegger 1976:96), he couldn’t find his way back to the only way of “redeeming” his philosophy. In an interview to the German magazine “Der Spiegel” the nihilistic (self-destructive) tendency of his philosophy (consequence of the pretentious attempt to build up an ontology of the

95 The Davoser Disputation between Ernst Cassirer and Martin Heidegger illustrates that point if read in the light of RO’s stress of participatory ontology (and the nihilistic consequence of its rejection) and the fact both still held to the pretentious dogma of autonomy of theoretical thought (Dooyeweerd’s transcendental critique): What Kant eigentlich in der Lehre von den Grundsätzen geben wollte, ist nicht eine kategoriale Strukturlehre des Gegenstandes der mathematischen Naturwissenschaft. Was er wollte, war eine Theorie des Seienden überhaupt. (Heidegger belegt dies.) Kant sucht eine Theorie des Seins überhaupt, ohne Objekte anzunehmen, die gegeben wären, ohne einen bestimmten Bezirk des Seienden (weder den psychischen, noch den physischen) anzunehmen. Er sucht eine allgemeine Ontologie, die vor einer Ontologie der Natur als Gegenstand der Naturwissenschaft und vor einer Ontologie der Natur als Gegenstand der Psychologie liegt. Was ich zeigen will, ist, daß die Analytik nicht nur eine Ontologie der Natur als Gegenstand der Naturwissenschaft ist, sondern eine allgemeine Ontologie, eine kritisch fundierte metaphysica generalis. Kant sagt selbst: Die Problematik der Prolegomena, die er so illustriert, wie ist Naturwissenschaft möglich usw., ist nicht das zentrale Motiv, sondern das ist die Frage nach der Möglichkeit der metaphysica generalis bzw. die Ausführung derselben. Man kann das Problem der Endlichkeit des sittlichen Wesens nicht erörtern, wenn man nicht die Frage stellt: Was heißt hier Gesetz und wie ist die Gesetzlichkeit selbst für das Dasein und die Personalität konstitutiv? Daß etwas vorliegt im Gesetz, das über die Sinnlichkeit hinausgeht, ist nicht zu leugnen. Aber die Frage ist: Wie ist die innere Struktur des Daseins selbst, ist sie endlich oder unendlich? Der Mensch als endliches Wesen hat eine gewisse Unendlichkeit im Ontologischen. Aber der Mensch ist nie unendlich und absolut im Schaffen des Seienden selbst, sondern er ist unendlich im Sinne des Verstehens des Seins. Sofern aber, wie Kant sagt, das ontologische Verständnis des Seins nur möglich ist in der inneren Erfahrung des Seienden, ist diese Unendlichkeit des Ontologischen wesensmäßig gebunden an die ontische Erfahrung, so daß man umgekehrt sagen muß: Diese Unendlichkeit, die in der Einbildungskraft herausbricht, ist gerade das scharfste Argument für die Endlichkeit.Was heißt denn hier eigentlich ewig? Woher wissen wir denn von dieser Ewigkeit? Ist diese Ewigkeit nicht nur die Beständigkeit im Sinne des αἰών της Ζητήσεως? Ist diese Ewigkeit nicht nur das, was möglich ist auf Grund einer inneren Transzendenz der Zeit selbst? Wenn sie vom Ewigen sprechen, wie sind sie zu verstehen? Sie sind nur zu verstehen und nur möglich dadurch, daß im Wesen der Zeit eine innere Transzendenz liegt, daß die Zeit nicht nur das, was die Transzendenz ermöglicht, sondern daß die Zeit selbst in sich horizontalen Charakter hat, daß ich im zukünftigen, erinnernden Verhalten immer zugleich einen Horizont von Gegenwart, Künftigkeit und Gewesentlich überhaupt habe, daß hier eine transzendental ontologische Zeitbestimmung sich findet, innerhalb deren allererst so etwas wie die Beständigkeit der Substanz sich konstituiert. — Von der Seite aus ist meine ganze Interpretation der Zeitlichkeit zu verstehen. Und um diese innere Struktur der Zeitlichkeit herauszustellen und um zu zeigen, daß die Zeit nicht nur ein Rahmen ist, in dem die Erlebnisse sich abspielen, um diesen inneren Charakter der Zeitlichkeit im Dasein selbst offenbar zu machen, bedurfte es der Anstrengung meines Buches. Jede Seite in diesem Buch ist geschrieben einzig im Hinblick darauf, daß das Seinsproblem seit der Antike und immer auf die Zeit interpretiert ist in einem ganz unverständlichen Sinn und daß die Zeit immer dem Subjekt zugesprochen wird. Im Hinblick auf den Zusammenhang dieser Frage mit der Zeit, im Hinblick auf die Frage nach dem Sein überhaupt galt es erst einmal, die Zeitlichkeit des Daseins herauszubringen, nicht in dem Sinne, daß nun mit irgendwelcher Theorie gearbeitet wird, sondern daß in einer ganz bestimmten Problematik die Frage nach dem menschlichen Dasein gestellt wird. Wenn die Möglichkeit des Seinsverständnisses und damit die Möglichkeit der Transzendenz des Menschen und damit die Möglichkeit des gestaltenden Verhaltens zum Seienden, des geschichtlichen Geschehens in der Weltgeschichte des Menschen selbst möglich sein soll und wenn diese Möglichkeit gegründet ist auf ein Verständnis des Seins und wenn dies ontologische Verständnis in irgend einem Sinn auf die Zeit orientiert ist, dann ist die Aufgabe: Im Hinblick auf die Möglichkeit von Seins Verständnis die Zeitlichkeit des Daseins herauszustellen. Heidegger 1991:279-283) Thus, an ontology of the autonomous self (breaking away from a participatory ontology - Christ as the true root), ultimately leads to self-destruction.
autonomous self – breaking away from a participatory ontology rooted in Christ) is rather more than evident in his “desperate” statement that only “a God” can save “us” (Heidegger 1976:193).

