

The New Synthesis Theology of the Netherlands

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NEW SYNTHESIS THEOLOGY OF THE NETHERLANDS

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Chapter One—The Nineteenth Century Background

In recent times there has been a major change of direction in Dutch theology. In speaking of this change, I have in mind primarily the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (*Gereformeerde Kerken van Nederland*). There has been also a change of direction within other denominations, notably in the so-called *Hervormde Kerk* as well as in the Catholic Church in the Netherlands, but our main interest here is in the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands.

A word must be said about the origin of these churches. They derive from the union of two movements of separation away from the original Reformed Church in the Netherlands which was called the *Hervormde Kerk*. The first of these movements took place in 1834 under the leadership of Rev. Hendrik de Cock. It was called the *Afscheiding*. The second took place in 1886 under the leadership of Dr. Abraham Kuyper. It was called the “*Doleantie*.” These two movements thus united in 1892 and took the name *Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*.

There was some difference of emphasis between the men of the *Afscheiding* and the *Doleantie*. These differences were not without importance, yet they existed between two parties which both sought earnestly to be true to the Reformed Confessions in the traditional sense of the term.

A. The Reformed Confessions

There are three Reformed Confessions: (1) the *Belgic Confession*, (2) the *Heidelberg Catechism*, and (3) the *Five Articles Against the Remonstrants*. Together they are spoken of as the *Three Forms of Unity*.

In the first place these claim to be Protestant Confessions, taking their teachings from the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the written Word of the triune God. The Roman Catholic Church had, in the course of the centuries before the Reformation, constructed a synthesis-theology. It was an edifice composed of two “stories,” the first being that of the natural theology of the Greeks, and the second being the “supernatural” theology of the Bible. Luther and Calvin had, each in his own way, experienced the dreadful significance of this synthesis-theology in their own lives. The Christ of this synthesis-theology was not He who had in their stead borne God’s wrath toward them. Roman Catholicism did not proclaim that freedom with which Christ had released his people from the burden of their sin.

In particular, the theology of Roman Catholicism constituted an attack on the once-for-all finished character of the work of Christ. The voice of Christ who spoke with absolute authority and finality of himself as The Way, The Truth and The Life in Scripture did not come through to the people. There was no clear proclamation in the Roman Catholic Church of the sovereign grace of God in Christ. Thus, the Reformation was an exodus from the bondage-house of Rome. But, as in the case of Israel’s exodus from Egypt, so also in the case of the exodus from the Roman bondage-house, it was a mixed multitude which sallied forth.

Some of those who left the Roman Catholic Church were not willing to say an absolute farewell to the Roman Catholic principle of natural theology. Against Romanism they stood up for the sovereignty of God’s free grace, but with Romanism they desired to retain something of the sovereignty of man. Surely, they argued, you must not make the Scriptures teach a system of determinism. The Bible teaches man’s responsibility and this presupposes man’s ability to choose for or against the overtures of the gospel by his own wisdom and power. You must be “reasonable” in your teaching of sovereign grace. These “reasonable” Protestants gave expression to their views in what they called a *Remonstrance* (1610). Hence they were called Remonstrants, or Arminians, after their chief leader Arminius. The *Hervormde Kerk* called a synod to deal with their views which convened in the city of Dordt (1618–1619). The synod of Dordt became not merely a Dutch synod, but it attained quite an international character.

1. The Synod of Dordt

The synod formulated five articles, calculated to reply to the previous five articles of the Remonstrance. In these it affirmed the (a) total depravity of man, (b) the unconditional election of men by God, (c) the limited or definite atonement of Christ, (d) irresistible grace and (e) the perseverance of the saints.

These doctrines were intended, in consonance with one another, to express the sovereign grace of God in Christ for the living comfort of the people of God, to express that which had already been taught every Sunday in the churches when its ministers expounded the *Heidelberg Catechism*. The first question of this catechism asks: “What is your only comfort in life and death?” And the answer is: “That I, with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ, who with his precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must be subservient to my salvation, wherefore by His Holy Spirit He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me heartily willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto Him.” The second question asks: “How many things are necessary for you to know, that you in this comfort may live and die happily?” And the answer is: “Three; the first, how great my sins and misery are; the second, how I am delivered from all my sins and misery; the third, how I am to be thankful to God for such deliverance.”

This is historic Protestantism, pure and simple. Here, as well, is historic or traditional Calvinism. In his famous work on *De Leer der Hervormde Kerk*, J. H. Scholten rightly says that, if it had wished to do so, the Synod of Dordt could have answered the objections of the Remonstrants from the *Heidelberg Catechism*. The five articles of Dordt merely spell out more precisely the particularism of the gospel already found in the Catechism.

2. The Roman Catholic Synthesis

In the Roman Catholic scheme of things, God cannot reach any individual man. He can only reach down to the lowest class (*infima species*), because man's individuality is composed in part of nonbeing, i.e., of pure contingency, and thus God cannot reach man there. But similarly, man cannot reach up to God as an individual: God is God only in the event that He (or It) has no individuality. For example, God cannot say I am, for if He could, then He would not be One.

The Roman Catholic scheme takes its natural theology from the Greeks. The Greeks, like all other men, had inherited the sin of Adam. Following the example of Adam, they assumed the sovereignty or autonomy well when, in Plato's dialogue, the *Euthyphro*, he said that he wanted to know the nature of the holy regardless of what the gods themselves said about it. Socrates assumed that, unless man can by himself, i.e., by his own powers of logic, being in no wise dependent on God, define what reality is, he may know nothing about it. With this assumption of autonomy, Socrates carried out the principle already expressed by Parmenides before him to the effect that only that can exist which man, thinking logically, says must exist.

A. From Socrates to Aristotle

Socrates said, in effect, that he, as man, was the final point of reference in human predication. In saying this, Socrates claimed for man the place of the triune God of the Scriptures. Socrates does not want a God who will “define” reality for him and, hence, on the basis of his sheer authority, tell him what the nature of anything is. For Socrates, therefore, the sort of authority that Scripture proclaims would be purely contingent, and therefore purely indeterminate. If Socrates is to “know himself” and be true to himself, he can ask nothing less for himself than ultimate definitory power over all reality, whether past, present or future. How could he urge his young disciples to know themselves if he had to allow that they themselves were utterly unknowable for their being immersed in pure contingency?

But then, if one does bravely urge one’s young disciples to cling relentlessly to the principle that all being is that which I, the thinker, by logic, say it must be, then perchance one of the brightest of them will object that his teacher is urging him to commit suicide. “Dear teacher,” this bright boy might say, “are you not, in effect, asking us to say that we do not know ourselves as individuals, unless we say that we, as knowing and responsible individuals, together with all our space-time environment, are sublated into one abstract eternal principle of being? In such a case, where would we be as individuals?”

The historic Socrates never faced the challenge involved in such a question, and neither did Plato or Aristotle. They all uncritically assumed, rather, the rightness of the Socratic principle. True, they did see something of the nemesis involved in this principle, and did try to escape it. But the best they could do, on the assumption of human autonomy, was to accept both a purely deterministic principle of unity and a purely indeterministic principle of diversity, and to regard them as correlative to one another; and thereupon, to conceive of them together as being correlative to man’s autonomous self.

Socrates could not tell his youthful disciples to know themselves in terms of pure rationalism and its implied determinism; if he had, he would have been telling them to lose their individuality in abstract universality. On the other hand, neither could Socrates tell them to know themselves in terms of pure irrationalism and its implied indeterminism; if he had, he would have been instructing them to lose their individuality in abstract unrelatedness, i.e., in pure chance.

Finally, however, Socrates could not enjoin the youth to know themselves in terms of the principle of correlativity of pure rationalism and pure irrationalism; if he had, he would have been telling them to go off in opposite directions on

different horses simultaneously.

B. The Greek Form-Matter Scheme

Dr. Herman Dooyeweerd speaks of the Greek position as that of the form-matter scheme. In order for man to know reality in terms of this scheme he must be taken up into, and therewith be lost in, pure form. There is no “knowledge,” properly speaking, except of universals. Man can therefore have no knowledge of himself as temporal and of his environment as temporal. And, having no knowledge of himself and of the facts of his space-time environment means, in effect, that he does not exist. However, to the extent that man as an historical being, and to the extent that the facts of his temporal environment must, nevertheless, be said to have some being and some knowledge which is not immediately absorbed by the universal, this must be the case by virtue of the fact that men, and the world of space and time, are, in part, composed of pure contingency, as well as of pure rationality. But so far as man and the facts of the world are contingent, they again have no individuality.

C. Paul Challenges the Greek Form-Matter Scheme

It was Paul the apostle who first challenged this form-matter scheme of the Greeks in the name and on the authority of the self-attesting Christ of Scripture. In effect, Paul told “Socrates” that he did not know himself unless he saw himself as Christ did, i.e., as a creature of the triune God of Scripture, as a sinner under the wrath of his creator-God and as saved from the wrath of God to come by Christ’s death for him on the cross. Thus, Socrates must repent. He must seek forgiveness of his sins through Him who was made a curse for sinners and who rose from the dead for their justification.

Paul speaks to the Greeks with this authority of Christ. If they will repent and believe, then they will also see that their form-matter scheme is inherently “foolish.” Socrates must admit that he was wrong in his view of being wrong in his view of knowledge, and wrong in his view of ethics. He must confess that he has all the while been seeking to suppress the truth about himself as a creature sinner before God.

Paul does not say that the natural theology of the Greeks is true as far as it goes. He says, in effect, rather that it is intellectually self-refuting as well as morally reprehensible in the sight of Christ, the coming judge. The Greeks, together with all other men, are under the wrath of God. They are covenant-breakers in Adam.

Paul does not discuss questions of “fact” and views of “logic” as such. For Paul, there are no facts as such and there is no logic as such. Paul does not ask the Greeks to consider whether the facts might not be considered as probably or even possibly pointing toward the teleology of Scripture rather than to a teleology such as Plato and Aristotle offer. In effect, Paul asserts on the authority of Christ that no facts of the space-time world can exist and no logic can function except on the presupposition that whatever things the triune God of Scripture says are true.

D. The Modern Freedom-Nature Scheme

The reader may by this time be asking what the Greek form-matter scheme has to do with the change of direction in the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands.

The answer lies in the nature of that change of direction which in Holland has to do with the nature of the Scriptures and of their message. The men of the new movement in Holland are asking their followers to see these with the help of the light of the framework of thought first expressed by Immanuel Kant. Dooyeweerd calls this the “freedom-nature” scheme of thought.

Just as the Greek philosophers looked at all that pertains to man and his environment through their form-matter scheme, so modern men look at these through their freedom-nature scheme.

This modern freedom-nature scheme of thought has, at bottom, the same structure as the ancient form-matter scheme. In both cases, it is the would-be autonomous man who assumes that there is an inexhaustible source of newness or contingency from which all reality, gods and men, have sprung, and that it is the proper nature of man to impress order upon this ultimate chaos by means of his own legislative logical power.

The main difference between the modern freedom-nature scheme and the ancient form-matter scheme is that the former stresses the idea of pure contingency more than did the latter. The Greeks thought that man ought to aim at the goal of actually logicizing all space-time being, while the moderns, having seen more of the hopelessness of such a goal, think of it as merely an ideal to strive after.

Since the fall of Adam, apostate man has always made appeal to his own autonomy. Kant attempted to do this even more stringently than Socrates. Man can, Kant argues, know nothing, absolutely nothing, of a God who is not himself a construct, a projection, of the ultimate self-dependent mind of man. This thus gives modern expression to Socrates’ old conviction.

B. Modern Synthesis Theology: Neo-Orthodoxy

Modern philosophers and theologians have attempted to construct a synthesis between the Kantian man and the Christ of the Scriptures in like manner as Roman Catholicism has attempted the same thing between the Greek man and the scriptural Christ.

Karl Barth and Emil Brunner were quite right when they pointed out that this “new Protestantism” was not that of Luther and Calvin. Unfortunately, Barth and Brunner did not signalize the real reason why such was the case. How could they? Their own thinking, no less than that of Friedrich Schleiermacher and his nineteenth century followers, was still constructed by means of the freedom-nature scheme of Kant and/or his philosophical followers.

Emil Brunner indicated in the plainest possible way that a true “theology of the Word” must be consonant with a critical, i.e., a Kantian type of philosophy. Yet, it was not for this reason that Barth said “no” to Brunner after some ten years of conjoint operation against such “immanentistic” theologians as Schleiermacher and Albrecht Ritschl. Brunner was, said Barth, *horribile dictu*, returning to the natural theology of Rome and all it entails. In the *Church Dogmatics* (*Kirkliche Dogmatik*), begun in 1932, Barth set off his own view not only against the *analogia entis* idea of Romanism and against the “consciousness-theology” of the nineteenth century liberals, but also against the position of Brunner.

1. Karl Barth

However, Barth did all this not because he had any intention of restoring orthodoxy to the theology of the “blessed possessors” (*beati possidentes*). On the contrary, his “*nein*” to Brunner came about because, together with Romanists and Protestant consciousness theologians, Brunner had not completely cleansed his thinking of the left-overs of orthodoxy. Orthodoxy, and not merely that of the period’s Protestantism, but orthodoxy so far as it holds to the direct revelation of God in nature and in history, has been from beginning to end, Barth’s *bete noir*. He even observed remnants of a theology of possession in his own earliest major work, *Romans*, as also in the second one, *Dogmatik 1*(1927). Thus, when he opposed Brunner he was also, in effect, opposing his earlier works, in attempting to be self-critical in his criticism of others.

2. The Christ-Event

Finally, Barth found himself in his book on Anselm and then, in 1932, commenced writing his *Kirchliche Dogmatik* on the principle of the Christ-Event alone. You have, he argued therein, a lie instead of the truth if you say as much as a single word about a God in himself. We know nothing about God unless this God be wholly revealed in and therefore wholly identical with Christ. And you also have a lie, instead of the truth, if you say as much as a single word about a man in himself. Historic as well as liberal Protestantism were thus guilty of speaking such lies. There is, to be sure, an absolute identification of God and man in Christ, but it is indirect. Jesus is God and the Bible is the Word of God but the “is” is, in both cases one of act not substance.

It is of the essence of God, says Barth, to turn wholly into the opposite of Himself and then to take mankind up into participation in His aseity. God is what He is to man in Christ, and Christ is what He is in His work of saving mankind.¹

¹ Christ is the salvation of mankind. Christ is *Geschichte* and “this *Geschichte* is Presence.” Thinking of Christ as *Geschichte*, and of *Geschichte* as the present act of redemption by God operating in all men, enables one to escape the static orthodox notion of the mutual relationship of the two natures of Christ. Likewise, it facilitates escape from the atomistic orthodox notion of the relation of the states of humiliation and exaltation. Orthodoxy conceives of Christ’s state of exaltation as having followed in terms of calendar days upon his state of humiliation. But to do this is to identify the nature of Christianity with *Historie*, which spells the death of Christianity, reducing it to a series of unconnected intellectual doctrines. There is no escape from this nemesis unless one begins thinking in terms of the Christ-Event. Only then can it be said that what was transpiring at a certain date in Palestine is happening now to oneself and for oneself. In the Christ-Event (*Geschichte*), God’s eternity is present in, and even subject to, time. This is Christ’s humiliation. Again, man’s time is taken up into God’s eternity. In the Christ-Event, we deal with the common realization of human and divine being. Barth speaks of it as the “common actualization of divine and human essence.”²

Looking at Barth’s idea of the Christ-Event, however, we see that it is but the theological expression of the freedom-nature scheme of modern post-Kantian philosophy.³ The basic difference between Barth and historic orthodox theology is not merely one of exegesis: it is, rather, one of the framework of thought in terms of which exegesis is conducted. One need only to remember what Barth has said about actualizing Chalcedon in order to perceive that he operates with an essentially Kantian view of man, of fact and of logic.⁴

The basic differences between Barth and Brunner, Barth and Bultmann, etc., are such as would exist among those who confront unitedly the adherents of the historic, orthodox Christian Faith, whether they be Lutherans or Calvinists.

But we are now more specifically concerned with Calvinistic or Reformed theology as it is expressed in the so-called *Three Forms of Unity* in Holland, viz., *The Heidelberg Catechism*, *The Netherlands Confession of Faith*, and *The Five Articles of Dordt*.

C. The Reformed/Neo-Orthodox Synthesis: Its Nature

The thesis of this essay is that the change of direction in Holland is one which is marked by a turning away from the traditional Reformed Faith, and toward the reinterpretation (*Umdeutung*) of it in terms of the post-Kantian freedom-nature scheme of thought, and, in particular, of neo-orthodox theology. We shall be concerned chiefly with the new direction so far as it affects theology and, in particular, hermeneutics. But the new direction in theology and hermeneutics involves and presupposes the post-Kantian methodology of science and philosophy as well. Finally, the new direction in theology is, apparently, effecting a new direction in the ecclesiastical situation of the *Gereformeerde Kerken*.

1. H. M. Kuitert

Perhaps the most outspoken advocate of the new approach in hermeneutics is Dr. H. M. Kuitert of the Free University (*Vrije Universiteit*) of Amsterdam. I speak of Kuitert here only for the purpose of giving the reader a broad, introductory insight into the nature of the change taking place both at the Free University and in the *Gereformeerde Kerken*. I shall trace the development of that change of direction below. Dr. Kuitert believes one of the great discoveries of modern times to be that of the historicity, or historicalness of reality. Modern scientists, philosophers, and theologians unitedly utilize this notion of “historicalness” of reality in the interest of a common goal, the realization of the kingdom of God. Dr. Kuitert urges all Christians, and particularly all Reformed Christians, to rejoice in this great discovery and to make use of it in presenting the gospel to modern men. Apparently we are no longer to adhere to Abraham Kuyper’s notion that the regenerate people of God (the special principle) and the non-regenerate of the world (the general principle) work on mutually exclusive principles in their every act of interpretation of any fact in the universe. (We shall see that others follow Kuitert on this point.) This is not to say, however, that one ought to follow the late B. B. Warfield instead of Kuyper. To be sure, Warfield’s method of supposed neutrality up to a point, might, at first sight, seem to be to Kuitert’s liking. Did not Warfield argue against Kuyper in the interest of cooperation between Christians and non-Christians on a neutral ground? How could, in Kuyper’s view, Christians of a twofold science (*tweelrlei wetenschap*), asked Warfield, find any contact with unbelievers at all? But this is only in passing. Kuitert’s position involves not merely the rejection of Kuyper’s approach, but that of Warfield as well. Both Warfield and Kuyper, according to Barth’s principles, ought to be classed with the *beati possidentes*. Neither one had even an inkling of historicalness of all reality. But men such as Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer did. In his own writings, especially in *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer seeks to unify modern science, philosophy, and theology in terms of Christ as the Center,^{5 5} and, for Bonhoeffer, Christ as the Center means, for all practical purposes, the same thing which the Christ-Event meant to Barth.

It is these neo-orthodox men, and many others with them, who have, according to Kuitert, seen the vision of the historicity of reality. Like them, we must leave behind the old metaphysics, the metaphysics of a God-in-himself and of a man-in-himself, and of a Christ with a divine, unchanging nature artificially grafted onto a changing human nature.

In short, Dr. Kuitert and his associates are, in effect, asking not only the Reformed Churches, but all orthodox believing Christians, to forsake everything

they have believed up to this time, in the interest of making them apostles of the Christ-Event of Barth, constructed as that notion is on the modern freedom-nature scheme of thought.

If what has been said is basically correct, then the new direction of thinking which such men as Kuitert are urging upon the Reformed community amounts to a complete about-face (*Umkehr*). But, of course, the people of the new direction do not wish to forsake the traditional view altogether. They are, apparently, of the opinion that an interpretation of Scripture and of the Reformed Confession made according to the Kantian freedom-nature scheme can be combined with the traditional approach as expressed in the Reformed Confession. The real intent of Christ, of Paul, of the Reformation and especially of Calvin, and of Dordt, can now at last be given something approaching adequate expression. Now, at last, the Reformed believer can leave his isolated position and present the gospel of the universal sovereign grace of God in a way that will make men listen. We must not deny, but rather reinterpret the three forms of unity, and especially Dordt.

In other words, the men of the new direction are attempting to construct a synthesis-scheme between historic Christianity, i.e., the Christianity of the Three Forms of Unity, and the freedom-nature scheme of things, precisely in the manner in which Thomas Aquinas attempted to construct a synthesis between Christianity and the Form-Matter scheme. Romanism is a synthesis of Christ and Aristotle. Neo-orthodox theology is a synthesis of Christ and Kant. In fact, in both cases we are offered the same monstrosity. We are virtually asked to believe that a totality view of life based on the idea of human ultimacy can be intelligently united to a totality view based on the divine ultimacy. We are virtually asked to believe that the thinking of Paul the Apostle was to all intents and purposes the same as the thinking of Saul of Tarsus.

Dr. Kuitert and his associates apparently do not realize that they will eventually be compelled to make a final choice between a totality view of reality based on the presupposition of man as autonomous, and one based on the assumption that the triune God of Scripture is the creator-redeemer of men.

2. Robert Collingwood: The Historicalness of Reality

Kuitert and his associates could, if they wished, find in Robert Collingwood's book, *The Nature of History*, a warning with respect to where the new direction of thought which they advocate will lead them. Collingwood takes the position that "the historic consciousness" based on the notion of the historicalness of all existence is the final judge of what Jesus could have been or have said as the would-be saviour of men. In short, for Collingwood it is the autonomous man who, in true Kantian fashion, legislates reality into being. There is no reality, i.e., reality for us—except such reality as the historic consciousness allows and affirms to be possible and present to it.

According to Collingwood the sort of philosophy of history which accords with the Reformers' Christ-line is to be called theocratic history. "In theocratic history humanity is not an agent, but partly an instrument and partly a patient, of the actions recorded." The idea of God's plan back of history as revealed by Christ is completely misunderstood by Collingwood; he will not think of man as made in the image of God and therefore as an analogue of God. For Collingwood, man's thought, to be really his own, must be absolutely his own. Man must be his own ultimate interpreter.

What happens to the "objective facts of history" on this point of view? The answer is, says Collingwood, that they gradually disappear into the subject that interprets them. That does not mean that the subject creates them in the sense that it produces them. But it does signify that the meaning to be attached to any objective historical fact is what it is as part of the framework that the subject projects for itself.

Collingwood thinks that the modern historian should follow Vico, the Italian philosopher of history, in holding that *verum et factum convertuntur*. "The fabric of human society is created by man out of nothing, and every detail of this fabric is therefore a human *factum* to the human mind as such."

Nothing short of this will do for Collingwood if we are to be rid of what he thinks of as the dualism between God and man. Nothing short of this will do if we are to get rid of the idea of history as that science which deals with the past as a dead past. Nothing short of this will do if we are to be rid of the idea of human nature as something fixed or static or given. Even a man like David Hume, Collingwood says, did not realize the full implication of his own thought on this point. "He did not think of mind as learning to think and act in new ways as the process of its activity developed." Yet it is the concept of development and change that must be applied to human nature itself. To be truly free human

nature must first and above all else be free to change itself. It is this truth that Kant helped us to see. He saw that the mind of man has the power to make laws for itself. "This enabled him to put forward a new interpretation of the idea of history as the education of the human race. For him, it means the development of humanity into a state of being fully mind, that is, fully free." "The purpose of nature in creating man is therefore the development of moral freedom; and the course of history can be conceived as the working out of this development. It is thus Kant's analysis of human nature as essentially moral nature of freedom that gives him the final key to his conception of history."

