

Encyclopaedic models in the Kuyperian tradition (part 1: the “fathers”)

R. Coletto
School of Philosophy
North-West University
POTCHEFSTROOM

Renato.Coletto@nwu.ac.za

Abstract

This is the first of a series of three articles exploring in historical order the encyclopaedic models presented in the Kuyperian tradition of scholarship. The role of scientific and pre-scientific frameworks (e.g. world-views, philosophy), the relationships between sciences (e.g. theology and philosophy) and other issues are explored and evaluated in several different models. This article deals with the period of the “fathers” of Kuyperian scholarship. In particular the works of Dooyeweerd, Vollenhoven, Stoker and Van Til will be examined to identify their strong and weak points. My thesis is that, during the period in question, the basic models were proposed, certain problems were identified and attempts were made at providing better accounts of the complex and multiple relationships and influences among frameworks. These attempts were not always successful, yet in many cases they point towards desirable improvements of the Kuyperian model. This article will lay a basis for the discussion of more recent models and for a systematic conclusion in two more contributions to follow.

Opsomming

Ensiklopediese modelle in die Kuyperiaanse tradisie (deel 1: die “vaders”)

Hierdie is die eerste artikel in 'n reeks van drie wat die modelle vir wetenskapsbeoefening, soos voorgelê in die Kuyperiaanse tradisie, in historiese volgorde verken. Die rol van wetenskaplike en voorwetenskaplike raamwerke (bv. wêreldbeskouings, filosofie), die verhoudings tussen wetenskappe (bv. teologie en filosofie) en ander faktore word in 'n aantal verskillende modelle ondersoek en geëvalueer. Hierdie artikel gee aandag aan die periode van die “vaders” van die Kuyperiaanse tradisie van wetenskapsbeoefening. Meer spesifiek, sal die werk van Dooyeweerd, Vollenhoven, Stoker en Van Til ondersoek word ten einde sterk en swak punte te identifiseer. My hipotese is dat gedurende hierdie periode, die basiese modelle voorgestel is, probleme geïdentifiseer is en pogings gemaak is om beter verduidelikings te gee van die komplekse en veelvuldige verhoudings en invloede tussen raamwerke. Hierdie pogings was nie altyd suksesvol nie, tog is daar baie gevalle waar daar heen gewys word na verlangbare verbeterings van die Kuyperiaanse model. Hierdie artikel vorm die basis vir 'n bespreking van meer resente modelle en vir 'n sistematiese konklusie in twee verdere bydraes wat hierop volg.

1. Introduction

The Kuyperian tradition is known for its promotion of “Christian scholarship”, “scriptural philosophy”, the “inner reformation” of science and so forth. Indeed this tradition has delivered a unique contribution by arguing that no scholarship is religiously neutral and that Christian academics should be busy transforming scholarship and education. The Kuyperian tradition has demonstrated that there is always a link between our fundamental commitments, our philosophies and the special² sciences, thus recognising the influence of “religious ground motives” in science and scholarship.

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- 1 In this article the terms *scholarship*, *science* and the phrase *science and scholarship* are considered synonyms and include all theoretical fields of study. The term “framework” indicates all the components or players of a model (scientific or not), like worldview, philosophy or the sciences. The adjectives *Kuyperian* and *Neo-Calvinist* are also used as synonyms. The term *religion* refers not only to the “classical” religions (e.g. Islam, Christianity), but to all systems of belief and ideologies (including the secular ones).
 - 2 It has become customary, in reformational circles, to call “special” all the sciences or disciplines focusing on a specific aspect of reality (e.g. biology, economics, law). By contrast philosophy (and theology according to some), are regarded as “general”.

Several Kuyperian scholars have tried to sketch models accounting for the multiple interactions between the sciences. Such models often include pre-scientific factors like worldviews and religious ground motives, control-beliefs and so on. Therefore they offer an overview of the position, nature and role of both the pre-scientific frameworks (e.g. worldviews, ground motives) and the various scientific frameworks (e.g. philosophy, physics, ethics) involved in the scientific enterprise. Of course such models have been proposed, more or less explicitly, in many traditions, for example in Neo-Marxism, Roman Catholicism, positivism and so forth. The result of this type of research is the proposal of a particular *encyclopaedic model*, which always presents both descriptive and pre-scriptive traits.