Remarkably, many years before Heidegger, Baader (drawing on Boehme) already anticipated the self-destructive outcome of autonomous philosophy, which, because of its false seeking (apart from God), by means of its “self-addiction” (Selbstsucht), wouldn’t be able to build up positively, but was rather leading to experience the curse of alienation from true being and becoming:

Uebrigens hat J.Boehm bestimmt genug nachgewiesen, wie einem falschen Suchen der Kreatur kein positives sondern nur ein negatives Sich-finden entspricht, womit denn eben (naemlich mit dem Deficit des wahrhaften Selbst) die Selbstsucht eintritt, wie ferner eine solche Sucht nach aussen als Wirken und Setzen nicht produzierend, bauend, wachstuemlich oder Leib anziehend, sondern umgekehrt zerstoeren oder verbrennend sich aeussert, wie die Anschauung negativ (finster) wird, oder wie eine solche Creatur den Fluch, die Flucht des wahrhaften Seyns und Werdens innerlich wie auesserer erfahrt. (Baader 1832:xix)

It is remarkable that Marlet’s and Radical Orthodoxy’s account on (participatory) ontology and (Christian) epistemology, internally harmonizes with Van Til’s and Stoker’s stress on the Creator-creature distinction, as well as the unity (although in diverse forms) of philosophy and theology, as they are both dependent on God’s Word revelation (which reflect the work of the triune God), for although they are handled distinctively as scientific disciplines, in terms of apologetics, philosophy and theology are to be viewed as unified and ultimately dependent upon the Triune God. Accordingly, even via Heidegger it appears to be possible to confront contemporary culture in general, as well as individuals, with the message of the Gospel.

In that light, reformational philosophy’s (Neo-Calvinistic) rejection of metaphysics appear to be dependent upon the modern/post-modern nihilistic paradigm (corresponding to Heidegger’s position on being-in-time), which is the consequence of the abandonment of a participatory ontology – and attempts to establish an autonomous ontology:

Personally I (as Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd also do) restrict the meaning of the term “metaphysics” to that of “speculative philosophy”. In this sense Calvinist philosophy has no “metaphysics”.” (Stoker 1971:456)

Thus, one can wonder if Stoker would have accepted RO’s stressed participatory ontology, which is close to the Creator-creature distinction he and Van Til stressed. Although the question regarding a possible “revival” of a true reformational metaphysics should be cogitated, a closer treatment of the subject should be retained for another thesis.

By now it is important to retrieve the insight, that Radical Orthodoxy’s stress on participatory ontology is in line with Van Til’s emphasis on the ultimate dependence of the cosmos upon
the triune God (agreed by Stoker), reinforcing TMSA’s conviction that a Christian philosophy and cultural criticism shouldn’t be separated from the Christian story. Therefore, Trinitarian apologetics shouldn’t be ashamed of the Gospel, nor ultimately rely on philosophy or theology (as sciences), but use the best of both disciplines, as they represent a deepening of the true biblical faith, which is ultimately dependent on the triune God. (Rom 1:16)

As previously showed, this fact was indirectly underlined by Marlet, who, regarding philosophy's insufficiency (without taking Christ's incarnation into account), pointed to the technical side of philosophy's beholding of the cosmos with (the idea of) God as constituting its "infinite horizon". This perspective is unable to reveal man's personality. (See point 5 on Marlet) Marlet's paraphrasing de Lubac, on how the mystery of personhood was resurrected by Christianity (Marlet 1954:100) illustrates the point that only an incarnational account of God's Word revelation brings upon integral redemption of mankind.