"Kant has thus achieved the remarkable feat of showing why there should be such a thing as history; it is, he shows, because man is a rational being, and his full development therefore requires a historical process."

We have now, according to Collingwood, reached an important milestone in the development of the modern view of history. According to it, the traditional biblical view of things cannot explain why there should be any history at all. For on this biblical view, it is said that all things are already determined by the plan of God. On this view, therefore, thinks Kant, man's acts are purely mechanical. There is nothing of significance determined by them. God has determined everything of significance already and man is but a puppet in the hands of God.

But now Kant has posited the idea of human freedom in the sense of its right and ability to make its own laws for human nature. Thus man has reached an inward teleology. And it is this inward teleology in terms of which the idea of history as a whole as well as the significance of each of its phases and each of its figures must be viewed.

Involved in Kant's idea of an inward teleology is the notion that the mind must both be itself and know itself. And this can be attained only if "reality consists neither of isolated particulars nor of abstract universals but of individual facts whose being is historical." "A reality so defined can only be the life of the mind itself, that is, history." There must be no "body of things whose proper collective is nature" (placed outside the mind). Experience must not be set over against "nature" thus conceived, as something immediate. Experience must rather be thought of "as containing meditation or thought within itself."

It is only thus that "the facts of history are present facts. The historical past is the world of ideas which the present evidence creates in the present. In historical inference we do not move from our present world to a past world; the movement in experience is always a movement within a present world of ideas. The paradoxical result is that the historical past is not past at all; it is present. It is not a past surviving into the present it must be the present. But it is not the present as such, the merely contemporary. It is present because all experience whatever is

present; but not merely present.” “Chronicle, then, is the past as merely believed upon testimony, but not historically known.” These are “mere events.” But the historian seeks for the “unity of the outside and inside of an event.” And such unity is action. “Unlike the natural scientist, the historian is not concerned with events as such at all. He is only concerned with those events which are the outward expression of thoughts, and is only concerned with these insofar as they express thoughts.” “To the historian the actual facts whose history he is studying are not spectacles to be watched, but experiences to be lived through in his own mind; they are objective, or known to him, only because they are also subjective, or activities of his own.”

Collingwood thinks that a Copernican revolution has thus been accomplished in modern times in the way we regard history. So far “from relying on an authority other than himself, to whose Statements his thought must conform, the historian is his own authority and his thoughts autonomous, self-authorizing, possessed of a criterion to which his so-called authorities must conform and by reference to which they are criticized.” The historian “has it in his power to reject something explicitly told him by his authorities and to substitute something else. If that is possible, the criterion of historical truth cannot be the fact that a statement is made by an authority. It is the truthfulness and the information of the so-called authority that are in question and this question the historian has to answer for himself on his own authority. Even if he accepts what his authorities tell him, therefore, he accepts it not on their authority but on his own; not because they say it, but because it satisfies his criterion of historical truth.... For the historian there can never be authorities, because the so-called authorities abide a verdict which only he can give.” “There is nothing other than historical thought itself, by appeal to which its conclusions may be verified.” “All that the historian means, when he describes certain historical facts as data, is that for the purposes of a particular piece of work there are certain historical problems relevant to that work which for the present he proposes to treat as settled; though, if they are settled, it is only because historical thinking has settled them in the past, and they remain settled only until he or someone else decides to reopen them.” “It is thus the historian’s picture of the past, the product of his own *a priori* imagination, that has to justify the sources used in its construction.” “Freed from its dependence on fixed points supplied from without, the historian’s picture of the past is thus in every detail an imaginary picture, and its necessity is at every point the necessity of the *a priori* imagination. Whatever goes into it, goes into it not because his imagination passively accepts it, but because it actively demands it.”

If the reader should think that on such a basis there is little or no difference

between the writing of novels and the writing of history, Collingwood assures us that there is. He gives the following criteria by which to distinguish between them: (1) History must be localized in space and time, novels need not be. (2) All history must be consistent with itself. Purely imaginary worlds such as novels tend to offer, need not. There is but one historical world “and everything in it must stand in some relation to everything else, even if that relation is only topographical and chronological.” (3) Thirdly, and most important, the historian’s picture stands in a peculiar relation to something called evidence. Whether a historical statement is true is determined by an appeal to evidence. And what is evidence? In accord with what has been said before, Collingwood answers this by saying first that “it is not ready-made historical knowledge, to be swallowed and regurgitated by the historian’s mind. Everything is evidence which the historian can use as evidence.... Evidence is evidence only when someone contemplates it historically. Otherwise it is merely perceived fact, historically dumb.”

When the historian approaches his task in this manner, his picture of the past, however fragmentary and faulty, is governed by an idea which is “clear, rational and universal.” “It is the idea of the historical imagination as a self-dependent, self-determining, and self-justifying form of thought.”

Suppose now that the method of Collingwood be applied to the New Testament and to the Christ who speaks through it. Here are the records. Here are statements made by those who say they were apostles of Jesus of Nazareth. What would Collingwood do with them? His answer may be expected from what we have heard him say. Summarized in his own words it is something like this: “Confronted with a ready-made statement about the subject he is studying, the scientific historian never asks himself: ‘Is this statement true or false?’ In other words, ‘Shall I incorporate it in my history of that subject or not?’ The question he asks himself is: ‘What does this statement mean?’ And this is not equivalent to the question ‘What did the person who made it mean by it?’ although that is doubtless a question that the historian must ask, and must be able to answer.”

Applying this approach to the gospels, Collingwood would wish, perhaps, to find out what Jesus said and what the apostles said. But even if he could find out the exact borderline between what the apostles said and what Jesus said, he would still not simply rest with the statement of Jesus. He would seek then to determine what Jesus meant by what he said. But even that would not be the end of the matter. No statement that would shine out clearly as the words of Jesus would be for him a final authority. For “the scientific historian does not treat statements as statements but as evidence: not as true or false accounts of the facts of which they profess to be accounts, but as other facts which, if he knows

the right questions to ask about them, may throw some light on those facts.”

It must now be apparent that Collingwood’s position is a very consistent expression of the non-Christian philosophy of history. The great virtue of Collingwood’s view is that it so plainly rests itself upon the autonomy of man. When he speaks of the autonomy of the historical method he speaks, of course, in opposition to the idea that the historian should narrowly follow the method of the scientist. But more basically he is opposing the idea that the historian should be required to submit to any statement, even in his own field, as authoritative. The rights of the historian are infringed upon if he is required to take any statement at face value as being a true account of the facts that have taken place.

Kuitert and his associates are apparently seeking to retain the value of the traditional Reformed Confessions through giving them a more consistently Christian expression by means of a philosophy of history such as Collingwood espouses. They, apparently, do not realize that the post-Kantian, existentialist framework which they are using in order to present the scriptural Christ and his overtures to modern man is in fact calculated to destroy the gospel of the Scriptures and, with it, human predication in general.

3. Jean-Paul Sartre

A man like Jean-Paul Sartre clearly exhibits this fact. First, Sartre seeks to identify the absolutely free self on which, for him, everything rests. But how, then, can one identify oneself in distinction from other “selves” and things if one is, at best, no more than a whitecap on the surface of a bottomless cauldron of change?

Secondly, this self—supposing it had succeeded in identifying itself—would have to make a universal negative proposition to the effect that God cannot exist and that, therefore, there cannot be such a thing as a transition from wrath to grace in history, not such a thing as a coming judgment.

Thirdly, if this *a priori* universal negative judgment is not to be a mere formal universal, then it must be thought of as being correlative to the idea of pure contingency.

Thus the new framework of thought that is supposed to cure the “formalism,” the “arbitrariness,” and the “determinism” of the “causal” viewpoint of traditional Reformed thinking presupposes the idea of an autonomous human self, which must perform the function of the triune God of Scripture. This self, this would-be autonomous man, has ultimate definitory power over all possible existence. This self must assume itself to be ultimately self-interpretative. It must assume a notion that laws of logic constitute an abstract form which is inherently destructive of all change and a notion of change which is inherently destructive of all unity.

We shall presently substantiate what has been asserted so far in this essay. I have made these general remarks about the tendency of the new movement in Holland first in order that the reader may, at once, realize what is at stake. The claim of Kuitert and others is that the biblical message of the sovereign grace of God could not be adequately expressed in the categories of the historic Reformed Confessions, notably not in the “causal,” i.e., the deterministic categories employed by the synod of Dordt. The fathers of Dordt meant well, but how could they have done justice to the doxological and paradoxical character of the gospel as long as they did not have available the personal categories of neo-orthodox thinking?

D. The Reformed/Neo-Orthodox Synthesis: Its Development

1. Friedrich Schleiermacher

In Germany, it was Friedrich Schleiermacher who first reinterpreted scriptural teaching in terms of a personalistic philosophy constructed after the pattern of Kant's thought. Schleiermacher sought to do better justice to the uniqueness of Christ than orthodoxy had been able to do. In effect, Schleiermacher actualized Chalcedon before Barth did. Accordingly his philosophy re-interprets the historic Reformed teaching on election along universalist lines. He thinks that he does, while orthodoxy does not, do justice to the centrality of Christ in election. Schleiermacher believes "in a divine predestination to salvation in Christ."⁶ 6 This divine predestination to salvation in Christ applies ultimately to all men. There would, says Schleiermacher, be "insoluble discord if, on the assumption of survival after death, we are to think of a part of the human race as definitely distinguished from any other in respect to the divine activity of Christ."⁷ 7

All men are from all eternity what they are because they eternally are participant in Christ and therefore potentially identical with Christ. But then all men are also from all eternity participant in the absolute, pure contingency of Christ.

It is in terms of this Christ of correlativity between abstract identity and abstract diversity that Schleiermacher reinterprets the several doctrines of the historic creeds. His reinterpretation is, of course, tantamount to their denial.

2. Albrecht Ritschl

The same must be said with respect to the thought of Albrecht Ritschl. Like Schleiermacher, Ritschl wants to be genuinely Protestant. Like Schleiermacher, he wants to be even more true to the Protestant principle than were the men of the Reformation. He believes that he can bring out the real intent of the Reformation principle more clearly than Schleiermacher had done by means of Kant's phenomenal-noumenal scheme. His being more Kantian and less idealistic than Schleiermacher enables Ritschl, so he presumes, to be more genuinely Christological in his thinking. He desires also to be more biblical and more historical, therefore less speculative.^{8 8}

But the view of history that springs from the self-sufficient man of Kant leads directly toward a view of history such as Robert Collingwood holds. On its basis the "story" of the Bible, the "story" of creation, fall and redemption through Christ cannot be true.

3. J. H. Scholten

It was the theology, and especially the Christology as presented by Schleiermacher and Ritschl and their many followers, that Karl Barth and his early collaborators supposedly rejected in the interest of a more genuinely Reformation theology and Christology. This “neo-orthodox” theology of Barth and of those of his point of view is that which Kuitert and his collaborators now employ in order, as they believe, to bring to light the real Christ of the Scriptures and of the Reformers.

One wonders why the new direction in Holland has been so late in coming. There were, to be sure, some theologians in the Netherlands of the nineteenth century who held views similar to those of Schleiermacher and Ritschl. But, with the revival of genuine Reformed theology effected by such men as Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck, the Reformed churches seemed to be able to “meet and defeat” the forces of “subjectivism.” In his doctoral dissertation, *Faith and Revelation in Recent German Theology (Geloof en Openbaring in de Nieuwere Duitse Theologie, 1934)*, Dr. G. C. Berkouwer, the first major theologian to point, and that quite recently, Reformed theologians and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands in the direction of neo-orthodoxy, dealt with the ideas of a large number of the followers of Schleiermacher and Ritschl, but he found them to be subjectivists one and all. Over against them, he argued that Reformed Christians should rather maintain the uniqueness of the Reformed view of Scripture and its teaching. The Reformed Faith was, namely, better able than other theologies to signalize and oppose the various forms of neo-Protestant subjectivism. Berkouwer expressed such convictions also in his first work on Scripture, *The Problem of Scripture Criticism (Het Probleem der Schriftkritiek)*, in 1938. In such earlier writings, he held firmly to the traditional views with respect to the necessity, the authority, the perspicuity, and the sufficiency of Scripture. In his later writings, however, he has sought to reinterpret these older views by means of a new, essentially neo-orthodox framework of thought.⁹⁹

Yet, before tracing this new direction taken by Berkouwer and his disciples, of whom Kuitert is the most outstanding, we must look at the one taken long before by J. H. Scholten. This will prepare us for an understanding of Berkouwer’s own *volte-face*.

In his days, J. H. Scholten was a professor at Leiden University. There, he trained many young men for the ministry of the *Hervormde Kerk*. The title of his *magnum opus* is *The Doctrine of the Reformed Church in its Basic Principles (De Leer der Hervormde Kerk in hare Grondbeginselen)*. I use its fourth edition, published in 1890.

In this work, Scholten already did the sort of thing that the men of the new direction, such as Kuitert, are doing today. He was as deeply persuaded in his own time as Berkouwer is in ours that the traditional Reformed Confessions, especially the Articles of Dordt, need reinterpretation in terms of modern personalist thinking. These confessions, apparently, were written by means of an antiquated framework of thought. As they stand, they teach causal determinism. Can they, therefore, really propound the free, universal Grace of God?

Of course, the framers of the Confessions meant well. They were seriously trying to express the idea of the free sovereign grace of God. The fathers of Dordt, says Scholten, were quite right in rejecting the Remonstrant position, since beneath it lies the false notion of the liberty of indifference, the position of pure contingency. But, committed as they also were together with the Remonstrants to a causal view of reality, they, *horribile dictu*, were led to reject Arminianism by means of particularism. What they meant to state against the Remonstrants was the fact that “salvation is not merely offered to men but is actually given them, and that not only for the means, but also for the use and the appropriation of the salvation accomplished by Christ, i.e. faith, God must be given thanks.”¹⁰ 10

However, the unfortunate fact, says Scholten, is that the Reformed Fathers had no suitable personalist categories available to them by which to say properly what they actually meant to say. They meant, in every connection, and against or beyond others, to express “the idea of the sovereign grace of God and of man’s total dependence on God.”¹¹ 11

It was this principle of the sovereignty of God’s grace that the Reformed fathers were out to defend. Yet, unfortunately, they had no better means than the idea of particularism with which to defend it. They were apologetic about this principle, and softened it down as best they could. Thus, e.g., in the Heidelberg Catechism, “election is taught and reprobation is presupposed, but not specifically discussed.”

The only way to maintain the sovereign grace of God over against Arminianism and similar views, says Scholten, is to reject particularism altogether. A truly Christ-centered view of election will do just that. And, *alacriter dictu*, we are now able for the first time to do it, since we now have a personalist framework of thought at our disposal. By means of it, we can finally bring out the true intent of the Reformed Confessions, also that of the Reformers.

A. Scholten's Reinterpretation of the Formal Principle of the Reformation

Now, argues Scholten, we can, for the first time, do justice to both the formal and the material principle of the Reformation. The former is expressed in the idea that the Holy Scriptures are the only source and criterion of Christian Confession. The latter finds expression in the idea of the absolute sovereignty of God. Scholten discusses the former in Volume 1 and the latter in Volume 2 of his work.

In these volumes, Scholten reinterprets both the formal and the material principles of the Reformed Confessions by means of an essentially Kantian freedom-nature scheme of thought. We shall trace his argument here with care.

By all means, argues Scholten, we must maintain our formal principle of the Scriptures as the only source and criterion of Christian Confession over against Romanism. But, in doing so, we ought not to deny the continued revelation by the Holy Spirit as the “internal word” (*verbum internum*). “God’s revelation is not limited to the period of time when the Scriptures were given, but is a fact that continues.”¹² ¹² Moreover, when we assert the Scriptures to be “the only true source and criterion of all that is or is not to be called Christian” we are not yet dealing with the question of truth, but are stating merely that Christianity is an “historical appearance.”¹³ ¹³ Historical research must begin its work with the Scriptures as the original historical source.¹⁴ ¹⁴

From this point we proceed, says Scholten, to apply the principle that the idea of Scripture must be taken from Scripture itself. Failure to do this properly, he says has led to two heresies. “The first heresy is found in a confusion between Scripture and the Word of God; the second, in the theory of mechanical inspiration and the idea of *grammatolatrie* which springs from it.”¹⁵ ¹⁵

Those holding to the first heresy did not regard the writers of Scripture “as independent writers but as instruments of the Holy Spirit.” The result was that everything without distinction which is found in Scripture, not only doctrinal statements, but also historical reports, not only the *impulsus adscribendum*, but also the *suggestio rerum*, not excluding the cloak of Paul; not only the matter, but also the form of writing, language and style; were attributed to the direct operation of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁶ ¹⁶

There is no escape from these heresies except by appealing to the “witness of the Holy Spirit, i.e., in the agreement of that which, according to Scripture, God has revealed in Jesus Christ, with that which he still reveals through his Spirit, to the reason and conscience of the man, whose eye, in communion with Christ, has

been opened to truth.”¹⁷ ¹⁷

It is thus that Scholten would escape what he thinks of as the sheer authoritarianism both of Rome and of Protestant orthodoxy. Protestant orthodoxy identifies the Bible with the Word of God directly. It does this in order to escape Romanism. But in so doing, orthodoxy uses the worst possible method of escaping Romanism. If you depend on the direct identity of the Word of God with an infallible Bible, you are driven, by all the waters of the *clepsydra*, to the idea that you must be your own infallible interpreter.¹⁸ ¹⁸ To be sure, says Scholten, there is, according to Scripture, a principle of authority. This is, however, not characteristic of the gospel but of the law.¹⁹ ¹⁹ Did not Moses desire, and what the prophets Joel and Jeremiah proclaim as the promise of the new covenant, find its fulfilment in Jesus?²⁰ ²⁰ “Jesus did not announce himself as another Moses with the authority of his name, but with that of the truth.”²¹ ²¹

Nowhere does Jesus require faith on the authority of his name.²² ²² It was by the power of moral suasion that he drew men toward enthusiasm for “the good.” Protestant, especially Reformed thinkers, therefore deserve great praise for their faithful following of Jesus on this matter of moral instead of authoritative faith. With their principle of the testimony of the Holy Spirit as the “final ground of faith ... they expressed a principle by which every form of external authority is virtually rejected.”²³ ²³ “The Christian knows no authority of names and persons, he acknowledges only the authority of truth. It is not because Jesus or the Apostles have spoken, but because he recognizes the fact that their teaching is of God, John 7:17, and because their words are the words of eternal life, John 6:68, that the Christian joins the banner of Jesus.”²⁴ ²⁴

We have now, in the New Testament era, escaped every form of dualism between God and man. We now no longer need to say that, when God speaks, man does not speak. We now know that there is, through our communion with Christ, a melting-together (*samensmelting*) and a union of the divine and the human.²⁵ ²⁵ The notion of a “supernatural inspiration of truth by the Holy Spirit” is now replaced by the notion of the witness of the spirit of man, purified in communion with Christ.²⁶ ²⁶

²⁷

(1) Man Has a Natural Power by Which He Sees the Truth of God

We now see, Scholten argues, that there is a “natural power in man, by which he sees the truth of God.”²⁸ ²⁷ Thus we may express the witness of the Holy Spirit as follows: “It is the independent conviction attained without any dependence on external authority, but through the power of truth, therefore through God himself raised up and strengthened within man through communion with Christ, to the

effect that the Christian religion is the true religion.”²⁹ ²⁸

Jesus Christ has revealed “objective truth” and man has the capacity to receive this objective truth. Christian revelation contains no mysteries which cannot be understood or grasped by the human spirit.³⁰ ²⁹ Briefly: as in Christ divine truth was conjoined with his own human subjectivity, so the Christian may also, in his measure, boast that the truth is his property.³¹ ³⁰ Lessing was therefore quite right when he refused to use historical science to prove religious truths.³² ³¹ The historical record of Scripture is the criterion for the Christian character, “but not for the truth of our religious conviction. The recognition of the Christian religion as the true religion has its ground in the witness of the Holy Spirit, i.e., in the power of truth itself over the human spirit as related to God. Expressed otherwise: as the historical source of Christianity, Scripture, i.e., as seen from an historical point of view, contains the rule by which the Christian character of a confession must be judged, but, viewed from a religious point of view, it does not contain the rule but the expression of a Christian’s faith.”³³ ³²

It is only if we make this distinction between the historical and the religious way of looking at Scripture that we can give Scripture criticism its due.³⁴ ³³ Faith needs no certainty with respect to many historical matters recorded in Scripture.³⁵ ³⁴ “The religion founded by Jesus is not the true religion because He established it; it would be true in itself, and divine, even if it had another historical origin than that of the Scriptures of the New Testament.”³⁶ ³⁵

The knowledge of God is a part of human nature.³⁷ ³⁶ The human spirit has the gift and the capacity to raise itself up to God and the supersensuous. But as it progresses toward maturity the human spirit needs external authority. The Old Testament meets this need. Then comes Christ to set him free “from the law and from authority.”³⁸ ³⁷ “The image of God, present only as capacity in man, and prevented in its development by sin, has obtained truth and reality in Jesus Christ, in order to be realized in the human race through him.” In the new covenant we therefore have “the religion of freedom and independence.”³⁹ ³⁸

Looking at the picture as Scholten has given it in his first volume, we see that he has presented us with a reinterpretation of the traditional Reformed view of Scripture in terms of the inward self-sufficiency of man. Man needs Christ, primarily as an ideal by means of which he may see his phenomenal existence in the light of his noumenal existence. In short, Kant is, for Scholten, for all practical purposes, the philosopher of Protestantism. We are on the way to Collingwood.

Scholten’s false Christ is a means by which he would help us suppress the voice of the Christ of the Scriptures, and therefore of the Reformed creeds.

4. Scholten's Reinterpretation of the Material Principle of the Reformed Confessions: The Sovereignty of God

We can now be more brief on Scholten's discussion of the material principle of the Reformed Confessions.

This material principle is, for Scholten, the absolute sovereignty of God as the foundation of the religion expressed by Jesus.^{40 39}

Jesus came to save sinners by bringing them unto God. The sinner is, in his estimate, not inherently evil, but a wandering, undeveloped spirit, who resists the good merely because he does not know it, or because he is too completely embroiled in the snares of his sensuous, selfish life, and therefore unable to appreciate the true and the divine at their true worth.^{41 40}

Some day, sin will yield to the ever-increasing power of man's spiritual life. "That sin, considered as a fall of the individual in the struggle between spirit and flesh, does not necessarily belong to the development of man as such, was proved by Jesus' example."^{42 41} Jesus does, indeed, speak of eternal punishment. But this is to look at sin by itself, without reference to conversion and faith. The possibility of these two must never be excluded. Jesus did not exclude it even when he spoke of the sin against the Holy Ghost. His words on this matter may be thought of as an earnest warning, but not as a threat of permanent exclusion from the kingdom of God.^{43 42}

When Paul used the expression "Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated," he referred only to the temporary non-election of Esau.^{44 43}

Throughout his second volume, it is Scholten's contention that, if we would today teach men the absolute sovereignty of God, we must not think in terms of particularism in the manner of the Reformed fathers. We must, of course, by all means join them in their defense of the gospel of the sovereignty of God against Rome. In terms of this same principle, we must also evaluate the defects of various Protestant points of view. But we can do this properly in our day only if we excise the principle of particularism as being destructive of the gospel of the free grace of God. However, we excuse our forefathers for using this principle because it was the only means they had of opposing those who made the gospel of God to depend on the indifferent will of man, we ourselves must not allow it to function in our thought.

