

# ESSAYS ON RELIGION, SCIENCE, AND SOCIETY

HERMAN BAVINCK

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## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Like his sixteenth-century spiritual forefather John Calvin, Herman Bavinck (1854–1921)<sup>1</sup> was first and foremost a son and servant of the church, dedicating his energy, his genius, and his remarkable intellect to knowing God better and helping God's people to witness more effectively to their world. But, also like Calvin, Bavinck believed that Christian renewal was not restricted to the church; the whole person in the totality of human experience, including life in society, was called to obedience before God (*coram deo*). As this English translation of a collection<sup>2</sup> of Bavinck's occasional writings on religion, science, and society goes out into the world, it is worth recalling Bavinck's first visit to North America, to the Fifth General Council of the Alliance of Reformed Churches holding the Presbyterian System meeting in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, on September 21–30, 1892. At this assembly Bavinck gave a keynote address with this far-reaching title: "The Influence of the Protestant Reformation on the Moral and Religious Condition of Communities and Nations."<sup>3</sup> Less than a year earlier at the First Social Congress held in Amsterdam, November 9–11, Bavinck had provided a discussion paper on what at that time was referred to as "the social question" with this all-encompassing

1. This introduction is not a full biographical commentary on Herman Bavinck, only an introduction to the significance of this volume. For a more comprehensive treatment, see the introductory essay in this volume by Bavinck's childhood friend, Henry Dosker, and my Editor's Introduction in any one of the four English volumes of *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003–8).

2. Aside from the Editor's Introduction and Henry Dosker's biographical sketch of Bavinck, this volume is a complete translation of the Dutch collection *Verzamelde opstellen op het gebied van godsdienst en wetenschap* (Kampen: Kok, 1921). The original foreword by Bavinck's brother, the Rev. C. B. Bavinck, is provided in appendix A, pp. 279–80.

3. The speech is recorded in the Proceedings of the Fifth General Council of the Alliance of Reformed Churches holding the Presbyterian System (London: Publication Committee of the Presbyterian Church of England, 1892), 48–55.

visionary title: "According to the Holy Scriptures, what general principles govern the solution of the social question, and what pointers are provided for the solution in the concrete application of these principles that is given for the people of Israel in Mosaic law?"<sup>4</sup> These two titles tell us much about the man, his faith, and his profoundly catholic, Reformed, Christian vision.<sup>5</sup>

The Dutch Reformed Translation society was established in 1994 by people who believed that the Dutch Reformed confessional and theological tradition contained a treasury of material that would bless the worldwide church if it could only be made available in the dominant language of modern world communication. Our first project was to translate the major work of the greatest Dutch Reformed theologian, Bavinck's four-volume *Reformed Dogmatics*, into English with the hope that the work of translation would be carried on further by the worldwide church. That has come to pass: the *Reformed Dogmatics* is now being translated into Korean, Portuguese, Indonesian, and Italian. Bavinck's extraordinary gift as a theologian is reflected in the fact that one hundred years after it was written, the *Reformed Dogmatics* remains timely and speaks directly to issues the church faces at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

This volume of essays demonstrates that good theology is not restricted to private matters of personal piety and faith but has an essential public dimension. The Triune God, who saves us through the work of Christ and incorporates us into the body of Christ, the new people of God, by the powerful work of the Holy Spirit, is the same God who is Creator of heaven and earth. We are able to distinguish different works in the economy of the Triune God, but we may never separate them. Salvation does not take us out of creation or elevate us above it but heals and restores creation's brokenness. In theological terms, grace opposes sin, not nature; grace does not abolish nature but restores it.<sup>6</sup>

It is the insistence on taking creation seriously as God's revelation without in any way diminishing the necessity of biblical revelation as the key to understanding it that is the hallmark of Bavinck's writing on matters of religion, education, science, and society. In the remainder of this introduction,

4. "Welke algemeene beginselen beheerschen, volgens de H. Schrift, de oplossing der sociale quaestie, en welke vingerwijzing voor de oplossing ligt in de concrete toepassing, welke deze beginselen voor Israel in Mozaïsch recht gevonden hebben?" in *Proces-verbaal van het Sociaal Congres, Amsterdam, November 9–12, 1891* (Amsterdam: Höveker en Zoon, 1892), 149–57. This was the same congress in which Abraham Kuypers delivered his famous address later published as *The Problem of Poverty* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1991), and the same year Pope Leo XIII issued his encyclical *Rerum novarum*.

5. The fullest expression of Bavinck's vision in a single essay is likely his "The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church," trans. J. Bolt, *Calvin Theological Journal* 27 (1992): 220–51.

6. For an excellent summary of Bavinck's distinctive Reformed understanding of the relation between nature and grace, see Jan Veenhof, "Nature and Grace in Bavinck," trans. Al Wolters, *Pro Rege* (June 2006): 10–31.

I shall briefly highlight four closely related themes that recur in the fifteen essays of this volume: biblical faith, revelation, and religion; Christianity and the natural sciences; Christianity and the human sciences; Christianity and politics/social ethics.

Unlike Karl Barth in the twentieth century, for example, Bavinck had no qualms about considering Christianity as a *religion* that on a formal level shares characteristics with all religions. In particular, the phenomena of revelation and faith are common to the religious life of all people (chap. 1). In the center of the human person, integrating all our faculties and diverse expressions, is what the Bible calls the *heart*, the locus of a seed of religion (*semen religionis*) or sense of divinity (*sensus divinitatis*). In his works, God is present to all people; the world is the theater of his glory; the human heart responds in faith activated by grace or in rebellious, inexcusable unbelief, but it cannot avoid responding. We humans are inescapably and incurably religious.

What is distinctive about the Christian religion is that it comes to us as a message of grace in Jesus Christ. A Christian is not just someone who knows something about God in general, but also one who believes everything promised in the gospel. The Christian faith is not a matter of subjective feeling or moral doing, but a confident trust that in biblical revelation we have been given the saving *knowledge* of the one true God in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

From this it follows that the essence of Christianity (chap. 2) cannot be found in religious experience, even if sought in the experience of the historical Jesus (Schleiermacher, Harnack), or in the reduction of the historical Jesus to an idea (Strauss, Hegel), or in Christlike moral practice (Kant, Ritschl). No, only when the believer acknowledges that Jesus Christ in his person and work is the way, the truth, and the life; only when we know him to be the subject and object of our faith, the center and core of the gospel message itself—only then are we Christians. That is the essence of the matter.