Can such models be “restrictive” as well? Certainly, models offering an incomplete or one-sided picture, models hiding certain relationships between the frameworks might encourage inappropriate forms of scholarship. Enquiring into this field of study has therefore the advantage of preventing such distortions. More positively, this type of research can lead to a better understanding and practice of scholarship.

In a few previous articles of mine I have already explored several models for Christian scholarship. However, I have done so by paying attention especially to *specific aspects* of those models, like the role attributed to Scripture (Coletto, 2009a; 2010), the function of pre-scientific frameworks (Coletto, 2009a; 2011) and so on. This article is the first of a series of three, in which I would like to look at the different models in a more *encompassing* way, i.e. trying to capture their general encyclopaedic structure, their main characteristics, intentions and so on.

As a matter of fact, the models proposed within the Kuyperian tradition present a few differences. In some of them philosophy occupies a rather central position and worldviews are relegated to a marginal role. In some models theology is the key factor, while in others worldviews are supposed to play a “mediating role” between religion (i.e. ground motives) and philosophy. Different metaphors and images are used as well. For some, scholarship is like a motor-vehicle in which philosophy plays the role of the “gearbox” (Wolters, 1989:14-15). For others scholarship is like a journey starting from religious commitments and reaching the phase of special scientific research. For some scho-

larship is like a “spiral” (Duvenage, 1985:31-36), others consider it like a series of concentric circles (Klapwijk, 2008:200) and so on.

The main question of this article (and of two others to follow) is to know whether we can learn something relevant from the Neo-Calvinist “modelling” of scholarship and whether it is possible to continue and eventually to improve the Kuyperian research in this area.

Concerning the present article my thesis is that, during the period in question (about 1930-1970), there were several attempts at improving the Kuyperian encyclopaedic reflection by eliminating some “rigidities” and by better recognising the complex and multiple relationships and influences among encyclopaedic frameworks. These attempts did not always go in the right direction and were not always successful. Yet in many cases they show the way towards a better encyclopaedic model.

All proposed improvements and new directions, I would argue, need to be respectful of the specific tradition in which they are presented. In the following series I will try to stimulate a reflection “from inside” the Kuyperian house. I will visit several “rooms” (models) and propose some renovations, to be performed with materials that are suitable to the tradition itself. The purpose of these articles is first of all to explore and evaluate models already proposed by several authors and circles, in order to acknowledge their strong (and weak) points. Finally, the purpose is to possibly indicate new directions for the future.

The present article (part 1) deals with the contribution of four of the “fathers” of Neo-Calvinist scholarship: Dooyeweerd, Vollenhoven, Stoker and Van Til. Part 2 will focus on more recent authors and the third part will provide some conclusions and a few suggestions for the future.

I understand the Kuyperian tradition as containing a few schools or circles. While I use the term Kuyperian and Neo-Calvinist as synonymous umbrella-terms to include all the schools, in the present article I will distinguish a *reformational* family (starting with/including Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven) from the school initiated by Hendrick Stoker in South Africa and from the Vantilian family (starting with Cornelius Van Til). Let us begin our enquiry from the reformational tradition.

2. H. Dooyeweerd

2.1 *Ground motives, theology and philosophy*

There are a few priceless intuitions in Dooyeweerd's encyclopaedic view, first of all the idea that all science/scholarship is always already linked to pre-scientific commitments of religious nature. The idea is not absent in Polanyi, but with Dooyeweerd it finds a particular clarity and relevance. Dooyeweerd walked several extra miles to argue this idea. The historical evidence he displayed to prove his point, ranges from the pre-Socratics to the 20th century and includes discussions of philosophy, law, physics, mathematics, politics and other cultural fields.

Scholarly thinking is shaped by a transcendental three-fold idea. The first "side" of this idea provides an answer to the question concerning the *origin* of all meaning (i.e. of created reality). The second side deals with the *unity* of such meaning and the third one deals with the relation of *coherence and diversity* between the different aspects of created reality (Dooyeweerd, 1984, 1:93-102). It is interesting to notice that, according to this model, a transcendental idea impacts first of all on philosophy and only afterwards ("indirectly" – 1984, 1:69) on the special sciences as well (via philosophy). In this model, therefore, philosophy has a special position, one could say a sort of mediating position. One may observe, for example that according to Dooyeweerd (1986:60) social *philosophy* is directly linked to a fundamental ground motive while *sociology* is based on social philosophy. It is not discussed whether and how sociology is eventually connected to a ground motive.