Reformed theology, rather than any other form of Protestantism, was, in Scholten's view, the most reformable on this point.^{45 44} Within Protestantism, the Reformed aspect was this because it was the most consistently theological in its

methodology. Everything in history, it maintained, was to be subordinated to God and his plan. This detail had to be brought out, even if only by means of the essentially pagan principle of particularism. This principle's un-Christian character expressed itself most consistently in the doctrine of reprobation, an idea which was the only tool available to our Reformed fathers if they would expunge the notion of pure contingency inherent in the Remonstrant view.⁴⁶ ⁴⁵ They did not see, as we now do, that God's almighty power is one of moral suasion, not physical coercion.⁴⁷ ⁴⁶

By employing moral instead of physical categories, we can now reject the particularist outlook of our fathers, while all the better maintaining the absolute sovereignty of God. Both the Old and the New Testaments speak of a time when true religion will be generally held by all men, and sin will be no more. The seed of the woman will destroy the seed of the serpent, and Jesus says he will draw all men unto Him.

This will happen, not by means of external power, but by the power of "truth and the moral principle." Paul, too, expects such a final victory of the kingdom of God among men.⁴⁸ ⁴⁷

Thus, this is what our Reformed Fathers really meant, but could not express, because of the causal, metaphysical categories within which they had been taught to think. They knew full well that particularism did not belong to the essence of Reformed faith. They indirectly expressed their conviction on this point in the rebuke given by the Synod of Dordt to those who held a supralapsarian view of God's relation to sin.⁴⁹ ⁴⁸

"Upon the results of our investigation," Scholten finally says, "we therefore affirm that particularism is not a principle of the Reformed Church."⁵⁰ ⁴⁹ Were, then, the Remonstrants on the right track? Of course not. We must see, once for all, that the dilemma between the Remonstrants and the Reformed fathers was a false one. We can do this only when we replace the metaphysics of their time with the ethical categories of our day. Only then may we divine that God's sovereign grace and man's autonomy do not exclude but rather supplement each another. Then only shall we see that, with his absolute, sovereign power of persuasion, God through Christ leads man onward and upward toward the full domination of the spirit over the flesh.

In reviewing what has been said, we see that in Scholten's theology the historic Reformed Faith has been reinterpreted in accordance with post-Kantian, and specifically with idealist, principles. Here is the nineteenth century Dutch version of neo-Protestantism, a synthesis of post-Kantian, Hegelian neo-Protestantism. It is Modernism *pur sang*, and we are on the way to Collingwood.

E. Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck: Orthodox Reaction to the Christ-Kant Synthesis of Nineteenth Century Theology

How did the Reformed theologians of that day meet the claims of Scholten and his disciples? Did the Reformed churches have men who were able to counteract their influence? They had, to be sure, the “theological school” of Kampen, organized in the fifties. But its faculty was scarcely equipped to deal with the philosophical theology of someone like Scholten.

However, there was Abraham Kuyper. He had been a student of Scholten’s in his prime, and understood him well. Moreover, Kuyper had the genius, the erudition, and the temperament required to offset the influence of Scholten. He knew that Scholten’s reinterpretation of the gospel was worse than a denial of it.

Then, there was Herman Bavinck. He, too, had been a student of Scholten in his later days. He likewise had the necessary genius and erudition to perceive that Scholten’s theology was not a modern reinterpretation but, in fact, a misinterpretation of the Reformed Faith. Kuyper said that Scholten wanted to use, not serve, the Reformed Faith, and that his was a game of words.⁵¹ 50 Bavinck was as outspoken as Kuyper in his rejection of Scholten’s basic approach. However, both men realized that if the Reformed Faith was to perform its proper task, it would have to acquaint itself more thoroughly than it had up to then with modern science and philosophy. The reinterpretation of the Reformed Faith given by someone of Scholten’s calibre was based on the assumption that modern philosophy and science held a correct view of man and his world.

What was needed, as both Kuyper and Bavinck realized, was a restatement of the Reformed Faith in order to meet Scholten’s misinterpretation of it. Any such truthful restatement would have to be as broad and comprehensive as Scholten’s “reinterpretation.” It would have to consist of an entire Christian life-and world-view. The call of the hour was thus to develop a self-consciously Reformed view of science and philosophy, consonant with the theology of the Reformed Confessions and capable of challenging a position like Scholten’s. Kuyper and Bavinck were well aware that, personally, they could make only a beginning in this direction.

In Kuyper’s case, this beginning was centrally expressed in his three-volume work, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology* (*Encyclopaedie der Heilige Godgeleerdheid*). In Bavinck’s, it found central expression in his four-volume

work, *Reformed Dogmatics* (*Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*). Both works first appeared toward the close of the nineteenth century.

In them, Kuyper and Bavinck discussed at length the epistemological principles that must undergird a Christian life-and world-view. The regenerate man sees every fact of the universe within the illuminating framework of teaching given in Scripture. The unregenerate man sees the same facts only in the light of his own experience as the ultimate point of reference. There is no neutral ground between believers and unbelievers upon which both sides may stand and conjointly investigate whether the facts of the world are what Scripture says they are or are not. Christians must accept, on its own authority, the teachings of Scripture with respect to the triune God and His plan for mankind. The Christ of Scripture is the self-attesting Christ. He is the sun, in the light of which alone all things can be seen for what they are.

Accordingly, the believer must not, in the interest of winning unbelievers to Christ, agree with their problematics. He must not join the unbeliever in asking whether God may possibly or probably exist, and whether man is possibly and probably made in God's image or is, rather, a product of pure contingency. He insists that the body of biblical teaching as a whole must be taken as the presupposition of significant predication in any field of research.

Have I, in saying this, read my own views into Kuyper and Bavinck? Yes, I have, at least as to their verbal expression. But what I have said was, I believe, the basic intent of both men. I have elsewhere argued that neither one was fully true to this intent.⁵² ⁵¹ In both cases, remnants of Scholasticism clung to their thinking. The basis for a truly biblical view of man is stated by Calvin at the outset of his *Institutes*: man is what Christ in the Scriptures tells him he is, i.e., made perfect in the image of God, fallen into sin through Adam, the first man, and either, as a believer, redeemed by Christ and his Spirit or, as an unbeliever, not redeemed, and therefore a covenant-breaker abiding under the wrath of God. To be sure, Kuyper and Bavinck were willing to follow Calvin on this point; and yet, again and again, both men argued as though man could to some extent, know himself for what he is through direct self-inspection. Bavinck, for instance, says: "In self-consciousness, therefore, we have to deal not with a mere phenomenon, but with a noumenon, with a reality that is immediately given to us antecedently to all reasoning and inference. Self-consciousness is the unity of ideal and real being; the self is here consciousness, not scientific knowledge, but experience, conviction, consciousness of self as a reality. In self-consciousness, our own being is revealed to us, directly, immediately before all thinking and independently of all willing."⁵³ ⁵²

One wonders how Bavinck could fail to see that, in so saying, he was virtually granting that principle of human autonomy that underlies all the misinterpretations which the natural man gives of himself and his environment. As earlier indicated, the idea of human autonomy is accompanied by the notion of pure contingency as the principle of individuation, and by the notion of abstract being of pure determinism, above the Creator-creature distinction, as the principle of unification.

Can the different starting-points of Calvin and Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* then, after all, be regarded as consonant with one another? And may Kant then, after all, be called the philosopher of Protestantism? Of course not. Calvin's approach is, according to both Kuyper and Bavinck, diametrically opposed to those of such men as Descartes and Kant. This is their basic conviction.

In terms of this conviction, therefore, Kuyper and Bavinck rejected Scholten's theology as modern. They rejected his reinterpretation of the formal and the material principle respectively of theology. For both men, Scholten's was a man-centered view of Scripture and likewise of its content. They also rejected his claim that, by his reinterpretation of the formal and the material principle of Scripture, he had discovered an authentic internal coherence between the works of God and man. In particular, they denied his contention that his idea of truth was genuinely Christ-centered.

The world and life views of Kuyper and Bavinck stand squarely opposed to Scholten's, which was based on the man-centered philosophy of men like Kant and Hegel. It is only in name that Scholten's "modernist" view can be called Reformed. If one follows out Scholten's principle, he will be bound to agree, ultimately, with men like Collingwood and Sartre.

F. Bavinck and the “Ethical Theologians”

We now turn to consideration of a second effort at reinterpreting the Reformed confessions in the Netherlands during the nineteenth century, the effort of the so-called “ethical” theologians.

1. Daniel Chantepie de La Saussaye

The founder of the “ethical movement” in Holland was Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye (1818–1874).⁵⁴ ⁵³ De la Saussaye was critical of the “modern” theology of Scholten and his followers.⁵⁵ ⁵⁴ On the other hand, he was more basically critical of “orthodoxy” and of the scholastic period of Reformed theology. Finally, he was greatly interested in the relationship of German and Dutch theology.

Jan Veenhof relates that De la Saussaye had been much influenced by Vinet. From Vinet he had learned about the proper function of conscience and the meaning of the “ethical” nature of truth. He considered himself also a grateful pupil of Schleiermacher.⁵⁶ ⁵⁵ For him, as for Schleiermacher, that only must be thought of as being properly a constitutive element of Christian doctrine which “may in truth be considered the life-principle of the Christian.”⁵⁷ ⁵⁶ This necessitated for him the maintenance of the “historical” element in Christianity. And then, there was German idealism. Relates Veenhof: “The stress on the immanence of God and his contemplation of the relation between the logos and ethos within ethical theology constitute undeniable indications of the fact that he had received strong impulses from the systems of Fichte, Hegel and Schelling.”⁵⁸

⁵⁷

“In all this,” says Veenhof, “the progressiveness of De la Saussaye manifests itself.”⁵⁹ ⁵⁸ At the same time, he thought of himself primarily as having “*issu de Calvin*.”⁶⁰ ⁵⁹

A. “Truth is Ethical”

The problem facing us now concerns how one who avows his sympathy with the modern freedom-nature scheme of thought can, nevertheless, still think of himself as being of the “issue of Calvin.” Can there be anything approaching an intelligible synthesis between the God-centered theology of Calvin and the man-centered theology of Kant and his followers?

For example, would it not seem obvious that the theology of men like Kuyper and Bavinck is based upon the idea of the Scriptures as the final source and standard of truth, whereas the theology of De la Saussaye is based upon the autonomous moral or ethical consciousness of man as the final source and standard of truth? Would it not, therefore, seem to be obvious that De la Saussaye’s theology is not basically different from that of Scholten? Of course, Scholten may be too intellectualistic in his construction of theology to suit De la Saussaye; yet, both reject the Bible and its teaching as the final source and standard of truth in the interest of the primacy of the Practical Reason of Kant.

It ought to enlighten us if we can discover the attitude of Kuyper and Bavinck toward De la Saussaye. Both men had been students of Scholten. Both admired Scholten, and appreciated the fact that their revered teacher had made the attempt to give a modern expression to the Reformed Faith. But both men emphatically rejected Scholten’s “reinterpretation” of the Reformed Confessions as being “speculative” rather than biblical. Kuyper and Bavinck, however, had differing attitudes toward the father of the ethical movement. Kuyper’s was openly negative. He sensed at once that, for all his warm religious attachment to Christ, De la Saussaye’s theology was man-centered.

On the other hand, Bavinck’s attitude toward De la Saussaye seemed, at times, to be hesitant.

He gave a great deal of attention to De la Saussaye, and to the ethical movement’s adherents in general. He was desirous of rendering the best possible judgement on their work. Yet, even so, his final estimate of them as a whole is essentially the same as Kuyper’s.

Dr. Klaas Trimp brings out this point well by a quotation from Bavinck’s address on De la Saussaye given in 1884. Here, Bavinck had much praise for the theology of De la Saussaye. He confessed his fascination by it. Yet, the conclusion of the address questioned whether ethical theology was in accord with, and set forth the teaching of Christ and the Scriptures better than, Reformed theology. His reply was negative. Said Bavinck: “However much we may learn from De la Saussaye ... his theology cannot be ours.... This is true only because, according to our judgment, there is no guarantee in this theology

that it maintains the truth as God has given it to us in His Word; nor that it preaches Christ as He makes himself known to us in the Scriptures, and as He alone can be the Savior of our souls.”⁶¹₆₀

If one wishes really to reject the “modernism” of Scholten and the “intellectualism” of Roman Catholicism, he must do so on the basis of Christ speaking directly in Scripture. And if one wishes really to do justice to the “ethical” character of truth, and therewith do justice to the principle of the Reformation, then he must, ever and anon, do so in terms of the framework of teaching found in Scripture. When De la Saussaye maintained that the nature of truth was “ethical,” his position became, in effect, like Kant’s in its appeal to the autonomous moral consciousness of the natural man as his final standard of truth. De la Saussaye’s meaning of the adjective ethical differed *toto coelo* from Bavinck’s. Great confusion results if this fact is forgotten.

2. J. H. Gunning

Before going further into this question, we refer briefly to the second “father of ethical theology,” Dr. J. H. Gunning (1829–1905). Veenhof informs us that the same men and movements of thought that influenced De la Saussaye also influenced Gunning. Veenhof also speaks of Plato’s influence, of an “uninterrupted confrontation with Spinoza,” of Gunning’s “admiration” for the German theologian Beck, and of his “spiritual affinity” with Kahler.⁶² ⁶¹ It was, says Veenhof, Gunning’s desire, as also that of De la Saussaye, to reinterpret traditional theology from the point of view of the ethical principle.⁶³ ⁶² In so doing, he sought to establish an intelligible relation between the gospel and modern man. Gunning was, as distinct from De la Saussaye, much absorbed by eschatology and the church.⁶⁴ ⁶³

Also differently from De la Saussaye, Gunning authored a large work wherein he set forth his views comprehensively. Its title was *Glimpses into Revelation* (*Blikken in de Openbaring*, 2. de druk, 1929).

A brief excursion into it makes clear how he has reinterpreted biblical teaching by means of the modern post-Kantian framework of thought. We turn to Volume One for proof of this fact. Its very first sentence, Chapter One, reads: “I believe that the Holy Scripture is the Word of God.”⁶⁵ ⁶⁴

Examining the book might cause one to imagine Gunning’s principle of interpretation to be the same as Bavinck’s. However, this soon appears not the case. Gunning’s basic principle is actually very like De la Saussaye’s, namely: “All true knowledge, therefore, rests on the foundation of the moral spiritual life.”⁶⁶ ⁶⁵

Am I then, asks Gunning, to be charged with doing despite to the authority of Scripture? Not at all. I am out to defend it. A true defense of the authority of Scripture must be done in terms of the person-to-person relationship of the believer to Christ.

The point that must be basic to everything is that Christianity “is not a system, which is independent of the persons holding it.”⁶⁷ ⁶⁶ Orthodoxy, for example, held to such an abstract view of Scripture, and its position led to Rationalism.⁶⁸ ⁶⁷ Against orthodoxy, we must insist that: “God reveals himself not as a series of doctrines.”⁶⁹ ⁶⁸ Rather, He reveals Himself to man as a person. And man is a person “because he is what he is through his own deed.”⁷⁰ ⁶⁹

Accordingly, God’s revelation comes to man in the form of personal persuasion, not by way of compulsion.⁷¹ ⁷⁰ Authority is not a matter of compulsion by means of a “dead fact.” “No, God asks of you something

higher.”⁷² ⁷¹ He asks for personal obedience. “In the realm of the spiritual, there is nothing impersonal.”⁷³ ⁷² The Spirit of God does not compel you to accept the unity of Scripture by showing you that it is a series of intellectually concatenated facts. On the contrary, it is only after you have been that unity because you are personally related to Christ that you accept the “authenticity of the information.”⁷⁴ ⁷³ It is thus that Scripture “proves itself and has its own certainty within itself.”⁷⁵ ⁷⁴

In true Kantian fashion, Gunning makes the moral or ethical consciousness of man his final court of appeal. “We have a conscience, we are conscious of the fact that there is a law of God which requires unconditional obedience; a law which we must obey. He who recognizes this fact, i.e., really acknowledges it with all his heart, and is prepared to accept all its implications, is at bottom lifted above all doubt.”⁷⁶ ⁷⁵ The “noble Fichte” understood this well. “Where there is such a holy zeal as there is in Fichte to listen to the voice of conscience, there the heart must come to certainty, even though thought has not at all reached such a height; as for instance, it is known of Fichte, that the gospel of John was precious to him as the highest and most glorious expression of the truth and served him as daily nourishment of the heart in his family circle.”⁷⁷ ⁷⁶

It ought to be clear from what has been said that Gunning’s final court of appeal was not the Scriptures, in the sense that this was true for Kuyper and Bavinck.

For all his personal adherence to the Christ of Scriptures, Gunning, as well as his predecessor De la Saussaye, “Christianized” the post-Kantian freedom-nature scheme. Accordingly, the ethical theologians could not basically challenge the speculative misinterpretation of Reformed theology given by the great modernist Scholten.

It was in the interest of the ethical theologians as well as of Scholten to make the gospel intelligible to its modern despisers. But the price they paid was capitulation to, or, at least, compromise with the modern, would-be autonomous man. Kuyper and Bavinck were also interested in relating the gospel to modern man, but neither was willing to pay the price the modernist and the ethical theologians were willing to do so as to accomplish this end.

3. The Authentic Bavinck

Veenhof sums up his comparison of Bavinck and the ethical theologians as follows: “There is agreement in position with respect to the preceding trends, in personal and scholarly ‘attitude’ characterized by broad appreciation, and in striving for renewal of theology and a reconciliation of faith and science. Material harmony is also demonstrable at various points. The difference, in addition to that of divergent philosophical and theological backgrounds, lies in this, that Bavinck had an eye for the unique character of the special revelation in Christ; interpreted the idea of ‘truth’ intellectualistically; stood more critically over against the category of experience; maintained revelation as revelation critically as distinct from the category of experience and as revelation of deed and word, life and doctrine; and opposed *Ethizismus*. While agreeing in their rejection of the mechanical theory of inspiration, they parted company in the definition of the relationship of revelation and Scripture, and with respect to the biblical description of history. There was also some divergence regarding the authority of Scripture, the function of the *Testimonium Spiritus Sancti*, and the estimate of historical criticism. They were agreed, however, in the idea that the life of God, regeneration, is effected in man without the Word of the Gospel. Thus the relationship of Bavinck to ethical theology remains equivocal.”^{78 77}

In the body of his work, Veenhof offers detailed justification for all of these points. In this brief sketch, we must limit ourselves to his general evaluation. We dissent from Veenhof’s final assertion to the effect that the relationship of Bavinck to the ethical theologians “remains equivocal.” To be sure, there is a certain plausibility in what Veenhof says. Due to remnants of scholasticism in his thinking, Bavinck was not always able to set off modern theology clearly from his own Biblical-Reformed point of view.^{79 78} This did not prevent him, however, from pointing out the basic difference between his point of view and the modern speculative one of the ethical theologians. He declared repeatedly that any synthesis of Greek and Christian methodology produced a monstrosity. For him, Roman Catholicism was such. He also stressed that any synthesis involving modern and Christian methodology similarly produced a deformity; in fact, that the Frankenstein’s creation called Roman Catholicism was basically identical with the other one known as modernism.

What else did Bavinck mean when, with Kuyper, and following Calvin, he derived his “system” of theology from the Scriptures as the direct revelation of the triune God to man? And what else did he mean when, with Kuyper and Calvin, on the basis of Paul, he spoke of man as naturally knowing God (*gnontes ten Theon* (Rom 1:19)); yet as being sinful in Adam (Rom: 5:12), seeking to

suppress this knowledge of God? Bavinck rejected the “intellectualism” of Roman Catholic theology, derived as it was from Greek methodology, because based in part on the Greek assumption that man is neither a creature of God, nor has he broken any known will or law of God. Bavinck rejected the anti-intellectualism of modern theology, derived from the direct revelation of Christ in the Scriptures in opposition to the falsehood and delusion which derives unfailingly from the natural man’s self-sufficient speculation.

In short, underneath all his evaluations of ancient, medieval, and modern thinking, Bavinck did work with an idea of analogy based upon that of the self-sufficient triune God of Scripture and man as His creature, who has sinned against Him, and in all cases responded to His Word with either obedience or disobedience.

We shall now take a brief look at some of the sections of Bavinck’s great work, *Reformed Dogmatics*, in order to corroborate this claim.

At the very beginning of this work, Bavinck deals with Kant’s distinction between knowing and believing. For Kant, science is possible only in the realm of sense; in that of the suprasensible, we may have only faith. “Accordingly, for Kant, dogma rests on a personal, moral persuasion of faith.” Schleiermacher came “to a similar result.” For him, dogmata were “formulations of the religious feeling.”⁸⁰ ⁷⁹ But, on such a basis, dogmatics “ceases to be dogmatics, and simply becomes a description of what is held to be the truth within certain circles.” “But science is concerned to discover truth; if, then, dogmatics wishes really to be a science, it cannot be satisfied with a description of what is, but has to point out that which must be accounted as truth.”⁸¹ ⁸⁰

Now, to be sure, having said this much, Bavinck at once describes truth as “the ideal, the logical, the necessary.”⁸² ⁸¹ On the basis of such statements, one might think that Bavinck’s view of truth is that of an intellectually concatenated system of concepts. But such a claim would, at most, be only plausible. Christian dogmatics is, says Bavinck, “that knowledge which He (God) has concerning Himself and all creatures as standing in relation to Him, which He has revealed in His Word to the church.”⁸³ ⁸²

A modern theologian like Julius Kaftan, says Bavinck, thinks that Kant has liberated us from such a supposedly objective and intellectualist view of dogmatics.⁸⁴ ⁸³ On the basis of Kant’s philosophy, Kaftan seeks to ascribe a “religiously-ethical” character to revelation.⁸⁵ ⁸⁴ Dogma must not be the object, but the expression of faith, and must, in consequence, bear a “religious-moral” character. Dogmatics does not develop a system of doctrine which must be accepted intellectually. On the contrary, it seeks to show how the Word of God

may be proclaimed in order to arouse a proper faith, and to develop an inner faith-knowledge (*Glaubenserkenntnis*) that corresponds to truth.^{86 85}

According to such a position, faith is indeed knowledge, specifically knowledge of God, but this knowledge is of a special kind. It is not scientific, demonstrable knowledge; it is, rather, knowledge acquired by the activity of the moral will. Such knowledge differs absolutely from that obtained by science. Scientific knowledge rests on the compulsion of facts, but religious knowledge is obtained by a moral experience. It is attained by an act of the will, and is for that reason ethically conditioned.^{87 86}

The way of obtaining religious knowledge is wholly different from that of obtaining knowledge of the visible world.^{88 87}

It appears from what we have quoted of Bavinck that he is deeply conscious of the principal contrast between the historic and the modern Protestant methodology, based as it is on Kantian principles. What we have said about Kant is quite in line with what Bavinck says about him.

Kant's basic starting point is to all intents and purposes identical with that of Socrates. Socrates said he would accept nothing on the authority of men or gods. Rather, he would prefer the ability to penetrate the nature of holiness for himself. Richard Kroner termed this approach of Socrates "the principle of inwardness," pointing out that Kant's own entire purpose was likewise to function exclusively on the selfsame basis.

When, therefore, the Bible as God's word told him he was a creature of God, but had, through his fall in Adam, become a sinner against God, Kant rebelled. The "concept" of creation, Kant argued, was contradictory. That of the incarnation was also. And ditto with every other concept pertaining to that which is suprasensible.

