PART FIVE

CONCLUSIONS
CHAPTER TWELVE

THE AMBIVALENCE OF ADAPTATION AND THE ONGOING STRENGTH OF RELIGION

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1. Introduction

The main overall theme of the NOSTER-Leuven research programme has been the question of the character and usefulness of adaptation of religion to changes in society. This question has been approached from various angles leading to a variety of answers, observations and assumptions. In this concluding contribution, I have scanned the papers for trends and tendencies, the result of which can be summarised in the following three statements:

(1) Orthodoxy is not to be seen as the authentic original form of a given religion, but as an idealised original form that should be seen as a construction in reaction to changes in time.

(2) Over the ages, liberalism—despite its laudable strife for adaptation—has been less successful than generally assumed.

(3) Of great importance for the survival of religion seems to be a clear definition of the boundaries of religiously informed practices and ethics. Their recognisability and authenticity shall—when combined with a due lack of obtrusion—be of great influence for the ongoing acceptance of religion(s) in the public domain.

These statements need clarification.

2. Pure Origin As Later Construction

Many adaptations—liberal, orthodox, or of any other character—claim that this articulation of religion should be seen as a return to the more pure and original form of the religion in question. This return to the origin is often presented as the result of a process of tidying or cutting away of ill-grown branches. But in fact it is a form of adaptation to