

Herman Bavinck's *Modernisme en Orthodoxie*: A Translation

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Editor's Note

Our thanks to Bruce Pass for providing this translation of Herman Bavinck's important rectorial address on modern theology.¹ Bavinck took so-called "modern" or "liberal" (Dutch: *vrijzinnig* = "free-thinking") theologians seriously and, as is evident in this address, treated them much more sympathetically than they generally treated him. Though opponents like Eerdmans and Hylkema wrote "hit-pieces" on Bavinck and Abraham Kuyper that employed sarcasm and mockery, their investments of time, energy, and journal space in their publications also give evidence of grudging respect. In fact, Bavinck's rectorial address was discussed at the gathering of modern theologians in April 1912. Bavinck was even invited to come to the gathering, and he participated in the discussion.²

Bavinck's attendance at this event was not a happy experience, a not entirely unanticipated result. Feeling like a Daniel, he had been reluctant to accept the invitation. "I entertained little or no expectations about my visit," reflects Bavinck, "but I found no freedom to decline the invitation. I am prepared to give an account of the hope that is in me" (94). As it

1. *Modernisme en Orthodoxie* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1911).

2. Bavinck's visit has been carefully documented and analyzed by Free University historian Cornelis Augustijn, "Bavinck ter vergadering van Moderne Theologen 1912," in *Rapport met de Tijd: 100 jaar theologie aan de Vrije Universiteit 1880–1980* (Kampen: Kok, 1980), 88–110. The citations that follow in the text are from this essay (my translation). Augustijn had access to Bavinck's own (unpublished) reflections on the experience, and he also examined the public, written responses from key participants.

turned out, Bavinck had good reasons for his apprehension. It soon became clear that a significant number of the two hundred or so like-minded modernists in attendance resented his appearance and vocally indicated their unhappiness and objections (96–97). In addition, for those who are astrologically superstitious, the timing could not have been less auspicious. On April 17, 1912, the planets were aligned to produce a total eclipse of the sun, and interest in Bavinck’s visit was overshadowed by the desire to witness this momentous event (88, 98). And to top things off for the truly superstitious—which excludes the editor and, we assume, the readers of *The Bavinck Review*—only two days earlier the RMS Titanic sank in the North Atlantic Ocean. Because of the eagerness by attendees to witness the eclipse—evidence that science-driven modernists are also human beings first—Bavinck’s remarks were cut short, and he never had an opportunity to engage the group fully and in a meaningful way (98–99).

Having been educated at the crown jewel of modern, liberal theology—the theological faculty at the University of Leiden—Bavinck knew the modernist mind from the inside. He is consistently respectful to his teachers, and his scholarly treatment of their work is both thorough and fair. In fact in my editing of this piece, as I was led to the various essays and books that Bavinck cites, I was once again reminded how characteristic this is of Bavinck’s work. At the same time he does not soft-peddle his critique; “respectful” did not entail being deferential. He faces his and Kuyper’s critics head-on. There was too much at stake! First, there was a matter of personal integrity: the Neo-Calvinists were accused of being double-minded. Second, more importantly, the modernist “gospel” was no gospel at all. Modernism fails not only to satisfy the mind but also to meet the longings of the human heart for God. The destiny of people’s souls hung in the balance.

A rectorial address is a formal academic affair, but Bavinck’s voice as a pastor can be clearly heard in this one. His prepared remarks reflect an intensely personal, autobiographical character that was rare for the ordinarily reserved Bavinck. Having been accused of double-mindedness, that is, allowing his confessional obligations as a professor in a conserva-

tively orthodox Reformed church and school to trump the superb modern education he had received at the University of Leiden, Bavinck opened his heart:

I ask leave to speak about myself again. To a certain extent it is true that I am obligated by ecclesiastical religious traditions. That is how I came to the Academy and became a student of Scholten and Kuenen. Naturally, this resulted in a serious crisis. But Scholten failed to satisfy me scientifically, and Kuenen failed religiously to satisfy me. They robbed me of something that I could not give up. Stones for bread. What was it of which they deprived me? Traditions, dogmas, ecclesiastical opinions? No, honestly not—Binnerts³ does not sense the power of orthodoxy—much more than that: Religion itself, communion with God, forgiveness of sins, comfort and assurance for time and eternity, not only the objective but also subjective Christianity. If I were to take my stand there [with the modernists], then creation, the fall, sin, atonement, forgiveness, conversion, regeneration would lose all their value, they would become sounds, symbols. But they remain realities. If I were to give them up, I would lose myself. Therefore, I said, this cannot be true. These realities are more valuable, are facts more real than the difficulties in nature and Scripture. Therefore, it is not tradition that binds me but that which is personal for me, in the depths of my soul, the life of my life, the salvation of my soul. (Augustijn, 99–100)

What is striking is Bavinck's masterly ability to turn the arguments of his critics against them. He finds that their efforts to solve the perceived tension between religion and modern science fail on their own terms. The problems that modernists love to highlight in orthodoxy are no less their problems. But orthodoxy does have answers, and those answers have integrity. Although the speech is now more than 100 years old, the currents of thought it describes, dissects, and counters are fully alive today, and often, like in Bavinck's day, they are not fully recognized as threats by church leaders. This remains a timely message. The concluding sentence is worth highlighting:

3. A. Binnerts presented a formal response to Bavinck's *Modernism and Orthodoxy* address at the April 1912 gathering. The response was published and is included in Augustijn's research data: A. Binnerts Sz, *Nieuw Gereformerde en Moderne Theologie, Beschouwingen naar aaleiding vand de rectorale oratie an Prof. Bavinck, ter modern theologen vergadering voorgedragen en aangevuld met een Naschrift, Redelijke Godsdienst*, Series II, No. 6 (Baarn, 1912).

Everything is held together by the almighty, wise and holy, merciful and gracious will of him, who is our Father in heaven—in heaven, in order that we may not think of his heavenly majesty in a earthly way, and *yet* our Father, in order we should trust at all times with childlike fear and reliance on him. (107 below)

It's all about God: his reality, his power, his love and grace.

The editor and translator were initially not in agreement about whether the final section, dealing with the specifics of the school year 1910–1911, should be included. The translator prevailed over the editor, and it is included with the editor's "second thoughts" full approval. It was necessary to keep the entire address intact for historical reasons and also because there are a few charming anecdotes that humanize this lofty academic event (lunch with the queen; all that gold!). Christian Reformed readers will find note 78 interesting.

Finally, a few brief formal matters: Editor's and translator's notes are clearly indicated. The sub-headings have been added by the editor. Significant additions are put in brackets. In some instances Bavinck's references appear to be mistaken; where possible I have corrected these.

—John Bolt

Translator's Note

Generally I have attempted to preserve Bavinck's syntax and to restrict "dynamic" renderings to a minimum. Where Bavinck adopts an idiomatic turn of phrase, however, I have chosen a contemporary English turn of phrase. I have also rendered Bavinck's gender-specific language in gender-inclusive terms where possible.

Bavinck uses many Latin technical terms and includes citations of authors in languages other than Dutch. An English translation has been provided in the main text, and the original appears in a footnote.

Bavinck's own endnotes are extensive and have been reproduced in full in the footnotes. Where Bavinck's sources could be readily identified, the references have been augmented and modernized.

I am especially grateful to Gert de Kok for his assistance in proofreading a draft of this translation. Its shortcomings, which I hope are few, I readily acknowledge as my own.

—Bruce Pass
Edinburgh, December 2016

Modernism and Orthodoxy

A Speech Delivered at the Rector's Induction at the Free University on October 20, 1911 by Dr. H. Bavinck

The revival of Reformed Theology, which has been happening in our Fatherland since the last quarter of the previous century, is such a remarkable fact that in recent years it has also attracted attention and awoken interest far beyond our circle. Even among modern theologians here in our country at least some were convinced that they could no longer close their eyes to this phenomenon and that the effort was worth it, even were it only for historical importance, to acquaint themselves with it in some detail. This acquaintance, however, has generally not been to our advantage. It has led to a greater appreciation of our intentions and efforts, but ultimately it has led to the serious charge that we have adopted a double-minded standpoint, neither modern nor orthodox, neither naturalistic nor supernaturalistic, and in this way have traded away the best and fairest when we went over to the modernist camp and pitched our tents over there.⁴ Allow me to cast some light on this accusa-

4. The accusation has especially been made by Prof. B. D. Eerdmans of Leiden and has since been repeated by him. He has spoken about it many times among likeminded colleagues and in public lectures, and he has given it publicity in various articles such as "De Theologie van Dr. A. Kuiper," *Theologische Tijdschrift* 43 (1909): 209–37; "Bijzondere Openbaring," *Theologische Tijdschrift* 44 (1910): 377–96; "The Progressive Element in the Reformed Churches of Holland," *The Christian Commonwealth, the Organ for the Progressive Movement and Social Ethics* 15 (1910): 436. At the congress of liberal theologians in Berlin he gave a speech, "Wandlungen der Calvinistischen Orthodoxie im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert," which was included in the proceedings of that congress: Max Fischer and Friedrich M. Schiele eds., *Fünfter Weltcongress für freies Christenthum und religiösen Fortschritt* (Berlin: Schöneberg, 1911), 430–42. The content of this speech is similar to Eerdmans's pamphlet, *Moderne Orthodoxie of "orthodox" Modernisme* (Baarn: Hollandia, 1911); When Dr. W. J. Aalders, "Een Misverstand," *Nederlandsche Kerkbode Voor De Protestanten In Nederland*, 46–47 (Feb. 11, 18, 1911) and Prof. Dr. H. M. van Nes, *Modern of Orthodox* (Baarn: Hollandia, 1911) protested against Eerdmans's charges, he immediately responded with another article, "Orthodox verweer," *Theologische Tijdschrift* 45 (1911): 342–46. Moreover, Eerdmans received unexpected support in his attack from Dr. C. B. Hylkema, who articulates the same accusation in a 400-page book, *Oud en Nieuw Calvinisme. Een vergelijkende geschiedkundige studie* (Haarlem: Tjeenk Willink, 1911).

tion, not in all the details because I would run out of time, but let me try to show you the position in its character and intention, which we need to take against it.