But let not the preacher worry about this contradictory position of suprasensible knowledge. Let him not try in one way or another to prove by conceptual reasoning that God exists, and that He has spoken to man in the world of phenomena. If he does this, then he will do great moral injustice to his God as well as to himself. By "proving" God's existence in the manner that Scholasticism did, or by presuming to prophesy conceptually about God's nature and work, as orthodox Protestant theologians have done, he will reduce God to the proportions of finite man.

It is only if we realize that God is wholly above anything that man can say about him by means of a so-called "system of doctrine," that we can enjoy the proper relationship to him. Then, our relation to him will be ethical and personal, instead of intellectual and impersonal.

Bavinck did not fall for the trap that Kant had laid for Christian theologians, whereas the ethical theologians did. Bavinck knew quite well that Kant's philosophy was founded upon the notion of human autonomy, upon the concept of pure contingency as the principle of individuation, and upon pure or abstract rationality as the principle of unity. Bavinck realized that theologians who based their efforts at interpreting the gospel to modern man upon the premises of Kant's philosophy were being deceived to suppress instead of to proclaim the gospel of the Christ of the Scriptures. Having himself been tempted once by this modern scheme of thought, especially as a student in Scholten's classes, he had great understanding for those who had fallen for it, although ultimately he considered himself obliged to oppose them, knowing that if one adopted the phenomena-noumena scheme of Kant, one had to give up one's allegiance to the Christ of Luther, Calvin, and Paul.

Bavinck never hesitated to speak of Scripture as containing a "system" of truth; but it was a totally different sort of system from that desired by either ancient or modern philosophy. These base their notion of "system" on that of human autonomy. Thus, Parmenides long ago said that reality had to be that which man, by thinking with logical consistency, could say about it, and this remained the notion of "system" held to by Kant. His argument that, since pure contingency both stood behind and operated within anything and everything with which man has to do, therefore gods and men can have no such system. Parmenides' assumption was that everybody must mean the same thing by "system"; yet the analogical system of Bavinck is the diametrical opposite of that of Aquinas.

Beginning with Schleiermacher, nineteenth and twentieth century theologians have been carried away by the Kantian freedom-nature scheme of thought. J. H. Scholten, the modernist, and the "ethical" theologians already discussed, reinterpreted the Reformed Confessions and made them acceptable to modern man and conformable to the requirements of his false type of system.

Bavinck did not follow in this train. For him the Bible contained, to be sure, a "system" of truth, yet a system produced by a dogmatician who knew himself from beginning to end as being "bound to revelation."⁸⁹⁸⁸ The dogmatician can produce nothing new. He can only "reproduce that truth which is given him by God."⁹⁰⁸⁹ "The *dogmaticus* comes to the Scripture as a believer, and only as such does his work of ordering its content from beginning to end."⁹¹⁹⁰

For a proper introduction to dogmatic theology, there is no room for a "philosophical *Prinzipienlehre*, which must first lay the ground for dogmatics and vindicate its right of procedure."⁹²⁹¹

The dogmatician does not take his place outside, but “within Christianity; he does not place himself first, together with rationalism, on the standpoint of reason (*rede*), in order thereafter to climb up to, or descend downward to faith ...”⁹³ ⁹²

Kaftan was formally right when he spoke of faith-knowledge; but he should not have interpreted this in terms of the dualistic scheme of Kant. Rather, he should have “broken with Kant’s dualism,” rejected the modern notion of science (*wetenschap*), and said that, precisely because there is true faith-knowledge, dogmatics can claim to offer truly scientific knowledge of God.⁹⁴ ⁹³ “Dogmatics is a positive science, receiving all its material from revelation and possessing no right whatsoever to modify or extend this content through speculation carried on independently of this revelation.”⁹⁵ ⁹⁴

In constructing a biblical system of truth, Bavinck said he was following the Reformers who were, “from the outset, anti-scholastic.”⁹⁶ ⁹⁵ “The starting-point of the *Institutes* of Calvin is theological, yet Calvin did not begin with an abstract view of God, but rather from God as he is known by man from nature and Scripture.”⁹⁷ ⁹⁶

However, in the course of time, the treatment of dogmatics has become ever more scholastic, there being less and less appreciation for the connection between faith and the life of faith.”⁹⁸ ⁹⁷

Holding to the idea of a “biblical system,” Bavinck naturally allowed its material to center about the Christ of Scripture. “The content of dogmatics is the knowledge of God as this is revealed in Christ through his Word. The special nature of the knowledge of the believer exists in the fact that he regards everything religiously and theologically, viewing all things in the light of God, *sub specie aeternitatis*. That is the difference between his and a philosophical or scientific world view. In dogmatics, it is always the believer, the Christian, who speaks. He does not speculate about God, does not begin with an abstract, philosophical concept of God, does not proceed from *theologia naturalis* to *theologia revelata*, and does not reason about God as he exists in himself, because such knowledge is totally beyond his reach. Rather, he describes only the knowledge of God which is revealed to him in Christ. Even when in the first part of dogmatics he speaks of God, His attributes, and the trinity, he speaks and thinks as a believer, not as a philosopher.”⁹⁹ ⁹⁸

The dogmatician does indeed speak of the “essence and works” of God, but he does so on the basis of Scripture teaching.¹⁰⁰ ⁹⁹

It was on the basis of his Christ-centered biblical system that Bavinck criticized the scholasticism which, he says, had begun to make its appearance,

even in Reformed circles, as early as the end of the sixteenth century. In fact, from the time of the Reformation, there were those who had left Rome, not for “religious-ethical,” but for aesthetic reasons.¹⁰¹ 100

Within the intellectual speculative scheme of Rome, it was a matter of metaphysical gradation. To be saved meant to be lifted, gradually, in the scale of being. This nature-grace scheme had no proper place for the biblical narrative of man’s creation, fall, and redemption in Christ. In short, the Reformation set its ethical view of man’s relation to God over against the ontological view of Rome.

It is important to distinguish the meaning of the word “ethical” as Bavinck uses it and as modern post-Kantian theologians use it. The latter believe Bavinck’s dogmatics to be purely metaphysical, intellectualist, and, therefore, not ethical at all. To the modern post-Kantian theologian, the words “ethical” and “religious” mean what they do as part of the freedom-nature scheme of Kant, and it was this scheme that had, of course, mesmerized De la Saussaye, Gunning, and their successors.

Bavinck was not always well-enough prepared to signalize this absolute difference in principle between the Reformed and the modern “ethical” views, but, in the last analysis, he did understand that no compromise was possible between the two.

Apparently, Veenhof likewise has not absolutely perceived this difference. If he had, he would not have said that Bavinck’s attitude toward the ethical theologians was equivocal.

But my immediate reason for discussing Bavinck’s relation to the “ethical theologians” lies, of course, in the fact that Messrs. Berkouwer and Kuitert, together with their collaborators, have by and large adopted a position similar to that of the “ethical” theologians, and claim moreover that they are not only true to the Reformed Confessions, but also to Bavinck, and so are, for the first time, able to bring out their “real intent.” Berkouwer, in particular, is fond of appealing to Bavinck in support of the new direction he is following. Although he can find no justification for this in the main thrust of Bavinck’s thought, he can, and does, at most, find some similarity of language between Bavinck’s authentic position and his own new view of the Confessions and the Scriptures.

Much more could be said about Bavinck’s position as contrasted with that of the “ethical theologians.” However, enough has been said on the subject to indicate that, in Bavinck, the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands had a great theologian who, with Kuyper, withstood the inroads of a modern, Kantian-based theology.

Of course there were weaknesses in their theology, as mentioned earlier, especially in the field of apologetics. Both men rejected the apologetics of the

Utrecht men, Doedes and Van Oosterzee, on the ground that it was concessive to modern unbelief. We must agree with them in this. The Utrecht men held to a view of apologetics similar to that of Bishop Butler, based on the empiricist anthropology of John Locke, and very common in Protestant circles in their day. It was even taught at Princeton Theological Seminary, with great Reformed theologians like B. B. Warfield assuming it to be the only conceivable method of apologetics. So, also, did Kuyper. The difference between them was that Warfield advocated it, while Kuyper rejected it. Bavinck agreed with Kuyper; yet, when both Kuyper and Bavinck, willy-nilly, employed apologetic argument, they sometimes fell back on the very method they had condemned.

It was because they were not fully true to their own basic principles. They had not yet found time to work out a truly Reformed apologetic. Their falling back into the traditional apologetic was, especially in the case of Bavinck, due to the remnants of scholasticism still found in their thinking. Kuyper and Bavinck were pioneers, leading us onward to a more biblically-based, and therefore a more anti-scholastic theology, philosophy and apologetics.

The significance of this fact will appear more clearly when we come to a discussion of the recent tendency among Reformed theologians toward the erection of a new Reformed/Neo-Orthodox theology.

Chapter Two—Twentieth Century Development

A. G. C. Berkouwer and Neo-Orthodoxy

Dr. G. C. Berkouwer occupies a unique place in the theological development of this period. Indeed, the radical difference between the respective postures of the synod of Assen (1926) and that of Amsterdam (1967) cannot be understood for what it is unless the correspondingly radical difference between the earlier and the later views of Berkouwer be noted.

The synod of Assen (1926) of the Reformed Churches symbolized the high-water mark of traditional Reformed theology. That of Amsterdam (1966), involving the same churches, symbolized the victory of neo-orthodoxy. This change of direction from Bavinck to Barth mirrors perfectly the *voltefact* in the theology of Dr. G. C. Berkouwer in the same period.

During this time, Berkouwer underwent a radical change in his view of Roman Catholicism, neo-orthodoxy, the nature of Church confessions, and the nature of Scripture. I have traced his development in my booklet entitled *The Sovereignty of Grace*, mentioned above. In the present connection, I limit myself to the question of Scripture.

1. Berkouwer's Earlier Work on Scripture

In 1938, Berkouwer wrote a book, *The Problem of Scripture Criticism* (*Het Probleem der Schriftkritiek*). In it, he presented a comprehensive and thorough statement, being a defense of the traditional view of Scripture. We shall give a summary of his argument.

There was a time, said Berkouwer, when men aimed to destroy Christianity by means of Scripture criticism.¹⁰³ ¹ Later, however, Christian theologians themselves felt that they had to make room for “criticism.” It is this fact which constitutes the problem of Scripture criticism; namely, theologians seek a synthesis between faith and criticism.

In nine chapters, Berkouwer has dealt with various aspects of this attempted synthesis. We can touch on only a few of them.

First of all, he discusses the question of science. In the nineteenth century, natural science boasted great progress. Men therefore developed great confidence in what science (in Dutch, *wetenschap*) might accomplish. They began to speak of “The scientific method.”¹⁰⁴ ² Why shouldn't theology, they asked, replace its dogmatic approach with that of the scientific method? But then, they rejoined, can theology ever adopt a neutral approach to its object?¹⁰⁵ ³ Perhaps not. But should not one, at any event, beware of an *a priori* approach to the problem of Scripture? “A definite statement on the essence, character, and significance of Holy Scripture must stand at the end, rather than at the beginning, of scientific procedure.”¹⁰⁶ ⁴ Then only can theology be relieved of the uncertainty of faith (*geloof*) and attain to general validity.

However, many theologians then realized that, if one used the scientific method in relation to Scripture, there would be little, if anything, left of it as a revelation of God. After all, they did wish to preserve the revelational character of Scripture.

Thereupon, the “discovery” was made that a limited form of Scripture criticism was not at all destructive of this revelational character of Scripture. On the contrary, it was argued that orthodox theology, with its view of the infallibility of Scripture, was the villain that had done injustice to the Scripture as the revelation of God.

A. Wilhelm Herrmann: Old Liberalism

Wilhelm Herrmann dwelt on this point in his *Dogmatik* (1925). The true nature of faith, he argued, is one of trust. Orthodoxy had intellectualized this notion of personal trust by reducing revelation to a series of doctrines, to a communication of truths “made known”; truths which had to be accepted on the basis of faith.¹⁰⁷ ⁵ It was thus that orthodoxy had petrified the living relation between the believer and God.¹⁰⁸ ⁶

The result was, argued Herrmann, an unevangelical heteronomy. It is simply un-Christian to require of the believer to accept any and every part of Scripture. “In that case, faith would no longer consist of trust, but would be blind acceptance, *assensus*, *notitia*, *sacrificium intellectus*, lifeless submission.”¹⁰⁹ ⁷ This orthodox view of faith had in fact derived from Jewish theology via Roman Catholicism.¹¹⁰ ⁸

Throughout his work, Herrmann sought to put the orthodox position on the defensive. It was, he said, intellectualistic and atomistic. On the one hand, it had no unified outlook on life; on the other, no eye for the genuinely unique.

But what is the Reformed Christian, in fact, to do? Should he strive to satisfy Herrmann’s principle of unity and diversity? No, he cannot do this, for in that case he would be denying the very presupposition of his position. The Reformed believer holds that the truth is true merely because God says it is. God has, from the beginning, told man what is true, what is good, what is holy. There was never a second of time when God’s speaking to man did not set before him the true goal, standard, and motive of his reaction to his environment. Man’s acceptance of God’s speaking to him was, from the outset of history, one of covenantal response. All of man’s dealings with every fact of his environment is basically a faith relationship. Every action of man is a reaction to reality as a whole, but reality as a whole is what God says it is.

After the fall of Adam, God continued to speak covenantally to man, and man continued to react covenantally to God. But, as a sinner, man acts everywhere and always as a covenant-breaker, instead of covenant-keeper.

Out of this mass of perdition, God, through Christ and by his Spirit, saved a people for his own possession. From being covenant-breakers, they thus became covenant-keepers, soldiers of the cross, doing battle with those who, as covenant-breakers, seek to set their own goal, their own standard in life. It is a battle, carried on at every sector of the front. There is not a square inch of undisputed ground between them, and consequently there can be no science as such (*wetenschap*), no philosophy as such (*philosophie*) and no theology as such (*theologie*).

Accordingly, the Reformed believer does not “prove” to the unbeliever his belief in Christ as speaking with absolute authority to be “in accordance with fact,” as the unbeliever understands it; nor “prove” his position to be in accord with “logic,” as the unbeliever understands it; nor “prove” his position to be “in accord with experience,” as the unbeliever understands it.

Rather, he openly accepts his totality view on the authority of God through Christ in Scripture speaking to him. After having done so, he will only then place himself for the sake of the argument, upon the position of his “friend” the unbeliever, whom he is seeking to win over to his Christ. He will show his unbelieving friend that, unless one takes his totality view on the authority of Christ speaking in Scripture, there is no meaning to “logic,” to “fact” and, basic to them, to “experience!”

Berkouwer has not put the matter in quite this way. Yet, he does, unhesitatingly, presuppose the Scriptures to be the finished revelation of God, setting forth in finished form the significance of the finished work of Christ in His crucifixion and Resurrection.

Let it be said that Berkouwer is, throughout his book, pointing out the impossibility of a synthesis between a position like that of Kuyper or Bavinck, i.e., that of Assen (1926), with a position such as Herrmann’s. For Herrmann, as for De la Saussaye and Scholten, the truth is “ethical,” in the Socratic sense of the term. As a Christian theologian, Herrmann listens to the voice of God, but only in so far as God can make plain to him that what he says and does is in accordance with “truth” and “morality” to the extent that he has, before even having met God, established the nature of these.

This posits, according to Berkouwer, the problem of Scripture-criticism. And he who seeks to “solve” this problem, specifically in the manner in which Herrmann does, will end with chaos. Herrmann’s position, as the reader knows, resembles that of Ritschl before him, the latter obviously having been constructed on the principles of Kant’s freedom-nature philosophical scheme.

The problem of Scripture criticism is found in the fact that those who profess commitment to Christ reinterpret Christ actually in terms of their more basic commitment to Socrates. The resulting reinterpretation is, inherently, a misinterpretation.

Berkouwer points out that, for all the differences among the various forms which this synthesis between Socrates and Christ may take, they always lead to the same “misinterpretation” of the claims of Christ in terms of those of Socrates, and thus the result is likewise always the same: internal confusion. Scripture criticism, says Berkouwer, is not, in the last analysis, a matter of details. Rather, it is one of “approach and method with far-reaching

consequences.”¹¹¹ ⁹ The basic question is whether Scripture criticism and Christianity are actually compatible.¹¹² ¹⁰ The answer is negative. Historical criticism, as it is carried on in modern times, makes Scripture itself indeed problematic.¹¹³ ¹¹ A believer must, of course, begin with a strictly non-problematic Scripture.

Wherever Scripture criticism is accepted in principle, the place of Scripture must be determined “historically”; and when historical research is taken as the final arbiter, the inevitable result will be relativism.¹¹⁴ ¹²

He who does not resist the claims of Scripture criticism at the very outset will never escape from it.

B. Berkouwer Rejects Neo-Orthodoxy

After having dealt with Herrmann and several other of the older liberals, Berkouwer proceeds to discussion of the neo-orthodox theologians. These, of course, rejected the older liberal position as having done injustice to the idea of the primacy of God's revelation, and desired instead to begin with revelation.

At first hearing, this sounds as though they meant in all sincerity to return to a position similar to that of the Reformed confessions. In reality, however, the "theologians of the Word," as the neo-orthodox are called, do not put the Word in its rightful place of absolute primacy at all.

One may see this readily in the case of Emil Brunner. First, Brunner accepts the principle of Scripture criticism, then he seeks to set limits to its operations.¹¹⁵

¹³ But, of course, Scripture criticism will accept no such restrictions. "Give it an inch and it will take a mile."

As for Karl Barth, although he makes somewhat stronger claims for the primacy of revelation than does Brunner, this does not deter him from accepting Scripture criticism as well. Barth, too, constructs a synthesis between the two, but it suffers from the same internal weakness as those syntheses of the older liberal theologians. He desires, it is true, not to reduce the narratives of Scripture to myths, for the concept of a myth, he says, destroys that of history altogether, and we must at all cost think of history as being history between God and man (*Geschichte zwischen Gott und Menschen*).¹¹⁶¹⁴

Yet, according to Barth, this is at any event, not history in the ordinary sense of the term. History between God and man is, to be sure, of a very special kind: we may speak of it as "saga" or "legend."¹¹⁷¹⁵

Now, what are we to think of Barth's view? Berkouwer's answer is unequivocal. "It leads," he says, "to a dualism which tears historical revelation apart."¹¹⁸¹⁶ For years, Barth concerned himself with the question of the relationship of revelation to history, and was never able to overcome the dualism in his view on this question. "He is still caught in the confusion between the idea of historical revelation and the knowability of this revelation from the point of view of unbelieving neutrality."¹¹⁹¹⁷ Barth does not reject the principle of "unbelieving, neutral criticism in its presuppositions ..." Only when it leads to the extreme of reducing revelation to myth does he call a halt.¹²⁰¹⁸ He thus does not start with Scripture and ask of it what it thinks of the idea of saga and legend, but is concerned merely with the possibility and reality of the *Geschichte Gottes mir dem Menschen*.¹²¹¹⁹ Herewith, Barth has in fact severed the tie between history and revelation and paved the way for the acceptance, as saga and legend of everything that a neutral science might find difficult or impossible to fit into

its notion of the historical continuum.¹²² ²⁰ In accordance with his method, Barth discovers no justification for rejecting the notion of myth. But why, indeed, would anyone working from a “neutral scientific basis” heed Barth’s arbitrary command to stop before reaching the point of myth?¹²³ ²¹

Summing up what he has so far said, Berkouwer speaks of an internal struggle which develops when men begin by handing over the Bible to the principle of Scripture criticism, and afterward seek to save the content of the Christian faith on the basis of divine revelation.”¹²⁴ ²² “When one first yields to the principle of Scripture criticism and allows it to have its way with the Holy Scriptures, which are the only source of the knowledge of faith, one cannot then expect faith ever to fulfill any leading function in criticism. In this way, one becomes the victim of a vicious circle which is seen operating everywhere within Scripture-critical thinking.”¹²⁵ ²³

C. Scriptural Criticism Involves Relativism

Berkouwer goes on to inquire as to the various ways in which theologians who, having accepted Scripture criticism, seek to avoid the relativising of divine revelation involved in it. There are, in particular, three ways by which men have sought to accept Scripture criticism and yet escape the relativising of Christian revelation.

(1) “*The Escape of Experience*”

J. H. Gunning, the ethical theologian, sought this escape by an appeal to experience. Even if men should attack the resurrection of Christ, so Gunning argued against Kuyper, our experience could withstand this attack.

Berkouwer replies that this answer assumes the intelligibility of experience independently of Scripture and that it makes this experience the final criterion of certainty with respect to all manner of facts of the past.¹²⁶ 24

(2) “*The Escape of the Kerygma*”

Berkouwer discusses a second type of false method for escaping from relativism, that initiated by Martin Kahler’s famous work, *Der sogenannte historische Jesus und der geschichtliche biblische Christus*.¹²⁷ 25 Paul Althaus also attempts this escape.

Kahler, namely, considered the effort to construct a life of Jesus from the gospels as historical documents to be tantamount to running up a dead end street.¹²⁸ 26 But, no harm, the New Testament documents were not really given to us as historical sources for any “life of Jesus,” but rather, they constitute a testimony of faith (*geloofsgetuigenis*).¹²⁹ 27

Thus, only if we take the gospels to be actually such a testimony, are we able to escape the uncertainties of historical research.¹³⁰ 28

But, asks Berkouwer, what then is the relationship between the faith of the congregation (the apostles) and the revelation of God? “Did the faith of the first witnesses receive and interpret the revelation with complete trustworthiness? If the New Testament consists in the main of a faith interpretation type of revelation, what guarantee might we then have that such interpretation is true?”¹³¹ 29

According to Althaus, Scripture criticism presents no source of danger for a faith which lives, not by historical sources, but by kerygma.¹³² 30

The position of Emil Brunner is similar to that of Althaus, since both men were largely influenced by Kahler.¹³³ 31 The image of Christ, says Brunner is a portrait, not a photograph. It is “not historical material, but *kerygma*.”¹³⁴ 32 Thus, “the solution of Althaus, Kahler, Brunner, and many others is an escape that

leads to the same impasse.”¹³⁵ 33

(3) The Escape of Paradox

The notion of paradox, the third “escape,” though similar to that of *kerygma*, according to Berkouwer, requires separate discussion. “If faith in the New Testament comes into contact, not with an historical source, but with a witness of faith (e.g., the book of Revelation), then it will be necessary—apart from the question of the relationship between *kerygma* and history—to ask questions concerning the nature of this witness.”¹³⁶ 34

The nature of this witness, then, has something of “a dualism between the Scriptures as a human document and the actual word of God”¹³⁷ 35, involving very clearly the idea that Scripture criticism is not an enemy, but a friend of revelation. In fact, the idea of revelation then requires as a supplement the notion of Scripture criticism.¹³⁸ 36

Thus it appears that, for all its pretense of calling men back to the Word of God, the theology of paradox has not been able to lift the ban that has, for so long, rested upon theology. In fact, paradox theology continues here in the same path as old liberalism. It reacts against liberalism along nearly the entire line of theological thinking except here, “where it was especially needed.”¹³⁹ 37

Looking, then, at these three attempts to escape from the destructive results of Scripture criticism, namely experience, *kerygma*, and a paradox respectively, we see that they have centered about the “Christ witness” (*Christus getuigenis*). Every other problem not directly related to this *Christus getuigenis* thus has received less and less attention. But such a reduction cannot possibly be allowed (*is volstrekt ongeoorloofd*).¹⁴⁰ 38

Moreover, the various distinctions between “moderate, radical, legitimate and illegitimate, believing and unbelieving criticism” cannot solve the problems that appear, once the principle of Scripture criticism is granted. All these distinctions only strengthen the conviction that the problem of Scripture criticism is not a matter of many unrelated questions. Rather, there is but one problem, that of Scripture criticism itself, and it appears for what it is only in the light of the “non-problematic authority of Scripture.”¹⁴¹ 39

(4) The Doctrine of Beginnings

We must now pass in quick review a few of the many points Berkouwer discusses in the further pages of his book.