Two additional things flow from this: religious studies, including the philosophy of religion (chap. 1) and the psychology of religion (chaps. 4, 9, 10, and 11), provide useful and important insights for Christian theology, but Christian theology must be clearly distinguished from and never folded into religious studies (chap. 3). In these essays, Bavinck shows himself to be extraordinarily well-informed about the latest scholarship in these matters and also very politically and culturally aware of what was happening in his nation and in Europe more broadly. Bavinck's observations and insights into such matters as the relation between will and understanding (chap. 11), the unconscious (chap. 10), and matters of education and pedagogy (chaps. 12 and 13) remain invaluable introductions to important issues that still vex us today.

Not only the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) of psychology and pedagogy—not to mention beauty and aesthetics (chap. 14), subjects on which one might at least expect a theologian to be minimally knowledgeable—but also the natural sciences receive profound treatment in Bavinck's capable hands. In addition to the straightforward treatment of evolution and development (chap. 6), which provides useful pointers to how Christians should still frame the debate today, Bavinck gives us a remarkable treatment of the topic of Christianity and the natural sciences from the political side of matters in colonial education of all things (chap. 5). That this thoughtful and thorough treatment of a very complex scientific and political matter reflects Bavinck's own public career as a member of the First Chamber in the Dutch Parliament makes this all the more remarkable. It is hardly the sort of careful and informative speech that we are accustomed to as part of our political and scientific rhetoric. More is the pity for us.

The most challenging for us, and perhaps the potentially most rewarding essays, in my judgment, are the three sociopolitical essays in chapters 7, 8, and 15. The treatment of the two Genevan reformers named Jean (Calvin and Rousseau) is fascinating, informative, and profoundly challenging to many of our contemporary commonplaces, especially the notion of equality. Be prepared to be provoked in these chapters; pay careful attention to the biblical thoughtfulness and sound reasoning. Here too, the issues Bavinck dealt with then are still with us. What we lack is the kind of biblical wisdom and historical awareness that Bavinck enjoyed in great measure. We are blessed to be able now to share them also in the English language.

English readers can be grateful to the D. R. T. S. and Baker Academic for this enriched portrait of Bavinck as a social philosopher, someone knowledgeable in the latest developments in psychology and pedagogy and culturally attuned to the spirit and spirits of his age. He was indeed the master theologian of the *Reformed Dogmatics* and is rightfully renowned for that. However, he was also more, much more as these essays show. Gratitude is also due to the competent work of translators Harry Boonstra and Gerrit Sheeres, whose fluency in French and German as well as Dutch and English was required for this volume. Boonstra is the translator of chapters 1–3 and 11–15, Sheeres of chapters 4–10. Both men also checked each other's work for accuracy and consistency. The original foreword by C. B. Bavinck, Herman's younger brother, was translated by the editor. The editor was also responsible for updating the footnotes to twenty-first-century standards and for, wherever possible, correcting errors. In some instances it was not possible to trace and fully check a reference to an obscure journal; these were left as originally given and marked with an asterisk (\*). In addition to Bavinck's own notes, additional explanatory notes by the editor are clearly marked. Page numbers to the original Dutch edition are set in square brackets within the text.

Bavinck's thought has been my companion in the academy and the church for thirty years. That has been a rare privilege. With gratitude and joy I join those whose work has made it possible for these essays to reach a wider audience and bless many more.

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# HERMAN BAVINCK

A EULOGY BY HENRY ELIAS DOSKER

In these latter days the great leaders of Calvinism have all been swept away in a comparatively short space of time. Gone is that dour Scotsman, Doctor James Orr, who struck such mighty blows in defense of the Scriptures. Gone is Doctor Kuyper, that matchless leader of men, a genius of the first rank, recognized as such the world over, and yet in his faith as simple as a little child. Gone is our own unique leader, Doctor B. B. Warfield, incomparable as a teacher, tireless as a student and author, consistent in his sturdy faith, the greatest of all leaders of American Calvinism. And gone last of all, but not least, is a man who was buried at Amsterdam on August 2, 1921, Doctor Herman Bavinck, whose deep researches, tireless industry, boundless horizon, wide variety of interests, and stirring eloquence made him the pride of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands and a leader of worldwide Calvinism.

Of all these great scholars and leaders, Bavinck's scholarship was perhaps the broadest and technically the most perfect. But it is impossible, at least at this distance in time, to make a comparison, in any way adequate or reliable, between Kuyper and Bavinck or Bavinck and Warfield. The law of perspective forbids it. Each had his own peculiar points of excellence and also his own peculiar limitations; none of them could have occupied the place of the other. We might be surer of our ground had Kuyper left a well-worked-out

From *Princeton Theological Review* 20, no. 3 (1922): 448–64, with minor style changes. This article can be found online at <http://scdc.library.ptsem.edu/mets/mets.aspx?src=BR1922203&div=5&img=1> (accessed August 11, 2007).

magnum opus on theology. It was in his mind to do so, but he never accomplished the task. The same is true of Doctor Warfield, and therefore the real data for comparison (*data comparationis*) are lacking.

What Luther and Melancthon were in the German Reformation, Kuyper and Bavinck were in the Neo-Calvinist period in the Netherlands. Each supplied what the other lacked. And both will shine with added luster as the distance that separates them from us increases.

Herman Bavinck was my lifelong friend, and I have written this brief sketch with the thought that it may serve as a friend's tribute to his memory. We studied together in the gymnasium of Zwolle and have been separated since 1873, but the tie of friendship remained unbroken; during all these well-nigh fifty years, almost to the time of his death, we corresponded, and our repeated visits, on either side of the Atlantic, deepened our friendship. Besides this, I have been a constant reader of his writings and gladly admit that he was my preceptor as well as my friend. As I set myself to the task of writing this sketch of the life of a truly great man, it seems best to etch his life with a few strokes of the pen and then make an attempt at analyzing his character as a theologian: his personality, methods of work, and variety of interests.

In this life no one stands by himself. Seething and struggling in our veins are innumerable physical and intellectual traits, as bequeathed to us by preceding generations. I admit at once that in some respects, viewed from the standpoint of his parentage, Doctor Bavinck is a conundrum. He was so like and yet so absolutely unlike his parents. His father, Reverend Jan Bavinck, was born at Bentheim, in Hanover, in 1826; his mother was Gesina Magdalena Holland of Vrieseveen, in the province of Drenthe. The older Bavinck was one of the epigoni, if not one of the founders, of the Free Church of Holland, which separated itself from the State Church in 1834. Sent by the few persecuted and hounded Separatists of Bentheim to Holland for his theological education, he must have been a phenomenal student, and must also have enjoyed considerable earlier advantages, for in the small theological seminary at Hoogeveen, where he went, he took over the classes in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. And he must have been a considerable Latinist, for Doctor Bavinck years later committed to him the final revision of the *Synopsis purioris* (1880); as the son testified, his father "made many corrections."