It is also interesting to notice that Dooyeweerd had clear insights in the dangers of the mediating-pattern in matters of encyclopaedia. For example, during his fifth and last conference at the Social Museum in Paris he (1959:66) criticised an idea which was (and still is) quite widespread especially in theological circles. In other words he criticised the model according to which theology is the necessary mediator between the biblical revelation and Christian scholarship (in particular philosophy).

Dooyeweerd's argument was quite simple: if Christian philosophy is dependent on theology for its access to the (ground motive of the) scriptural revelation, how can philosophy ever hope to offer any original contribution to the reformation of scholarship? Deprived of

its own access to the Scriptural sources, philosophy will be bound to repeat what theology has already said, in philosophical language. According to Dooyeweerd (1980:135) this mediation-attitude derives from the Aristotelian legacy introduced into the Christian encyclopaedic tradition via Thomistic philosophy. Such a scholastic position is dangerous not only for encyclopaedic purposes but even when it comes to matters of religious belief and salvation in Christ. In fact, we might add, theology’s mediation parallels the mediating role of the clergy in the Catholic tradition. In the latter case the Reformation deemed it necessary to provide the “lay” part of the church with an independent access to the sources of the Christian religion and to change the mediating-magisterial role of the clergy into a ministerial role. The same religious impulse prompted Dooyeweerd to search for a proper link between philosophy and the Christian religion.

2.2 Sequentiality?

While Dooyeweerd rightly criticised the mediating role of theology, he was not equally radical in criticising the mediating role of philosophy. He had the merit, however, of pointing out the problems related to the role of mediators in encyclopaedic models. Patterns of mediatorship have often affected Kuyperian scholarship and are probably not yet sufficiently recognised.

In addition to mediatorship, in some previous articles I have referred to a “sequentiality” problem (Coletto, 2009; 2011:110 ff.). Sequentiality can be defined as the *multiplication of the mediators*. It consists in placing the different frameworks of a model (e.g. worldview, philosophy and so on), in a chain-like sequence. As a consequence, each ring of the chain is related to the previous and to the following ring but it is not clear what its relation to the other “rings” (i.e. frameworks) may be.

In this sequence of mediators one can often still identify a central or main mediator, the one playing the crucial role in the sequence. In Dooyeweerdian circles for example, philosophy can be regarded as the central mediating agency because it is the “ring” transmitting the whole *corpus* of pre-scientific and religious resources to the scientific side of scholarship. Something similar is argued about theology in other circles. The chain of sequentiality, therefore, does not exclude that certain mediators are more important than others. In

any case, the impression is often created that little can be accomplished in one area (or “ring”) before the preceding one (or the main mediator) has reached some sort of “completeness”, solidity or the like. This normally causes (Christian) scholarly communities to focus on certain areas while neglecting others.

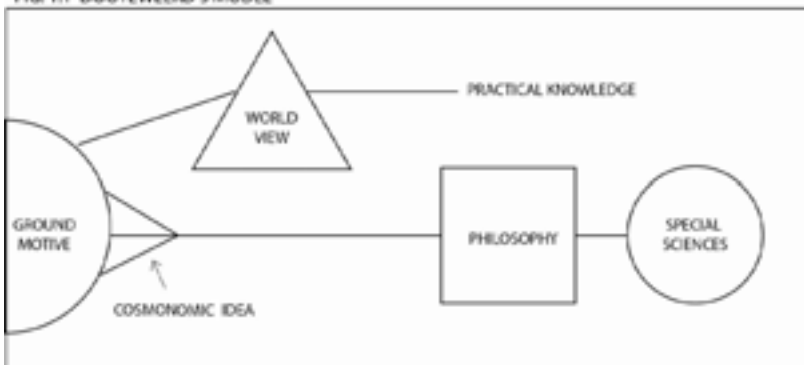
A second problem which is frequently encountered in the Kuyperian models is that they seem to account for real scholarship only in a rather simplified way. In other words such schemes do not take into account or reflect sufficiently the rich complexity of interactions and inter-relations existing between scientific and pre-scientific frameworks, between a ground motive and the special sciences, among the special sciences themselves and so forth.

Further reflections on sequentiality are stimulated by the role Dooyeweerd attributed to worldviews in his own model.

2.3 Ground motives, worldviews and philosophies

To be fair to the Dooyeweerdian model, one should admit that it is not completely mono-linear. In his model, one should take note of the nature and role of worldviews: on the one hand they are grounded on religious motives and on the other they are directed towards practical or pre-scientific knowledge. There is therefore a second “line” or sequence (parallel to the theoretical one) complicating or enriching this model.