One of basic importance is the question of the fall of man. “For those who do not believe in the revelation of God, Genesis 3 is one document from ancient times which we must investigate according to the method of wholly unprejudiced research.”

There are, however, as we have noted, others who do both confess the Christian faith and commit themselves to Scripture criticism. They thus accept “the fact of the fall,” but as to its actual meaning, they would fain distinguish “between form and content, between the kernel and the husk,” of the Genesis narrative.¹⁴² 40 Its value is religious and moral, not scientific.”

Berkouwer dismisses this view by saying that nowhere in Scripture do we find a dualism between the religious and the historical. “The religious relationship of man to his Creator is specifically revealed together with the creative act of God at the beginning of history.”¹⁴³ 41 “All the data of Genesis 2 and 3 are of such integral significance for determining the nature of sin that it must be considered impossible to dismiss the historical narratives and, having done that, to turn nevertheless to Genesis 3 for instruction on the nature of sin ...”¹⁴⁴ 42

If the principle of Scripture criticism be consistently applied, the conclusion must always follow that the paradise narrative sheds no light whatsoever on the question of the origin of sin.¹⁴⁵ 43

In this connection, Berkouwer makes mention of Emil Brunner’s views of the Genesis account. The reader will recall that Brunner virtually accepted the Kantian distinction between the worlds of the noumenal and the phenomenal, and a dimensional view of reality based upon it. Accordingly, the realm of the “noumenal” was, for Brunner, the world of free, i.e., ethical relationships, while that of the “phenomenal” was for him the world of non-personal, scientific correspondences. If, then, we think of the Genesis narrative as speaking of man’s disobedience to God, we reduce man and his ethical decisions to a matter of impersonal physical and biological laws. By having done this sort of thing, Brunner contended, orthodoxy destroyed the true nature of Christianity.

Berkouwer does not, in this connection, speak of this broader background of Brunner’s rejection of the historicity of the Genesis account, but he does presuppose it in what he says of Brunner. Thus, Brunner was unable to find words strong enough to express his dislike of the doctrine.¹⁴⁶ 44

Finally, Scripture criticism, says Berkouwer, has no eye for the unity and harmony of Scripture.¹⁴⁷ 45

(5) The Doctrine of Last Things

Scripture criticism is as destructive of a truly biblical doctrine of last things as well as of a truly biblical doctrine of first things. These two points naturally go together. In fact, it is the one system of dimensional philosophy that leads to the reinterpretation of first things, middle things, and last things.

Recent philosophers of history are unwilling even to consider the words of

Jesus and, therefore, at face value, his prediction with respect to the future. We have earlier noted that, according to Robert Collingwood, it is the historical consciousness that must determine, if not what Jesus said, then at least what he must have meant by whatever he might have said.

In his discourse on eschatology, Berkouwer again turns to Althaus, whose work on *The Last Things (Die Letzten Dinge)* is typical of much recent eschatology. Althaus has denied the possibility of any directly discernible incident of God's revelation in history. It was, he said, hidden in history.^{148 46} Therefore, revelation concerning last things was not information relating to events which will take place in future time. "The end (*Vollendung*) of history does not belong to history any more than does its beginning (*Urstand*)."^{149 47} It thus appears that, for Althaus, Scripture was not the source, but merely the background of his teaching.^{150 48}

It is easy to understand why Althaus and others, from their peculiar point of view, rejected what they called "Biblicism." "When men today speak of a Biblicistic eschatology, they refer to any view which seeks to build up its eschatology after the manner of a reproduction and systematising of Scriptural content."^{151 49}

(6) Scripture-Criticism and Roman Catholicism

Of Berkouwer's lengthy discussion of Roman Catholicism we mention one point only.

Berkouwer points out that Roman Catholics make a formal commitment to the infallibility of Scripture. Upon this presupposition, Reformed believers might, at first fling, imagine that they have in Romanism an ally against modern subjectivism in general and Scripture criticism in particular. Rome even speaks of the inerrancy of Scripture.

Unfortunately, it is the meaning of words, not merely the sound, that counts. What then, is the exact purport of such words as "infallibility" and "inerrancy," as used by Catholics? When we ask this question, we soon discover that Rome is really quite unwilling to begin its interpretation of life with Scripture, making its thought captive to any obeisance to what it says. Like modern Protestantism, Romanism works with the idea of autonomous science. Besides this, there exists always the Mother Church's claiming the final right of determining what the teachings of Scripture must mean.^{152 50}

If the authority of Scripture, in the full Reformation sense of the term, is no longer placed in the foreground, the attitude toward Scripture criticism will suffer accordingly, for then, the Scripture will no longer be taken as the "deepest foundation of faith."^{153 51} "Precisely in the confession of the authority of

Scripture lies the only possibility of perspective in every struggle.”¹⁵⁴ ⁵² But, those who thus submit to Scripture as its own ultimate authority must inevitably be prepared for the scorn of those who have accepted the principle of Scripture criticism.

D. Ecclesiastical Developments

What has been said up to this point has prepared us for an understanding of the ecclesiastical developments spoken of in the previous chapter. Berkouwer himself considered the same discussion of old Liberalism, neo-orthodoxy, and Roman Catholicism to be indispensable for an understanding of the ecclesiastical struggle concerning Scripture within the *Reformed Churches of the Netherlands*.

The leaders of these churches were, we may safely assume, well acquainted with the various attempts which had been made to harmonize the Reformed view of the Scriptures with the post-Kantian dimensional scheme of reality and the principle of Scripture criticism posited upon it.

Berkouwer begins his review of the struggle in the Netherlands by recalling the positions of Kuyper and Bavinck. For them, “the authority of Scripture was absolute because it was divine.”¹⁵⁵ ⁵³ Accordingly, the argument was not merely an intellectual one; it was basically ethical or existential, that is to say, that the natural man who takes offence at the cross of Christ should also take offence, instinctively, at the Scripture.¹⁵⁶ ⁵⁴ The reader will note again that when the “ethical theologians” insisted that truth was “ethical,” they virtually meant the same as Socrates, when he said he would desire to understand the nature of holiness regardless of what gods or men had previously said about it. Bavinck’s notion that truth as ethical is that truth is truth because God speaking through Christ in Scripture says it is true. This is the opposite of what Socrates meant.

Roman Catholicism tried to synthesize Socrates and Christ, and modern Protestant liberalism and neo-orthodoxy have attempted exactly the same. But every effort at making a synthesis between Socrates and Christ is, whereas in the main always an insult to Christ, thereafter ultimately and inevitably self-refuting as well.

Would the leaders of the Reformed Churches now be inveigled into this effort to combine the Reformed Faith and Scripture criticism?

There was, as noted, only one way to escape the folly of such an effort, i.e., to begin with the notion of Scripture’s unproblematic nature, submitting one’s every thought to the obedience of Christ speaking therein. This always involves, of course, an internal struggle for the believer; yet the believer is not, in the full and true sense of the word, if he is unwilling to do this.¹⁵⁷ ⁵⁵

Does this position of submission to the absolute authority of Scripture require of the believer a sacrifice of his intellect? It does not; on the contrary, the believer who accepts Christ and his word on the basis of simple authority will discover afterwards that only on the presupposition of such authority does human predication take on any significance whatsoever. As noted earlier, the

Reformed believer does not offer his view as being more in accord with logic than are other views. He begins by acknowledging to himself that all things presuppose the mystery of the self-interpreting triune God of Scripture, and the mystery of his counsel-by-which back of the works of creation and providence.

The Reformed believer is not terrified when told he cannot “prove” the providence of God inasmuch as he cannot define the disproving of it.^{158 56} Hoogland’s argument presupposes that the Socratic position is correct in its requirements, and that predication can and does have its beginning, and continues to operate in, a bottomless and shoreless ocean of pure possibility. God, according to this view, does not support possibility, but rather, possibility supports God.

Mr. Hoogland believes that, by his methodology, he makes room for faith. But the faith he makes room for is virtually the same as Kant’s: faith in a God of whom nothing can be said by man because he has said nothing to man.

It is a point of basic importance. We may, with Berkouwer, speak of the “unproblematic” character of Scripture, its absolute authority, and, in particular, its “mystery,” only when, at the same time, we join with Paul in speaking of the God who by his counsel brings everything to pass. In the first chapter of this work, we have seen that Scholten reinterpreted both the “formal” and the “material” principles of the Reformed Confessions, having done so because he wanted to serve Socrates as well as Christ in his belief that he might win men to Christ if he permitted them, while worshipping Christ, to continue worshipping Socrates also.

Over against this attempt at synthesis, Kuyper asserted his principle of absolute antithesis between the natural man and the redeemed man. Gladly conceding that the natural man discovers “truth” and may appear to lead a “good” life, he does this, Kuyper said, not through the correctness of his basic principle, but in spite of its incorrectness. The redeemed man’s principle alone is correct.

This position, stated by Kuyper and followed out by Bavinck, was defended by Berkouwer in his early book on Scripture.

Fully aware of what was being said by those who used Scripture criticism, Kuyper and Bavinck spoke freely of “the mystery of Holy Scripture.”^{159 57} Now, this mystery is not that expressed by modern Kantian philosophy; nor is it that which is involved in the idea of pure contingency and abstract possibility. Rather, it is the mystery that obtains for any believer who had presupposed the self-contained triune God of Scripture as the source of all possibility of human predication. Neither is it the mystery of the modern existentialist who opens his

eyes in wonderment and asks why anything exists rather than nothing at all. Indeed, no man can intelligently ask this question, since it presupposes that an entity emerging from pure contingency might itself somehow be other than pure contingency.

The traditional Aquinas-Butler apologetic has committed the basic error of assuming that the man, operating on the principles of (a) human autonomy, (b) pure contingency, and (c) abstract rationality can and does have the ability to interpret at least some part of human experience. By contrast, the “isolation” of the Reformed view of Scripture of which Berkouwer speaks is, rather, based upon the presupposition that the sovereign of the universe speaks to the men in it. Says Berkouwer: “The question of Scripture faith is not one of an *a posteriori* assertion of empirical infallibility, but of an actual Scripture faith, of the binding and therefore liberating power of the Word of God.”¹⁶⁰ 58

We have noted earlier that the Protestant and, more specifically, the Reformed view of both the formal and the material principles of Scripture are accused of determinism. For example, if God controls whatsoever comes to pass, then naturally what he says to man is true simply because he says it. Pure determinism and blind authoritarianism are, we are told, like the convex and concave sides of the same disc. How is it possible therefore, on such a basis, to do justice to human responsibility and the “human” factor in Scripture? Does not then belief in Scripture become belief in this red or that black book, regardless of its contents? Are not Calvinists inconsistent, being both deterministic and indeterministic, rationalistic and irrationalistic? Surely, if Calvinists were consistent, their faith would be identical in nature with that of the Mohammedan.

In reply, Kuyper and Bavinck, following Calvin, Augustine, and Paul, would say: “Who art thou, that repliest against God? On what do you stand when you deny the sovereign, triune God of Scripture? You stand in a vacuum. Or rather, you do not stand in a vacuum, since you do not exist at all! If the triune God whom you insult by challenging his absolute authority and unrestricted sovereignty did not hold you in his hand, you could not even be the covenant-breaker you are.” Thus, the possibility of denying the triune God of Scripture in reality presupposes affirming him.

The “human factor” in Scripture, and man’s responsibility in action, are what they are precisely because God is the sovereign, triune God of Scripture, being what he is and doing what he does. It is on this basis alone that we may speak significantly of an organic, as over against a mechanical, view of Scripture.

But, of course, those who searched for an organic union between Christ and Socrates claimed that they, rather than Kuyper or Bavinck, were doing justice to the human factor in Scripture, as also to responsibility in ethics.

Dr. Berkouwer also treats several men who sought to uphold a modicum of human autonomy for man under cover of the idea of organic inspiration.

(1) J. B. Netelenbos

According to Rev. J. B. Netelenbos, the idea of organic inspiration involves the necessity of making a distinction between the “truth of God in its essence and in its external expression; between the truth which God has revealed, and the images and forms in which the writers of Scripture have expressed this truth. Of course, God did not inspire those images: they were merely “clothing” connected with the peculiar personality of the prophet, the milieu in which he lived, etc. Thus, this clothing (*inkleeding*) of the thoughts of God was entirely Oriental. “I accept the facts of Genesis 2 and 3, i.e., that there has been a fall through temptation, and that sin has come into mankind from the world of devils; but we are told of this fact in Oriental clothing, i.e., in mythical form.”¹⁶¹ 59

Dr. Berkouwer then adjoins: “Over against this, the committee (of the General Synod of Leeuwarden in 1920) posited that, according to the Reformed view, ‘not just the thoughts, but also the words, not merely the content, but also the form, are inspired of God,’ and adds: Netelenbos had an erroneous notion of organic inspiration.”¹⁶² 60

In line with this false view of organic inspiration, however, Netelenbos moreover entertained a false distinction between believing and unbelieving criticism.

Apparently, both his notions of organic inspiration and believing criticism sprang from some form of Kantian dimensionalism. Cannot one consistently be a believer in the “God” of Kant’s noumenal realm, while yet operating critically in Kant’s phenomenal realm? On such a basis, will not belief and criticism be two complementary aspects of single act of understanding (*Verstehen*)?

The committee replied that “so-called historical criticism must always be rejected”¹⁶³ 61, and “one must be free from all such motives as do not conform with the authority of Scripture.”¹⁶⁴ 62

(2) J. G. Geelkerken—*The Synod of Assen*

We come now to the synod of Assen (1926), and the person of Dr. J. G. Geelkerken. Dr. Geelkerken openly asserted the authority of Scripture over against both the modernists and the “ethicals.” Yet he, too, like Netelenbos, sought for a synthesis between Scripture criticism and Scripture faith.

He desired “organic freedom” in his interpretation of Scripture.¹⁶⁵ 63 He knew that the followers of Kuyper and Bavinck spoke of an organic view of Scripture inspiration, yet, as could be seen from their literalistic interpretation of Genesis 3, their view was obviously still quite mechanical.¹⁶⁶ 64 If one had truly the

correct view of organic inspiration, it would become evident that the concept of history as used by Scripture was quite different from “history in the ordinary sense of the term.”¹⁶⁷ ⁶⁵ The appreciation of the nature of this difference between two types of history both involved, and was involved in, a likewise proper evaluation of modern scientific discoveries.¹⁶⁸ ⁶⁶ One could then do justice to, and appreciate the light that comes from, a study of the ancient Eastern world with respect to “original” history (*oer geschiedenis*) as contained in Genesis 1–10.¹⁶⁹ ⁶⁷

We have here, says Berkouwer, a view of Scripture similar to that of Romanism. Geelkerken, as well as Romanism, has accepted the authority of the whole of Scripture; yet, for the proper understanding of its meaning, appeal has to be made to science.¹⁷⁰ ⁶⁸

In its reply to Dr. Geelkerken, the Synod of Assen agreed that “believing science” could and ought to help in the better understanding of Scripture, but such a science should derive its basic principles at the very start from Scripture. Naturally, this would exclude the possibility that scientific results that could be conceived as originating independently of Scripture would justify one’s departing from the literal sense of certain passages.¹⁷¹ ⁶⁹ Dr. Geelkerken himself rejected “unbelieving,” or “neutral” science, but his use of the word remained, in effect, really inconsistent with this rejection.

And, what is the nature of that “light from the ancient East” of which Geelkerken speaks? He has never given, and perhaps cannot give, an answer to this question. The ancient East must be interpreted in the light of Scripture, rather than the reverse. His method distinctly implies the priority of scientific results with regard to Holy Writ. It confuses the proper relationship of Scripture authority to science, and is in conflict with the nature of that authority.”¹⁷² ⁷⁰

(3) J. G. Ubbink

A third man who has augmented the manoeuvres by which Reformed men seek synthesis between Scripture faith and Scripture criticism is Dr. J. G. Ubbink.

In the Scriptures, said Dr. Ubbink, we come in contact with the “highest reality,” i.e., God.¹⁷³ ⁷¹ Yet, the idea of scriptural inspiration does not exactly comport with our experience of God. Why the wish to use a little, merely earthly lamp to supplement the light of the sun?¹⁷⁴ ⁷² The Reformers, advised Ubbink, did no such thing. “They concentrated their attention rather, on Scripture’s inner content, i.e., the Word of God.”¹⁷⁵ ⁷³ Following them, we ourselves must distinguish between the Word of God and Scripture: the former deals with the “voice of God, the divine reality, which is naturally to be distinguished from

what we have in our hands when we handle Scripture.”¹⁷⁶ 74 “In short, the Word of God is infallible, but Scripture is not.”¹⁷⁷ 75 It is, rather, “the fallible proclamation of the authentic Word of God,”¹⁷⁸ 76 which manifests its power through, but also in spite of, Scripture. There is thus a hiddenness about revelation, i.e., never a direct identification of the Word of God with the writ of God.¹⁷⁹ 77

Ubbink described his position as “ontological realism.” By means of it, he sought to overcome subjectivism. But, says Berkouwer, Ubbink is merely a change of position within subjectivism.¹⁸⁰ 78

What has been the outcome of the three conflicts discussed? For the churches, it was that they learned to see some of the many fashions in which men have tried to combine Scripture faith and Scripture criticism, and the result has been always something which they cannot accept. “[They] ... have thus refused admittance to every form of Scripture criticism ...”¹⁸¹ 79 “Therewith they have, in principle, rejected the development of Protestantism, especially ... its latest phase.”¹⁸² 80

(4) The Distinctively Reformed View of Scripture

Berkouwer then deals, in a long chapter, with the ways in which Reformed theology ought to express and develop its distinctive view of Scripture.¹⁸³ 81

He treats of such problems as Scripture translation, textual criticism, organic inspiration, accommodation, the biblical world image, the scriptural manner of writing history, the “servant form” of Scripture, revelation and offence, inadequate revelation, the divine and human factor, etc.

At every point, Berkouwer discovers a basic contrast between the Reformed position and that of one or the other of modern theologians. Take, e.g., Kuyper’s point about the “servant form,” and Barth’s own idea of the *Wortmachligkeit* of Scripture. Here might appear to be a similarity between them; yet, they are poles apart. Barth compresses revelation into an *a priori* structure of thought, whereas Kuyper does not.¹⁸⁴ 82 But Kuyper allows his contemplation of revelation to be controlled by the written Word, and Barth doesn’t.¹⁸⁵ 83 For Kuyper, it is inconceivable that his reflections on revelation *pro mensura humana* should develop into an *a priori* theory of knowledge, to be stretched out to the farthest extremities of the dialectical scheme of revelation and “hiddenness,” as found in Barth.¹⁸⁶ 84

In the various subjects discussed in his chapter on the distinctiveness, or “isolation,” of the Reformed view of Scripture, Berkouwer has signaled for us a number of concrete instances of the one “danger” that always surrounds those who hold it: namely, that the threat of synthesis is always nigh.¹⁸⁷ 85 Berkouwer

recalls Bavinck's warning to the effect that the problem of Scripture criticism is not merely intellectual, but also ethical. The natural man takes offence at "the Christ of the Scripture" and "the Scripture of Christ." Often, Scripture criticism surrounds itself with a halo of religious devotion, claiming to hold to a genuine theonomy as over against the philosophically constructed heteronomy of orthodox believers.¹⁸⁸ ⁸⁶

Yet, underneath all Scripture criticism lies forever the danger of human autonomy.¹⁸⁹ ⁸⁷ Satan also tempted Jesus once by a would-be pious appeal to Scripture. In his reply, Jesus significantly did not appeal to some supposedly authentic "Word of God" behind the written words of Scripture. Rather, he opposed Satan's false exegesis with a true one. "Thus does there arise between Christ and the tempter the mighty wall of God's Word. After this holy appeal, this bowing under the theonomy of Scripture, Satan departed and, lo, the angels came and served him. Now, the Son of man could enter upon His full official task to bless the whole of life with His grace and power."¹⁹⁰ ⁸⁸ With these words, Berkouwer closes his remarkable book, and we also conclude our all too sketchy summary of it.

2. Berkouwer's Later View of Scripture

In his second work on Scripture (*Holy Scripture 1*, 1966 and *Holy Scripture 2*, 1967), there is no longer, for Berkouwer, such a thing as a distinctively Reformed view of it.

On the contrary, the entire tenor of his thinking has changed since his first book on Scripture, with the change ascribable to his acceptance of what he calls a “personalist,” rather than “determinist,” view of God’s revelation to man.

First, a word must be said about how, according to Berkouwer, this new view promotes a more proper view of Scripture.

A. The “Causal Categories” Of the Synod of Dordt

We begin by noting briefly Berkouwer’s reinterpretation of the canons of Dordt in terms of his newly-discovered “personalistic” framework. He writes of this in an article on “Questions Pertaining to the Confession” (“*Vragen Rondom de Belydenis*”) in *Gereformeerde Theologisch Tydschrift*.^{191 89}

The canons of Dordt stress the sovereignty of God. Would they had restricted themselves, muses Berkouwer, to stressing only the sovereignty of God’s grace! Unfortunately, as things stand, they have long presented us with an “objective distinction,” to the effect that God has, in time, given faith to some men and withheld it from others. The sixth section of the first canon, accordingly, does not offer a doctrine which is drawn directly from Scripture. Contrarily, it even draws a conclusion connected with a certain vision of God as having “caused all things.” It is no wonder that men have therefore charged Dordt with holding to a determinist view of reality and, in particular, the idea that the very unbelief of men has had behind it the all-causing God!

To be sure, the canons do deny that God is the “cause” of man’s sin. But then, how might we at one and the same time speak of God as the “all-causing” and yet as not having been the cause of human sin? In short, how shall we, who hold to the basic intent of the canons, defend ourselves against the charge of holding to a fiat contradiction, or determinism?

Berkouwer now proposes to solve the “problem” by rejecting the entire causal framework employed by Dordt, and substituting for it a new one which would do justice to the doxological “intent” of the canons. Look for a moment at section 16, article 1 of the Canons. Here, the “static objectivising of two closed groups of men is crossbred with a kerygmatic-pastoral testimony in an open situation full of responsibility, in which much, yea anything, may happen ... in connection with God’s judgment.”

Once we have reached this plateau of pure openness, do we not breathe more easily? Are we not, then, no longer stifled with causal categories, the accusations of contradiction and determinism no longer assailing us? Now, for the first time, we can truly present the sovereignty of grace, but, even so, we must not look down in disdain on those who still grovel in the realm of causal relations since we, too, have been tempted to fall into what seems to be a “logical conclusion” with respect to the reprobate, and have failed to think in terms of the “biblical *a priori*,” substituting for it our own fatal *a priori* of parallelism.

Indeed, we must not think in terms of logical symmetry and parallelism. Such parallelism has behind it, after all, the idea of “the mere good-pleasure of God’s

will,” the notion of “*potentia absoluta*.”

Surely, is it not wrong that men should take offence at the gospel in their rejecting the idea of someone’s “mere good pleasure” as the ultimate source of discrimination among men?