Wherever he went, the elder Bavinck always remained a teacher. He had a perfect love of teaching (*amor docendi*) and proved to be a most acceptable teacher. When he went to Hoogeveen, he assisted Rev. W. A. Kok, the head of the small theological school from which he had graduated, as second docent; and when in 1854 the educational interests of the Free Church were unified and a more pretentious institution was established, the elder Bavinck was the first to be nominated by the General Synod as one of the professors. Was it his innate modesty, his underestimate of his own powers,

that pessimistic view of things, which ever sees lions in the way, of which his illustrious son also had a share? Who can tell us? He made the lot settle the matter and declined the call.

I knew both the parents of Doctor Bavinck intimately. They were typical of their environment and cherished all the puritanical and often provincial ideas and ideals of the early Church of the Separation. Simple, almost austere in their mode of life, exhibiting something of what the Germans call *Kultur-feindlichkeit* (hostility to culture), they were pious to the core, teaching their children more by example than by precept. The mother was uncommonly clear-visioned in her ideas and never afraid to express them; the father was diffident, aroused only with difficulty, but then evincing rare power. Such were the parents of Doctor Herman Bavinck. The pulpit was his father's throne, and there he displayed what his son once, in my hearing, described as a "healthy mysticism." He knew how to "speak comfortably" to Zion. Many of the qualities of mind and heart and intellect, which later distinguished the great son, were therefore evidently inherited from his parents. But, as I have said, in many respects he differed from them.

Herman Bavinck received his early training in the Hasselman Institute, a private training school of great celebrity. In 1870, with my brother and myself, he entered the gymnasium of Zwolle, of which Doctor E. Mehler, a converted Jew and celebrated Graecist, was the rector. After his graduation he spent a single year at the seminary of Kampen, and then, obeying an irresistible impulse, despite universal and bitter opposition, he sought regular university training. It was a daring move. Of all places, he went to Leiden, where the celebrated Doctor Kuenen, one of the most influential of the Higher Critics of the nineteenth century, was then the leading professor. Doctor J. H. Scholten was still there, the founder of that new system of Reformed theology, of which reason, determinism, and monism were the main pillars. But Scholten was beyond his prime and no longer swayed the hearts of the students as of yore; his was a setting sun. Prins was there, the archenemy of the Separation, and [L. W. E.] Rauwenhoff, one of the fathers of modernism; Tiele and Oort, de Goeje and de Vries, Pluygers the Latinist and Cobet the marvelous Greek scholar.

What an environment for a son of the Churches of the Separation! And Bavinck had been so thoroughly grounded in the old simple faith of the Reformed doctrine! But he came to seek after truth and in God's wise plan it was just this environment and this training that was to fit him for his life task. But he had many a bitter struggle at Leiden. Kuenen especially, with his "heart of gold," was his idol among his professors. I remember his letters of that period, his description of serious doubts and questionings and battles; but all these struggles only tested and purified his faith. Beloved of all his teachers, he left the university with the degree of Doctor of Theology, June 10, 1880, after writing a thesis on *The Ethics of Zwingli*. The absolute

fairness and objectivity of this work explains many things in his later life. It is certain that nowhere else in his later writings is the subconscious influence of Kuenen—not, of course, his uncompromising antisupernaturalism, but his scientific method—so palpably felt as here, both in the method of approach and in the treatment of his subject.

Most valued of all the gains that came to him in Leiden was the lifelong friendship of his fellow student Snouck Hurgronje, who later became a distinguished Semitic scholar, succeeded de Goeje as professor of Arabic in the University of Leiden in 1906, and is widely known as one of the very few Christians, who, in disguise, have succeeded in penetrating the holy precincts of Mecca and lived to tell the tale. The two supplemented each other; through all their student days, they were like David and Jonathan, and the tie between them was broken only by Bavinck's recent [1921] death.

Returned to Kampen, Doctor Bavinck at once presented himself for examination by the seminary authorities. Because of his university training, this naturally was more carefully conducted than in ordinary cases, but he passed with the highest honors. And wherever he went, till his death, he remained a loyal son of the Church of the Separation of 1834.

For a brief interval of two years he became pastor of the Church of Franeker, a mere episode in his life. Twice in succession he declined the call to the recently founded Free University of Amsterdam, because he had decided to identify himself fully with the hated "Seceders." The two years spent at Franeker were golden. He there acquired a full mastery of the art of preaching, and he learned to understand the viewpoint of the common people and to appreciate the practical side of the ministry. The church was always crowded to the doors, for people came from great distances to hear him. Small wonder, for he was indeed a princely preacher; with wonderful depth of analysis and the profoundest reverence for God's holy Word, he spoke with rare simplicity and a thrilling eloquence all his own.

In 1882, the General Synod called Doctor Bavinck to the vacant chair of dogmatics in the seminary at Kampen. He accepted and began his work on January 10, 1883, with an oration on *The Science of Sacred Theology*, defining its principle, content, and aim. This address was heard with breathless attention. It struck a new note in the history of the seminary and of the church. It heralded the dawn of a new day. And every eye was fixed on him as the coming man. Said Doctor Kuyper in *De Heraut* (January 21, 1883): "Now this is really scientific Reformed Theology. Here the first principles are again correctly set forth; here a road is staked out which may lead to an excellent development. . . . I have hardly ever read a treatise with such undivided attention, from start to finish, as this inaugural." And the great leader did not exaggerate nor miscalculate the future. For the next twenty years Doctor Bavinck was the soul of the seminary. Kuenen once said of Leiden, "Leiden is Scholten," and for these two decades, "Bavinck was Kampen," its pulsing

heart, its irresistible dynamic, lifting the whole plane of teaching from the mediocre and ultrapractical into the academic sphere of scientific idealism. Every teacher felt this influence, all later-comers modeled as much as possible after the new pattern, and the whole school was lifted on the shoulders of this Atlas. What Kampen is today it owes, under God, to Bavinck's presence and influence.

Bavinck was naturally the hero of the students. As I write, before me lies a sheaf of testimonies, too long to quote, to his rare ability and inspiring power as a teacher, all written by students who sat under him in these glorious days. He was only thirty-five years old when he began his work at Kampen, but he carried an old head on young shoulders. He had read deeply and widely to an astonishing degree, as all his published works testify. In those fruitful Kampen years he wrote and published the first edition of his magnum opus, *Reformed Dogmatics*, in four volumes, later expanded and republished in the Amsterdam period of his labors. His life knew no wasted moments. He wrote a steady stream of brochures on various subjects as he staggered along under an almost insupportable burden of occupations. One does not wonder that at last he sank under the load, but rather that he held out so long.