FIG. 1.1 DOOYEWEERD'S MODEL



At the same time one must admit that this second line is not really part of the *scientific* process and is not supposed to influence it. Ac-

According to Dooyeweerd (1984, 1:157-158), in fact, worldviews are supposed to influence only pre-scientific knowledge.

This arrangement has a history and a precise motivation. The main difference between ground motives and worldviews lies in the fact that the former imply a claim to universal validity which the latter do not imply. An example from Christian scholarship may clarify this point. For the Christian the biblical religious ground motive is the “heart” of the Bible itself, the “motif” of “creation fall and redemption in Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit” (Dooyeweerd, 1966:14). On the other hand, the particular worldview of a particular Christian community (say the worldview of the Neo-Calvinists of the 19th century in the Netherlands) may be subjected to revisions, alterations and corrections, precisely in the light of the biblical revelation. Worldviews originate in the daily interaction with a particular community and cultural context, in a certain time and place. Their truth-claims are more modest.

As we see in figure 1.1 in Dooyeweerd’s model philosophy and worldview are like two trees, both “planted” on the common soil of a religious ground motive. Both theoretical and “naïve” knowledge are connected to a religious ground motive. However, science develops through philosophy and specialises in the particular disciplines (which study the world through modal perspectives). Naïve knowledge, by contrast, develops via a worldview and focuses on concrete events and entities.

It is important to notice that, in his model, Dooyeweerd does not place a worldview between a ground motive and philosophy, as having a mediating role. The reason is, as Wolters (1989:22) correctly explains, that such a move would take us in the direction of relativising and historicising Christian scholarship.

From Dooyeweerd’s approach one can learn a few lessons. Firstly, we learn that Dooyeweerd was aware of the problems implied in mediatorship and tried to avoid them. Secondly, we learn that different frameworks have different characteristics and functions which should not be confused. Finally, by not supporting a mediating role of worldviews he mitigated the problem of sequentiality.

Nevertheless, Dooyeweerd’s model might raise a question: are we sure that worldviews do not function at all in the process of theorising? In more recent times Klapwijk (1987:108 ff.) has asked

precisely this question and has also provided his response which tries to integrate worldviews in the scientific process. If he is right, Dooyeweerd's model should become more articulated and inclusive. But what about the problems (also recognised by Klapwijk, 1987:109) concerning the relativising and historicising of Christian scholarship? While we keep in mind these issues, let us complete our exploration of the scientific part of Dooyeweerd's model.

2.4 *Philosophy and the special sciences*

Concerning the rest of the model, once the religious direction has been incorporated into philosophy, it can be transmitted to the special sciences. Obviously, "inner reformation" is not supposed to stop at the philosophical level but should affect a re-orientation of science and scholarship as well. Dooyeweerd had good expectations in this area, and in the last years of his life he (1984, 1:vii) enjoyed observing the progress of a new generation of reformational scholars working in the special sciences.

Unfortunately, the enterprise seemed to be particularly laborious. While the elaboration of a reformational philosophy was a tangible success, only a few engaged directly in the special sciences. Progress occurred especially in the fields of *special philosophy*, for example in philosophy of economics (Goudzwaard), philosophy of politics (Skillen), philosophy of education and so on. But concerning the emergence of new theories in the special sciences, it is possible to argue that not much was achieved (Geertsema, 1995:18).

Admittedly, one shouldn't expect too much and too quickly from a relatively young school of thought. One should rather grant that even placing the studies of a special science in a new (philosophical) light constitutes an achievement (Geertsema, 1995:18). The question could be asked, however, whether the "inner reformation" project was fully successful and eventually what hindrances were experienced. We will return on this issue in part 2. We can now move to the Vollenhovan model.

3. D.H.Th. Vollenhoven

The Vollenhovan encyclopaedic model is rather similar to the Dooyeweerdian one and therefore I will discuss it more briefly. In this model too, we find a fundamental commitment to the sources of the Chris-

tian religion, but the role of ground motives is not considered as important as in the previous model. Here the Bible is linked more directly to scholarship (to philosophy first of all). Having worked as an assistant of Vollenhoven, Klapwijk (1987:107) reports that the latter had difficulties imagining that the richness of the biblical revelation could be enclosed in a “formula” like “creation, fall and redemption” (the Dooyeweerdian definition of the biblical ground motive). Vollenhoven’s “scriptural philosophy” found its roots directly in the Scriptures:

If you believe God’s Word, and trust that Word, you obtain a philosophy the basis of which is formed by that non philosophical, non scientific belief in Holy Scripture and in God (Vollenhoven, 1953:8 or 1992:103).