Let us not, therefore, preach such an arbitrarily electing God. Our message must be rather that of the living God who “elects not according to works, but according to grace.”

B. The “Staticism” Of the Chalcedon Creed

Another respect in which the transformation from the traditional to the modern activist pattern of thought appears is indicated by what Berkouwer chooses to say concerning the Chalcedon Creed. We must not, it seems, call a halt at Chalcedon. When Barth declared that he had actualized Chalcedon, a question was appropriate as to whether in doing so Barth had not liberated us from a static Christology. Has Barth, indeed, perhaps helped us rid ourselves of our “objective,” our “causal,” our “static” categories, and enabled us to see the authentic doxological nature of all true confession?

In 1936, Berkouwer had professed that Barth offered a merely “formal sovereignty” of God. More recently, however, it is the orthodox view, that of Kuyper and Bavinck, which is supposed to be formal and static.

It is his new activist approach to theology in general that Berkouwer applies specifically to the question of Scripture.

C. The Problem of Scripture and Scripture Criticism

The problem of Scripture and Scripture criticism is believed to be more complicated than it was before 1938. For example, the variation occurring within Scripture is considered much greater than was formerly thought. Realizing this, the church now imagines that it ought not to seek to establish the idea of a finished canon on objective historical ground in isolation from the faith of the church. Far more preferably, the recognition of the canon ought to be the act of listening to the witness which is heard, without being able or intent to give a historical or rational justification of it. In reality, it should not have been the purpose of the Reformation to start unhistorically from the idea of *sola scriptura*, in order thus to isolate the church from its history and its work of confessing.

We must not, today, speak of the question of the authority of Scripture as though it were a matter of “timeless contemplation.” We must rather do so as being ready to give an answer to all those who require one for believing as they do, and it must be furnished with good conscience in the face of all the questions which have sprung up in modern times. In our day, we must not merely insist that Scripture is inspired, but be able as well to give an account of the nature of its inspiration; we must not set aside all “historic insight” from the point of view of a “timeless correlation between Scripture and faith,” nor minimize the “human factor” of Scripture in the interest of maintaining a rightful place for the “divine factor.” Fundamentalism may even serve as a warning signal at this point, for it “obscured the contexts in which God himself has given Scripture to us,” the result having been a mere “negative apologetic.” And Bavinck has already warned us against thinking of Scripture as a “code-book of articles.”

Thus does Berkouwer reject what he calls “the causal approach to Scripture,” as he now rejects likewise the “causal” pattern of Dordt. The former, together with the causal view of election, etc., have, he says, often led us into a “metaphysical problematic,” whereby one is concerned with the problem of the “union” of the divine and the human factor in inspiration, which then becomes an example, among others, of the general action of God in relation to man. One is then caught in a “competition-problematics,” giving the impression of seeking to penetrate the relation between God and man, and being able to proceed no further with this than did Thomas Aquinas when he discussed the general problem of how divine and human activity may perform conjointly.

Even the use of the phrase “organic inspiration” does not, *ipso facto*, escape the Thomistic problematic: one may thereby still fall into a “metaphysical

explanation of inspiration,” being unable to escape the charge that human agents were mere amanuenses in the hand of a divine writer. As long as the idea of human instrumentality is handled “formally,” and one uses the notion of a “first and second cause” to explain how the divine Author of Scripture took human authors into his service, one will never have the true scriptural view of inspiration.

The scriptural perspective is thus not one of causation, but of “witness”: only thus can we escape our isolation. Roman Catholics are beginning to see the need of replacing the causation idea with that of witness, and in America the Presbyterian Churches have also caught on to it in their *Confession of 1967*. Professor E. P. Clowney of Westminster Theological Seminary, however, still controlled by a formal causality pattern of thinking, quite unfairly, it is said, charges this Confession with unfaithfulness to Christ.

In his earlier work on Barth, Berkouwer called special attention to the fact that when Barth says the Bible is the Word of God, the copulative “is” must be interpreted in the context of his activist theology as a whole, which is destructive of the Reformation view of Scripture.

In his second work on Scripture, however, Berkouwer has operated with that very activist theme of thought which he earlier signalized as being destructive of the faith.

It is of importance, too, to note that Berkouwer’s more recent activist view of Scripture parallels his activist view of election. According to Barth, grace is both sovereign and universal, being so because men are men only by virtue of the fact that they participate in this so-called “Christ-Event.” Thus Berkouwer himself now apparently functions within this “Christ-Event” framework of thought in the interest of escaping from the causal determinism of the statement of Dordt. If only we would fill our spirits, he opines, with the doxological nature of our confession of the sovereign grace of God, then we would succeed in dropping the eternity-time antithesis as we have already dropped the idea of an all-causing God. To achieve this, we must begin with Christ and his determining work in history, and then, having seen the true significance of the work of Christ, we will have, with Paul, simultaneously given up an “isolated interest in an all-determining counsel of God, upon which decisive significance assigned to history cannot ensue.”

We must no longer think in terms of a static objectivism; of two closed groups of men; of abstract parallelism; of absolute power; of a special *gnosis*; and of a “doctrine” of election. Rather, we must think of the living God and his redeeming work among men.

It appears, then, that Berkouwer has changed his views on what Scholten

spoke of as being both the formal and material principles of Scripture. Berkouwer's principle of interpretation of the Reformed Confessions is now to all intents and purpose as was that of Scholten. The sovereignty of God in revelation (Scripture) and in action (election) is now no longer the unproblematic starting point for him which it was in Berkouwer's earlier days. His all-important principle of the unproblematic nature of Scripture is now replaced by the synthesis motif which it alone formerly could withstand. The very motif that Berkouwer once found so destructive is now considered constructive. The Reformed view of Scripture, formerly thought of as the one and only safeguard against the formalism of Rome, old liberalism, and neo-orthodoxy, is now pictured as the acme of formalism, and any true principle of unity and diversity, formerly found nowhere but in the Reformed view of Scripture, must now be sought for only in a "personalist" view of Scripture similar to that of neo-orthodoxy.

Berkouwer's second work on Scripture consists of two volumes. I have dealt in some detail with the contents of each of these two volumes in a monograph referred to earlier, *The Sovereignty of Grace*. Only a few points of special interest will here be mentioned.

D. Berkouwer's Activist Principle of Interpretation

Berkouwer has discovered a new and better meaning for the word “is” in the famous Reformation statement that Scripture “is” the Word of God (*Sacra Scriptura est Verbum Dei*).^{192 90} It was Karl Barth who actualized the idea of the incarnation, in terms of which he was able to do away with the ideas of God in himself and man in himself and provide for a common history between man and God. The man Jesus is God. There is absolute identification of God with man in Jesus, yet it indirect: God is wholly revealed and, at the same time, wholly hidden in Christ. Accordingly, revelation is exhaustively historical, but history is never directly revelational.

Barth's activist view of Scripture is closely associated with his activist view of the incarnation, the two being, in fact, identical. Accordingly, in Barth's view, the Bible is the Word of God, and the Word of God is God. But again, the identification is indirect. Revelation is Scripture, yet Scripture is never directly revelational.

Thus, Barth's view of the Word of God, viz., of God as the Word speaking to man as indirectly identical with the word of man, and of man, as word, responding to the speech of God, is the theological expression of Kant's philosophy of the primacy of the practical reason.

Kant declared that reality was ultimately contingent or, in Sartre's words, that “existence precedes essence.” Time is ultimate. In the words of Heidegger, “reality temporalizes itself” (*Realitat zeitigt sich*); or, of Alexander, space-time, as ultimate, spouts out deities; or, of Bergson, reality is creative evolution. “Facts” are thus “statistically standardized correlations of existential changes” (Dewey); or, facts are events (Whitehead); or, Jesus Christ is the apex of the one all-inclusive process of cosmic evolution (Teilhard de Chardin).

It seems, however, that if reality is ultimately contingent, then, of course, no man should know anything about anything. Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* would then be a basic *faux pas* (Archbishop Temple). Man could not even identify himself. To do so, he would have to know everything about everything conceptually, meaning, that reality would have to be, as Parmenides required it to be, one eternal changeless being, and that human knowledge would have to be identical with this one eternal block of being.^{193 91}

Prior to Kant, the empiricists (John Locke c.s.) had stressed the principle of pure contingency, while the rationalists (Spinoza c.s.), the principle of pure determinism. The genius of Kant lay in the fact that he correlativized both these notions by showing that reality is for man the act of his own interpretation by

means of the “combined” principle of pure rationalism and determinism as a pure form, conceived as being correlative to the principle of pure irrationalism and indeterminism, i.e., pure contingency.

Of course, the elements of Kant’s “discovery” were already present in ancient philosophy. Parmenides had held that all reality was changeless; Heraclitus, that all reality was flux; and Socrates, that he would admit nothing to be true which did not comport with his principle of man as independent.

Even so, no one in ancient times conceived of man consistently as being able to create, virtually, “ultimate” reality for himself and thus, once and for all, to justify to himself his attitude of autonomy. With Kant, however, man could now be sure that nothing could henceforward be said about God as the creator of man and his world. Man could now be sure that a directly identifiable presence of the Creator-redeemer of Scripture in the space-time universe was impossible. He now knew that the principle of unity of his experience was not to be found in the providence of God, but in his own categorizing activity; that the principle of diversity likewise lay, not in God’s providence, but in pure contingency. Thus, in the idea of pure abstract unity exalted above the creator-creature distinction, thought of as correlative at the outset to one another, and now in turn correlative to the idea of human autonomy, Kant had discovered new weapons with which to justify his covenant-breaking attitude toward God.

In one form or another, theologians since his time have attempted to use his principle of act so as to synthesize Christianity with modern thought.

At the synod of Assen (1926), the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands maintained that no such form of synthesis could be tolerated in its midst. But, in the period of 1926 to 1967, the idea that the Reformed Churches simply had to adopt some form of synthesis of Calvin and Kant gradually became the conviction of many. Dr. Berkouwer is now the gifted leader of this movement. We may well think of him as having undergone an “agonizing reappraisal” in his thinking, between his first and second work on Scripture, not as to suggest for a moment that he has personally rejected the Christ of Kuyper and Bavinck, but only that his second work, as it stands, is unintelligible except it be thought of as a reinterpretation of these men in terms of the activist principle of neo-orthodoxy, which is based on the activist philosophy of Kant.

E. The Unintelligibility of Berkouwer's Activist Principle of Interpretation

It remains only to indicate the unintelligible nature of Berkouwer's activist principle.

Berkouwer's new synthesis approach could and would be intelligible, provided the activist principle of neo-orthodoxy itself were; and the latter would be, provided its model within modern Kantian act philosophy were. But this, as before noted, is not the case. Kant did not save science. To be sure, non-Christian scientists, those who "believe" in Kant's idea of man as autonomous, have discovered scientifically, through research, many actually existing "states of affairs." But they have been successful only because of the alien fact that all things are from, and through, and unto the Christ of Scripture. It is the historic Protestant view of the teleology of history, best expressed in the Reformed Confessions, which alone accounts for science and its progress. Setting forth this truth in his first book on Scripture, Berkouwer there repulsed every effort toward a synthesis of Kant and Christ. But, in his second book on Scripture, he had advocated the very synthesis he repudiated in the first one.

I shall not repeat in detail facts supporting this charge, but rather, classify them briefly under three heads.

Underlying everything which Berkouwer says in *De Heilige Schrift*, 1966, 1967, is the idea that reality is something like what Barth says it is. According to Barth, God is what He is in His act of saving man in Christ, and man is what he is in his act of participation in this saving act of God. God is "inherently," and therefore universally, gracious to man. All men are, to be sure, under the wrath of God because of their sin; but the wrath of God is never His last word toward man. That last word is, rather, grace.

Man, therefore, is what he is as participant in this act of grace of God to him in Christ. Yet, such a view of man is inherently unintelligible and meaningless. The idea of identifying man's being with his participation in the act of God's saving him is really only the modern equivalent of the Greek notion of identifying man with his participation in the changeless being of God. In both cases, mortal man is thought of as being originally identical with God and as, at the same time, eternally outside of any relationship with God.

In this view man is, in principle, wholly omniscient with God, and God is, in principle, wholly ignorant with man.

The modern activist theologian thinks of the Scriptures as being an expression in words of his faith in such a God and such a man. The message of Scripture is that of sovereign-universal grace. Grace is sovereign in terms of pure

contingency. It is universal because pure determinism. It is sovereign-eternal because pure indeterminism and pure determinism are thought of as being correlative to one another. Such is the view of neo-orthodoxy.

Berkouwer's *Heilige Schrift* seems to proceed with a view similar to that of neo-orthodoxy. With the idea of organic inspiration, as over against the idea of mechanical inspiration, Kuyper and Bavinck sought to do justice to the "human factor" in Scripture. But then, they thought of man as being what the Reformed Confessions thought he was. In 1937, Berkouwer shared this view. He defended Assen (1926) against attacks by those who conceive of organic inspiration along post-Kantian activist lines. In 1938, he again defended Assen against both the "light" of the ancient east, and modern science based on the idea of human autonomy. But in 1966–1967, he apparently saw, for the first time, real light in the various sciences, those of history and of nature alike which were based on the idea of man as autonomous. In 1938, his view of organic inspiration had been a genuine bulwark against the attacks of science, falsely so-called. But in 1966–1967, his idea of organic inspiration was used to attack the "formalism" of the faith he once defended, even though in terms of the view of humanity which underlies modern science, philosophy, and theology, man cannot even identify himself.

In 1938, Berkouwer had argued that only by the "view of Assen" could one have a proper idea of the unity of Scripture. The Reformed teleology of history alone offered such a unity. Since 1966–1967, however, the real unity must be found in terms of a teleology history similar to that of Kant's primacy of the Practical Reason; and Berkouwer's more recently adopted principle of unity is similar to that of Barth, namely the idea of sovereign-universal grace. With this as the central message of Scripture, one has great "freedom" with respect to the realm of ordinary history.

But this "freedom" is really only that of Parmenides, who would have destroyed all temporal plurality by absorbing it into his eternal, changeless unity. The activist principle of modern science, philosophy, and theology is, as an unattainable ideal, out of all intelligible contact with the plurality of the space-time world.

Yet, it is this type of unity which Berkouwer now employs in order to point out that the traditional view of providence is itself unintelligible, because it is atomistic and deterministic and therefore makes no allowance for human freedom. It is thus in terms of this Parmenidean-Kantian principle of unity that Berkouwer develops his new exegesis of Romans 9–11, in which numerical distinction between saved and lost men is virtually denied.

Berkouwer's activist principle of diversity is, naturally, correlative to his

activist principle of unity. In 1938, he defended the idea that true human freedom and responsibility can be had only if one holds to the idea of God's counsel as its sole background. Man is free simply because he functions within the counsel of God.

To be sure, man cannot intellectually penetrate the relationship between God's counsel and man's responsibility. Deeply conscious of this fact, Bavinck used to say, "All things end in mystery" (*Omni abeunt in mysterium*).

The "system of doctrine" constructed was thus not a rationalist type of system, patterned after Parmenides; nor was it an analogical type, patterned after Aristotle's notion of the analogy of being. For Roman Catholic theologians, an analogical system is a dialectical interaction between the Parmenidean notion of staticism and the Heraclitean notion of flux, i.e., an intermingling of pure univocism and pure equivocism.

The Reformed "system" was a system constructed by men whose faith was in the God of Scripture, whose providence was and is over all. The Reformed "system" was an "open" system, since it looked for ever-increasing light to break from the pages of the once-for-all finished revelation of God to man through Christ in Scripture.

In Bavinck's view, man's intellectual efforts were to be expended in an attempt at an ever more comprehensive and ever-deepening apprehension of God's revelational activity in the world. The Reformed faith, not Kant, had saved science and made room for faith. Faith in the body of teaching of Scripture, centered in the creative-redemptive work of Christ: that was what gave foundation to science, philosophy and theology as man's intellectual exercise. The greater the diversity of the multi-colored factuality of the universe, the more magnificently does the unity of God's work appear!

Thus, the mystery of Scripture is correlative to the clarity of God's revelation through Christ in Scripture, a clarity not diminished by its mystery. There would be no such thing as clarity of Scripture, except that which comes from Him who calls Himself the light of the world. Believers in Him accept what He says about Himself, and about all the world as existing from Him, to Him and unto Him on His absolute authority.

Reformation theologians maintained the necessity, authority, clarity, and sufficiency of Scripture as the foundation of their interpretation of human life as a whole, over against the Roman Catholic "system" of natural-plus-revealed theology.

It was along such lines as these that Berkouwer, following in the footsteps of Calvin, Kuyper, and especially Bavinck, was thinking when he wrote *Het Probleem der Schriftkritiek* in 1938. No light could be shed upon Scripture and

its meaning, he maintained, that did not itself derive from the Christ of the Scriptures. No phenomena of the Scriptures, such as its human language, its apparent contradictions, etc., and certainly none beyond the Scriptures, such as the “assured results of science,” could ever furnish a criterion by which the truth of Scripture should be judged. There were, of course, and there always would be, many “difficulties” facing the Scripture-interpreter. Yet, even so, Scripture was the lamp, the only lamp in whose light anything in any dimension of reality could be seen for what it was, and is.

And Berkouwer himself had done magnificent work when, in the past, he had operated along these lines.

Now, everything has changed. The Bible is now said to be “historically conditioned,” as though history were truly interpretable, at least up to a point, by men who find their ultimate light in themselves instead of in Christ. Therewith Berkouwer, in effect, now works with their idea of pure contingency as his principle of diversity. The mystery of Scripture, formerly that of the self-contained triune God of Scripture in his relation to the children of men, is now, in effect, the idea of pure contingency surrounding all gods and all men alike.

Berkouwer has, so he thinks, thus liberated himself from the intolerable burden of operating with a “formal and causal problematic” in his handling of the Scriptures.¹⁹⁴ 92 What he has actually done, of course, is to enslave himself to the dictates of would-be autonomous man. Naturally, the autonomous man “cannot” accept the *Scriptura est Verbum Dei* of the Reformers. To do so would be, from his point of view, to allow himself to be reduced to a puppet in the hand of the absolute power of an all-controlling God. Accordingly, he substitutes the Kantian idea of indirect identification of Scripture with the Word in place of the direct identification of the Reformers. He continues to use the words *Scriptura est Verbum Dei* but this now means for him nothing more than the words of Scripture point toward a God in the Beyond. Thus, Scripture is now said to be a normative witness only.

This idea of Scripture as a normative witness is, however, unintelligible, since it is based on the notion that contingency is ultimate and man, emerging from this same ultimate contingency, can, by logical thinking, determine himself not to be the creature of God, and Jesus Christ not to be the Son of God who will come to judge men for their rejection of Him.

It is not merely that, following the activist interpretation of “Scripture is the Word of God,” the Word of God would be equally relative with the word of man himself; it is, rather, that this interpretation is part and parcel of a Kantian type of epistemology which destroys the possibility of saying “is” intelligently about anything. Thus, the triune God of Scripture says, “I am.” But, in terms of saying

this, he also says what man is, and what the world is. Only in terms of this latter content can the words “Christ is the Son of God” and “The Scripture is the Word of God” have proper meaning for man. It is only if man accepts Christ’s words, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life,” that he himself can intelligently say, “I am.”

To say this is not to have a futile, because seemingly a “negative apologetic,” as Berkouwer virtually suggests that it is; neither is it to cut off all intelligible contact with modern science and philosophy. On the contrary, it is to offer the modern scientist and the modern philosopher the only true foundation that exists for his efforts, and to offer modern man the salvation that he may have in Christ if he repents and turns from his trust in himself. It is not to engage in “formal-causal problematics” to tell modern man that he cannot, of himself, and without the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, repent of his sin; it is, simply, to do what Christ commands us to do, knowing that we, as men, will allow for mystery to exist between ourselves and our God. This was, to all intents and purposes, Berkouwer’s view in earlier days; but now that he has seen the “light” of the indirect character of the identification of the Word of God with the word of man, he is enveloping himself in confusion worse confounded.

F. The Synod of Amsterdam (1967) Revokes the Decision of Assen (1926)

In conclusion, we turn briefly to the decision of the General Synod of Amsterdam to revoke the pronouncement of Assen (1926).

In his first book on Scripture, Berkouwer defended the viewpoint of Assen against those who were seeking to undermine its position in terms of the modern, activist scheme of thought.

But in 1967, Berkouwer was a leader among, if not the leader of, those who seemed to be the “enemies” of Assen.

This turnabout in Berkouwer’s position came about gradually.^{195 93} One reason why the change did not become immediately apparent is the fact that he has described his new position as being one of “greater precision” than that of Assen.

The synod of Assen warned the churches to “hold to the Scriptures as the Word of God, and therefore to the whole of sacred history as this is written down for us and communicated to us in the Scriptures.” This appeal to us, says Berkouwer, rested on the conviction of the undeniable clarity of Scripture, yet it is not possible to do justice to this admonition without some further specification” (*nadere nuancering*).^{196 94}

For example, Assen had spoken of the clarity of Scripture revelation. But, what does this mean when considered concretely? Surely, it does not mean to squelch the “freedom of exegesis,” for the latter is “identical with obedience to Scripture.”^{197 95}

In the Genesis account which had been in dispute at Assen, it is immediately clear that God is not the author of sin (*Deus non auctor peccati*).^{198 96} But it is obvious that we would bring this clearly revealed truth into obscurity if we look at the Genesis account as though it gave us an intellectual theodicy, i.e., if we thought of the relationship of God to man in causal terms. In that case, God is the first cause of all things, and therefore even of the evil actions of men. When the Old Testament speaks of God as the creator of Israel, however, it speaks “doxologically” rather than causally.^{199 97}

Berkouwer here interprets the Genesis account by means of his new activist scheme of thought. The idea of the clarity of Scripture, like the ideas of its necessity, authority and sufficiency, is what it is now because of the indirect identification of the words of Scripture with the Word of God. A new view of the “freedom of exegesis” has thus resulted from this new, this “doxological” view of the relation of God to man. All manner of questions and problems formerly

considered illegitimate, because destructive of the “unproblematic” character of Scripture as directly identical with the Word of God, become now not merely legitimate, but even indispensable, for an appreciation of the Reformation point of view.

How reasonable it was, declares Berkouwer, that men, having now a more “concrete” view of the clarity of Scripture (i.e., than the Assen men had) should ask whether the Genesis narrative might not be addressing us concerning the reality of creation as a good and beneficial act of God “in the form of a cloak (*inkleding*) and of an exhibition (*uitbeelding*).”²⁰⁰ 98

Berkouwer’s evaluation of Assen is, naturally, similar to his evaluation of Dordt. The Fathers of Dordt meant well, but they were unable, by means of their causal categories of thought, to express the free-sovereign grace of God. Similarly also, the elders of Assen meant well, yet they too were unable, by means of their formal-causal framework of thought, to express the doxological character of the revelation of the sovereign universal grace of God.²⁰¹ 99

With our new doxological or activist view of reality, it becomes possible for us to appreciate the “kerygmatic power,” i.e., the revelational character of Genesis 1–3.²⁰² 100

Berkouwer says that it is, therefore, no indication of rationalism or any other such thing that we “ask questions” of the traditional exegesis.²⁰³ 101 To all intents, Berkouwer now does what Dr. Geelkerken and others after him did when they appealed to a “higher reality” than that of ordinary history, as being that to which the physical realities of the paradise narrative pointed. It was in terms of his new activist framework of thought that Berkouwer first justified the “critics of Assen,” and later led his followers on toward a total reinterpretation of Scripture and its content in terms of principles similar to those of neo-orthodox activism.