His university training had lifted him out of the narrow groove in which nearly the entire ministry of his church, as well as the mass of its members, was moving. Their *Weltanschauung* was practically that of the old Dutch Anabaptists, who sought their strength in separation from the world, in its cultural, social, and philosophical aspects. And Doctor Bavinck was a white raven among them. He dressed differently, spoke differently, taught differently—he was a man apart. And that very thing attracted his students and made him so mighty a factor in the cultural advance of the church that he loved and for which he labored so assiduously for the next two decades.

Bavinck had a thoroughly disciplined mind, yet with the heart of a child. God's holiness on the one side, human sin on the other, and between these forever the mystery of the cross. All his teaching, all his preaching, all his writing was shot through and through with the richness of divine grace as revealed in Christ. Says one of his disciples: "He never preached a sermon in which Christ was not glorified." As a preacher he was a constant pattern for his students, as to both form and substance. Doctor W. H. Gispen, one of the foremost preachers of the Church of the Secession and one of its choicest spirits, has said of the preaching of Doctor Bavinck: "That which unspeakably enthralls and attracts in Bavinck's preaching is the simplicity, the clearness, the sharp definition of ideas, and the logical progress of his reasoning. . . . His thorough apprehension of his subject in its fundamental aspects and content enables him to speak about it so easily and intelligibly to others."

At Kampen he lectured on dogmatics, ethics, the history of philosophy, encyclopedia, psychology, rhetoric, logic, and aesthetics. The undermanned condition of the seminary was responsible for this multiplicity of labors and

variety of subjects. One marvels how he found time in this period of his life to prosecute his studies and to write as voluminously as he did. Meanwhile God had given him a wife and helpmeet in Johanna A. Schippers, daughter of a typical representative of the Dutch higher middle class, well educated and fully able to stand by his side, who shared his triumphs and trials to the end. He was now in the full flush of mature manhood, an acknowledged authority in his chosen field, known far and wide through his writings and, with the single exception of Doctor Kuyper, the most widely recognized leader of the Free Churches of the Netherlands. And now came the greatest crisis of his life.

Under the leadership of Doctor Kuyper, in 1886 a new secession from the State Church had occurred. They called themselves *Doleerenden*—a Church under the Cross—and they sought rapprochement with the Free Churches of 1834. The training for the ministry proved to be the crux of the whole question. Was that training to be free, or was it to be under the control of the church? To us the answer seems easy; not so for university-trained Dutchmen. Bavinck's position on this question was predetermined by his own experience. He loved the freedom of scientific study and doubted the right of the churches to make a demand, of which the founders of the church in the days of the Reformation had never dreamed; but he also loved his own church and thus was placed in a most difficult position. I have neither time nor space to enter into a full discussion of this crisis. Suffice it to say that it was decisive for his later career. Together with his colleague and bosom friend Petrus Biesterveld, he was called to the Free University of Amsterdam, and both accepted. Thus he left the Kampen seminary, where he had passed the best years of his life, to begin his labors in an entirely new field.

During these twenty years he had been ceaselessly at work. His doctoral thesis on *The Ethics of Zwingli* (1880) had been followed the next year by the sixth edition of *Synopsis purioris theologiae*, which he managed. In 1883 appeared his *Science of Sacred Theology*; in 1884 *The Theology of Doctor Chantepie de la Saussaye*; in 1888 *The Catholicity of Christianity and of the Church*; in 1889 *Eloquence*, a treatise on the art of speaking; in 1894 *Common Grace*; in 1895 his *Reformed Dogmatics* (now in its third edition); in 1897 *Principles of Psychology*; in 1901 *The Sacrifice of Prayer*, a practical and experimental treatise on the Christian life; and in 1901 *Creation or Evolution*.<sup>1</sup> Besides this he had written a mass of ephemeral literature, had for a time edited *de Bazuin* (*The Clarion*), the denominational paper, and had with Doctor Kuyper and Doctor Rutgers prepared a revised edition of the Bible, which purified and modernized its diction. As he removed from Kampen,

1. Ed. note: The English translation is *Creation or Development*, trans. J. Hendrik de Vries (1901).

he carried with him the sweetest memories of what had been, as one of his friends describes it, “the glory period of his life.”

In the Free University he succeeded Doctor Kuyper, and great as Doctor Bavinck was, he was able to hold his own only by reason of the total dissimilarity of his talents from those of his great predecessor. Again, let me say, it is practically impossible to compare these two great leaders. It may be done later, or it may forever be out of the question. Only this may be said, though with great hesitation: I have read the writings of both for years, I admire them equally, and I feel deeply indebted to both of them in many ways. But it seems to me that in breadth of accurate scholarship, Doctor Bavinck may have excelled Doctor Kuyper, while Doctor Kuyper excelled Doctor Bavinck in giving definite conclusions and daring utterances. The one gently tries to untie Gordian knots; the other cuts them through with mighty blows of his keen sword. Says one competent to judge, “Bavinck was an Aristotelean, Kuyper a Platonic spirit. Bavinck the man of clear conception, Kuyper the man of the glittering idea. Bavinck built on historical data; Kuyper speculated with intuitively conceived ideas. Bavinck was in his thinking principally inductive, Kuyper deductive.”

What a wonderful pair they were! Rarely has God given to an institution two such men to teach sacred theology. But so much is certain—the task of Doctor Bavinck, in entering the Free University of Amsterdam in 1902, was a far greater test of his capabilities than his entrance into the Kampen Seminary in 1882; and with it the second great period of his life begins.

Do I imagine that after 1902 a different note was sounded in his letters? Did he ever regret the change? In leaving Kampen, he had to rend in twain bonds of love that had been growing ever stronger with the passing years. In one way he gained much by the change; in another he lost something. At Kampen he had stood forth as preeminent; at Amsterdam he was one of many unquestionably erudite teachers, all of whom had enjoyed the same advantages that he had. But at Amsterdam his position was more commanding, his sphere of influence wider, his words carried farther. “Give me a fulcrum,” said Archimedes, “and I will move the world.” How true it is!

On Wednesday, December 17, 1902, he began his work at Amsterdam with an oration on *Religion and Theology*, a model of its kind, which gives the reader some conception of the vastness of his learning. Yet he was deeply conscious that he was to sit in a chair, as he said on that occasion, “which these many years had been filled by the most richly talented and most many-sided man, whom God in the last half century has given to the professors of his name in these lands.” It was a heavy task that was laid on his shoulders.