As a matter of fact, the revelation of personhood is historically bound to the incarnation of Christ. It was through Christianity’s account on God’s self-revelation in history, that God’s transcendence became part of man’s experiential horizon (overcoming Plato’s theoretical transcendence of God). This was acknowledged by Heidegger, in his exposition of Dilthey’s Religionskritik. The role of Augustine was decisive in making inter-subjectivity part of philosophy. He also played an important role in the development of the historical consciousness, which is a fruit of Christianity:

Durch die Erfahrung des großen Vorbildes der Persönlichkeit Jesu kommt eine neue Lebendigkeit in die Menschheit... Dadurch, daß sich Gott in der historischen Wirklichkeit offenbart (Heilsgeschichte), wird er aus der theoretischen Transscendenz bei Plato herausgerissen und tritt in den Zusammenhang der Erfahrung. Augustin hat gegenüber dem antiken Skeptizismus die absolute Realität der inneren Erfahrung festgelegt (Heidegger 1995:164)

Thus, Heidegger’s philosophy can truly be called apostate, implicitly entailing not only the acknowledgment of its theological origin, but it also presupposes the historical consciousness and subjectivity developed by Christianity. By trying to break away from a participatory ontology in order to self-construct an autonomous ontology (directed towards death), Heidegger remained deeply influenced by Christianity (in Van Tilian terms, his philosophy clearly presupposed the Christian truth in order to suppress it – Rom.1). The Christian (apostate) root in Heidegger was so clear, that nobody less than Derrida had to admit it:

Everything in Heidegger, then, could be re-translated into Christian, Catholic, or Protestant theology so that in fact, moving away means continuing the same, not moving away, being true while being untrue to this heritage. That is my assumption, that he remained deeply Christian despite his denial. (Derrida 2005:124)

96 A summary of Dilthey's account on the fact that the historical consciousness was developed by Christianity, see: Dilthey's Religioskritik, In: www.dober.de/religioskritik/dilthey.html
6.2 The Trinitarian modal-spherical method as transformational apologetics

In order to put TMSA into practice, it will be briefly introduced to another nuance of apologetics in a transformational way, i.e. engaging it according to its Trinitarian framework and challenging them through the lenses of its non-reductive perspective. Firstly, (1) basic features of a nuance will be shortly pointed out. (2) Secondly, it will be shown how TMSA’s integral framework can help pointing to new perspective(s).

To begin with, dealing with some of the distinctive ideas of the famous apologist Ravi Zacharias 99 will show how a constructive engagement between TMSA and other nuances might be possible. Besides many written books, Ravi Zacharias is founder and President of Ravi Zacharias International Ministries100 and notably popular101. Although Zacharias doesn’t explicitly subscribe to any transcendental philosophy, some of his basic ideas clearly reflect such an approach, which was approximated by TMSA.

For instance in the Appendix of his book “Deliver us From Evil” (Zacharias 1997:219-220), one finds Ravi’s well-known four fundamental questions, which should be answered by every worldview (origin, meaning, morality and destiny). It is notable that he only frames them at the end of the book, after defining the logic of truth and pointing to the indispensable importance of an “unchangeable” absolute reference point, which he sets in contrast to the anarchy of Relativism. Although Norman Geisler’s quote implies a reductionistic view on logic, which is problematic from a reformational perspective102 (Zacharias 1997:219-220):

In order of being God is first: but in order of knowing, logic leads us to all knowledge of God. God is the basis of all logic (in order of being), but logic is the basis of all knowledge of God (in order of knowing) (Geisler 1990:17).

Nevertheless, Ravi’s stress on an absolute reference point parallels the transcendental idea of Origin, towards which the ego, according to the reformational conviction, is religiously inclined. In fact, three of Ravi’s four fundamental questions (origin, meaning and destiny)

99 Ravi often times argues from three levels, which remarkably parallels Marlet’s distinction between (1) the scientific-technical (corresponding to the law- side, the constitutive of a non-reductive ontology) and (2) the existential (relating to the subject- side, or entity side as referred to by Strauss in his book Philosophy the Discipline of the Disciplines). Those distinctions parallels the insights gained through the interaction between Stoker, Van Til and Dooyeweerd. (1) The transcendental corresponding to the P-C Context – the Grenzfragen of existence, (2) the transcendent corresponding to the theological, the P-A Context – the Kernfragen of existence. Thus, applying it to Ravi: (1) the theoretical, the logic of the argument, (2) the arts, to illustrate and kitchen table talk to conclude and apply. (Zacharias 2008:3-17)

100 Ravi Zacharias International Ministries, In: www.rzim.org

101 A simple look at the number of times youtube videos that are related to Ravi Zacharias have been viewed/clicked (more then one million times) suffice in order to have a premonition of his popularity: http://www.youtube.com/results?search_sort=video_view_count&search_query=ravi+zacharias

102 Instead, the biblical ontology of reformational perspectives, accounts for different ways (aspects) of knowing: Aspects of Reality as We Experience It, In: http://www.dooy.salford.ac.uk/aspects.html. The biblical ontology distinguishes between theoretical knowledge (as bound to time and the other facets of cosmic knowledge), self-knowledge and true knowledge of God (which isn’t theoretical, but pre-theoretical in nature, redeeming the religious centre of human existence)
perfectly correspond to the transcendental ideas of Dooyeweerd’s critique (origin, diversity, totality). TMSA, as elaborated throughout this thesis, while essentially presuppositional, is built upon Dooyeweerd’s transcendental method, as well as integrating Stoker’s philosophical supplement of Van Til’s theological method. Jeremy Ive’s Trinitarian interpretation of the transcendental ideas insightfully opened up the way for TMSA to establish its Trinitarian framework on an integral basis, also enabling a positive engagement with broader Christianity, as the sections on Marlet and Radical Orthodoxy has shown. Thus, such openness in approach is important, so that other nuances of apologetics can be approached by TMSA in a biblical and transformational way. For instance, the reformational apologist might take Ravi Zacharias’s fundamental questions and place it within the context of the transcendental ideas and its Trinitarian correlations. He might also point how the three levels from which Ravi Zacharias argues notably fit within the context of a radical biblical ontology of the heart, developed by reformational philosophy (similarly adopted by RO and Marlet).