B. The Cahiers Men

Berkouwer has written many books and he has now many followers. Some of these have themselves authored a series of pamphlets for the purpose of making the new “personalist” approach to Scripture more easily understood and more acceptable by the “common” people. The title of the series is: *Primers for the People* (*Cahiers voor de Gemeente*).

These “*Cahiers Men*,” of course, ridicule the traditional view of Scripture. With Berkouwer, they are deeply convinced that the “causal” scheme of Dordt must be replaced by the “personal” scheme; only if this is done, they say, can the Reformed Churches get a hearing for their message today. One of the “*Cahiers Men*,” Dr. G. P. Hartvelt, stresses three times over that the Bible is not a Book fallen from heaven.²⁰⁵¹⁰² Another, Dr. J. L. Koole, speaks of those who in former days thought of Scripture as if “produced by a tape-recorder,”²⁰⁶¹⁰³ “as though it were of the utmost importance for the ‘man of God’ of which 2 Timothy 3 speaks ... to accept the enormously high numbers in the book of Numbers.”²⁰⁷¹⁰⁴ This sort of approach to Scripture, he says, is far too prosaic (*reel te platzakelijk*). If we do have a tape-recorder view of it, then we cannot do justice to the variety within it.²⁰⁸¹⁰⁵ Such a view, moreover, cannot do justice to the “human factor in the development of Biblical history-writing.”²⁰⁹¹⁰⁶ In short, Koole, like Berkouwer, rejects what he describes as the deterministic framework of Dordt. This causal-determinist framework of our fathers implied a formal view of the authority of Scripture, and frequently it leaves the impression that the results of Scripture-research have been pressed into a pre-conceived mould. Writing his *Cahier* in 1967, T. J. Baarda starts out with a discussion of Assen (*De Betrouwbaarheid Van de Evangelien*).

What happens to our belief in the resurrection of Christ, he asks, if we give up credence in the snake of paradise?²¹⁰¹⁰⁷ If we let Assen go, has not the dam then burst, and will not the floods of unbelief overwhelm us? Was it not with this attitude specifically that Kuyper wrote his famous address on modern biblical criticism in 1881, but do we not, very unlike Kuyper, completely miss having the zeal of the Lord come upon us against the Scripture-critics and their work? No longer do we share Kuyper’s “holy synthesis” between an absolutely infallible Bible and “facts” that we cannot harmonize with it.²¹¹¹⁰⁸ What, then, will happen to our belief in the resurrection, asks Baarda, when the snake slides back into the jungle? His answer is, of course: nothing at all. The reason for this is that the message of the resurrection is no more historically verifiable than is the snake himself. In both cases it is a matter of belief, not of historical verifiability (*De*

boodschap van Pasen is historisch gezien niet verifieerbaar). “It was not the crucified one who was resurrected, but the Living One.”²¹² 109

This sounds paradoxical, says Baarda, and, admittedly, there is a great deal of thought (*bezinning*) in back of it; but, in any case, it interprets for us clearly what is at stake in the question of the resurrection.²¹³ 110

1. The Cahiers Men Operate with the Modern View of Scripture

Here we already have the positive foundation on which Hartvelt stands when he rejects what he considers the causal-formal-static-mechanical tape-recorder view of Scripture(!). It is, once again, the idea of human autonomy. And nothing short of this will do for Baarda, either. Indeed, anything less would be a merely formal view of the authority of Scripture. By “formal authority,” Baarda means the approach to Scripture by which one imagines he can make pronouncements about Scripture without taking its content into consideration. The idea of formal authority was originally presumed capable of settling all problems in advance.²¹⁴

¹¹¹ Even when our fathers replaced the “mechanical view” with the organic one of the inspiration of Scripture, there was no basic change. They spoke henceforth of the writers of Scripture as having been “instruments in the hand of the Holy Spirit.” Thus was the mechanical pattern of thought basically retained.²¹⁵ ¹¹² Thus, only “divine causation” could guarantee a divinely infallible Scripture and its content, including its central content.²¹⁶ ¹¹³

However, our modern experience now teaches us rather to think of God as an artist “who does not shun dissonance.”²¹⁷ ¹¹⁴ Now, we have sympathy with the ethical theologians whom Kuyper attacked in his famous address.²¹⁸ ¹¹⁵ ²¹⁹ ¹¹⁶ The “*ethischen*” declared that truth is ethical, taking this statement in the Kantian sense of the term. Geelkerken did the same thing. So, now, does Hartvelt, and, as far as I can make out, the other “*Cahiers* men.” They do appear to be followers of Kant also, with his distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal aspects of reality; and, finally, in basic sympathy with Barth’s idea of God as both wholly revealed and at the same time, wholly hidden. They seem, in fact, to hold to essentially the same sort of hermeneutic as such men as Fuchs and Ebeling, while yet appearing to desire retention also of the historic Reformed Confessions.

They appear to me to agree with the “new exegesis” of Romans 9–11 that Karl Barth has given, and think that it, rather than the research posits the question, who He was, what He said, and what He does justice to the sovereign-universal grace of God to mankind in Christ. In other words, their “new” view of the message of Scripture is basically in accord with the message of modern man as he projects first his ideal of himself, and then imagines God as “helping” him to realize this ideal. The autonomy of man thus requires the principles of the mutual correlativity of pure indeterminism and pure determinism both being correlative in their turn to the idea of the autonomy of man.

Followers of the modern scheme involved in Kant's notion of the primacy of the practical reason wish to make sure that there cannot be such a thing as the absolute, self-contained triune God of Scripture. Modern "irrationalism" allows for anything to happen (except, of course, that which is actually happening, i.e., the realization of the plan of God through the works of creation and providence). In other words, if the modern principle of contingency is to function, it must do so by virtue of the universal negative application of the law of contradiction, and therefore exclude the orthodox creator-creature distinction. The neo-orthodox theologians, following Kant and recent existentialist philosophy, use the law of contradiction in the same legislative fashion in which Parmenides used it, the only difference being that Parmenides used it "positively," "proving" that creation out of nothing was impossible and that all reality was static. Kant e.g. used it "negatively," but accomplished the same end: all reality was flux.

When Kuitert spoke with exultation of the great modern discovery, "the historicity of reality," he seemed not to realize that he was, so far as he had accepted it, wiping out the creator-creature distinction, and the whole of historic Christianity based upon it, as effectively as if Parmenides had had his way.

2. The Cahiers Men Work with the Historical Method

When the *Cahiers* men refer to their following the historical method and, in terms of it, aim at discovering what Jesus actually said, they seem not to realize that, by the same token, Jesus cannot be what either the Chalcedon or any of the Reformed creeds say he is. Would that Baarda, Kuitert, and Hartvelt, to name a few, would face up to the sort of claim that is made by Robert Collingwood in his book, *The Idea of History*! For example, Baarda says that we must, by following the proper historical method, at last come to the question “what has Jesus actually said?” (*We komen toch by de vraag uit, war heeft Jezus gezegd?*).²²⁰¹¹⁷ Well, says Collingwood, it is the “historical consciousness” which must first determine what Jesus could have said; and surely, Jesus could not have, in any sensible way, have said that he, as a genuinely temporal human being, was identical with the eternal Son of God.²²¹¹¹⁸

Like Collingwood, existential philosophers such as Heidegger believe that they are asking the most basic question any man can ask, and the first one any man must ask, when inquiring: “Why is there anything rather than nothing?” In other words, for these men the idea of possibility underlies God, and not vice versa. It was Satan who first introduced this idea into the mind of Adam.

On this basis, anything can happen, except that which the Reformed creeds say has happened, is happening, and will happen on the basis of the direct revelation of God through Christ in Scripture. This cannot happen, therefore it has not happened, is not happening, and will not happen.

The “*Cahiers* men” apparently do not realize that, in committing themselves to the historical method as entertained by such men as Collingwood and many others today, they are marrying the idea that the resurrection of Christ may be thought of as an uninterpreted fact, although it must not be rejected as the climax of the substitutionary work of Christ both as Son of God and Son of man.

They appear not to realize that they are seeking in vain to turn back the clock of history. They are preparing for union with the Roman Catholics. And why not? Is not the Christ-Event for Rome a composite of the Greek form-matter scheme and the Christ of Scripture, and is it not for modern Protestantism likewise a blend of the freedom-nature scheme of post-Kantian thought and the Christ of Scripture? Are not these at bottom one scheme? If the “*Cahiers* men” and their friends have their way, then both Kuyper’s antithesis between the regenerate and the non-regenerate, and Augustine’s between the “city of God” and the “city of man” will soon disappear.

3. The Cahiers Men Helpless Against Modern Scepticism

Berkouwer says that those who hold to the traditional causal framework of theology have a “negative apologetic.” To present a positive one, he argues, one must first have a proper “personalist” theological framework. In the same way, the *Cahiers* men desire, by any means at their disposal, to make Christianity acceptable to its sophisticated despisers.

But this supposedly personal framework of theology is, in reality, not personalist at all. According to it, human personality consists of a point of intersection between the impersonal-rationalist-determinist principle of unity, such as Parmenides held, and a purely impersonalist, determinate principle of diversity such as is involved in the idea of chance, and as held by Heraclitus. To the extent that ancient “rationalism” had any connection with “historical” factuality, it was in terms of pure impersonal irrationalism. So far as modern “irrationalism” has any contact with “historical” factuality, it is in terms of pure impersonal rationalism. And the idea of the exhaustive correlativity of pure deterministic-rationalism and pure indeterministic irrationalism is a “projection” of the human personality which must, in the first place, identify itself in terms of these mutually destructive principles. In other words, within the framework of thinking of modern apostate society as expressed in the idea of “the historical consciousness,” man cannot identify any fact, whether it be himself as the interpreting subject, or the “facts” of “nature” or of “history” as the interpreted objects, unless he can explain all facts exhaustively, which he cannot do, except he destroy their individuality without residue.

Apparently, therefore, the *Cahiers* men and other admirers of Berkouwer are seeking for a “positive” apologetic, by closing ranks with the natural man in his enterprise of seeking to discover what to make of such “facts” as the womb of chance has spouted forth.

The traditional Reformed view started, as Berkouwer acknowledged so well in his earlier days, from the “unproblematic” nature of Scripture as being the ultimate interpretation of all the facts of the entire universe. I have tried to set forth the same idea by saying that for the Christian all the facts of science and history must be seen in the light of the “story of Scripture,” while the non-Christian views the “story of Scripture” in the “light” of his own supposedly already intelligible self-consciousness and an already intelligible methodology of scientific and historical discovery.^{222 119}

A properly positive apologetic should maintain that only by means of the simple biblical teleology of history can any intelligible investigation, whether of

“natural science” or of “history,” be undertaken.

To say this is merely to continue the Pauline-Augustinian-Calvinist-Kuyperite view that man by virtue of his creation in the image of God cannot avoid knowing God (*gnontes ton theon*). Only on this basis is there an intelligible point of contact between the believer and the unbeliever. Only on this basis can one explain how the unbelieving scientists, as e.g., certain of the Renaissance men, could discover what Dooyeweerd calls “actual states of affairs.” They did so in the past, and do so today, because what the “story” (*verhaal*) of Scripture says about the facts of the space-time universe is true, whereas that which is told by apostate man is not true.

The Christian accepts the interpretation of all the factuality of the space-time world on the authority of Christ speaking by his Spirit through the apostles in Scripture. Apostate man, however, assumes that the facts cannot be what Christ says they are. Even when he maintains that, at the outset of any investigation, any hypothesis, must be assumed, even the Christian one, as being possibly explanatory of the facts to be investigated, he is already reducing Christ’s identification of himself to one possibility among many, and this is in effect to deny Christ’s claim for himself.

In short, if the world were what the non-Christian assumes that it is, then there would be no human predication.

It is only because of the fact that what Christ says about the universe is true, that even apostate man can make “positive contributions” to the progressive development of human research.

Only the traditional Reformed view, therefore, gives adequate expression to the exhaustively personal, i.e., covenantal, character between every human being in his relationship to every fact of the universe, and the triune God of Scripture. Thus, when Berkouwer thought that he had exchanged the “causal” framework of Dordt for the “personalist” framework of neo-orthodoxy, what he had actually done was to sell his birthright for a mess of pottage.

And when Kuitert imagines that he has made great gains by following out Berkouwer’s “*scopus*” idea of Scripture, he is in reality jumping off the Queen Elizabeth only to drown amongst those whom he is trying to save. This is, therefore, not a positive apologetic. There is no difference in principle between the hermeneutical principle of Kuitert and that of Ebeling. Ebeling doesn’t want to go as far as Bultmann or even as far as Barth in the latter’s de-historicizing of Christ narratives; yet his own “Jesus” is built up on the same principle as is the Jesus of Bultmann or the Christ-Event of Barth.

There is no difference in principle between the method of the “*historicus*” of the *Cahiers* men and that of the “historical consciousness” of Collingwood.

These men are as unwilling as is Collingwood to begin their study of the “facts” of the gospels with the interpretation spontaneously presented by the “unproblematic” voice of Christ Himself speaking in Scripture. Says Baarda: “The problem is for him (the historian) not ‘who is Jesus’ (as the believer might ask), but who was he.”²²³ 120

Apparently, Baarda is unable to see that he has, by saying this, and by his entire procedure of which this statement is an integral part, already given an interpretation, and that an anti-Christian one, of who Jesus is and what all reality is. His “historicus,” like the “historical consciousness” of Collingwood, has usurped the place of the Christ of the Scriptures. It is as though one lantern had proposed to another lantern to do research into the question of whether the sun exists. To be sure, Baarda limits the powers of his “historicus.” The “historicus” knows only the past tense of Jesus’ existence. Historical research posits the question, who he was, what he said, and what he did. His concern is with past time; his research ends with the cross and the tomb.²²⁴ 121 The message of Easter is, historically considered, not verifiable.”²²⁵ 122

How happy, however, ought we to be with this non-verifiable Resurrection of Jesus! It is only as such that He is with us and we with Him in the present. A verifiable Resurrection would be a Resurrection in the past, i.e., in Kant’s phenomenal world, and in this world all is relative. Nothing absolute is verifiable in past history. “The proclamation of the church does not seek to have us believe in a miracle-worker, a rabbi, a prophet, a unique man, a radical man, a man who all in all definitely belongs to the past, but rather in the living Lord.”²²⁶ 123 The church wants us, instead, to believe in the fact of the risen Lord as existing in the present. “It is not the crucified one who is raised up, but the living one.”²²⁷ 124

Thus the present, rather than the past, character of the Resurrection constitutes the essence of the church’s proclamation. “What happened cannot be told.” No matter. “Even though there were no eye-witnesses, yet there are men who do not hesitate to become witnesses to the Resurrection.” Acts 1:21ff “The witness of his being raised up, that is, of his Resurrection, has been the decisive deed of the oldest church. It was the central point of all she had to tell, the message that he lives (Mk. 16, 11; Lk. 24, 23; Acts 1, 3, 25, 19).”²²⁸ 125

Thus Baarda, in true Kantian fashion, postulates the resurrected Jesus as existing in the realm of the wholly “unknowable.” The heart of the church’s message is that Jesus exists in a realm of which “the historian,” laboring with the relativist categories of the phenomenal realm, can say absolutely nothing. But then, still reasoning along the lines of Kant’s primacy of the practical reason, Baarda postulates that this non-objectifiable Ego, this risen Lord, is somehow,

nobody knows how, related to the rabbi of Nazareth, the miracle worker, etc.

“In its preaching, the church has laid great stress on the continuity of the relating of what has taken place before and after Easter.... In the last analysis, the risen Lord is none other than the Rabbi of Nazareth. The Living one takes the responsibility for the words and deeds of the crucified one (Lk. 24, 44, 46; cf. Acts 1, 1–3).”²²⁹ 126

When the Apostle Paul says that Christ is declared to be the Son of God “by the Spirit of holiness” Rom 1, Rom 4, cf. Acts 13, Acts 23ff, he does that which the “evangelists” themselves did when in their narratives they allowed the radiance of the Resurrection to break through, or when in their description of what Jesus did and said they anticipate the titles which were closely related to the Resurrection.”²³⁰ 127 “Thus the event (*het gebeuren*) of the Resurrection, which was not verifiable to the historian, has influenced in all kinds of ways the mode of narrating what had happened in the history of Rabbi Jesus, as this was later told and handed down.”²³¹ 128

It appears then that, according to Baarda, the Apostles had to bear witness to two kinds of facts. “There are facts which anyone at all can verify, and there are obviously facts which can be discerned only by faith.” There exists therefore, says Baarda, a “certain right” to say that the witness deals with facts, and that the proclamation takes these facts over and interprets them.”²³² 129 “Proclamation of the Word wanted to make history, not describe it.”²³³ 130 “You need only to read the short histories of Jesus in Lk. 9, 46–48; 49–50; 58; 59–60; 61–62; 10, 38–42, etc., to discover how little in them real history matters.”²³⁴ 131

I have enumerated the main ingredients of Baarda’s argument in the interest of trying to understand his basic approach to the question of the relation of fact and interpretation.

Baarda’s aim is, negatively, to show that we must not make the simple identification of “it is written” with “it happened” or “it was said.”²³⁵ 132 In the past, Reformed theologians thought it necessary to make this identification in order to maintain the historical trustworthiness of the gospels.²³⁶ 133 But we have now learned to inquire into the nature of historical trustworthiness. We now know that there are two kinds of facts, as indicated above. This enables us to be true to the witness of the apostles while, at the same time, we no longer exclude in advance the idea of “saga and legend” as having a legitimate place in the gospel narratives.²³⁷ 134 To all intents and purposes, Baarda’s distinction between two kinds of facts is the same as that of the *Geschichte-Historie* distinction of neo-orthodox theology. Baarda says: “Thus one sees how history sometimes takes on dimensions which cannot be designated as historical.”²³⁸ 135

As noted earlier, Baarda's *Cahier*, like the others, was written to alleviate the fears of the simple people of God to the effect that if the identity of "it is written" with "so it happened" is not maintained, all is lost.

Do not all the gospels want to teach us that Jesus is the Lord of the world?²³⁹
¹³⁶ Let then the narratives have less of history in the ordinary sense of the term. And what of that? He who listens and yields himself to this Lord may very well find that history in the true sense of the word is being made in his life and in the life of his environment. To be sure, this *geschiedenis* can most likely be told only with difficulty in historical terminology. Yet, this fact does not make it less real for him who is involved in it. The *geschiedenis* of the witnesses and martyrs, along with its deepest secret, cannot be fathomed in the language of historiography."²⁴⁰ ¹³⁷ "That the gospels reaching us through the ages can still set us in motion is, for him who will note it, proof (albeit not scientific) that they are really trustworthy. One cannot offer a logical argument for this trustworthiness; one can only confess it and witness of it before the world."²⁴¹ ¹³⁸

However, if the people of God for whom Baarda writes his *Cahier* follow his advice, there will be no risen Lord at all to whom they may witness as the only name given under heaven by which men must be saved. The Resurrection of Christ would not be verifiable—identifiable—because there would be no questions asked by any man about anything, let alone answers given. The question of the "historical reliability of the gospels" could never be solved because it could never be presented. In short, there would be no history. There would be no "findings of modern science" to be related to the "message" of the Scriptures, because there would be no such thing as science.

On the Kantian scheme of the primacy of the practical reason, employed by neo-orthodox theology and by Baarda, pure form needs pure contingency for its correlative, and vice versa, and, being correlative to one another, they cancel each other out.

There would, on this basis, be no question of the relation of fact and narrative (*feit en verhaal*), because every fact would have to be identical with the whole narrative²⁴² ¹³⁹, and every narrative would have to be identical with pure contingency. There could be no man who could identify himself, but if there were, he could have no Christ who was in any way different from himself unless he were wholly different from him, and, so as to be wholly different from him, he would have to be wholly identical with him.

This is the message that Baarda would substitute for the message which such men as Kuyper and Bavinck have offered. Such, indeed, is the "positive" apologetic which he would offer. He does not differ from these his predecessors

merely because he stresses more than they did the variety found in the gospels. Rather, Baarda has adopted a new principle of variety, i.e., that of pure contingency, instead of the all-comprehensive plan of God. Accordingly, he has also adopted a new principle of unity, i.e., that of pure form, and not, again, the all-comprehensive plan of God.

The “cultured despisers” of the gospel, as it was presented by such men as Luther and Calvin, will not despise that new gospel which Baarda brings them; indeed, it is their very own, “*mir ein bischen andern Worten.*”

Thus, the *Cahiers* men have apparently not faced up to the fact that the modern philosophy of science and that of history are destructive of human predication. Kuitert, however, seems to catch a glimpse of it in his article on: *Het Geloof in de Opstanding in de Nieuwere Theologie*.²⁴³ 140

Here Kuitert deals with several of the leading views of the Resurrection in recent theology. However, he is perceptibly not as happy about the “great modern discovery” of the “historicness” of all reality as he has elsewhere testified to being.

“Whence comes the theological problematic pertaining to faith in the Resurrection?” asks Kuitert. It comes from the “historical approach of the Christian message of salvation, which in the last analysis has developed into a certain method of historical research.”²⁴⁴ 141

“The historian wants to know what ‘really happened’ ” (*wie es wirklich gewesen*).²⁴⁵ 142 In order thus to learn what “really happened,” the historian distinguishes between the “objective facts” (*Tatsache*) and the contribution made by the narrator of these facts. In other words, the narrator always evaluates the “objective facts,” is always the evaluating subject (*wertendes Subject*).

Think back, for example, to the narratives of the past, i.e., to tradition. There, we can discover the objective facts only by distinguishing them from the contribution made to the telling about these facts by the narrator. To do this, however is especially difficult when the narrator deals with religious material. If there is to be agreement between historians on what is “objective” in an ancient document, there must first be agreement on a set of criteria by which objectivity may be determined. But agreement on the question of criteria, i.e., on methodology as an approach to the past, involves a reduction of the concreteness of historical reality toward the vanishing point. When historians operate with an agreed set of criteria for objectivity, they do the same sort of thing which natural scientists do in their own field. By means of agreed-upon criteria of objectivity, natural scientists attain to an objectivity which is a derivative of full reality. “In the same manner, historical knowledge attained with the aid of the historical

method is nothing more than a derivative, a residue of (full) historical reality.”²⁴⁶
143

One might expect that, having come this far, Kuitert would, with Abraham Kuyper, insist that there cannot be any agreed-upon criteria between the regenerate and unregenerate man about what is to be considered “objective fact” (*Tatsache*). The non-regenerate man’s criteria of historical objectivity *per se* exclude the fact of the existence of the triune God of Scripture and of his providence ruling over all.

But Kuitert deals with the idea of method as though it did not, from the outset, presuppose a position. People may, but need not, use a method as though it were a filter through which what is possible and what is not possible will be separated.²⁴⁷ 144

Having said this, Kuitert then comes back to the question of pure historical methodology, and points out the antinomy inherent within it. On the one hand, the historian cannot do without the services of the narrator in his search for objective facts. Yet, on the other, he must do without the narrator, since what really happened “can be ascertained only by isolating ‘facts’ from the subjectively colored stream of tradition.”