At Amsterdam Doctor Bavinck taught dogmatics, philosophy, and ethics. His mind had now attained its full maturity. The experience of Kampen was repeated here in the deep impression he made on his students and colleagues. He was greatly respected by an increasingly growing circle of men

of standing in the community and in the whole country, and his ripe scholarship was recognized on all hands. And as he grew in power, he also grew in modesty—at least his letters seem to indicate that; and what is more, his faith grew ever more simple. Perhaps the greatest thing he ever said was the simple statement, made at the close of an address of congratulation in his own home, on the occasion of his silver jubilee as professor of theology: “*I have kept the faith.*” That was great! To have drunk deeply at every fountain, to have weighed all the evidence to a degree possible only to a mind as acutely trained as was his, to have scanned the whole horizon of philosophical and theological debate, and then at the end of years, to be able to say these simple words! And thus he remained to the end. About this time he wrote me, “As I grow older my mind turns more and more away from dogmatic to philosophical studies, and from these to their application to the practical needs of the world about me.”

In the same year in which he began teaching at the university, his *Heden-daagsche moraal*, a study in contemporary ethics, appeared; two years later came his *Christian View of the World*, and his *Science from the Christian Standpoint*. In this period also his interest in Christian education, always one of the foundation stones of the Free Church movement, began to deepen. In 1904 he published his *Pedagogic Principles*, and soon he gained the front rank among the promoters of this cause and became an unquestioned authority on pedagogy. In 1907 his dispassionate discussion of evolution—*Pro et contra*—attracted wide attention. Besides all these smaller works, in 1907 he published his second major work *Magnalia Dei*, and a year later his Stone lectures on the *Philosophy of Revelation*. His interest in educational matters continued unbroken to the last, as witnessed by his *Manual for Training in the Christian Religion* (1913), *Training of the Teacher* (1914), *Education of Adolescents* (1916), and *New Education* (1917). And in the last year of his active life, he published a volume on *Biblical and Religious Psychology* (1920). Thus he was engaged in the Master’s business till the end.

The war sorely tried him. In 1918 he wrote a letter which reads like a sob. Said he, “Our modern civilization is dead. It will take a century before it regains its poise.” New problems arose on every hand. In the face of the strongest opposition, he had the courage to publish a volume on *Woman in the Modern World* (1918), in which he unequivocally defended woman suffrage. He was forever at work teaching, writing, lecturing, preaching, in all parts of the country. Wherever an educational convention met, he was sure to be among the leaders; at the General Synod his advice carried the utmost weight. And at one of these meetings came the beginning of the end. At the Synod in Leeuwarden in 1920, at the close of a masterly address, he sank down in his chair and was compelled to leave the meeting. His work was finished. It was the touch of death.

For months he struggled against the deadly heart attack, but neither love nor medical skill was able to avert the inevitable. He fell asleep in Christ July 29, 1921. When questioned whether he feared to die, he said, "My dogmatics avails me nothing, nor my knowledge, but I have my faith, and in this I have all." And another time, "I have one wish, but it cannot be fulfilled; and it is this: that when I have entered the heavenly glory, I might be permitted for a moment to return to this world to testify before all God's people and even before the world to that glory." He died as he had lived, a simple child of God. Now he rests from his long and arduous labors, and many of the riddles that staggered him here below are clear and illumined by the light of the throne of God.

Physically Doctor Bavinck was an imposing figure. As I remember him as a youth, he was tall and slender with wavy light hair and clear friendly gray-blue eyes. Even then there was something aristocratic in his appearance, wholly apart from what his parentage and early training could have suggested. As he grew older, he grew portly, which gave him a still more impressive appearance. Physically, mentally, and temperamentally, he stood in a class by himself. One of his friends, I think, expressed things correctly when he said: "Doctor Kuyper was the man of the common folks [*de kleine luiden*], who from day to day, in his *Standaard* articles and asterisked paragraphs, quickened the interest of the common people. Bavinck was the aristocrat of the spirit, who from time to time, in masterly orations, alike chaste in form and rich in content, threw his searchlight on the big things of life. Kuyper was always at the head of his hosts; Bavinck fought an independent battle."

The outstanding characteristic of Doctor Bavinck was his modesty. He utterly forgot himself. He hated fulsome praise. All the silly mouthings, so often bestowed on popular favorites, were abhorrent to him. He was modest, as all truly great men are, because he knew full well that with all his attainments, he had only lifted the tip of the veil of the great truth he was searching out. His was the glory of infinite pains. He was a tenacious friend. Once let a man enter his heart, and he would never show him the door. Yet his temperament forbade him to be too lavish with his gifts, so he had many friends and but few intimates. The greatest among the latter undoubtedly were Snouck Hurgronje and Petrus Biesterveld, whose early death he bitterly lamented. He was retiring by nature, almost to shyness. His fund of small talk was limited and drawing-room repartee easily bored him. Though his pulpit or platform vocabulary was limitless, he seemed to be lacking in words on trivial occasions. His true life was that of the study: his books were his best friends.

And yet as modest and retiring and self-contained as he was, fires were burning underneath the outward calm, which at times burst into bright flame. Take what happened on the day when he had successfully passed his candidate's examination. Under the new law of April 28, 1876, the old "grades" were abolished so that the successful student received a simple certificate.

But the theological faculty was still permitted, in exceptional cases, to give a “cum laude.” Snouck Hurgronje was examined the day before Bavinck and received his certificate; Bavinck’s brilliant examination, the next day, brought the exceptional “cum laude.” Believing an injustice had been done his friend, Bavinck, when the diploma was handed him, threw it on the table and asked the professors either to strike out the “cum laude” or to tear up the whole paper, after which he left the room abruptly. Fortunately the professors, who loved and admired him, saw what was wrong and advised him to take a long rest before he resumed his work. But the “cum laude” remained, one of the few cases in which a Leiden student has been so honored.

His mentality was marvelous. Few men have a mind as adaptable as his. He might have excelled in almost any branch of study. A wonderful linguist, a leading star in the field of dogmatics, great as a philosopher, an authority in pedagogy, wonderfully human in his contact with everyday life, and tenderly moving when he touched the Christian experience—he was indeed gifted above ten thousands.

His absolute fairness to an opponent sometimes created the impression of indecision, but those who accused him of this weakness were utterly mistaken. Read his *Reformed Dogmatics*, and you stand amazed at the wealth of information here displayed and at the breadth of horizon of the author. It is a history of dogmatics as well as a dogmatics itself. Every tendency and every error that has appeared in the long history of the church is put to the touchstone of the truth. If there is a ray of light, an atom of truth, it is gladly recognized; Bavinck becomes dogmatic only when he has penetrated to the very foundations of a truth and speaks from the standpoint of a clear vision. He never makes the mistake of placing an exclamation point where he sees, however faintly, a question mark. That made him sometimes hesitate where others were enthusiastically confident, but it was the hallmark of his true greatness. Those who criticized this apparent indecision did not know him. He was honest with the truth as he was honest with himself; and because he loved it so, he searched for it so diligently and expounded it insofar as he had clearly apprehended it.