Generally speaking, the two reformational models look very similar. In fact when Kok (1988:110-126) discusses Vollenhoven’s encyclopaedic model, it is not easy to say in what it differs from the Dooyeweerdian one. In the Vollenhovian model philosophy retains a kind of mediating role and in this sense the scheme is definitely similar to the Dooyeweerdian one. The more direct access to Scripture, which was mentioned above, is operative especially as far as philosophy is concerned, not in relation to the special sciences, and this reduces the differences between the two models.

One might even wonder whether it is really true that Vollenhoven promoted a more direct relationship between the Bible and philosophy, as Klapwijk (1987:107) argues. One may hesitate for a moment while recalling, for example, that Vollenhoven too, at a certain point provided his own “summary” of the biblical revelation and even called it “grondmotief” (Vollenhoven, 1935). Nevertheless, I think Klapwijk is right and Vollenhoven’s initial scepticism concerning ground motives has some relevance for our discussion.

In fact, one has the impression that the emphasis on direct access to Scripture constitutes an insight pointing towards a more “open” model.³ The idea that Scripture influences and directly leads phi-

3 To be fair to the Dooyeweerdian position one should acknowledge that the biblical religious ground motive is not simply an external link or bridge between philosophy and Scripture. It is the “heart” of the Bible, its power and the “key” to its understanding. It is therefore not external to the Bible but “part” of it.

losophy (i.e. apart from the mediation of ground motives) might have suggested new avenues to the new generations. It was therefore plausible to hope that Vollenhoven's strategy would inspire the new generations to adopt a model with less mediators and with more direct relationships between all frameworks.

In the next article (part 2) we will follow the developments of the Vollenhovian school. As far as Vollenhoven is concerned, unfortunately the "direct access" idea seemed to hold especially for philosophy. In other words, while philosophy gained immediate access to the roots of the Christian religion, the special sciences did not. At this point, however, one might ask: would it be possible to imagine a "non-monopolistic" type of mediation? For example a mediation that doesn't exclude contact and mutual influence between the two frameworks connected by a mediator? Although this question will have to wait until we reach the third part of this series, it is important at least to consider it.

Before concluding this section, let us notice another common feature of both the Dooyeweerdian and the Vollenhovian models. In practice, they both show a rather lukewarm attitude towards theology. According to Kok (1988:124) Vollenhoven's "comments about theology (...) remain by and large negative. A positive formulation as to what theology should be and do, is not to be found". I think Kok has in mind especially what theology "should be and do" in relation to philosophy and to other sciences. Something similar can be said about the Dooyeweerdian model (Coletto, 2009b:109). These might be the reasons why some felt the need to recover, within Neo-Calvinist encyclopaedia, the more positive role for theology that Kuyper himself (1965:614-615) had in mind. Among these academics we find Hendrick Stoker.

4. H.G. Stoker

4.1 *Encyclopaedic reflections*

Stoker reflected thoroughly on encyclopaedic issues and proposed a well-rounded model furnished with the definition of several sciences. The first sections of his *The philosophy of the creation idea* (Stoker, 2008, orig. 1970) deal precisely with an orientation concerning the tasks, characteristics and field of study of several sciences and types of sciences.

After examining the two reformational models, one difference that may be readily perceived in Stoker’s own model, is that greater emphasis is placed on the mutual cooperation of all disciplines. He writes for example: “notwithstanding the fact that each science has its own field none of them can work in isolation, each of them depends on interaction with the others” (2008:9; cf. 1971:41). The admission that on certain areas philosophy has a broader scope, is balanced by his recognition that theology gives the “deepest contribution” (1971:152), and so on.

A related characteristic of Stoker’s model is that theology is given a more positive and prominent role. Philosophy is not underestimated, on the contrary it is given the fundamental task of dealing with the “origins (the coherent radical diversity) in and of the cosmos” (2008:6). But in his opinion theology is more important than Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven admitted. As a matter of fact, says Stoker (2008:17), “philosophy cannot be practiced in isolation from theology”.

For Stoker theology is not a special science, it rather deals with issues of fundamental importance and crucial relevance for Christian scholarship (1971:39, fn. 26 on p. 456). In fact, according to Stoker theology is the science of “the revelation of God and of His relationship with all creation” (2008:6-7). After all, if Christian scholarship is biblical scholarship, then theology must be recognised as having a special role to play?