6.3 Trinitarian modal-spherical apologetics in dialogue with Ravi Zacharias

By generally sketching how to approach Ravi from the perspective of TMSA it was intended to give an example on how TMSA can positively engage with another apologetic nuance. In our case, such possibility has been shortly elucidated in the case of Ravi Zacharias. One can go further and use the same case in order to demonstrate more deeply how fruitful such a “dialogue of apologetic nuances” can be. Note that the present elaborations will be restricted to the Appendix of Ravi’s book “Deliver us from Evil” (Zacharias 1997:210-230) and “Is your Church Ready?” which was co-authored by Norman Geisler (2008:3-17), where Ravi points to the three levels of argumentation his apologetic approach entail. This restriction suffices for the intended task in this section, for it doesn’t aim at giving an exhaustive account on Ravi’s work or neither a systematic resume of his apologetics, but rather to point to some distinctive features of it, which are sufficient in order to engage it from the transformational perspective of TMSA.

Ravi reminds of the "objectiveness, universality and transcendence" of truth. (Zacharias 1997:210-220). TMSA on the other hand, holding to the non-reductive ontology of reformational philosophy, asserts the irreducibility and correlation of law and subject (see 2.1-2.2), i.e. the objective is correlative to the subjective, the universal to the individual and that transcendence suspends the immanent. Yes, it is a matter of fact that any (created) entity or event finds its fullness of meaning in God, who is the only absolute. Consequently, as created reality is absolutely dependent on God, truth not only finds expression in the objective, universal and transcendend, but rather, the person as a subject (must be) is subjected to the God given creation order in all the facets of human existence. Further, it is the individual, as created in the image of God, who receives redemption at the center of his

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103 Recalling the correlations: Transcendental ideas>Work of the ontological Trinity>The three Gestalten of God’s Word revelation>central spheres of the ego>Individuality, relationality and time aspects>Christian ground motive>Ground question of philosophy and the three basic answers of Calvinistic philosophy, etc.
being, thereby, being subjected to God's will through God's Spirit. Such regeneration of the heart, which is based upon faith in the redemptive work of Christ, is applied to the heart by the Holy Spirit. As the fullness of the faith intuition is in the heart, to receive Christ as Lord, by the work of the Holy Spirit and to the glory of God means that human life "truly" begins when he becomes a new creature. Therefore, to receive the gift of faith in the Gospel is but the beginning of everlasting life (John 17). Thus, God's incarnated transcendence finds expression through the work of the body of Christ (i.e. in the life of every individual who is in Christ) within the concrete struggles of temporal existence. This is the concrete implication of the coming of the Kingdom and it illustrates how individuality and universality, the objective and the subjective, immanence and transcendence come together in the lives of believers, in Christ, through the Holy Spirit and to the glory of God.

Thus, when Ravi speaks of reality in terms of the objective, universal and transcendent (Zacharias 1997:210-230), from the perspective of TMSA it must be said that reality implies both, the law and the subject sides of the cosmos (i.e. a principle of irreducibility and another one of correlation). In other words, the central and peripheral relations of the ego are to be distinguished from one another if one wants to avoid reductionisms, and then, related to the work of the ontological Trinity, for created reality (including man) is ultimately dependent upon the the triune God.

Consequently, TMSA agrees with Ravi's stress on the importance of an absolute reference point in opposition to the anarchy of relativism (Zacharias 1997:210-230). Nevertheless, TMSA points to the fact that such "absolute reference point" only correlates to one of the three transcendental ideas and that Christian apologetics must necessarily deal with all three of them, which are the basic presuppositions which regulate theoretical thought. Thus, in addition to Ravi's approach, TMSA states that an account on the transcendental ideas of diversity and of totality are as important as the one on the idea of origin (absolute reference point). Thereby, Ravi's "logic of truth" must be transcended when submitted to the transcendental critique of reformational philosophy, for "logic" (the analytical aspect) is showed to be only one way of knowing among the other aspects of reality. Further, analytical knowledge is theoretical knowledge, which is bound to time. As a central reference point, logic cannot grant a totality view of the structures of created reality. Thence, although TMSA agrees with Ravi in terms of the importance of logical coherence as such, be it when dealing with an absolute reference point or giving an theoretical account on whatever state of affairs. Nevertheless the Trinitarian-reformational vision points beyond the "truth of logic" by stating that truth in its fullness of meaning can only be understood by means of the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart of man. By redeeming man at his root, in Christ, man is personally re-connected to God, who is the absolute Origin of created reality (including man). Christ as the convergence point of the created cosmos is the one who guarantees the radical diversity and coherence of (temporal) human existence. TMSA's account on the three transcendental ideas is therefore Trinitarian and reformational. It follows...