In his later years, as has been indicated, Doctor Bavinck paid marked attention to philosophical studies, to educational matters, and to social questions; it seemed to some as if the new love was crowding out the old one. But he lived and will live preeminently in the field of dogmatics. Calvinism, or rather Neo-Calvinism, has lost in him one of its greatest leaders; as it looks today, no one can fill his place. He was a Calvinist by both training and deepest conviction and taught its fundamental principles with incomparable clearness and power. The formal principle of the Reformation, the absolute authority of the Holy Scriptures, was the cornerstone of all his theology. How wonderful is that chapter in his *Dogmatics* on the “principium externum,” how sharp his distinction between religion and revealed religion: “In the

one, human seeks God; in the other, God seeks human. And it is that seeking which makes revelation necessary.”

Doctor Bavinck strenuously upholds the central and organic conception of revelation. It occupies a definitely teleological position; it reveals to us the coming of God to humanity, forever to dwell with humankind. How sharp are his definitions, how keen his antitheses! Frequently his style is epigrammatic, vivid, and picturesque. As has been said he places himself foursquare on the doctrine of inspiration. But he is unafraid of all critical attacks on the Scriptures. These are to be expected “because the writings of prophets and apostles originated in, not *outside*, the sphere of history. . . . In entering into a human, the Holy Spirit entered into his style and language and intellectual equipment.” Hence the diversity but also the organic oneness of the Scriptures. Striking in Bavinck’s theology is the comparison between the incarnation of the Logos in the flesh and that of the Holy Spirit in the word.

How Bavinck makes all doctrine to live! In reading his *Dogmatics*, one can easily see how his students must have been carried away by his lectures. Theology was to Bavinck more than a science, more than a full concept of the teachings of the Scriptures, systematically arranged and philosophically expounded. The grace of God, a living faith in the Scriptures as principium, a hearty assent to their truth—all this was a prerequisite to its teaching and exploration. And every page of the *Reformed Dogmatics* indicates how true the great teacher was to his own principles. Of him as of Paul, it might well be said, he brought every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. This explains his uncompromising attitude toward rationalism. The latter, we are told, “must inevitably end in the bankruptcy of theology.” In these days of rationalistic exploitation of the truth, we hear a great deal of “a static theology,” and we are looked on as examples of arrested development. How Doctor Bavinck lashes that idea! He views theology as an organism always expanding, so long as the fullness of the Word is not exhausted. *God*, not *religion*, is the object of theology. Forgetting this, men have lost themselves in mazes of what is called the science of comparative religion, and they have cut themselves loose from Christian theology. And this theology has for its only object to learn more and ever more of God, whom theology possesses by faith. The service of God, both with heart and intellect, is the aim of all true Christian theology.

In these days we are frequently told that science is exact and built on facts, while the theologian builds his science on faith. Doctor Bavinck admits that God belongs to the invisible world and as such may be unknowable to science, but he warns the scientist against the maxim “All the invisible is unknown.” Accept this maxim, and what remains of ethics, psychology, philosophy, even of natural science itself? Every science ultimately rests on and demands faith. The claim that Christian theology is unscientific is therefore absolutely denied.

I wish I had time and space to follow Doctor Bavinck through his *Reformed Dogmatics*. He is always the man of highest culture and sweetest spirit, always

recognizing what is good in an opponent, lucid in treatment of doctrine, careful in definition, sparing of denunciation, clear in conclusions. As I said before, he never rants: in his system are no vehement explosions, no bitter attacks. He is ever the man of endless erudition, new and old, and he uses his information in the most judicious way.

Conservative? Absolutely so. But how? Listen:

Theology is truly conservative; it accepts the inheritance of past generations, yet not to scatter it but to hand it over, if possible increased and still more “reformed,” to the generations that follow. Theology receives these acquired treasures, not to cast them again and again into the melting pot of criticism, but to hand them over to us to see whether we also, as mightily as in former days, may experience their truth and beauty in our own souls. It is a mere illusion always to try to find something new in the field of theology. The glittering results of nature studies may have led many theologians to try to find novelties in the theological field, but disappointment has always punished such curiosity. But at the same time theology is a progressive science. Reverencing the past, theology builds upward on the foundations that are laid, till theology itself is complete and has attained its final object. Theology does not rest at Chalcedon or Dordt. Theology holds the conviction that it will please God to cast ever more light on the Holy Scriptures in days to come, on what till now was dark or nebulous in them. Till then theology has not completed its task or attained its object.

Such was the theology of Doctor Bavinck! It is to be deeply regretted that his *Dogmatics* was not translated into English,<sup>2</sup> but the task is Herculean: very few men have the idiomatic knowledge of both tongues to make it a success, and *no translation is far better than a poor one*.

Great honors were heaped on Bavinck. The queen of Holland knighted him with the Order of the Dutch Lion; he was made a member of the First Chamber of the States General, was a member of several scientific societies, and was sought after everywhere and always as a public speaker.

He appeared where no member of his church or faculty would have been invited. Thus he addressed the “Scientific Society,” on July 7, 1915, on the “Doctrine of the Unconscious,” and again delivered an oration before the eighth “Dutch Philological Congress” on “The Conquest of the Soul.” Some timid souls saw in this universality of interest a sign of weakness, an attempt to hold out a hand to the common foe. In reality it was a mark of his true greatness. His was a Johannine soul. When he died, he left no enemies. Friend and foe alike mourned him when he was taken home.

Presbyterian Seminary of Kentucky, 1922

2. Ed. note: It took nearly a century, but Dosker’s lament is now answered. All four volumes of Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics* have been translated into English, published by Baker Academic (2003–8).

# 1

## PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION (FAITH)

[9] The title of the subject briefly discussed here requires further explanation in order to avoid misunderstanding. One can understand the genitive (“of religion/faith”) in such a way that it is subjective, in which case “philosophy of religion/faith” is a philosophical view that finds its origin in religious faith, and is governed by it from beginning to end. But “of religion/faith” can also be an objective genitive, and then the reference is to a philosophical view about religion/faith itself—in the first place, about the essence and nature of religious faith [*fides qua creditur*]; and second, about the object or content of religious faith [*fides quae creditur*]. In this essay the title has the second meaning; the intent is to consider briefly the essence and object of religious faith.