Our remarkable new era. We have the privilege of living in a truly remarkable time. The last hundred years have brought on greater change in our insights and contemplations, in our lifestyle and transportation, than in the whole series of centuries which have gone before. Under the influence of this revolution Troeltsch felt compelled to regard the Reformation as still belonging to the Middle Ages and modernity as only recently having begun with the movement of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century.⁵ The more we think about this the greater proportions it assumes and the further its significance and influence

There is, however, a difference between the two opponents. Prof. Eerdmans aims particularly at the implausibility of all orthodoxy, not just of Reformed theologians; he also puts men like Valeton, van Dijk, Wildeboer, van Nes, et al. under the spotlight. Dr. Hylkema takes a more historical approach, providing a number of citations from Calvin's *Institutes*, and compares his statements on various dogmas with Reformed theologians from more recent times, above all with Dr. Kuyper in his *Lectures on Calvinism*. On page 284 he draws the conclusion that old and new Calvinism are two completely independent theological positions both of which have their own foundational worldview. Nonetheless, he intones from page 285 following that there is a unity in diversity and that both positions can still bear the same name because they rest on one foundational notion and are built up from one principle. Dr. Hylkema accords me the honor of occasionally quoting something from my writings. But on page 138 he places the expression "an evolutionary creation of God" between two quotation marks and attributes it to me without mentioning where I had used it. To the best of my knowledge, however, this has never flowed from my pen. Even so the author, in the footnote on page 99, puts an argument of mine about Pelagianism between two quotation marks, again without indicating where he found it. This citation also looks suspicious to me. Perhaps, I may suggest that Dr. Hylkema is only superficially acquainted with my *Dogmatiek*. This would account for his saying on the one hand that this work still awaits a decent rebuttal from the liberal side (cf. 79ff.) yet on the other hand levels a very unfriendly and unfair verdict against it (cf. 187).

5. See Ernst Troeltsch, "Protestantisches Christentum und Kirche in der Neuzeit," in Julius Wellhausen et al., *Geschichte der Christlichen Religion: Mit Einleitung die Israelitisch-Jüdische Religion*, 2nd rev. ed. (Leipzig & Berlin: B. G. Teubner, 1922 [1905]), 431–755.

extends. About general matters in previous centuries people entertained the thought that the earth was situated in the middle-point of the universe, that it formed a flat disk that rested in the water and was over-arched by a cupola in which the stars were fixed as various movable spheres. But this Ptolemaic, geocentric worldview has already for some time made way for the Copernican, heliocentric system, and our horizon has expanded in all directions into endless distance. Perhaps in that regard there is nothing that has so deeply and radically altered opinions as the immensity and the limitlessness of the universe. It surpasses our imagination already when we learn that the sun has nearly one and a half million times more volume than the earth, that it is 148 million kilometers away from us, and that each second it sends out 36 million horsepower in the form of heat waves towards the earth. These numbers still mean nothing when compared with those concerning the size and distance of the stars. Beyond our solar system, which occupies a small, yet according to Wallace, central and important position in the universe, an innumerable multitude of stars and solar systems extends on all sides into endless distance. There are six or seven thousand stars perceptible to the naked eye; with the famous telescope in California there are, so one says, a hundred million to observe, but the complete number, on an understandably rather arbitrary estimate, is guessed to be 500 million or more. The next closest stars are still more than two hundred and fifty thousand times further away than the distance of the sun from the earth. Centauri, the closest star, is situated approximately that distance from us so that its light needs four and a half years in order to reach the earth, notwithstanding that light travels at a speed of nearly three hundred thousand kilometers per second. Sirius, the brightest of all the stars, is not less than seventeen, and Vega not less than thirty or more light years away from us. Such numbers silence all speculation and defy all calculation; space, which according to the currently most accepted hypothesis, is filled everywhere with ether and cannot be thought of as finite nor as infinite, because what is composed of finite parts cannot be infinite, and what has a limit of itself raises the question as to what there can be beyond that limit. The notion of the limitless leads us already beyond the world of the

knowable into the unimaginable and transcendent.⁶ And yet all the millions of planets, stars, and suns that float through the atmosphere, according to the testimony of spectral analysis, are composed of the same materials as those we find here on earth, and in our own bodies and everywhere the same powers are at work and the same laws prevail. This great, limitless diversity simultaneously expresses a most powerful unity, a holy orderliness, that, according to Bilderdijk, raises the scepter of authority over all things and protects it from a “chaos, fiercer than a wilderness.”⁷

The world is just as limitless and immeasurable when one turns one’s attention to the realm of the miniscule.⁸ Armed with microscope and ultra-microscope the eye of the natural scientist also penetrates this world of the imponderable, and he discovers unity and order, organization and system, not just in each tiniest organism in cell and nucleus but also in the inorganic; each tiniest part is composed of yet tinier parts that are all in motion and constantly strive after rest. For a long time one has proceeded on the assumption that atoms, the chemical elements, approximately eighty in number, make up the final components of matter. Now, these components must already be so fine that musk, for example, gives off an odor in a room for years; that is, molecules can diminish without noticeable decrease in weight. A cubic centimeter of air contains between ten and a hundred million molecules, which are constantly in movement at a velocity of 485 meters per second and through these oscillations provide the sensation of warmth, sound, and color. Our senses, however, are limited, and before they come to that state of sensation they are restricted to a certain numbers of oscillations per second; above and below that they are no longer capable of perception. The spectrum, nevertheless, extends

6. J. Von Reinke, *Die Natur und Wir* (Berlin, 1908), 53.

7. W. Bilderdijk, *De Dichtwerken van Bilderdijk* (Haarlem: Kruseman, 1858) 8:307. Tr. note: the poem Bavinck cites is Bilderdijk’s Dithyramb on Jeremiah 33:25, “Have I not established my covenant with day and night and the fixed order of heaven and earth?”

8. P. Gruner, *Die Welt des Unendlich Kleinen* (Godesberg bei Bonn: Naturwissenschaftlicher Verlag, n.d.).

beyond the boundary of the violet. There is also ultraviolet light, which reveals itself by its chemical reactions, numbering more than 800 trillion oscillations per second and whose wavelength amounts to less than one ten thousandth of a millimeter. As these oscillations are still continuously increasing in velocity and number, and as the wavelength decreases by the same degree, we arrive at the waves that since 1895 have been known as X-rays and that possess such a strong capability of penetration that they also enter solid and opaque bodies like wood, cardboard, leather, etc. The discovery of these waves contributed therefore to the thought that atoms do not at all make up the finest and final components of matter. From atoms one proceeded to electrons, as they are called, which are a much finer substance than atoms. In velocity they almost match light and, for example, radium, discovered in 1898, can radiate for years without any hint of diminution. With the connection of electrons to atoms there arises then at every turn something new that is unique to each of the composite parts even as that is also the case with the connection of atoms to molecules; but the presumption imposes itself that the electrons differentiate themselves merely quantitatively. If this presupposition were to be scientifically proven, all matter would thus ultimately be comprised of one primordial substance consisting further of a condensation of ether, perhaps, and then alchemy would get the chance to become an exact science. Indeed, some naturalists and philosophers were of the opinion that the conclusion was well warranted that matter is merely a subjective imagining and that in reality there is nothing beyond forces, force-centers, and energies, or that the whole world is nothing more than a representation. The limit of research is reached, however, neither in the world of the small nor in that of the great; at every turn new roads begin and virgin territory is discovered. On the path of science, according to Pierre Loti,⁹ who declared some years ago in the French Academy, there opens a door at every turn, which does not lead to the light but to another, long, dark corridor at the end of which you again find another door, and so it

9. Tr. note: Pierre Loti was the pseudonym of French novelist and naval officer Louis Marie-Julien Viaud (1850–1923).

proceeds endlessly. By far the time has not yet arrived for a well-rounded worldview based only on scientific data; science itself is in continual flux and changes daily. Recently developed systems are being overthrown and replaced by others. Materialism, which only years ago was held as the highest wisdom, has succeeded its opposite; namely, pantheistic idealism or psychical monism. But this one thing is certain: our conception of the world has undergone massive change. Space and time have taken on proportions, which deride all calculation. In vertiginous heights and in unfathomable depths the whole universe is filled with creatures that form a world each by themselves, and yet they are parts of one immense and well-ordered whole.