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104 The biblical ontology of reformational perspectives, accounts for different ways (aspects) of knowing: Aspects of Reality as We Experience It, In: http://www.dooy.salford.ac.uk/aspects.html.
the three steps of the transcendental critique (Dooyeweerd), showing that "logic" cannot solve the problem of time or of the Self. No single (created) aspect can do it (see 2.1 and 2.2). The biblical ontology of the heart shows that it is by means of faith, that man encounters the knowable, putting his trust in God's revelation (see point 2.4). Faith as the highest human function is still bound to time, but God has put eternity in the hearts of man (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Thus, the religious center of human existence (the heart) transcends temporality in order to gain a totality view of reality and find unity within the diversity of temporal existence. Therefore, TMSA affirms that when Ravi speaks of the "logic of truth" (Zacharias 1997:219-220) it must be understood, that the way logic is used by man (the analytical function) to relate to the absolute is always dependent on the religious direction of man's heart. In other words, man's account on origin, meaning, morality and destiny (Ravi's basic questions) will always reflect the direction of the faith of the person, giving an account of those questions. This implies that by reducing all knowledge to logical knowledge and thereby neglecting the irreducibility of the central and peripherical spheres of the ego, the true religious state of affairs remains masked. If knowledge of God is reduced to theoretical knowledge, one ends up seeking an absolute reference point within creation (temporality). But absolute truth is supratemporal and can only be disclosed to man through God's integral Word revelation. Hereby it can be said that Dooyeweerd's criticism of Van Til (see 2.1-2.2) is equally applicable to Ravi's following of Geisler regarding "logic and knowledge of God".

Nevertheless, such a criticism of Ravi should be regarded by TMSA as a complementary one. It must not be seen as absolute, for one can read Ravi's expositions in a perennial way (to be supplemented), as correlated to Stoker's statement that man is equipped with the functions required in order to understand God (see 2.4). Therefore it is true that man can give a logical account on his knowledge of God, although knowledge of the absolute (God and the root of the self) is supratemporal and not temporal in nature (as theoretical knowledge, which is bound to time). Employing his logical function, man deepens his experience and expresses it within time. Thus, Ravi's expositions can be complemented by the reformational-biblical ontology of the heart, showing that although faith is reasonable and knowledge of God can be accounted for, theoretical knowledge and knowledge of God are still to be seen as different from one another. Knowledge of God (ultimate meaning moment) is received by the opening of the heart through the Holy Spirit (P-A), while theoretical knowledge (specific meaning moment) is attained by means of man's responsible application of his analytical function (P-C). To understand the importance of those distinctions is crucial for reformatinal apologetics, for it reinforces the theologia crucis of the Reformation and that faith is a free gift of God himself for his elected. The theologia gloriae on the other hand implies that man can attain true self knowledge and knowledge of God by means of his mere analytical activity. The latter cannot be accepted by reformed and reformational apologetics, for Dooyeweerd's transcendental critique has demonstrated the opposite (in line with the Spirit of the reformation). Further, the confessions of the reformation reject such a theologia gloriae, in which man's logical function is seen as sufficient to grasp the ultimate truths (P-A relation - God and the Self) of human existence. But according to the Trinitarian-reformational vision of TMSA, true self knowledge and knowledge of God (P-A) can only be attained through
God's integral Word revelation, applied to the hearts through the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit.

As TMSA’s criticism of Ravi is intended to be constructive in a biblical-transcendental fashion, it is not to be seen as absolute, but its intention is rather to set up the relation between Ravi’s approach and the biblical ontology of the heart. In fact, it would be “reductionistic” to reduce Ravi’s approach to an objectivist (rationalistic) one, because of his account on logic and the absolute reference point. For as previously remarked, Ravi does touch the deepest transcendental questions in terms of his basic questions (origin, meaning, morality and destiny). Further, by building his arguments upon the three mentioned levels (logic, arts and kitchen table talk), his apologetic method does set the technical in unbreakable relation to the existential side of human existence. Thus, in order to approach Ravi’s methodology in a transformational way. TMSA applies Marlet’s distinction between the technical (constitutive) and the existential (see point 5) in the incarnational manner elaborated in point 5. Thereby it is possible to read Ravi’s fundamental questions (origin, meaning and destiny) as irreducibly correlated to each other in terms of the non-reductive biblical ontology of the heart. Therein, a perennial reformational reading would simply frame Ravi’s account on the absolute reference in relation to the transcendent idea of origin, while his view on logic would be placed in relation to the idea of totality – the analytical amongst the other aspects of reality. Such a corrective reading allows looking at the question of origin and logic in terms of the irreducibility and correlation of law and subject (see 2.1-2.2). The same applies to the three levels upon which Ravi builds his arguments (Zacharias 2008:3-17). Thus, as the distinction between the technical and the existential reflects the non-reductive biblical ontology (the irreducibility and correlation of law and subject) and those distinctions are intrinsically entailed in Ravi’s distinction, it is evident that his approach can be naturally placed within the framework of the non-reductive biblical ontology of TMSA.