Such a consideration of religion/faith has become especially necessary because the Reformation gave a different meaning to faith than was customary before that time. In Roman Catholic theology the view of faith was and is very simple: it generally is the acceptance of a witness on the basis of the trustworthiness of the spokesman, and it retains this meaning also in the religious arena. It is true that an operation of the Spirit is necessary to illumine the mind and to bend the will. Still, faith is and remains an

Ed. note: Originally published in 1918 in *Annuaarium* of the Societas Studiosorum Reformatorum (Rotterdam: Donner, 1906), 62–72. The original title of Bavinck’s essay is “Philosophie des geloofs [Philosophy of Faith].” For the sake of clarity and consistency of usage (also see the source note to chap. 3), the term is translated as “philosophy of religion,” which, as the conclusion of the essay shows, is Bavinck’s proper subject. In order to retain as much of the original as possible, we will at given points use a double term such as “religion/faith” or “religious faith.”

activity of the mind. It exists in the acceptance of and agreement with God's truth as contained in Scripture and tradition, on the basis of the inerrant authority of the church. That is why faith is not sufficient for salvation, for the reception of saving grace. Faith is only one of the preparations for baptism, in which grace is conveyed, and it must be completed by love and good works.

The Reformation, however, presented a completely different view of faith. [10] Even though faith could properly be called knowledge, it was, as Calvin said, still more a matter of the heart than of the mind. According to the Heidelberg Catechism, faith is not only a certain knowledge by which I hold everything that God has revealed to us in his Word to be true, but also a firm trust that not only others, but that I too have been given forgiveness of sins, eternal justification, and salvation, granted by God out of grace.<sup>1</sup> Faith thus received from the Reformers a unique, independent, *religious* meaning. It was distinguished *essentially* from the faith of which we speak in daily life, and also from historical and temporal faith, or faith in miracles. It was not just an acceptance of divine truth, but it also became the bond of the soul with Christ, the means of fellowship with the living God.

However, this view gave rise to various very difficult questions. What is the nature of this knowing that is mentioned first as an element of faith, and what is its content? What is the nature of the trust that, second, describes the essence of faith? Does this trust really and from the beginning include the assurance that God has granted me personal forgiveness of sins, eternal justification, and salvation? How can we make it clear to ourselves and to others that faith is knowing as well as trusting, that it is at the same time a matter of the head and of the heart? And what is the relationship between these two—do they just stand next to each other, or are they intrinsically connected? Do they both come from the same source and foundation? If so, what do they have in common? Which is the higher, or rather, the deeper synthesis that incorporates both of them? All these questions have been discussed at length in both scholarly and popular writings, but up to the present day the views about the essence of faith remain widely divergent in both scholarly and pious circles.

In everyday life a lack of a solution to these questions was even more sad. When the struggle of the Reformation was past and the enthusiasm had cooled, the two elements of faith were pulled apart more and more. On the one hand, a cold orthodoxy emerged that interpreted faith only in terms of doctrine, and on the other hand, a Pietism that valued devoutness above truth. This dualism in religion, church, and theology was strengthened by the twofold orientation of the newer philosophy that, after Descartes and Bacon, eventually ended up in dogmatism and empiricism.

1. Ed. note: Lord's Day 7, Q & A 21.

[11] It was Immanuel Kant's goal to reconcile this philosophic dualism. Although he was an adherent of the Enlightenment, he did undergo a remarkable change, especially under British influence. During his study of the natural sciences, he came under the allure of mechanical explanation of natural phenomena, especially as this was held as the ideal of science by Isaac Newton. In epistemology, Kant was especially influenced by the criticism in Britain, notably by David Hume, so that he turned his back on dogmatism and became convinced that rationalism in theology and metaphysics was untenable. From now on, according to Kant, genuine scholarship/science was possible only in the world of phenomena. The transcendental and supernatural world are inaccessible to the human mind; all proofs adduced for the supernatural end up in an antinomy.

However, Kant was too religious, or at least too moral, to be satisfied with the results of his theory. He could not surrender faith in himself: faith in the moral worth of each human person that transcends the whole world. If this faith was not to be a chimera, then it had to rest on another, firmer foundation than the cogent reasons and proofs of rationalism. Kant discovered such a better foundation for faith in the writings of Rousseau. Also a son of the Enlightenment, Rousseau for a time was friendly with the Encyclopedists. However, in 1749 a tremendous change took place in his life.

The Academy at Lyon had announced a writing contest with this question: Has scientific and artistic progress contributed to the impoverishment or the improvement of morality? During a walk, Rousseau learned about this contest in the *Mercur de France*, and suddenly a new light dawned on him. He saw another world, and he became another person. Suddenly he became conscious of the deep and sharp contrast between nature and culture that was evident in his time. From that point on he became the enthusiastic preacher of the gospel of nature and a living protest against the Enlightenment, as the father of Romanticism. In his teaching about society and state, education and religion, he turned from the corrupt culture of his time to the truth and simplicity of nature. In all areas, the historical had to make room for what was originally given, [12] [abandoning] decaying society for innocent nature, positive Christianity for natural religion, the false reasons of the mind for the impulse of feeling. Certainty about the truths of religion was also to be found in feeling. Rousseau does make use of rational arguments to prove the existence of God, the freedom of the will, and the immortality of the soul. However, for him these arguments are subordinate and of incidental worth. For him the final certainty of these truths of the faith are not to be found in the theoretical but in the practical sphere, in the original and immediate witness of feeling that is deeper and much more reliable than the reasoning mind. Each person is assured in his heart about a supersensory world.

Rousseau's influence on his contemporaries and their descendants was overwhelming. Lifestyle and clothing were reshaped according to his example.

His thoughts about inequality among people became the material from which communist and socialist systems were built. Without Rousseau, France would not have had a revolution. Modern teachings about religion, morality, and education are permeated by his spirit. The philosophy of Kant, Fichte, and Jacobi; the Romanticism of Schlegel and Tieck; the theology of feeling of Schleiermacher—all these have been influenced by his ideas. The practical orientation of Kant's religious philosophy is especially reminiscent of the teaching about feeling on which Rousseau had built religion.

But Kant was not a person of emotions and therefore could not identify positively with Rousseau's thoughts. He did, however, learn one thing from Rousseau, that religious truths possess a different certainty for people than truths of the mind or reason, of science or philosophy. For Kant this insight provided spiritual liberation, the freeing from an oppressive restraint. If religion and morality really contain their own certainty, then metaphysics does not need to provide all kinds of proofs for God's existence, the freedom of the will, and the immortality of the soul. Moreover, science could then freely go its own way and be bound only by its own character and laws. Criticism also would have freedom to investigate the most sensitive topics, without having to fear negative results. Morality and religion would then have their own foundation and would be safe and secure from all attacks of science.