Historiography too has contributed to this change in our conception of the world. It too has considerably expanded the horizon of the past and the present both behind and around us. Geology teaches us by the order and structure of the layers of the earth that the earth has gone through a violent period of storm and stress¹⁰ and attained to its present state only through various epochs. In these periods a development from lower to higher organisms took place that displayed a great wealth of forms, which for the most part have all died out. Whence life comes and how it came to be has therefore remained an unsolved puzzle for science up to the present day. The same is true regarding the origins and the earliest habitation of humanity. Although animal-like origins have more or less become generally accepted, it is still by no means proven. Wilhelm Branca, the senior lecturer of geology and paleontology at the University of Berlin and advocate of the descent theory, only recently admitted that the human of the quaternary period appeared as “a Johnny-come-lately with no forebears, a genuinely new man,”¹¹ that is, as a person whose ancestors certainly pre-existed him but as yet remain *unknown*.¹²

10. “Sturm und Drang.” Tr. note: a proto-Romantic movement in German literature and music in the second half of the eighteenth century.

11. “ein ahnenloser Parvenu, ein wahrer homo novus”

12. Wilhelm Branca, *Der Stand unserer Kenntnisse vom fossilen Menschen* (Leipzig: Veit, 1910), 60; cf. Alois Schmitt, *Der Ursprung des Menschen* (Freiburg: Herder, 1911),

Likewise, the origin and background of the earliest European inhabitants lies in obscurity, but it well should be acknowledged on the basis of research into fossils preserved in caves, peat bogs, and alluvia that these people were of similar characteristics as us, that they were in possession of understanding and reason, of language and religion, and of fire and tools.¹³

Of no less significance are the discoveries, which, since the beginning of the previous century, have taken place in Assyria, Babylonia, and Egypt. These have informed our knowledge that mighty kingdoms standing on a high level of civilization already flourished in these lands centuries before Christ and long before Moses and Abraham. Art and science and especially astronomy were practiced fruitfully. They were dedicated to agriculture, industry, and commerce, and they lived with the people around them in constant interaction. What kind of relationship existed between the inhabitants of Asia and those of Europe and other parts of the world remains in scholarly circles a question which awaits an answer. But it should be regarded as even more remarkable that on the basis of the unity of human nature some of the proponents of the descent theory are either upholding or returning to monogenism, that is, the unity of the human species in its origin and place of habitation. Subsequently, the expeditions of recent centuries have indirectly confirmed this unity to the utmost. Through the improvement of modes of transportation, through the lust for expansion, through the striving after spheres of influence and new markets, through the resurgence of mission, and for yet more reasons the whole earth in its length and breadth is gradually laid open before us. Unknown lands and peoples, unknown languages and religions are in a certain sense no longer unknown. All the knowledge acquired through these discoveries and inquiries has strengthened or renewed the belief that all people are partakers in one and the same

which articulates the uncertainty of the descent theory very clearly.

13. Dr. L. Perrier, "Les premières manifestations du sentiment religieux d'après les récentes données de l'anthropologie préhistorique," *Foi et Vie* (July 16 and August 1, 1909).

nature and that they are all in the possession of the fundamental elements of culture, of language and religion, of knowledge, morality, and art. There is a very wide discrepancy in the degree of culture, but there are no “natural” (i.e., barbaric or culture-less peoples) in a broader sense. The oft-judged unsuitability of some tribes and races to be raised to the level of culture is contradicted more often and more stridently by expert opinion.¹⁴

Yet, along with what has been said just now, take into consideration that science in our century is not, as in the Middle Ages, enclosed within the walls of cloisters, nor does it remain limited to the circle of the university, but in every way it is connected with life and enriches and enhances life. The marvels of science are matched by the marvels of technology, which puts knowledge at the service of praxis in such a way that the human spirit also rules practically over nature. Together and in union with still many other factors, both have guided culture to a height that has never before been reached; they have freed many individuals as well as classes of society from restrictive chains. They have given to the life of the worker a more secure, previously unknown wealth and restored the honor of work itself, previously scorned by the Renaissance. Alongside the nobility and clergy they have given rise to an industrious and flourishing middle class, they have precipitated new problems for the State and the Church and called them to what in many respects is a different and more difficult task, and they have steered the whole stream of the time in a democratic direction. Far be it though, that this culture has only spread blessing. The undermining of all religious and moral foundations, the pitiable conditions of the proletariat, and the socialist, anarchist, and nihilist uprisings teach us otherwise. Yet all these movements too are proof of the notion that we live in a completely different world to our forefathers and that we do not know what will yet change in the future. We obviously do not stand at the end but at the beginning of a development. Which conquests in science and technology may yet obtain, and

14. Cf. H. Schurtz, *Völkerkunde* (Leipzig/Vienna: F. Deuticke, 1903), 27; S. R. Steinmetz, *De Studie der Volkenkunde* ('s-Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 1907).

from them which new conditions may eventuate in society and State we cannot say, but in every sense there is reason for great expectations. God is busy doing momentous things in these times.

Valid science and true faith. Because we believe that it is He who also in this century upholds all things and reigns [over all things] by his omnipotent and omnipresent power, we thankfully and hopefully accept the world that He allows us to know through science and in which He has assigned us a place. Naturally, we thereby make a distinction between the facts, which science allows us to know, and the interpretations, which are often attached to them by science's practitioners. However, facts are "stubborn things"¹⁵ that command respect, and by God's providence they have been placed in our way. Thus just as we thankfully make use of all the resources that the human genius puts at our disposal, so also we accept with joy the increase and expansion of our knowledge unto which science these days offers us abundant opportunity. We are thereby filled with amazement at all those men and women who with extraordinary dedication, with a sincere love of the truth, and often not without great self-sacrifice have labored at the temple of science and, as we assume, that the best and greatest of them have not, as is so often imagined, been numbered among the so-called unbelievers but remained humble before God, so too mixed into this amazement is a feeling of affinity and affection. When others among them on occasion made scientific research subservient to principles and purposes that cannot draw our approval, then we must differentiate such research from that which is generally applied in the natural and historiographical sciences these days and has proven its propriety in brilliant results and also has the right to our approval. One of the most noteworthy characteristics in the development of science has undoubtedly been the universal and consistent application of the inductive method. Empiricism in experiments and historical criticism in exegesis in principle meet with no objection in our circles too,

15. Tr. note: the phrase "facts are stubborn things" derives from John Adams's famous address, *Argument in Defense of the Soldiers in the Boston Massacre Trials*.

as deduction and synthesis certainly have a right to exist. Even then there still is no reason for protest as this inductive method is applied in social sciences such as psychology, psychiatry, criminology, etc. within certain limits where this is possible. We are children of this age and thankfully receive every good gift that the Father of lights gives us in this century.

But when we thus with both feet take our position in this age, it is said of us that we should then be consistent and honest, that we ought to abandon the ancient Christian and Reformed confession, and that we should move across to the camp of the moderns with all our goods and chattels. We ourselves demonstrate our half-heartedness in that we style all the doctrines of predestination, providence, revelation, miracles, inspiration, regeneration, prayer, etc. so much on the contemporary worldview that they have virtually lost their original sense. The contemporary orthodoxy, so people say, opposes supernaturalism. In principle as well as in practice it has broken away. It accepts the modern worldview and stands on the same foundation as the liberals, and it even lures the church into the delusion that it maintains the teaching of our fathers and fosters the impression that in principle it opposes the liberals. The complaint also arises in the political arena that in the present condition of the parties there is something false through and through, that the title and the contents of the ideologies don't match up, and that as soon as possible another alliance must be formed. All their efforts are concentrated there in order to bring this wish to fulfillment, but thus far they have been crowned with but little success.¹⁶

16. Dr. Beversluis in particular in his pamphlet, "The Impurity of the Party Relationships," etc., was pleading for a change in the situation and a rapprochement of the parties, but he had little success at the meeting at Utrecht, April 24 last year. The six points of agreement, which he proposed, were not accepted. At the sixth general meeting of the Noord Brabant and Limburg Preachers' Association, Dr. D. van Peursum from Eindhoven gave a lecture in which he developed the idea that cooperation was not to be achieved on the ground of mutual esteem but must rest on unity of principle and that this principle alone can be found in *regeneration* as opposed to classic modern humanism, which always spoke of self-perfection. *De Hervorming* (July 8, 1911).

Ed. note: In 1879 Abraham Kuyper founded an intentionally Christian (Calvinistic) political party, the Anti-Revolutionary Party, and led it to success, becoming Prime

This charge can now at once be acknowledged to the extent that the words “modern” and “orthodox,” which have already come into use to describe factions in the Dutch Reformed Church, are quite unsuitable for describing contemporary trends [of society] with sufficient clarity. “Orthodox” is the name of all those who agree with the confessions of their Church, but since such agreement can be understood to concern either the letter or the spirit, the main or also the side-issues, the word immediately acquires a very moderate and flexible sense. The word does not occur in Scripture, and among the churches it became the name of the Greek Church alone by which it stakes its pride in abiding by the theology of the Damascene.¹⁷ Since 842 the Eastern Church celebrates the festival of orthodoxy every year on February 19.¹⁸ The Roman and Protestant churches, however, have never adopted this name since they have in principle never wanted to limit themselves to the existing state of affairs without further qualification. Within the Reformed churches, agreement with the confessions has never been understood in the sense that all freedom of opinion thereby should be excluded. Article 4 of the Belgic Confession, for example, considers the Epistle to the Hebrews to be among the letters of Paul, but there were nevertheless many Reformed theologians who, following in the footsteps of Luther and Calvin, attributed it to another author. Concerning predestination there existed within the circle of Reformed theology a stark difference of opinion, and concerning Christ’s descent into hell opinions are always put forward that deviate from the letter of the Catechism’s explanation. In the confessions, a number of verses were cited as proof-texts, but exegesis and dogmatics

Minster of the Netherlands in 1901. There were other Christian political parties competing for votes plus a Roman Catholic party, and many Dutch religious leaders, especially those in the National Dutch Church (*Hervormde Kerk in Nederland*), sought greater cooperation among all parties. In this note Bavinck displays his keen awareness of the issues at stake, which could be summarized as the tension between being true to one’s own principles and a more political, pragmatic cooperation for a greater good.