After this “immersion” has been accomplished, it is by means of the biblical ontology itself that further steps can be taken towards the approximation of Ravi’s approach and TMSA. By acknowledging that the technical (objective) is always correlated to the existential (subjective), it becomes easier to conceive (from a non-reformational apologetic perspective such as that of Ravi) the importance of TMSA’s modal-spherical stress on the central and peripheral relations of the ego (see 3.1-3.6). Theoretical (objective) knowledge is irreducible, although (always) correlated to self knowledge, because the self’s relation to the cosmos (including theoretical knowledge) is a different one than the self’s relation to himself and others. The same distinction is important when dealing with true knowledge of God. The inclination of the self towards God (his absolute Origin) is a central relation, which can never be eradicated from human experience, for an absolute reference is necessary in order to relate the relations. Therefore, true knowledge of God cannot be reduced to theoretical

105 Ravi’s exposition on the absolute reference point corresponds to the first step of Dooyeweerd’s transcendental critique. Thus, it should be read in its context, if one attempts a reformational reading and application of Ravi’s approach.
knowledge (logic). The former can only be received by the opening of the heart through the Holy Spirit. It is a free gift of God and can never be attained through human effort. As demonstrated by the biblical non-reductive ontology, man’s functions (including the analytical) are bound to time.

It is only through a supratemporal reference point which transcends temporality that man attains a totality view of created reality (including human existence) (see 2.1-2.2). Therefore, TMSA’s transformational (incarnational) approach of Ravi’s approach fulfills a similar function than to submit it to Dooyeweerd’s transcendent critique of theoretical thought. By applying Marlet’s incarnational understanding of “classical categories” such as the technical and the existential, it has appeared to be possible to constructively link Ravi’s approach to TMSA. Further, the Trinitarian interpretation of such approximation of approaches can be drawn as a “natural” consequence, as demonstrated in point 3. This can be done in concrete apologetic confrontations, by linking the existential and the technical to the basic questions (transcendental ideas – steps of the transcendental critique), to the work of the ontological Trinity and its reflection, expressed by the three Gestalten of God’s Word revelation. Thus, the coherence of the biblical worldview as the integral meta-narrative of the Gospel of Christ is displayed as rooted in the triune God, who himself guarantees the unity and diversity between the technical and the existential, the transcendental and the transcendent, the P-C and the P-A, philosophy and theology. Thus, the Gospel is the only power unto salvation (Rom 1,16-18). This is the ultimate truth which can only be perceived by man in Christ, who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit and reconciled with God. Christ redeems creation (including man) at its root, through his incarnation, cross and resurrection. Fallen man, because of the fall into sin has become futile and a worshipper of the creature (Rom 1) and is prior to salvation always inclined to idols and absolutizations of the creaturely and temporal. As the fall has affected the center (root) of creation (including man), all the peripherical relations (branches) of human existence has been subjected to the law of sin. The only way to restore the cosmos (and man) unto God and his divine creation order was by means of Christ’s incarnation, cross and resurrection; His work of integral restoration through the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the true meaning of the incarnation, cross and ressurrection, which can only be grasped in its fullness of meaning through the biblical ontology of the heart as the application of the absolute sovereignty of God over the whole of creation. This is the Trinitarian-reformational vision, which is foundational for TMSA and opens up the way for a transformational interaction between different approaches of Christin apologetics as well as that of apologetics with other Non-Christian worldviews.

Thence, hereby a brief example was given on how TMSA, as a method of apologetics, can fulfill a transformational function when dealing with other apologetic nuances, as well as with the technical and existential questions or structures related to it.
7. Conclusions and future perspectives for the Trinitarian modal-spherical method of apologetics

At the first sight, the divergences between Van Til and Dooyeweerd in Van Til's *Festschrift* (see 2.1-2.3) seemed to be irreconcilable. But Stoker provided a solid (and reformational) basis for the reconciliation of Dooyeweerd and Van Til in terms of apologetics in the same *Festschrift* (see 2.4), anticipating that a new reformational apologetics was about to emerge (if Stoker's suggestions were put into practice). While a radically Trinitarian understanding of God's Word revelation appeared to be intrinsic to Stoker's supplement to Van Til's method as well as to the interaction between Dooyeweerd and Van Til (see 2.1-2.4), their positions on the relation between the Trinity and the *Gestalten* of God's Word revelation were not expressively dealt with in their elaborations.

Therefore, Olthuis' exposition on this very specific subject was introduced in order to express the previously implicit, thereby providing a full-fledged outline of the Trinitarian and reformational view of the Gestalten of God's Word-Revelation (see 2.5). A new approach to apologetics was "naturally" emerging as a consequence of the critically evaluated interaction between Stoker, Dooyeweerd and Van Til.

While the Trinitarian core of reformational apologetics and the coherence between reformed covenantal theology and reformational non-reductive philosophy had been sufficiently elucidated (see 2.1-2.6), the (peripheral) implications of such a *turn in apologetic methodology* appeared to demand the development of a more detailed Trinitarian framework. Such a Trinitarian framework would have to be all-encompassing in its scope, able to integrate reformed theology and reformational philosophy within a radically biblical ontology.