In Stoker’s writings, therefore, theology becomes the science dealing (in considerable monopoly) not with one of the modal points of entry to reality (i.e. a modality) but *with God*, the Archè. Stoker does not argue that theology deals with special revelation while the other sciences deal with general revelation (1971:39). He rather argues that theology is the science of God. In fact, while philosophy should not deal with the ultimate Archè, this is precisely the task of theology (Stoker, 1970:8). Gradually, however, not only God but whatever lies outside the creational horizon became for Stoker the field of study of theology. For example “ouranology and angelology” (sciences dealing with the heavenly realm and the angels) are “entrusted to the guardianship of theology” (1971:39). Why are they part of theology? The reason is that “the data concerned are to be found in the Scriptures only” (39). In this respect, the impression emerges that although in principle Stoker wants to “open” the

written revelation to other sciences, in the end it remains the field of study of theology. (In this regard see also Van Til).

Now, compared to the new avenues of reflection opened by Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven on the nature of theology, this seems to bring us back to a more “classical” position, a position that some might no doubt perceive as rather “scholastic”.

One more problem seems to emerge: while providing his definition of theology Stoker often refers to Christian theology but his definition would hardly be valid for the non-Christian types of theologies. When he defines theology as the “science of God’s revelation of himself and of his relationship with all thing” (2008:7; cf. 1971:38-39) this will not fit all types of theology. In some cases he (1971:39) does define non-Christian theology as well, but he can never bring the two under a common definition of “theology”. This creates the impression that the difference between Christian and non-Christian scholarship is not only directional but structural as well. Such hypothesis goes against the grain of Kuypertian scholarship, which stressed the fact that all types of scholarship, while differing in their “direction”, are structurally the same.

We have noticed that according to Stoker (1971:fn. 26 on page 456) theology is not linked to any modality. But are the other sciences linked to modal aspects? In fact, even for other sciences Stoker does not always seem inclined to maintain a clear link between science and modality. In some cases he (1971:39) says that a special science studies “things” (that “belong together on account of common characteristics or of a particular aspect of our created universe”). This prompts the question: how does Stoker distinguish between scientific and non-scientific thinking?

4.2 Demarcation problems?

Stoker’s (2008:9) strategy to distinguish science from non science consists in identifying a series of characteristic traits of science. Science is systematic and verified knowledge, it is based on observation, on sound methods and so on.

4 See for example the definition: “in my opinion science (...) can be defined as: that form of knowledge (...) that has been optimally technically and methodically systematized (...) and as far as possible been technically and methodically verified” (Stoker, 2008:9).

The first problem with any list of this type is that in many cases it attributes to science characteristics which apply quite well to non-scientific knowledge as well. In other cases Stoker adopts criteria proposed by (humanist) philosophers of science which time has a bit worn out and in the long run proved un-satisfactory. This is the case, for example, with his apparent acceptance of the (positivist) idea of verification (convincingly opposed by Popper), or with his (1970, 2:197) approval of the (Popperian) idea that proper science always starts with a problem (opposed by Feyerabend). It would have been better for Stoker to develop more original criteria on the basis of his own original starting point.

Admittedly, Stoker's characterisation of science enables him to argue that philosophy is a scientific framework. This is a positive move, but one may suspect that, on the same basis, some non-scientific frameworks and activities could also be regarded as scientific. In fact, pre-scientific knowledge can also be based on observation, can be verified (Strauss, 2001:29), can start from a problem and can follow an appropriate method.

In addition, that list of criteria will inevitably be confronted with activities in which only some of the characteristics of science will be present while others will be absent. For example one might be confronted with theories or ideas which are verified to an extent but not yet systematised. There might be a starting problem while the method might be disputable. The problem can be phrased as follows: do we have science only when all the characteristics of science are there? Or when the majority of the characteristics are present? Also when only a few are there? This strategy, I would say, leads to a position of uncertainty, in which the border between scientific and non-scientific thinking is extremely gradual and (I would say) also quite uncertain.