17. Ed. note: John of Damascus (c. 675–749), author of *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*.

18. Karl Burger, “Orthodoxie,” *PRE*³, 16:495–98.

retained their freedom and occasionally brought to light errors in these citations or paucity of explanatory power. On the other hand the doctrines of the “counsel of peace” [*pactum salutis*] and covenant of works did not occasion much mention in the confessions and yet gained universal admittance in dogmatics. The Reformed churches of our time themselves have introduced a not insignificant change in Article 36 of the Belgic Confession at the Synod of Utrecht in 1905¹⁹ and, strictly speaking, they should have forfeited the name of orthodox. Perhaps what speaks more strongly still is the fact that even though contemporary missions, evangelization, and works of mercy have been transplanted to our country from abroad, they are all practiced by the Reformed churches with great zeal and warm love. Just as the anti-revolutionaries in the political arena,²⁰ avoiding Bilderdijk’s *contra-revolutionaire* position, united themselves with the historically Christian principles of Groen van Prinsterer and have always set themselves against conservatism, so too those who profess the Reformed religion can and must, as long as they remain true to their origins, never give the impression that for them orthodoxy per se is the highest truth. However high we may estimate the confessions of the church, they are a “standardized norm,” subservient to Holy Scripture, and thus always remain subject to revision and expansion.²¹

Besides, no one who empathizes with his own age can be against everything modern in every respect. Even though modern theology in general thinks and lives from the Christian tradition much more than it presumes to do, so too orthodoxy, unless it totally cuts itself off from its environment, stands to a greater or lesser degree under the influence of

19. Ed. note: Synod of the *Gereformeerde Kerken, Nederland*.

20. Tr. note: The Anti-Revolutionary Party, founded in 1879 by Abraham Kuyper, had its origins in Groen Van Prinsterer’s Anti-Revolutionary parliamentary caucus in the Dutch parliament, which had existed since the 1840s. As the name would suggest, the Anti-Revolutionary Party opposed the ideals that gave rise to the French revolution.

21. Ed. note: Reformed theologians classically distinguish the confessions as *norma normata* (standardized norm subservient to Holy Scripture) from the Word of God as *norma normans* (standardizing norm).

the intellectual currents of this century. Yet we cannot deny that nowadays Christianity is encountering a crisis as perhaps never before. A case like that of Jatho at Cologne is not an isolated one;²² it is an expression, and by no means the most congenial expression, of the tossing and turning taking place in thousands upon thousands of heads and hearts in all Christian countries. In the same way the “New Theology”—modernism in the Roman Catholic Church, which has been condemned by the Pope but on that account has not yet been eradicated—is equally a manifestation of that which in one form or another is making inroads in the academies and churches of nearly all Protestant countries.²³ Just as Bunsen²⁴ some years back turned what was Semitic in Christianity into Japhetic savagery, and Carlyle no longer found Hebraic robes suitable for contemporary Christians,²⁵ so too all trends and factions are in greater or lesser measure busy in reconstruction,²⁶ and they are exerting themselves in this work in order to reconcile ancient Christianity with modern culture. That isn’t a peculiarity of any one trend, for example, of the

22. Tr. note: The German Protestant minister Carl Jatho (1851–1913) was dismissed from office in 1911 on doctrinal grounds. Strongly influenced by Goethe and Spinoza, Jatho was a self-described Monist and Pantheist.

23. Ed. note: The “New Theology” Bavinck is referring to here is not the *Nouvelle Théologie* or *Ressourcement* movement within French and German Catholicism in the early- to mid-twentieth century and associated with names such as Louis Bouyer, Marie-Dominique Chenu, Yves Congar, Jean Danielou, Henri de Lubac, Karl Rahner, Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI), and Hans Urs von Balthasar. Rather, he has in mind what was called “modernism” in the Roman Catholic Church and condemned by Pope Pius X in his 1907 encyclical, *Pascendi dominici gregis* (“Feeding the Lord’s Flock”). The encyclical was followed by a compulsory anti-modernist oath introduced on September 1, 1910, only a year before Bavinck delivered this address. The language of “modernism and orthodoxy” was “in the air” more broadly, not only in ecclesiastical and theological circles.

24. Tr. note: Christian Karl Josias Bunsen (1791–1860) was a Prussian diplomat and philologist.

25. Ed. note: Bavinck refers here to Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881), known for his anti-Semitism; see T. Peter Park, “Thomas Carlyle and the Jews,” *Journal of European Studies* 20 (1990): 1–21.

26. “Neubau”

moderns, but of all trends without exception. The question is simply whether with this exertion to reconcile Christianity with modern culture one retains or loses its substance. That this reconciliation is sought in such varied ways shouldn't cause any amazement, because what we are inundated with—natural and historiographical scholarship, technology and global transportation, and the whole of modern culture—is so overwhelmingly rich and powerful that none of us has yet been able to bring unity and harmony in our thinking and living. For example, think about the numerous and complex questions put forward by historical criticism of the Old and New Testaments, dogmatics and ethics, evangelism, mission and care for the poor, of criminal law, social legislation and the limits of State intervention; anyone would feel that we are all still searching and as yet cannot deliver the last word. Yes, for good reasons let it be foretold that no single person and no one generation and not even one century is capable of a solution for all these problems but that God himself in the course of history must create order in the chaos and make light rise out of the darkness.

Terminology and supernaturalism. Viewed from this high vantage point, the terms “orthodox” and “modern” sound petty and narrow-minded, and indeed it is still the case that both words fail to express the content of what one believes. “Modern” is a title that appears already in the Middle Ages and was often given to a person or party that appeared with something new of any kind. “Orthodox” is a word that simply includes agreement with one or another confession and doesn't determine whether one is Greek [Orthodox] or Roman [Catholic], Lutheran, Remonstrant, Jewish, or Muslim. Moreover, the emphasis lies only on agreement with the confession as if that were all that counts. The Greek and Roman church perhaps have some claim to this in that faith there is nothing more than naked assent²⁷ to the truth that the church confesses, although then again this faith is regarded as yet incomplete and

27. “nudus assensus”

must be complemented by love. But in the Reformation saving faith²⁸ took on a completely different character from the beginning. It was a matter more of the heart than of the head, more heart than the mind,²⁹ a trust in God's grace in Christ and an assurance of salvation. The name "orthodox" completely undervalues this element and gives the impression that agreement with the confession is the only thing that counts; and that is not so and must not be so. The university that brings us together here in this hour does not place itself on an orthodox but on a Reformed basis, and the churches with which its theological faculty is affiliated are not called orthodox but Reformed churches. This name deserves preference far above orthodox and also that of Calvinistic or Neo-Calvinistic.³⁰ For, on the one hand, within the name Reformed there lies a connection to the past, historical continuity, and maintenance of the Christian confession just as those in the Reformation in like manner cleansed the Holy Scriptures of Roman error. On the other hand, [the name Reformed has within it] the demand and obligation to continually review the doctrine and life of one's own person and household, and, in addition, our whole environs according to these scriptural and historical principles. [We are] reformed for reform³¹ and vice versa.

Still more mistaken and inappropriate are the terms "naturalism" and "supernaturalism," each of which comes up in the previously mentioned accusation. The latter name acquired a very definite meaning in the eighteenth century yet did not stand as an opposite of naturalism but as the opposite of rationalism.³² Both trends proceeded from the notion that the world originally was created by God in such a way that it lives by its

28. "fides salvifica"

29. "magis cordis quam cerebri"

30. Rutgers, *Calvijns invloed op de Reformatie in de Nederlanden* (Leiden: D. Donner, 1898), 94, 225–27.

31. "Reformati quia reformandi."

32. O. Kirn, "Rationalismus und Supranaturalismus," *PRE*³, 16:447–63. Ed. note: on "naturalism," "supernaturalism," and "rationalism," see Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:161–70, 214–19, 303–12, 356–65.

own powers and in all respects can get along by itself. But while rationalism held that sin had brought no substantial difference and that a person was only in need of greater exertion of strength, supernaturalism judged that sin had so affected the understanding and the will of a person that a special assistance of God was necessary, consisting in the revelation of teachings to the mind and a strengthening of the will by grace, albeit in some persons to only a small degree. Deism, which lay at the basis of both trends, however, was neither the teaching of Scripture nor that of a particular ecclesial confession. It arose as a philosophical system in England, developed into a complete repudiation of Christianity, and itself fell under the sharp criticism of Kant and Schleiermacher. Reformed Christians have thus never been supernaturalists in the historical sense of the word, and an injustice would be committed against them if they were simply to be introduced with this term.