Therefore, an important foundation has been laid through Jeremy Ive’s Trinitarian interpretation of reformational philosophy, integrating the main insights previously gained from Dooyeweerd, Stoker, Van Til and Olthuis in an all-encompassing Trinitarian paradigm and consequently leading to the emergence of the Trinitarian modal-spherical method of apologetics (see 3-3.5).

While the Trinitarian interpretation revealed to be grounded in the modal-spherical structure of the ego in its central and peripherical relations, it became crucial to bind such modal-spherical view to an integral understanding of God’s Word revelation and the ultimate dependence of the cosmos (including man) upon the triune God. (see 3.1-3.2)

Such a Trinitarian interpretation of God’s Self- and Word revelation would also become a unifying power for TMSA, in order to ground the irreducible and correlative importance of reformed covenantal theology and reformational non-reductive philosophy as its methodological (philosophical/theological) foundation. Ive’s contribution not only reinforced Stoker’s understanding of the P-A and P-C, but rather, it deepened the biblical understanding of the work of the Persons of the Trinity in a perichoteric way, which is central for the Christian worldview and should therefore be integrated in reformational apologetics. Each of
the Persons of the Trinity participates in each of the great acts: creation, redemption and transformation. While the Father leads in creation, it is in and through the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, while the Son is to the fore in redemption, through his incarnation ministry, death, resurrection and ascension, each of the other two Persons are intimately involved in that – the Father sending and the Spirit empowering. And while the Holy Spirit is the direct agent of transformation, it is according to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, to the praise and glory of the Father. Thus, such a Trinitarian vision is to be seen as foundational for reformational apologetics (3.1).

Thus, by upholding such all-encompassing Trinitarian framework, further conclusions were drawn, such as a Trinitarian understanding of the ground idea of philosophy (see 3.5) as well as concrete expressions and immediate Trinitarian dynamics which are concretely manifested in the multi-aspectual confrontations between Christian apologists and adherents of other worldviews (see 3.6).

Further, provisional conclusions has been drawn, reinforcing the importance of a biblical ontology and of transcendental philosophy in a way which does justice to God’s Self- and integral Word revelation (4.1-4.2). After reconciling Dooyeweerd and Van Til via Stoker and drawing on the consequences for apologetics, the TMSA evolved, upholding the unity of philosophy and theology in apologetics as rooted in the triune God.

Thereby TMSA had to go beyond Van Til’s theological approach, grounding the gained insights in a full-fledged Trinitarian framework and in the biblical ontology of the heart, leading to a paradigm which regards both, reformed covenantal theology and reformational philosophy as foundational (see 4.3-4.14).

After the evolvement of TMSA in the Neo-Calvinistic context as the consequence of the interaction between Van Til, Stoker and Dooyeweerd in Van Til’s Festschrift and its grounding in the Trinitarian vision inspired by Jeremy Ive’s contribution, the focus of TMSA was subsequently directed to broader Christianity (see 4.15).

Due to the perennial reformational reading applied during its process of evolvement and the all-encompassing scope it attained, it appeared to be the task of the integral biblical and reformational vision, to set the relation between TMSA and broader Christianity.

Therefore Marlet’s expositions on Neo-Thomism and the Philosophia in Ecclesia recepta came into play in order to test and to enrich TMSA’s vision (see 5-5.2.9) and to open up a new and constructive platform of interaction for reformational apologetics. Precious insights gained through Marlet’s incarnational vision of the history of the Church’s philosophy were deepened and complemented by Radical Orthodoxy (see 5.3). This was basically possible because Marlet and Radical Orthodoxy appeared to share in some inspirational sources, which were also inspirational to Neo-Calvinism. (see 5.2.1).

Thus, the deep convergence between them revealed itself to be in terms of transcendental philosophy, or to be more specific, due to the shared biblical ontology of the heart. On the
other hand, manifested divergences appeared to be at best dealt with and corrected when placed within the Trinitarian and biblical framework, which constitutes and directs the reformational and transformational scope and intention of TMSA as an apologetic nuance.

The Trinitarian modal-spherical method of apologetics revealed itself as a constructive and reformational approach, encompassing the motives of creation, incarnation and transformation, thereby reflecting the work of the ontological Trinity. TMSA seeks to confront other nuances (be it of apologetics, of philosophy or theology) as well as of apostate worldviews from a radically Trinitarian and non-reductive perspective.

In order to put TMSA into practice, the latter (intention and scope) was briefly demonstrated in an exemplary way (6-6.2). In future, TMSA can be further tested and applied to other cases, by using a similar procedure and opening up new avenues of discourse for reformational apologetics, serving the task of the Church in its proclamation of the Gospel.