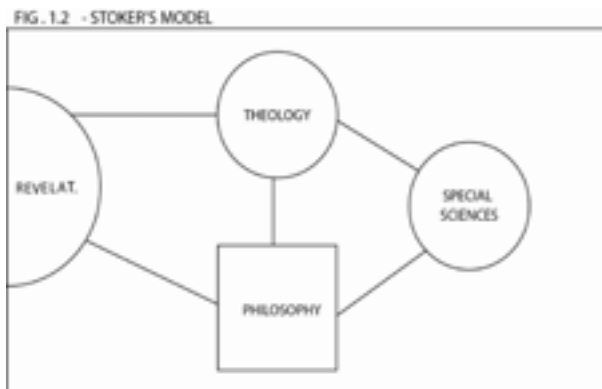
4.3 Coming back to theology

In my opinion, the fact that Stoker did not provide a clear-cut demarcation criterion may have affected his view of theology as well. It is in fact typical of many Christian traditions to place theology in a sort of limbo, where it is simultaneously scientific, non-scientific, supra-scientific and "practical", a kind of philosophy and a sort of worldview, equally undistinguishable from faith and religion. In this confusion, theology is often attributed an increasingly dominant

role. Now, it would be unfair to say that for Stoker theology was everything and nothing at the same time. Yet one might have the impression that, whatever the reason may be, the powerful tradition regarding theology as the queen of the sciences had some impact in Stoker's analysis.

In fact, he (1971: 39, fn. 26 on p. 456) begins by proposing the idea that theology is more than just a special science, yet later on he speaks of theology as being "*primus inter pares*" (the first among equals – Stoker, 1971:39). The well known expression is borrowed from Catholic theology, where it describes the role of the Roman *Pontifex* among the other bishops. (Etymologically *pontifex* means builder of bridges, mediator). Was it the inevitable result of a rather "Catholic" way of looking at reality? Did he, in some cases, retain traces of a scholastic approach?

I think to answer this question it would be necessary to look at his philosophy more broadly and deeply. For our present and more modest purpose, it is fair to recognise that he made a conscious effort at enriching our understanding of how scholarship works and should work. Should one try to sketch his model I would draw it as in figure 1.2 below, to highlight his intention to create a "cooperative" model. The figure however does not illustrate the primacy gradually attributed to theology and its gradual "seizure" of the written revelation (indicated as "revelation" in the figure below and in fig. 1.3). It can also be observed that Stoker (like Van Til, see fig. 1.3) did not say much on frameworks like ground motives, world-views, world-pictures and the like. In other words, the pre-scientific frameworks may be slightly under-discussed in these two models.



Nevertheless, one can also notice that Stoker’s model, among the ones examined in this article, is probably the most “cooperative” and the less affected by the problems related to mediation and sequentiality. In addition, if it can be agreed that in the reformational model the positive role of theology in the encyclopaedic context is not fully displayed, we should also welcome Stoker’s attempt at improving this side of the model. Furthermore, his exploration of the inter-relations between disciplines and the resulting emphasis on inter-disciplinary cooperation are positive traits of his contribution. Due to the reasons stated above, the specific strategies he adopted to “promote” theology were not always satisfactory. Yet one has the impression that in his model there were positive insights and quests to be preserved.

We should now consider the work of a good friend of Stoker who dealt with similar issues and problems. Let us therefore move to Cornelius Van Til, an American “father” of Neo-Calvinist thinking. In the following sections we will explore his encyclopaedic model and his attempt at recovering the role of theology.

5. C. Van Til

Van Til does not discuss encyclopaedic issues very often and in his works one will find only a few hints on this topic. His notes, however, give the impression that he tries to emphasise the need for inter-disciplinary cooperation (Van Til, 1974:3). He does not argue for the priority of one or the other discipline, he rather tries to establish the inter-connectedness of all fields of study.

John Frame (1987:91) has praised this attitude and has also contrasted Van Til’s flexibility on this point with the rigidities of the “Amsterdam philosophy”. In Frame’s opinion authors like Dooyeweerd are guilty of insisting too much on encyclopaedic issues and of erecting high fences among the disciplines. According to Frame, these issues are often just matters of pedagogic convenience and “there is more than a way to cut a cake, for the purpose of eating it” (Frame, 1987:91). In his opinion Van Til had the right attitude: instead of insisting on the priority of a science upon the others, or asking which science is based on which, he emphasised that to produce Christian scholarship all sciences should be based on Scripture.

We will briefly explore Frame's model in the next article, because he is a good representative of the Vantilian school in more recent times. For the moment we have to notice, however, that in Van Til's model things might not be as simple as they appear to Frame. Declarations of principle are important to understand a model, but definitions and practical implementations are sometimes even more important.