Nowadays, one can abandon this historical meaning of the word and under supernaturalism, in accordance with the etymology [of the word], understand the recognition of an order of things that lies objectively outside and above nature and subjectively beyond the range of the human intellect.³³ Then, however, so much space is created for the sense of the word that it is completely no longer suitable to denote only the trend, which here in this country stands as orthodox over and against modernity. The rationalists of the eighteenth century would undoubtedly raise an objection if one wanted to portray them as rejecters of all that is supernatural and lump them all together in one bundle with the real naturalists such as Zeno, Epicurus, and Lucretius of antiquity, or Feuerbach, Czolbe, Dühring, and Haeckel of more recent times.³⁴ These eighteenth-century rationalists believed in the existence of a personal God who was exalted above nature, maintained the independence and immortality of the soul, and were strongly convinced of the propriety and the necessity of natural

33. Scholten, *Supranaturalisme in verband met Bijbel, Christendom en Protestantisme* (Leiden, 1867), 1.

34. Rudolf Eisler, *Wörterbuch der philosophischen Begriffe*, 2 vols., 2nd rev. ed. (Berlin, E. S. Mittler und sohn, 1904) s.v. "Naturalismus" (1:715–17).

religion. Even a thoughtful rationalist like Kant still claimed not to reject the reality of all supernatural revelation when he made its recognition, but not religion itself, dependent upon it.³⁵ Only when rationalism progresses to the rejection of supernatural revelation and recognizes no order of things which is distinguishable from and exalted above nature does it spill over into genuine naturalism. Truly the so-called “orthodox” are not the only ones who have difficulty with such a naturalism, but definitely also many of the spokespersons and followers of the modern trend.

The modern theology which arose here in this country around the middle of the previous century actually distinguishes itself by its anti-supernaturalism by its resolute rejection of all revelation and miracles. It considers itself bound to hold this negative point of view because in its opinion recent natural and historiographical scholarship has irrefutably demonstrated that there is no longer any order of things above and beyond nature to speak of, that everything on the territory of the spirit also obtains naturally, and that the time of the doctrine of miracles lies irrevocably in the past. Theology must follow in the footsteps of science so much so that whenever it speaks of God it does so not by looking to a being that may exist beyond, and in this sense, above, nature, but because the rational faith of the religious person recognizes order, regularity, law, and harmony in the collectivity of phenomena, concluding from the known to the unknown, and in this recognition requires a highest being that determines everything after fixed, logical laws as the power in all power and as the life of all life in the universe of phenomena.³⁶ It is thus undoubtedly incorrect, as Prof. Eerdmans says, that the liberal theologian doesn't reject the possibility of miracles but only claims that historical inquiry and contemporary experience teaches that God does not perform miracles. From the beginning supernaturalism was opposed by modern theology not only on historical but first and foremost on metaphysical

35. Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson (LaSalle, Ill: Open Court, 1934; rpt. New York: Harper and Row, 1960), 142–45; cf. Kirn, “Rationalismus und Supranaturalismus,” 449.

36. Scholten, *Supranaturalisme*, 1–5.

foundations. It denied not only the activity but also the possibility of revelation and miracle.³⁷ In this respect Prof. Meyboom spoke much more accurately in his opening address at the most recent gathering of the modern theologians when he said that naturalism remained the principal attribute of the modern trend.³⁸ One must indeed keep in mind that modern theology was not born out of religious-ethical need but has intellectual origins. No verdict at all is thereby being handed down concerning the personal piety of its fathers and spokespersons, but it is impossible to deny that it has been guided much more by the concerns of recent scholarship than by that of religion. If someone still demands proof of this fact, one could refer to the stance the modern trend adopted in the political arena, joining with the liberals in the schooling issue.³⁹ There it

37. B. D. Eerdmans, "'Orthodox' Verweer," *Theologische Tijdschrift* 45 (1911): 360. In the same edition there is an article by Dr. G. A. van den Bergh van Eysinga in which this is put as crassly as possible: "Science knows and acknowledges no miracle." Ed note: The article by van den Bergh van Eysinga that Bavinck refers to has the cheeky, oxymoronic-sounding title "Onwetenschappelijke Wetenschaplijkheid" ["Unscientific Science"], *Theologische Tijdschrift* 45 (1911): 312–35; the citation is on p. 333: "De Wetenschap laat echter niet met zich gekseren: hare eischen zijn gebiedend, het wonder kent en erkent zij niet." ["Science does not allow any wool to be pulled over her eyes, her requirements are authoritative, she knows and acknowledges no miracle."] To see that this was from the very beginning the position of modern theology, one need only consult the cited works of Scholten and furthermore Pierson, *De oorsprong der moderne rigting* (Haarlem: Kruseman, 1862); A. Pierson, *De moderne rigting en de Kristelijke kerk* (Arnhem: Thieme, 1866); idem, *Gods wondermacht en ons geestelijk leven* (Arnhem: Thieme, 1867); et al. Its principle also been understood by others in this way; e.g., by A. T. Reitsma, *De moderne theologie* (Groningen : Noordhoff, 1862), 15; J. Reitsma, *Voor en tegen de moderne theologie* (Groningen: Wolters, 1863), 6; cf. also J. I. Doedes, *Modern of Apostolisch Christendom* (Utrecht: Kemink en Zoon, 1860); idem, *De zoogenaamde Moderne Theologie eenigszins toegelicht* (Utrecht: Kemink en Zoon, 1861); J. Cramer, *De illusie der moderne rigting* (Amsterdam: Kirberger, 1862); idem, *Het berouw en het ethisch determinisme* (Amsterdam: Kirberger, 1868); A. Kuyper, *Het Modernisme, een fata morgana* (Amsterdam: de Hoogh, 1871); ET: "Modernism: A Fata Morgana in the Christian Domain," in James D. Bratt, ed., *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 87–124.

38. Meyboom, supplement to *De Hervorming*, Saturday July 10, p. 4.

39. Tr. note: Bavinck refers here to the ongoing "Schoolstrijd" [school conflict] in

took so little regard of the indispensability and significance of religion that it backed a neutral instruction and a neutral education in schools and drastically confined religion to the church and the family, or preferably still, to the heart and home. The same superficiality clings to the modern trend at all times and places when it talks about religion from a scholarly point of view. It accepted without criticism a worldview which was put forth as the truth and at once abandoned all Christian doctrines at its demand. The question didn't even occur to it whether it may not have thrown the baby out with the bathwater. It wanted above all to be modern, "up to date," but because of that, as theology, it became a faithful copy of the rationalism of the eighteenth century.⁴⁰

This superficiality has taken its revenge in a truly alarming way in the poverty of preaching, in the emptiness of the churches, in the practical consequences which the people had to bear, in the inability to formulate a confession and dogmatics,⁴¹ in the uncertainty pertaining to all Christian doctrines, and in the great variety of positions that are put forward among the followers of the modern trend—positions that also touch on principal loci such as the person of Christ, the nature of sin, the necessity of redemption, the personality of God. There were and are among them every color of the rainbow: followers of Kant and Hegel, "ethical" and intellectuals, conservatives and radicals, pantheists and theists, syncretists who co-mingle Buddhism, Islam, Judaism and Christianity, and particularists who still acknowledge a special place and an absolute meaning for Christianity. There was even a while when there was an

Dutch society, a major political controversy concerning the freedom of educational choice for parents through equalization of public financing for Protestant, Roman Catholic, and non-religious schools.

40. As Niebergall says, "They are only mere thoughts, certainly, but also significant thoughts at which we have arrived independently; most are in agreement with us concerning rationalism." Fischer and Schiele, *Fünfter Weltcongress*, 263.

41. At the meeting of modern theologians on April 8–9, 1902, F. C. Fleischer expressed the desirability of a modern dogmatics, but Prof. Cannegieter opposed this and said, "we moderns are so rich that we can't say on cue what we have; only beggars know what they own." Cf. 1st and 2nd supplement in *De Hervorming* (May 17, 1902).

atheistic nuance among them, but above all what is remarkable is that in recent years under all manner of influences—the pessimism of Schopenhauer, the pacifism of Tolstoy, the socialism of Marx, the mysticism of modern art, the Woodbrook Study Center,⁴² and the revival of Hegelian philosophy—that under these and yet other influences a party of malcontents has been formed that is no longer satisfied with the “old” modern theology and seeks something else, something deeper. Broadly speaking there is once again being awakened an awareness of human dependence and misery, a conviction of the seriousness of sin, a need of a redeemer, a necessity of reconciliation and regeneration, a faith in the mystery of the world, and a thirst for fellowship with the living God. Doctrines that had long since been viewed as outdated and dismissed—the fall, miracles, Christ, regeneration, heaven and hell—have again come into conversation. The richness of religious speech in believing circles has awakened jealousy, and the ancient Christian confession has found an appreciative verdict among many.⁴³

It does not follow, therefore, that all moderns should be painted with the same brush and lumped together under the name of “naturalists,” because everyone who confesses a personal God who in his essence is distinct from nature even though by his providence He is present and active in it, everyone who believes in a sustaining and reigning of the world by God’s omnipotent and omnipresent power, everyone who honors

42. Tr. note: the Woodbrook Quaker Study Center was founded by George Cadbury (1839–1922) in 1903 and occupies his former home on the Bristol Road in Birmingham.