For Kant this foundation was not feeling (as with Rousseau), [13] but practical reason, the moral nature of man. In his conscience, man feels himself bound to a categorical, unconditional, absolute imperative. The "thou shalt" of the moral law supersedes all considerations and excuses, and demands the whole person for itself, always and in all circumstances. Here a power arises in man himself that is far above all other powers in nature. As a moral creature, man is therefore a citizen of another, higher order than nature; he belongs to a kingdom of invisible elements that exceeds all earthly treasures. If this moral world order is to be true reality and not an illusion, and if it is to triumph one day over all that is great and strong and mighty in this world, then man must be free in his actions and his soul must be immortal to receive his reward in the hereafter, and God must exist in order to reconcile in eternal harmony the terrible opposites between virtue and luck that exist on earth. These are not conclusions legitimately deduced from preceding scientific premises, but they are postulates put forth by man according to his moral nature. He cannot prove, he cannot demonstrate, that it is all true, but he is subjectively certain of it; he believes and acts as if it were true; he does not *know*, but he *believes*, and he has moral grounds for his belief. Kant therefore gladly relinquished knowledge about religious and moral matters, because he had found another, safer place for faith.

All those who join Kant in this transition from theoretical to practical reason go, as a matter of principle, in the direction that is usually called

“ethical”<sup>2</sup> in religion and theology, in metaphysics and philosophy. First, they limit knowledge to what the senses can observe, and last, they see the only basis for faith to be in a supernatural order. However, “ethical” includes many differences of insight and views among the followers of this orientation. In his negative views, Kant agreed with Rousseau, but in his positive views he went in a totally different direction. In the same way Schleiermacher mainly agreed with Kant in epistemology, deducing that man cannot know the absolute psychologically because of the limitation of human knowledge, but with Fichte he also deduced this lack philosophically from the infinity of the absolute. Schleiermacher, in distinction from Kant, held that willing and acting and knowing do not disclose the supersensible world, because this willing also moves in opposites and never reaches unity. [14] This unity, this oneness, of thinking and being in the absolute can be experienced and enjoyed only in feeling, which precedes thinking and willing and is completely independent of absolute power. But whether one goes in Kant’s moral (ethical) direction or in Schleiermacher’s mystical direction, in both cases one is in direct opposition to Hegel. Elevating reason to a cosmic principle, Hegel recognized the essence of things in self-moving thought and considered religion, just like art and philosophy, to be a developmental stage in the movement of absolute spirit.

However, all these orientations, the ethical and mystical as well as the speculative, suffer from a significant one-sidedness. By limiting religion to one human faculty, they diminish man’s universal character. They divide man in two and separate what belongs together. They create a gulf between religion and culture, and they run the danger of reducing religion to moral duty or aesthetic emotion or a philosophic view. But according to the Christian, confession religion is other than and higher than all those views; religion must not just be *something* in one’s life, but *everything*. Jesus demands that we love God with all our heart, all our soul, and all our strength. In our thinking and living, there can be no division between God and the world, between religion and culture; no one can serve two masters.

Therefore, if we want to do full justice to religion, we must return to the central unity in man that is the basis for differentiating his faculties and which in Holy Scripture is often designated the heart, from which proceed all expressions of life in mind, feeling, and will. Reformed theologians sought that central point for religion in (as Calvin called it) the seed of religion [*semen religionis*] or sense of divinity [*sensus divinitatis*], and in the Christian

2. Ed. note: The Dutch word *ethisch* not only refers to the moral/ethical realm but also applies to an entire school of nineteenth-century Dutch Reformed theology (founders: Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye [1818–74]; Johannes Hermanus Gunning [1829–1905]) that accented the personal, existential relationship with Jesus over that of doctrine and confession. In that context *ethisch* has the weight of “existential.” When referring to Kant later in this paragraph, Bavinck uses *ethisch* in a more restricted *moral* sense and there has distinguished it from the mystical sense.

religion theologians went behind faith and conversion to regeneration, which in principle is a renewal of the whole man. When they took a position in this center of man, they saw opportunity to avoid all one-sidedness of rationalism, mysticism, and ethicism, and to maintain that religion is the animating principle of all of life.

In due time, under the operation of word and Spirit, conversion comes from this new life that is planted in regeneration. Conversion affects the will and emotions, and faith comes to the level of consciousness. [15] With this point of view, all reasons to rob faith of its genuine character and to change it into a mood or inclination disappear. One can then, without danger of error, describe faith as a habit or act of consciousness because it arises out of regeneration [and] is always a loving faith in principle distinguished from what is [popularly] called "faith." Faith is the light that comes to one's life, because it is born from this life. It is not a blind faith forced by authority, but a free deed from the new life that is born from God and reaches out to have fellowship with God.

The advantage of this view, which teaches that faith maintains its own character, is not trivial. It is noteworthy that the Christian religion, as taught by Holy Scripture, has called this action of regenerated consciousness "faith," not feeling or experience. There must be a reason why the word "faith" is chosen for this activity of the Christian and is kept in all the confessions. That reason must be that the Christian faith is not a mood, inclination, or sensation, but binds us to an object and thus protects us from dangerous subjectivism.

That object to which the faith of the Christian is bound is, generally speaking, the revelation that God gives us of himself, the witness that proceeds from all his works, and the Word through which he speaks to us. Faith and revelation, revelation and faith belong together. Just as light and eye, sound and ear, the known object and the knowing subject correspond to each other—in the same way faith in our soul responds to God's revelation in his works. They are made for and intended for each other.

This revelation of God to which faith responds is detected most fully in all the works of his hands, in all of nature, in all of history, in the totality of the universe. If we could see properly, we would be able to see God's revelation everywhere, because he is and works everywhere; God is not absent anywhere. In him we live and move and have our being. The pious person sees God everywhere—within and outside of himself, in his heart and consciousness, in the leading of his life, in the blessings and catastrophes that come to him. There is nothing that is apart from God in our small and large worlds, nothing that does not ultimately carry the stamp of his glory.

However, this view does not deny that there are a variety of differences in the revelation of these all-encompassing works of God; the unity includes great and rich diversity. Centrally and finally this revelation comes to us in

the person of Christ, and in the Word that testifies about him. Revelation then becomes a revelation of grace. In the Christian religion we do not just find revelation and faith in general, but grace and faith in a special sense that correspond to each other. [16] The Christian must believe everything promised in the gospel. Revelation, grace, and promise are the content of the gospel, and it is only a childlike faith that can gratefully accept and appropriate these benefits from God.

Thus the Christian faith has not only its own origin but also its own object: a word, a witness, a benefit, a gift, a promise from God to which it cleaves, by which it is encouraged, and to which it abandons itself with complete trust, in need and in death. This faith is not only a subjective mood or experience; it includes knowledge—knowledge of the one true God in the face of Jesus Christ, whom he sent. Such knowledge is life and light, grace and truth at the same time.