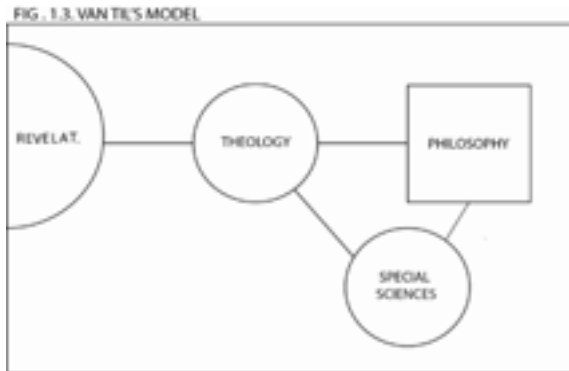
What one notices in Van Til's concrete scholarship is that he emphasises especially the role of theology. In his writings, for example, "theological encyclopaedia" becomes a synonym of "Christian encyclopaedia" (Van Til, 1976:3). At times one also gets the impression that the rest of Christian scholarship could almost be derived from theology. For example his theory of knowledge is completely argued from a theological point of view. Yet he doesn't call it a "theological" theory but *A Christian theory of knowledge* (title of Van Til, 1969). In other words "theological" seems to be a synonym of Christian.

Once again, the definition of theology is very important: for Van Til theology is an exposition or explanation of the Bible (1974:3-4). The content of theology, ideally, is the same content of the Bible and of the confessions of faith (p. 3-4), with God as its primary object of study (p. 1). Van Til returns, therefore, to the classical understanding of theology as science of God and of the Bible. In this he sides with Stoker but ignores the critical arguments already provided by reformational circles.

Nevertheless, Van Til does not (1974:15; 1976:23) fall into the trap of "reserving" the Bible only for theology and creational revelation for the other sciences. Nor does he reserve God as presupposition of theology only. In his view all the disciplines, with different emphases, should have access to all revelations and presuppose God. As they have access to the Bible, "Christian science and philosophy", says Van Til, "are also indirectly theological" (1974:1).

At this point, however, Van Til adds that the extra-theological sciences are not equipped to understand the written revelation properly: exegesis of Scripture is "the business of theology" (Van Til, 1969:26). In their case it would be wise, therefore, to consult theology. Does this not create dependence on theology and theologians? "Even so", says Van Til, "the Christian philosopher and the Christian scientist will be first of all directly dependent upon the Scripture itself" (1969:26).

I believe this series of moves produces a different model from what one would have expected after reading Van Til’s statements of principle. Instead of having all the disciplines based on the Bible, we seem to have them all based on theology? How should one understand the philosopher’s and scientist’s dependence on Scripture, if exegesis of Scripture is the business of theologians? The mediation-problem seems to re-emerge, albeit in a different guise. A scheme might therefore be drawn like this:



Should one ask: is the scheme applicable to non-Christian scholarship as well? Does theology play such a central role in all traditions? The Vantilian reply would be that scholarship is always based on a certain “faith”, on presuppositions or a worldview. This answer, however, entails an insufficient distinction between theology (which is a science) and faith, worldviews or other pre-scientific presuppositions. In part 2 we will see that this had far-reaching consequences for the development of the encyclopaedic reflection of this school of thought.

6. Conclusion

We have sketched and examined a few fundamental models for scholarship in the Kuyperian tradition. Together with the exceptionally good sides of these models (on which it is superfluous to return), we were able to notice a few problematic traits, ambiguities or areas of possible improvement.

The first problem is related to issues of mediatorship and sequentiality. When we use metaphors suggesting a certain hierarchy in the position of the frameworks constituting our encyclopaedic mo-

dels, we start encountering some problems. Some of these frameworks (e.g. worldviews, philosophy, a special science) are not supposed to be in touch with (some of the) other frameworks. This may obscure crucial connections or obstruct the access to the most vital sources of academic reflection.

At the same time, and this is the second problem, such models usually fail to account for the rich complexity of interactions among frameworks which constitute the process of scholarly research. Though realising that models are always simplifications of the complexities of reality, this may lead to over-simplifications which may in turn open the door to all sorts of superficialities and even misunderstandings regarding the mechanisms of scholarship itself.

As this article dealt only with the initial phase of the history of reformational philosophy, it is necessary to ask the question whether and to what extent more appropriate encyclopaedic models for (Christian) scholarship were offered in the following periods, when new generations of Neo-Calvinist thinkers started supplying their reflections. This will be the topic of the second part of this series.

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