43. Eerdmans (Ignotus/Agnotus) wrote his two articles in the spirit of the Malcontents, “Reactie of Vooruitgang,” *Theologische Tijdschrift* 43 (1909): 2–33; 146–80. Furthermore, I refer by way of examples to the lecture by Dr. van Peursum cited above in note 14; to the paper by F. C. Fleischer cited in the previous note; to the various Christological views among the moderns (cf. my *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:272, 300); to the article concerning the “old” belief in providence and miracles by A. H. van der Hoeve, *Theologische Tijdschrift* 44 (1910): 397–418; and concerning the “fall” by J. F. Beerens, *Theologische Tijdschrift* 44 (1910): 419–36; to the paper by Dr. C. E. Hooykaas concerning the eschatological expectations in the religious world-and-life view with following discussion in the same from April 28 and 29, 1908 (supplement to *De Hervorming*, Saturday May 23, pp. 14ff.).

religion not merely as an aesthetic feeling comparable with that which nature and art evoke but as life in the fellowship with the living God, everyone who cherishes the hope of faith that the kingdom of God will achieve certain victory over every sin and death in each person and in humanity—they all are supernaturalists not in the historical but in the etymological sense of the word even if they deny the actuality and the possibility of miracles.⁴⁴ For if there is a God who is substantially distinct from nature and who is exalted above it, and if from this God there proceeds an efficacy and a means that makes the whole power of evil in both the ethical and physical sense subservient to his command, then an order of things is thereby recognized which lies above nature and also above the human intellectual capacity. In the past Pierson correctly observed against Scholten that the prayer for a pure heart is just as supernatural as the prayer for healing of a sick man.⁴⁵ There is indeed no religion and morality, and in no case any Christian religion and morality, without supernaturalism. The question of supernaturalism is thus truly not as simple as that which has from the beginning been portrayed by the proponents of modernism; it is inseparably bound up with the substance, the right, and the truth of religion. The history of religions and the philosophy and the psychology of religion have clearly brought this to light in the recent years. A natural religion, or more preferably still, a religion on the foundation of naturalism, is perhaps thinkable as a philosophical postulate, but it is unsuited to the foundation of a community, to the creation of worship, and it also appears nowhere as a religion in actuality. All religions are supernatural. They always rely on a genuine or putative revelation. They all live from the belief that the deity is a power above nature. As soon as modernism leaves the pulpit and enters

44. Dr. Samuel Cramer too says that the conservatives among the moderns are supernaturalists not in the sense this term bore twenty years ago, but in the sense that they, unlike von Hamel, for instance, do not derive religious disposition and experiences from the individual alone or humanity as a whole but believe in divine external operations in life and the world which are purposed and performed by Him. *Konservatief Modernisme: Godgeleerdheid en Volksleven* (Leiden: van Doesburgh, 1882), 27.

45. Pierson, *Gods wondermacht en ons geestelijk leven*, 37, 42, 55, 64.

life, once it comes into contact as a religion with the awful realities of sin, suffering, and death, in preaching, in prayer or in song, it speaks in the language of supernaturalism in spite of itself.⁴⁶ There is only the choice between remaining silent and bowing before the supremacy of nature, or believing and bearing witness to a God who, in spite of everything that arouses doubt, is a God of love and a Father of compassion whose holy will triumphs over every power that opposes him.

It follows with logical consequence from all this that the question of supernaturalism or naturalism concerns not only one or the other Christian confession but the substance of Christianity—even of all religion. At the recent monist congress held in Hamburg, Haeckel was cited once again in a lecture delivered by Dr. Heinrich Schmidt of Jena that the descent theory has completely destroyed the doctrine of the independence and immortality of the soul as well as that of the freedom of the human will. It is certainly true that he is attempting to find a secure compensation for religion in monism, but it hardly requires proof that this monistic religion has but the name in common with what up until now has counted and what will also count in the future as religion.⁴⁷ The thousands multiply in the present time who are finished with God and regard religion as a delusion which will disappear once and for all like the belief in ghosts. The moderns are in opposition to those who hold this

46. Eerdmans positions himself at first completely on a naturalistic standpoint but then says that he only acknowledges miracles on historical grounds, *Theologische Tijdschrift* 45 (1911): 360, and that the liberals along with Prof. van Nes believe in the reality of the communion between God and man. He adds there that the moderns are indeed naturalists insofar as they repudiate them (the orthodox) in their usage of the word “supernaturalism” but not in the sense that they completely disregard spiritual experiences. It would be desirable that Eerdmans had explained in more detail this usage of the word supernaturalism and especially these spiritual life experiences. Perhaps he would then have come to the recognition that he himself had not yet completely vanquished supernaturalism.

47. Bruining argues in his article, “Pantheïsme of Theïsme,” *Teylers Theologische Tijdschrift* (1904): 433–57, that pantheism in the full sense of the word has no place for religion and that this always denotes the *acknowledgment* of a relation to God; cf. G. Wobbermin, *Monismus und Monotheismus* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1911).

naturalistic worldview before our eyes insofar as they value religion and want to maintain it and, like us, they are equally called to its defense. In the eyes of the radical progressives they are no less backward and narrow-minded, not to mention more half-hearted and uncommitted, than the confessors of the regular, unquestionably Christian faith. What they have heard in recent years about their “Jesus-image” and “Jesus-cult,” to give just one example,⁴⁸ is in any case sufficient to deprive them of the certainty that they may have found a harmony of “Old and New,” a reconciliation of the Christian faith and the modern worldview. The assurance that the future is theirs does not seem to be free of boasting.⁴⁹

Religion and the limits of modernism. Indeed, this modern worldview, which at the moment supports them and has comprised the foundation of their agenda, is sinking away under their feet. The modern conception of the world that science now holds up before our eyes looks quite different to the one it presented fifty years ago. People thought then that the whole world could be explained with the help of matter and energy and laws, and they entertained very naive conceptions with respect to the minimal data. This conception of the world is, however, entirely outdated, or at least it has changed significantly. With further research people saw that the world was not as simple as they had previously imagined. The origin and the substance of things remained shrouded in an impenetrable darkness. The hypothesis of Kant-Laplace explaining the origin of the planets, which had long gained almost universal acceptance, has been disproven by recent criticism. At least up until now life has not allowed itself to be explained mechanically and chemically in spite of all attempts carried out to this end. People sought in vain for conclusive proof of the animal origins of the human being. The psychic dimension of the person, in particular consciousness and will, asserted itself in its independence. Powers appear to be at work in history and other laws

48. Cf. my *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:272, and the article by Rev. K. C. Anderson, “The Collapse of Liberal Christianity,” *Hibbert Journal* 8, no. 30 (Jan. 1910): 301–20.

49. Eerdmans, “*Moderne*” *Orthodoxie*, 44.

appear to prevail other than those in material nature. Evolution is a word that, particularly in this area, has been misused in many ways and has explained nothing of the substance of the matter concerning the events and the facts. Every person, and especially every genius, is a being who occludes a mystery. Indeed, in the natural sciences, atoms, powers, and laws appear to be mysterious quantities that become more incomprehensible the more closely they are examined. So science has increased or, more preferably, her interpreters have increased in humility. The word “impossible” that earlier rolled off the tongue is used with greater caution or indeed completely avoided. Where the human being was explained from the world the conviction has taken root with many that the world must be understood from the human being, matter from spirit, actuality from the idea. All being appears to be taking root once again in “a cosmic life of the creative variety.”⁵⁰ It is once again pronounced that “our existence is no closed circle but rather remains open to impressions from metaphysical contexts.”⁵¹ Physics thus has need of metaphysics once again, science cannot do without philosophy, and the final cause and deepest ground of all things appears to be such that it is either completely unknowable or else can only be the object of a childlike faith.

Now, I am not claiming that this latest conception of the world agrees with Christianity in every respect. This, nevertheless, is certain: modern theology with its naturalism has been far too hasty. Prof. Eerdmans says that supernaturalism in the last hundred years has been washed away bit by bit by the rising waves of the “Enlightenment.” Along with ghosts and witches, spirits and devils are relegated to the realm of fables. Heaven is wrenched from its place and was no longer in the blue space above the clouds. Hell and the eternal fire is no longer somewhere in the deepest depths. God is no longer “our dear Lord”⁵² but has become the Absolute,

50. “... ein kosmisches Leben schöpferischer Art.”

51. “Unser Dasein ist kein geschlossener Kreis, sondern steht Eindrücken aus metaphysischen Zusammenhängen offen.” Julius Goldstein, *Wandlungen in der Philosophie der Gegenwart* (Leipzig: W. Klinkhardt, 1911), 163.

52. “Onze lieve Heer.” Ed. note: this is a characteristic expression of Dutch “Jesus-

the primary cause of all things. Historical inquiry and contemporary experience teach that God performs no miracles.⁵³ This, however, is putting it all much too coarsely. From a purely scientific point of view one is not entitled to make such statements as long as our knowledge of nature and its context is so completely deficient, and as long as history lays out an endless series of facts before us that await clarification, and as long as religion, which inhabits and is nourished by mystery, retains its right to exist. It is also noteworthy that with respect to the change of the dominant worldview not only is religion being revived⁵⁴ but also all notions of revelation, miracle, regeneration, etc. are back on the agenda.⁵⁵

piety” traditionally heard in Roman Catholic circles.