The antinomy, therefore, consists of two mutually exclusive manipulations (*behandelingen*) of the narrated past. “He who is out to ‘discover what really happened’ must abstract from the ‘*wertende Subjekt*’ (the narrator). Historical research makes inquiry with respect to that which is ‘*passiert*,’ and therefore *passe*. On the other hand, he who acts as the ‘*wertende Subjekt*’ (the narrator) and inquires into the meaning (*Zusammenhang*), is by definition no longer concerned with historical problematics, but with something else, with existential, and eventually with religious, questions.”²⁴⁸ 145

Working with the “historical method,” the “historian” therefore has no room for the event known as the Resurrection. But, having said this, nothing is either lost or gained; it is only a question of method. Of course, the historian may abuse his method by making a filter of it, by which he would exclude, e.g., the Resurrection. The historical method as such is inherently antinomous, and can therefore say nothing about what really happened. “The question of what ‘really happened’ leads into insoluble antinomies—whether employed by historical-critical theologians or by fundamentalists—if we cannot say what happened.”²⁴⁹
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We must therefore realize that whatever else may or may not be clear from Kuitert’s discussion of the relation of “the historical method” to the Resurrection in the article under discussion, it is obvious that he works with the same sort of scheme as does Baarda: namely, one which is basically similar to that of neo-

orthodoxy. Kuitert finds the “historical method,” which he rightly treats as an aspect of this scheme, as being inherently antinomous. Yet, he continues to employ it. He refuses to see that its “*wertende Subjekt*” which, as he affirms, always determines the nature of what really happens, has happened, and will happen, is the would-be autonomous man. According to Kuitert, the church does not think of the Resurrection as a *nudum factum* and the New Testament itself knows of no such apparition. Yet, Kuitert joins the modern theologians in their worship of the same apparition, desiring merely to modify certain of its aspects and its contours which they have imagined, or to supplement the vision had by one with that had by others.

Of course, Kuitert also continues to worship the risen Christ of the New Testament. But that is synthesis thinking at its worst. If the people of God follow Kuitert and his colleagues, the message of the risen Christ will once again sink back into the bottomless ocean of contingency.

4. The Cahiers Men and Their Delusion

The *Cahiers* men seek to reassure the people of God by the prospect of a bright future. We shall now see how they propose to do this. There would be no hope for the future, argues Koole, as long as believers retain their view of Scripture which resembles a record-player reproduction of past events²⁵⁰ 147, and as long as the modern historian himself remains hyper-critical.²⁵¹ 148 But, he argues, there is really no need for such a sharp opposition between belief in Scripture as the Word of God, and modern historical science. The believer will, no doubt, give up his mechanical view of Scripture and the historian will give up his hyper-criticism.

The believer in Scripture may look forward toward a science of historical writing that will be reasonable in its demands upon Scripture. Note, for example, the following:

1. Historical research requires, first of all, and justly so, that the writer of history be able to survey the field of facts with which he deals. The Old Testament writers of history can readily pass this test.²⁵² 149

2. It requires, secondly, that the writer of history be able to trace the way by which the events he deals with have become known to him, i.e., through the sources he has used. Well, we who believe the Old Testament can pass this test also.²⁵³ 150

3. It requires, in the third place, that the sources to which it appeals be used critically. The historian must evaluate his sources; he must not believe in tales. Again, believers can readily pass this test.

As believers, we may therefore retain our conviction that “history is the work of the Lord.”²⁵⁴ 151 Of course, as believers, we must also be reasonable in stating our conditions of settlement. This involves the following:

(a) that we no longer maintain a “formal authority” of Scripture. We must ask of men to accept the “central content” of Scripture, rather than “every arbitrary biblical communication.”²⁵⁵ 152

(b) that we do more justice to the “human factor” than formerly. The biblical history-writers were, after all, dependent upon the materials available to them.

(c) that we must not press the communications of Scripture into a hard and fast scheme of exact reporting. Only thus can we do justice to the variety of Scripture materials (*genuanceerdheid van de Schrift zelf*).²⁵⁶ 153 What shall we say of these three points?

On the first point, we observe that a man like Bavinck long ago repudiated the idea of a merely formal principle of Scripture. If there was anything that Bavinck stressed, it was that the central message of Scripture, and God’s saving of His

people from the wrath to come, constituted Scripture's material principle, without which its formal principle would not exist. The real issue lay, and lies, in the nature of this message. However, according to Baarda, as well as Berkouwer, the central message can, and indeed must, be stated within the person-to-person schema of neo-orthodoxy, instead of in the "formal-causal" schema of Dordt. In so saying, these men have, to all intents and purposes, repudiated the position of Bavinck.

On the second point, the same sort of observation is in order. Bavinck sought to do full justice to the "human factor" in Scripture by means of his notion of organic inspiration. But again, the question is, what is meant by organic inspiration. According to Baarda's line of reasoning, no one, not even a great dogmatician like Bavinck, can do justice to the idea of organic inspiration, unless he exchange the supposedly causal categories of Dordt for the personalist categories of neo-orthodoxy.

The third point is then involved in the other two. The hard and fast scheme of "exact reporting" is, of course, supposed as an aspect of the formal-causal categories of Dordt. Thus, the contingency idea of Kant and his followers is not enlisted for setting us free from Dordt's arbitrary determinism. According to the *Cahiers* men, the people of God may well rejoice, if only they will give up this arbitrary determinism and substitute for it the phenomena-noumena scheme of Kant and that of Barth's *Historie-Geschichte*, which is derived from it. Christ's claims for himself will be acceptable to the natural man; or rather, henceforth there will no longer be such a thing as the natural man.

Hartvelt, too, seeks to encourage the people of God with regard to modern scientific and historical procedures. Just think of the fact that the life of Jesus is told, not by only one witness, but rather in four different ways.²⁵⁷ 154 This fact ought to make "the historian" favorably disposed to us as believers, who begin anyway with the conviction that it is God speaking in Scripture.

Of course, the historian as historian has no eye for this, his method being inadequate for it. Unfortunately, "historical science can see the Scripture only as a human witness."²⁵⁸ 155

At first glance, this might mean, concretely, that one cannot catch all of reality in all of its dimensions by means of the historical method.²⁵⁹ 156 But how much better off we, as believers, are, if only we realize that it is primarily with this additional dimension of reality that our faith is concerned. Then, we shall no longer make the mistake of disputing against incontrovertible discoveries of science, as the church did at the time of Galileo.²⁶⁰ 157 We shall, rather, learn to read the Scripture with the realization that there are grades of historicity in it. As

modern man became mature at the time of the Renaissance²⁶¹ 158, so we too shall lay aside our children's story-Bible and realize, e.g., that there is "*een verschillend soortelyk gewicht*" in the historical parts of the Old Testament."²⁶²

¹⁵⁹ We shall gladly accept the discovery, as one may call it, that Israel used "literary genres" in its historical descriptions.²⁶³ 160

Here we find, says Hartvelt, "the heart of all present-day theological discussion." In his day, Bavinck had already spoken of the "historical and psychological mediation of revelation." At present, however, the question of "literary genres" is embedded in a deeper problematics, i.e., that pertaining to the differences in kind of historical materials. It is the question of the "nature of the historical" that confronts us in the problem of "literary genres."²⁶⁴ 161

The people of God may thus profit greatly from a "new manner" of dealing with Scripture²⁶⁵ 162 that comes with the maturity they attain as they read the Scriptures in accordance with the discovery of the differences of dimensional depth found therein. They may no longer fear the loss of its trustworthiness²⁶⁶ 163, now that, whatever the problematics of "the history" they find in it, they can, as believers, continue to keep their eye on the "Lord of facts, the Lord of history."²⁶⁷ 164

The greater maturity which the new personalistic view of Scripture brings involves, as it itself is involved in, a deeper insight into its mystery²⁶⁸ 165, and therefore also a deeper insight into the nature of its inspiration, trustworthiness, and infallibility.²⁶⁹ 166 The old problematics of the respective relationship of its divine and human factors has thus disappeared as a fog disappears before the rising sun.

The trustworthiness of Scripture is focused on its content: Jesus Christ. Therewith, the word "trustworthiness" has attained a personal content. In other words, Jesus Christ is its content.²⁷⁰ 167

Finally, with our new manner of communication with Scripture shall come a new manner of communication with the Reformed creeds, e.g., with articles five and seven of the Belgic Confession. Article five speaks of "holy and canonical books" and says that, without doubt, we believe "all things contained in them." It concludes by saying that "the very blind are able to perceive that the things foretold in them are fulfilling."

Such words may, at first sound, lead us back to the time when we were still wont to read the Bible without awareness of the grades of historicity which fill its pages. Those were the days when, with the fathers of Dordt, we thought of God as the alone-working One (*alleenwerkzaamheid*).²⁷¹ 168 But now, with our new personalist-dimensionalist view of reality, we see no such problems. We

simply concentrate on Christ, the Lord of history. We now see that when article seven of the Confession speaks of the sufficiency of Scripture, it speaks of sufficiency “unto salvation.” “This sufficiency does not relate without qualification to everything that is literally found in the Bible. The Scripture is sufficient unto salvation. The clarity and sufficiency of Scripture are other words for trustworthiness; if you will, its inspiration.”²⁷² 169

In conclusion, the evidence I have given from Koole, Baarda, Kuitert and Hartvelt is, I feel, indicative of the faithfulness with which these men have substituted the neo-orthodox framework of thought for that of the Reformed Confessions.

I have not found in any of these men any attempt to deal critically with the modern philosophical problematics that underlies the theology of such men as Barth, Bultmann and Ebding. The article of Kuitert in *Gereformeerde Theologisch Tijdschrift* comes the nearest of anything that I have seen to containing some awareness of the fact that their new scheme is inherently antinomous. But I have found no such awareness of the fact that neo-orthodox theology is based, broadly speaking, on the apostate man’s idea of man as free, because autonomous; of his assumption of pure contingency and irrationality as his principle of diversity; and of pure determinism and pure rationalism as his principle of unity.

Hartvelt’s interpretation of the Renaissance is, of course, historically mistaken. Renaissance man sought to build the kingdom of man; he was not thinking of nature as revelational of the Creator God of Scripture. But the most tragic misinterpretation, or perhaps I should say, presupposition of the *Cahiers* men, pertains to their notion of modern historical methodology. These men make much of the contribution (*de inbreng*) which the human subject (*das wertende Subjekt*) makes when it deals with the facts of science and of history. They speak of the inescapability of this contribution and of the danger of “subjectivism” involved in it. But I have not found in any of them anything like a biblical appreciation of the fact that all men, as sinners, knowing God, are seeking to suppress the truth in unrighteousness. Bavinck argued at length against the reduction of the idea of sin from the notion of enmity against God to the Roman Catholic notion of ontological poverty of being. Men hate Scripture as the Word of Christ, said Bavinck, because they hate Christ’s call to repentance heard in it.

In other words, Bavinck defended the notion of truth as being ethical because, with it, he defended the triune God of Scripture as the final reference point in all human predication. The ethical theologians (*Tethischen*) defended the notion that truth was ethical because they opposed the God-centered theology of Bavinck and were influenced by the man-centered philosophy of Kant. Scholten’s position was similar to theirs, but even much further removed from orthodox

theology. Geelkerken followed in the steps of the “ethicals,” and now the *Cahiers* men, such as Wiersinga, etc., with Berkouwer as their leader, are following in their train. No wonder, then, that “Assen” had to be abrogated.

5. Mulder Adopts the Modern Method of Comparative Religion

So as to exhibit the destructive nature of the new theology, two other *Cahiers* men may be mentioned, namely, D. C. Mulder and C. Augustijn.

Mulder's entire method is that of modern comparative religion. He deals with all manner of parallels and analogies between the Bible's message and the "great religions" of the world. Naturally, he has no appreciation of the fact that there would not even be any such parallels and analogies unless the God of Scripture Himself had related all the facts of the world through His all-encompassing providence as centered in the work of Christ. How can there be any identification of any fact in any field in relation to any other fact in any field, except upon the presupposition of what the Reformed Confessions say about God and man as that which was, is, and will be?

At any event, Mulder's *Cahier* is important because of its view of methodology. Through it, we are assured, of course, that the Bible did not fall straight down from heaven, and thus we cannot approve our fathers' starting with its unquestioned authority. To determine why it is we take the Bible, and not the Koran or the Vedic writings as the Word of God, we must use the method employed by the science of comparative religions.

And we stand to gain by this necessity, since it drives us to a study of the "holy word" and of the "holy Scriptures" in other religions.²⁷³ 170 Surely, such a study will enable us to appreciate the distinctiveness of the Christian message.²⁷⁴
171

The science of religion and of religious phenomena is one aspect of human culture. It therefore cannot express an opinion about the truth or falsity of a religion. "This task it assigns to theology, or eventually, to philosophy." Of course, no one can really be absolutely neutral. "Yet, 'neutrality' or 'objectivity' is an ideal for which one must strive."²⁷⁵ 172 What is it then, that we discover with our "neutral" method? First, we find that, in general, men try by their religions to come into contact with "another world." Through their religion, men listen to what speaks to them from this other world (revelation), and respond to such speech in their liturgies, prayers, etc.²⁷⁶ 173 In this transaction between the two worlds, the word, the holy word, occupies a central place.²⁷⁷ 174 And, the holy word leads to the idea of the holy name.²⁷⁸ 175 Thereupon, he who uses a holy name "calls up divine reality." This opens the possibility of communication.²⁷⁹ 176

Communication is expressed in the words united into "narrative,"²⁸⁰ 177 and, more especially, into the idea of "holy narrative."²⁸¹ 178 These tend to express the

“deepest motives of a society and, as such, they attain a normative character.”²⁸²
¹⁷⁹ They not only inform men about what happened, or how things happened in the past, but they also indicate the structure of reality, and what this structure’s nature ought to be because of what has happened in the past. Such is, especially, the case with myths. ‘Myth,’ as such, is holy narrative, dealing with happenings of early time (*oertijd*), or perhaps in the eschatological future, thus underlying the present and offering an outlook on the future.” “The entire relation of man and society to the other world, the whole of religion, is expressed in myth.”²⁸³¹⁸⁰

Gradually, the myths of various societies have become deposited in their holy books.²⁸⁴¹⁸¹ And, gradually, these have become accepted as authoritative or canonical.²⁸⁵¹⁸²

In his final chapter, Mulder asks what we as Christians may learn from this survey of the religions in the world. He points out that he has dealt with only a fraction of the material available²⁸⁶¹⁸³; and yet, there is something of a structural nature manifest in the variety of religious phenomena considered. In what way thus can Christian theology profit from our study of these structures?

In the first place, says Mulder, we may observe parallels and analogies between the biblical message, with respect to its “holy word,” thus between the Christian vision with respect to Scripture, and the non-Christian Scriptures.²⁸⁷¹⁸⁴

Note the following. In the Bible, as well as in other religions studied, the word has a “calling and ruling character, because in it, as well as elsewhere, the word and the name together represent the indicated reality.” “We are confronted with this in the creating word of God, that especially calls forth realities, and in his revelational word, especially in His name, which represents him in this world.”²⁸⁸¹⁸⁵

Again, not only in the idea of the word, but also with respect to Scripture, there are many parallels and analogies with other religions.²⁸⁹¹⁸⁶ All in all, it may be said that the same sort of questions that are asked by devotees of other religions are discussed in Scripture, and one meets “the same formal structures.”²⁹⁰¹⁸⁷ Speaking theologically, we may conclude that the God of Israel addressed his people by means of categories which are generically human.”²⁹¹¹⁸⁸

We are compelled, therefore, not to look for the uniqueness of Christianity in its formal structures, but rather in its material contents.²⁹²¹⁸⁹ What, then, are the unique contents of the Bible? Well, the God of the Bible is a speaking and acting God. In particular, His speaking and acting appear in the creation of the world, in the history of Israel, and come to particularly concrete expression in the appearance of Jesus Christ. It appears clearly from Mulder’s *Cahier* that there is for him no more need to present the Christ of the Scriptures as the name which is

alone given to men that they might be saved.

6. Augustijn Adopts the Modern View of Church Confessions

Dr. C. Augustijn's contribution to the *Cahiers* series deals with the place of confessions in the Reformed Churches.

Dr. Augustijn first gives a detailed history of the attitude of Protestant Churches to their confessions, beginning with Zwingli. As for Calvin, he was not concerned with words, or with agreement on details, but rather with unity of doctrine on really important points.²⁹³ 190

In the period of time from 1555 to 1580, the Lutheran churches tended to place their confessions on a par with Scripture. In practice, this often meant placing the confession under the Scripture, and this evolved into a literalness of interpretation of the Confession, with every word becoming important.²⁹⁴ 191 The Confession thus became a tool of pressure, with the usual concomitant dishonesty.

After Calvin, a similar tendency developed in the Reformed churches. Confessions tended to become dogmatic treatises. One can see this in *Nederlandse Geloofsbelijdenis*. Beza himself urged people to read the Confession first, and then the Bible.²⁹⁵ 192 Instead of a "uniting testimony," the Confession became a formula with binding authority, with stress being laid on sound doctrine. It became a means by which the question of orthodoxy was determined. In practice, the Confession likewise took the place of the Bible.²⁹⁶ 193 Thus, the Remonstrants protested against the "formal handling of the Confession as though it were a church law."²⁹⁷ 194

What is the moral of all this for us? Does Augustijn want to lead us back to the Bible movement? Yes, he does, but only formally, not actually. In fact, he is, if possible, more concerned to destroy the Bible as a final norm of faith and practice than he is to destroy the Confession. Destroying the "normative" nature of the Confession becomes for Augustijn a means to destroy the normative nature of Scripture. He has apparently become as greatly enamoured of the historicity of all reality as has Kuitert.

To be sure, the church must confess that the Bible alone is the standard of faith and life.²⁹⁸ 195

And we would perhaps continue to use a confession. But then, we must make sure that this confession expresses what all members of the church agree on as constituting the meaning of Scripture.²⁹⁹ 196 However, there is at present no agreement in the church on what the Scriptures teach. And our present Confessions do not represent anything approaching a contemporary consensus of

opinion as to what Scripture teaches.³⁰⁰ 197

We live in a new day. Some of us are thus concerned with new questions which do not pertain as much as formerly to the notion of the authority of Scripture. "There are more pressing questions today: the unity of all men, war and peace, proper worldwide distribution of wealth, the limits of science, etc. These are problems for all mankind to deal with and therefore also for the church."³⁰¹ 198 Let us then do away with Confessions, traditional style. Instead, let us have moment-by-moment declarations on the part of the church about the important world questions. "A declaration by the Reformed Churches which determines that the government, the churches, and their members should devote a certain percentage of their income to 'human development' (*ontwikkelingshulp*) is worth more than every tie which binds to an old or a new confession."³⁰² 199 "*Ontwikkelingshulp* is, in our time, certainly among the first demands on our faith in Jesus Christ."³⁰³ 200

Augustijn remarks at this point that his approach requires the Reformed Churches to "acquire a new complexion." How true this In so doing, they would become the church of the Pharisees who said, in effect, that Jesus blasphemed because he did not, as they did, follow the ideals of the growing moral consciousness of man, and because he did not substitute the form-matter scheme of the Greeks for the God of Moses.

The author sees, moreover, a great future for the Reformed Churches, with their joining the modern ecumenical movement of neo-Protestantism and then, later, the new Protestant-Romanist Church of the Christ of the Aristotle-Kant axis.

We may think of Augustijn's *Cahier* as a fitting conclusion of the series. Taken together, this series is as rapidly as possible preparing the people of the Reformed Community in the Netherlands for a smooth transition from the worship of the Christ of the Scriptures to the worship of man.

The story is similar to that of the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America of an earlier date, this time European style.

Notes

[[← 1](#)]

Kirchliche Dogmatik 3:2, P. 81. Er Ist Selbst Diese Geschichte. Wie Die Geschichte Der Gottlichen. Rettung Fur Alle Und Jeden Menschen Ganz Und Gar Und Ausschliesslich Er Ist, So Ist Er Ganz Und Gar Und Ausschliesslich Die Geschichte Der Gottlichen Rettung Fur Alle Menschen.

[[← 2](#)]

Kirchliche Dogmatik 4:2, P. 126.

[← 3]

I Have Argued This Point at Length in *Christianity and Barthianism*
(Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., Nutley, N. J.)

[← 4]

Cf. My *Karl Barth on Chalcedon*.

[← 5]

I Have Dealt with Bonhoeffer's Views in *The Westminster Theological Journal*,
Spring Issue of 1972.

[← 6]

The Christian Faith, P. 546.

[← 7]
P. 540.

[← 8]

Cf. Hugh Ross Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology*, (1937); James Orr, *Ritschlianism* (1903); G. C. Berkouwer, *Geloof En Openbaring in de Nieuwere Duitse Theologie* (1932.)

[← 9]

Cf. The Writer's *The Sovereignty of Grace*, 1969.

[[← 10](#)]

J. H. Scholten, *De Leer Der Hervormde Kerk*, 1870, Fourth Ed., Vol. 2, Pp. 604–605.

[[← 11](#)]
P. 311.

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1, P. 81.

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Van Til, C. (1975). *New Synthesis Theology of the Netherlands*. The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company.

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P. 487.

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Pp. 501, 484, 522.

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P. 589.

[← 49]
P. 600.

[← 50]
P. 604.

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For a Discussion of Kuyper's Evaluation of Scholten and His Theology See G. B. Wurth, *J. H. Scholten Als Systematisch Theoloog*, 1927, P. 194.

[← 52]

Cf. My *Common Grace*, Pp. 34ff.; *The Defense of the Faith*, 1st Ed., 1955, Pp. 384ff. And a Pamphlet on *Bavinck the Theologian*, 1961.

[← 53]

Bavinck, Herman, *Wysbegeerte Der Openbaring*, Kampen, 1908, P. 61.

[← 54]

I Take Much of My Information on the Ethical Theologians from Dr. Jan Veenhof's Work on *Revelatie En Inspiratie*, Amsterdam, 1968.

[← 55]

P. 63. He Wrote a Critique of Scholten's Main Work on the *Leer Der Hervormde Kerk*.

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Trimp, C., *Betwist Schriftgezag*, 1970, Pp. 69–70.

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Veenhof, P. 677.

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I Have Been Criticized for Calling Attention to the Remnants of Scholasticism in Both Kuyper and Bavinck. See My *Defense of the Faith*, 1st Ed.

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Cf. The Argument of Marvin Hoogland in the Calvin Seminary Student Magazine, *Stromata*, September 1958.

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Vol. 63, 1963, Pp. 1–41.

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De Heilige Schrift, 2, P. 16.

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Cf. William James' Ridicule of the Block Universe and the Words of Spinoza that the Order and Connection of Things is Identical with the Order and Connection of Ideas.

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Heilige Schrift 2, P. 56.

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Cf. *My Sovereignty of Grace*.

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Heilige Schrift 2, P. 309.

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Ibid., Pp. 314–315.

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Van Til, C. (1975). *New Synthesis Theology of the Netherlands*. The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company.

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Over Schrift En Inspiratie, Pp. 19, 26, 66.

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Verhaal En Feit in Het Oude Testament, P. 44.

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Genuanceerdheid Van de Schrift Zelf, P. 49.

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Ibid., P. 61.

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Ibid., P. 61.

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Hartvelt Might, However, Have Mentioned Also Geelkerken in This Connection.

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Cf. My Discussion of Collingwood in *The Great Debate Today*.

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Cf. “My Credo,” In *Jerusalem and Athens*.

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Here Baarda Obviously Uses the *Geschichte-Historie* Distinction of Neo-Orthodoxy.

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Cf. Parmenides.

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Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift, 1968, Pp. 78ff.

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