Thence, TMSA appears to open up a promising avenue for the future of reformational apologetics. As a Neo-Calvinistic approach, it revealed itself to be all-encompassing and strong enough, so that even Marlet’s and RO’s incarnational approaches at the end seemed to best fit in when rooted within its Trinitarian framework. In other words, it is possible to conceive the incarnational account of Marlet and RO as well as the creational account of reformational philosophy within the integral Trinitarian framework of TMSA. The basic insights for such an assertion were already provided through the Trinitarian interpretation of reformational philosophy (see point 3). Speaking in terms of the Trinitarian framework, the creation motive (Neo-Calvinism) relates to the work of the first Person (the Father) of the Holy Trinity and the incarnation motive (Neo-Thomism) to the work of the Son of God. Thus, by taking both nuances into account, TMSA nevertheless states that both motives are to be seen in the light of the ontological Trinity as the transcendent root of the cosmos, upon which creation is ultimately dependent upon. This implies that the revelation (inspiration, transformation) motive is equally important as creation and incarnation as it relates to the work of the Holy Spirit. This conclusion can be drawn from the Trinitarian perspectives given on the ground question of philosophy (see 3.5). Thus, TMSA appears to be biblical and broad enough in its radically Trinitarian and reformational perspective, in a way that it absorbs positive developments of Roman-Catholic incarnational philosophy, but at the end subjecting its paradigm to an internal reformation via the radically biblical reformational vision of Neo-Calvinism. Thence, TMSA seeks to be constructive but nevertheless radically biblical in its approach of other nuances of apologetics and even of “apostate” philosophical nuances. Such an integral and transformational perspective, seeks to do justice to both, Christian theology and philosophy, in a way that seeks to promote constructive dialogue and inner reformation of the parties involved. More specifically, TMSA seeks to do justice to reformational philosophy and reformed theology, but in such a manner that it remains open for later revisions of method. It should have become clear that the latter openness is intrinsic to the biblical and the reformational vision, for this has been emphasized right from the beginning of the thesis. That was the reason why the thesis began with Dooyeweerd’s stress on the important distinction between theoretical knowledge, true self-knowledge and true knowledge of God. The former (theoretical thought) is bound to time and changeable. True
self knowledge and knowledge of God on the other hand, are interdependent, while its fullness is only present in the heart. As long as man’s existence is bound to temporality, he can only find fullness of meaning in Christ, through the work of the Holy Spirit, by means of his faith intuition. Therefore it is crucial for a truly biblical methodology of apologetics (as well as for theology and philosophy as scientific disciplines), that they remain open for the process of ongoing reformation, to which the Church has to be constantly submitted to. Thus, the biblical openness towards God’s reformational spirit is central to TMSA, which is to be seen as a fruit of the life the Reformation produced.

Further, to be reformational implies for TMSA as a method of apologetics, that it must be modal-spherical so that all spheres of life are subjected to the Lordship of Christ (the central and the peripheral relations of the ego). Therefore, reformational apologetics seeks to preach the Gospel to the whole man, taking the different facets of life into account and hoping to do justice to the radical diversity and coherence of created reality (including human existence), so that the triune God, upon whom the whole of creation (including man) is ultimately dependent upon, may receive all the glory: “For of him and through him and unto him, are all things. To him be the glory for ever. Amen” (Rom 11:36).
ABSTRACT

The task of a reformed apologetics is the application of both theology and philosophy in the confrontation with unbelievers, bridging the gap between the natural man and the Gospel of Christ and trying to do justice to the multi-aspectual, existential and constitutive sides of created reality. In the Festschrift of Cornelius Van Til, two well-known reformational philosophers, Herman Dooyeweerd of the Netherlands and Hendrik Stoker of South Africa, among others, discussed with Van Til the methodology of Christian apologetics (Jerusalem and Athens 1971: viii).

The investigation focus on the reflections of Dooyeweerd and Stoker on Van Til’s method, which attempted to break away from classical methods and to reform apologetics biblically. Thence, constructive criticisms, methodological integration of reformational insights and the opening up of new avenues of apologetic discourse follows after a structural evaluation of the dialogue between the three thinkers, leading to a Trinitarian, Modal-spherical method (TMSA) of apologetics, while still presupposing the biblical and triune essence of Van Til’s presuppositional apologetics. After absorbing and integrating inter-related elements in its Trinitarian framework, the new method of apologetics will be introduced to broader Christianity via two integralist accounts of traditional Christian philosophy, both inspired by an interpretation Neo-Thomism, which in many respects correspond to the Neo-Calvinist vision. So that after non-dualistically expanding TMSA’s methodological foundation and scope of interaction non-, it can be briefly introduced to other nuances of apologetics at the final step of the thesis, in the hope of contributing for the ongoing reformation of the Church and its apologetic endeavour.

KEYWORDS
Van Til, Stoker, Dooyeweerd, reformed apologetics, reformational philosophy, Trinitarian-covenantal theology, modal aspects of reality, law spheres, presuppositional apologetics, Marlet, Neo-Calvinisme, Neo-Thomism, Radical Orthodoxy, TMSA

SLEUTELWOORDE
Van Til, Stoker, Dooyeweerd, gereformeerde apologetiek, reformatoriese wysbegeerte, trinitariese verbondstheologie, modale aspekte van realiteit, wetssfere, voorveronderstellingsapologetiek, Marlet, Neo-Calvinisme, Neo-Thomisme, Radikale Ortodoksie, TMSA
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