53. Eerdmans, “*Moderne*” *Orthodoxie*, 12, and *Theologische Tijdschrift* 45 (1911): 360.

54. The revival of religion requires no proof; it is generally recognized. One need only consult the work of van M. Schian, *Die Wahrheit der Religion nach den neuesten Vertretern der Religionsphilosophie* (Zürich: Leemann, 1908), wherein the attempts of many authorities such as Eucken, Dorner, Troeltsch, Wundt, Siebeck, James et al. to maintain the right of religion is set out and assessed. Also in the circles of socialists some adopt a friendlier disposition toward religion. According to Hans Müller, socialism cannot do without religion. Max Maurenbrecher is of the opinion that socialism itself brings a religion. Paul Kampffmeijer strains to cleanse socialism from the suspicion of atheism; cf. their articles in the *Sozialistische Monatshefte* cited and discussed by August Erdmann, “Social Democracy and Religion,” *Sozialistische Monatshefte* 17, no. 8 (1911): 512–19.

55. Cf. notes 41, 42, and 44 above as well as comments by Titius, Troeltsch, and Loofs cited in my *Philosophy of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 20. According to Richard Kromer, “the meaning of the world [can] appear to us only in the supernatural,” cited in *Theologische Rundschau*, Dec. (1910): 481, and P. Jaeger says there on p. 489: “It is one of the most important tasks that we impart anew an indication of the transcendent to the generations that have lost their nerve by reason of the old Supernaturalism.” [*Es ist eine der wichtigsten Aufgaben, daß wir unserm durch den alten Supranaturalismus kopfscheu gewordenen Geschlechte den Hinweis auf das Überweltliche von neuem vermitteln.*] In an article on Ritschl’s *Bedeutung für die Gegenwart* in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 20 (1910): 165–96, Häring expresses himself thus on page 188: “We all know the restricted nature of the words ‘personality’ and ‘supernaturalism’; but what the Christian means by them is sacrosanct as long as Christianity, or more fundamentally, religion, exists.” [*Die Beschränktheit der Worte Persönlichkeit und Supernaturalismus kennen wir Alle; aber was der Christ damit meint,*

It is far from agreed upon that they are still conceptualized in a Christian sense, but their retrieval is nevertheless strong proof that they stand in the closest relation to religion and specifically to the Christian religion. This surprises nobody who reflects on their substance. If religion is not a mere psychical phenomenon but is inherent to human nature,⁵⁶ does have the right to exist, and is truth, then it follows that God exists personally, that he reveals himself, that he can be known and served. Moreover, this presupposes that God personally approaches me in relationship and can establish fellowship with me and that I can trust him unconditionally, at all times, in dire and death, and that I may place my destiny in his hands for time and eternity.

I am not claiming that this deep and rich conception of religion appears in all religions. We owe it precisely to Christ's Gospel, but every religious person will affirm and acknowledge that this is the truth and simultaneously the value of religion. But then this same religion also gives

ist unantastbar, solange es Christentum, ja im Grunde Religion geben soll.] Herman Gunkel also says that we "will never be able to dispense with [*niemals werden verzichten können*] the term revelation"; cf. Fischer and Schiele, *Fünfter Weltcongress*, 179.

Ed. note: The article by P. Jaegers that Bavinck cites is "Fragen und Sorgen der Gegenwart," *Theologisches Rundschau* 13 (1910). Jaegers refers to Richard Kromer's remarks concerning the philosopher Henri Bergson (1859–1941). Kromer notes that we learn from Bergson that we can only make sense of our this-worldly reality, that it only begins to have value for us, when we see that it is anchored in an other-worldly reality. Kromer concludes, "From this, clearly arises the thought that we so frequently encounter in piety: that the meaning of the world in general comes to us only from a Supra-worldly [source]." [Hier kommt der Gedanke deutlich heraus, an dem uns in der Frömmigkeit so viel liegt: dass der Sinn der Welt uns überhaupt nur an einem Ueberweltlichen aufgehen kann.]

56. K. Dunkmann, *Das religiöse Apriori und die Geschichte* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1910). The *a priori* is prior to all experience, says Spruyt in his *Proeve van eene geschiedenis der leer van de aangeboren begrippen* (Leiden: Brill, 1879), 348. Titius spoke similarly at the congress in Berlin [when he said that] there is "an intellectual, an ethical *a priori*" [ein geistiges, ein ethisches *a priori*] which constitutes the foundation of all development. Fischer and Schiele, *Fünfter Weltcongress*, 232. According to Hugo de Vries, *Afstammings- en Mutatieleer* (Baarn, 1907), 36, the need for religion is an innate property.

us the right and lays on us the requirement to resist any worldview that leaves no place for it. For just as in science, art, moral phenomena, etc. in religion we have to do with a portion of reality that under any conception of the world lays claim to full and impartial recognition. And what a reality reveals itself here! We do not want to cheapen anything of the importance of the discoveries or of the progress of technology, but they indeed contribute nothing of meaning to religion, which as fellowship with God is the comfort and peace of the soul. In this spirit Prof. Titius stated at the congress of liberal theologians in Berlin, when speaking on the tension between evolution and ethics, that he was an adherent of the notion of evolution, but “if this tension is irreconcilable, then I will flatly renounce the notion of development because, if necessary, I can live without understanding the world, but I cannot live if I no longer know what I should do.”⁵⁷ This is, however, a different reading of Jesus’ words, “what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?” Religion is always involved with the innermost recesses of the human personality, its eternal happiness, the blessedness of one’s soul,⁵⁸ and with this worldview therefore he must proclaim a weighty message, indeed he himself brings therewith a worldview that is supernatural through and through and ascribes a power to God that is above nature and raised high above all of our thinking and doing and makes all things subservient to the coming of his kingdom and the glory of his name.

It is completely true that our science no longer conceptualizes God in this way, and especially not the science of our time. In previous centuries under the reigning naive worldview it was indeed stated somewhat

57. “...wenn diese Spannung unversöhnlich ist, dann will ich rundweg auf den Gedanken der Entwicklung verzichten, denn ich kann zur Not leben, ohne die Welt zu verstehen, aber ich kann nicht leben, wenn ich nicht mehr weiß, was ich soll.” Titius, in Fischer and Schiele, *Fünfter Weltcongress*, 224. Also cf. Athanase Coquerel in Tiele, *Inleiding tot de godsdienst-wetenschap*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam: van Kampen, 1897–99), 1: 208: “to change my feelings, you only have need of a convincing explanation, but to convince me to reject my religious convictions, ‘you’d have to tear me to pieces’ [il faut me déchirer de haut en bas].”

58. Tiele, *Inleiding*, 2:55.

differently. God lived in heaven, which was located above the clouds, and he looked upon the earth from there. He observed the whole conduct of mortals and governed and reigned over everything according to his wise and holy will. He was everywhere near to us, and his presence was felt everywhere. The Copernican worldview, the expansion of our knowledge of secondary causes, insight into the rule of the law of causality, and deeper psychological and historical study of phenomena have, however, distanced God from us, so to speak. It is as if everywhere nature has come to stand between God and us. Nowhere does he appear immediately present and directly to be at work. Everywhere his efficacy is “mediated” by factors of nature and history. Even in one’s own mental life and deepest spiritual experience we do not encounter Him face to face.⁵⁹ Nature reveals God, yet equally it conceals Him. Countless then is the number of those who no longer believe in a personal God and at the most still use this name for the unconscious, absolute power that pervades, determines, and rules everything, for the primordial cause of all things, which can no longer be called dear Lord and compassionate Father but may only yet bear the cold name of The Absolute. Indeed, it is certain that religion, that is to say, persons themselves in the kernel of their being, cannot rest in this and cannot live by this. They long after a God who is near them, who hears their prayer, who in a word—all powers and laws of nature notwithstanding—can perform miracles and does perform miracles. Science to a certain extent does allow us to know God in this way as a distant God who hides himself behind nature and who acts in no other way other than mediately. Religion preaches a God of nearness who as a Father cares for his children and provides for all their physical and spiritual needs.

Here arises here an enormous problem, indeed a problem that runs much deeper and is of a more general character than is acknowledged by our modern opponents. It is in no way a problem with which orthodoxy, or Reformed theology, or Neo-Calvinism alone has to wrestle, a problem

59. Th. Steinmann, “Das Bewußtsein von den vollen Wirklichkeit Gottes,” *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 12, no. 6 (1902): 429–96.

that would invoke a contradiction between their past and present, between their old faith and their modern worldview. On the contrary, it is equally specific to the modern trend insofar as it at least wants to be theology and religion. Moreover, it does not originate in recent times but is centuries old and has actually always been there. Nothing is easier than to compare statements of earlier and more recent theologians on certain passages of Holy Scripture that speak about God in a very anthropomorphic way, texts which give expression to the absolute transcendence of God, to his immanence and efficacy in all that is made. Likewise, it is an easy thing to compare Calvin's *Institutes* with Kuyper's *Lectures on Calvinism* and point to a similar contrariety. However, one forgets thereby that the doctrine of God in Christian theology is not built on singular disparate statements but on the whole of revelation in Scripture, and that Calvinism as it was revived in the previous century deserves to be judged not after a single work but in its entirety and compared with the doctrine of the Reformer of Geneva. Positioning oneself at this impartial standpoint, one shall soon make the surprising discovery that the alleged contrariety does not exist between the Scriptures and contemporary theology, and neither does it exist between the old and the new Calvinism, but it appears in Scripture itself and is encountered in every theologian. I do not thereby deny that it has at the present time adopted a more acute form for the reasons mentioned above. Our conception of the world has definitely undergone significant change, and our knowledge of the connection between cause and effect in nature and history has increased appreciably. In principle, however, the question has always been there, and it comes down to this: how is it possible that the God that science recognizes and the God that religion requires is one and the same God? How can the infinite, eternal being that is the power in all power and the life of all life be at the same time the loving, the gracious, and the caring Father of his children?

One and the same God. If, however, in principle we pose the question in this way, our eyes will be opened to this quite special peculiarity of the Holy Scriptures: they proclaim the unity of both from the

beginning and maintain it to the end. The Creator of the heavens and the earth in whom all creatures live and move and have their being, who is incomparable, indescribable, infinite and eternal, He too is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and in Him the Father of all his children. I would have to go through the entire Scriptures with you in order to portray this unity of God before your eyes in its full glory, but I can summarize everything in these truly beautiful words of Isaiah the prophet, "This is what the high and lofty One says—he who lives forever, whose name is holy: I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite." This unity, which is of quite a different kind and has a much richer and deeper meaning than the word "monotheism" expresses, is sought in vain beyond the domain of special revelation. A certain dualism always lies at the foundation of religious life, whether it arises as a bifurcation of the godhead into many gods and spirits, or as pantheism alongside polytheism, or as a distinction between an evil and a good, a lower and a higher god, or also as an opposition between the pure idea of the good and eternal, indomitable matter. When in this century the theism of the Holy Scriptures was abandoned, in principle the same dualism and polytheism returned after a brief and dissatisfying experimentation with materialism and pantheism. After the philosophies of Fichte, Hegel, Schleiermacher, and Biedermann had sacrificed personality to the absolute, the recent Neo-Kantian theology led some of its adherents to abandon the absoluteness of God for the sake of personality. The "ethical" moderns here in our country made a distinction between the natural and the moral world-order, between God as an object of worship in religion and the eternal being that is the primordial cause of all things. In England J. Stuart Mill denied eternity to God, Drs. Rashdall and McTaggart abandoned his omnipotence, and Dr. Howinson defended the conception of a non-creating God. In America William James distinguished between the metaphysical and the ethical attributes of God and deemed the former worthless. Thus in this century in which science has brought to light more clearly than ever the endless diversity and the immense dimensions of the universe as well as its unity, worldly pluralism

has found its defenders, and the question is once more on the agenda whether polytheism deserves preference over monotheism.⁶⁰

The same dualism presents itself in another form where people still want to uphold the truth of religion or the dogmas of the church but only as nothing more than representations of symbolic value. In this form too, however, dualism is untenable. For if dogma is only a symbolic representation, then presupposed therein is that the core of it is something different than what is expressed in the representation. For example, religious belief according to Rauwenhoff actually entails only the reality of a moral world-order, but with the assistance of the imagination it is clothed by religion in a form which speaks to the mind, is appropriate for the people, and suitable for worship.⁶¹ One may well acknowledge that religion demands such assistance from the imagination, has always served this purpose, and shall continue to do so in the future, but the fact remains that the clothing itself changes with the times and is subject to continuous variation. In the Old Testament, for example, God was often portrayed in the image of a stone, a rock, a sun, a shield, a portion and a cup, or also as a bridegroom, a man, a shepherd, a doctor, a potter, etc., but we have outgrown these images and no longer speak like this. In the New Testament the apostles applied the Israelite names of Messiah, Lord, and King to Jesus. They spoke of his death as a sin offering, described his rising as a bodily resurrection, and portrayed the way he became Spirit as a bodily and localized ascension in order that Jesus' person and work

60. J. Stuart Mill in John S. Mackenzie, *A Manual of Ethics*, 4th rev. ed. (New York: Hinds & Noble, 1901), 448. William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: The Modern Library, 1902), 130, 515; idem, "Pluralism and Religion," *Hibbert Journal* 6 (July 1908): 721–28; idem., *A Pluralistic Universe* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1909); John McTaggart and Ellis McTaggart, *Some Dogmas of Religion* (London: Edward Arnold, 1906), 221; cf. my *Philosophy of Revelation*, 107, 211.

61. Thus L. W. E. Rauwenhoff in his *Wijsbegeerte van den godsdienst* (Leiden: Brill, 1887). Ed. note: Rauwenhoff was one of Bavinck's teachers at the University of Leiden. For a discussion especially of symbolism, see Auguste Sabatier, *Esquisse d'une Philosophie de la Religion d'après La Psychologie et L'Histoire* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1897), 390–400; cf. Edouard Le Roy, *Dogme et critique* (Paris: Bloud, 1907).

would make a deep impression on their contemporaries, but we have risen above that now as well. The image of a wrathful judge and of a sacrifice of reconciliation no longer suits our consciousness. Even if we often call God a Father these days, this is a symbolic representation that gradually loses its power and no longer speaks to those who have no father and live outside of a family.⁶² There is no need for lengthy argumentation that all religious representations of this kind lose their value and that their preservation by these symbolists leads to a questionable and eventually intolerable dualism. With it we return to the gnostic distinction between believing and knowing, to the nominalist doctrine of double truth, to the opposition between head and heart as per Jacobi, to the subordination of statutory to rational religion as per Kant, and of the representation to the notion as per Hegel. With it we are driven toward the fatal separation between world and church, between science and faith, between scientific and ecclesial theology. All of this is a result of symbolism, which is akin to pantheism, having confused religion with art and religious representation with atheistic sentiment. In art, and to a certain extent in worship, there is a place for symbolism, but religious representations cannot survive without faith in their truth.⁶³

Christian theology has taken another path. Following in the footsteps of Holy Scripture, it simultaneously maintained the absolute transcendence of God above every creature and his affinity to all creatures, in particular to the human being who was created in his image. This soon led to a distinction in the attributes ascribed to the divine being. There were negative and positive, quiescent and operative, incommunicable and communicable attributes. According to the way of negation⁶⁴ everything

62. Fr. Niebergall, "Die religiöse Phantasie und die Verkündigung an unsere Zeit," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 16, no. 4 (1906): 251–85.

63. Ed. note: Abraham Kuyper made this same case with vigor during his visit to North America in a lecture before the Historical Presbyterian Society, Philadelphia, December 6, 1898: *The Antithesis between Symbolism and Revelation* (Amsterdam: Höveker & Wormser; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1899).

64. "via negationis"

that is in creatures was denied to him, while according to the way of eminence⁶⁵ everything once again was ascribed to him. Alongside apophatic theology there arose cataphatic theology. On the one hand it was confessed that God is the Infinite whose name cannot be named, whose being cannot be defined, to whom no attribute—not even being—can be ascribed univocally. On the other hand it was maintained with the same insistence that he has many names, that all manner of virtues and perfections may be truly ascribed to him, that he is gracious and compassionate and rich in mercy. This isn't to say that the earlier theology was unaware of the absoluteness of God and that this was first brought to light through acquaintance with the immensity of the universe, for the quantitative expanse of the world with which we are now most certainly better acquainted than our forbears has nothing to do with the qualitative distinction between the infinite and the finite that is to be made between the Creator and his creatures. Indeed, that distinction was felt more deeply in previous centuries than in our day. Also, one should not echo the commonly-held opinion that in the days of the prophets and apostles and in the first centuries of the Christian church people found it easy to believe in miracles because they didn't have any understanding of nature, of natural powers, and natural laws. At that time they also possessed a knowledge of the normal course of nature, of the ordinances to which all creatures are bound, of the regular sequence of day and night, of summer and winter, of seedtime and harvest. Indeed, in Christian theology and philosophy the notion of nature, of its underlying powers and laws, of the relationship of primary to secondary causes, and the comprehensive providence of God was as earnestly investigated as it is in this century and fundamentally was understood much better.⁶⁶ In all these respects our knowledge may have increased, but in principle it is no different from that of previous centuries. Furthermore, this new knowledge has solved so few of the riddles of nature that it has actually confirmed the saying of the

65. "via eminentiae"

66. One need only consult the doctrine of concurrence, or of the relationship between primary and secondary causes; cf. my *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:608–15.

poet, “no creaturely mind can penetrate into the innermost being of nature.”⁶⁷ Similarly, the pantheism and materialism which have gained such great influence over the minds of the nineteenth century are not to be viewed as the fruit of modern natural and historiographical scholarship, for they appeared already with a much more slender understanding of reality in antiquity and were opposed by Christian theologians and philosophers of all times and refuted with succinct arguments. No, not because they had no awareness of nature and its ordinances, of the absolute transcendence of God and of his immanence and efficacy in all that is made, but notwithstanding, they believed in the wondrous power of God’s grace.

They attributed the basis of that faith to a revelation that is to be distinguished from general revelation and bears a special character, and today we too cannot do otherwise. That distinction indeed does not lie first and foremost in the *manner* in which the one and the other has come to us, in the natural or supernatural path along which God brought it to us, but above all in the *content*, which differs in essence with the one and with the other. General revelation that comes to us in nature, in history, and in our own heart and conscience gives us an awareness of the goodness of God, indeed equally and in yet stronger measure of his righteousness and wrath, of his incomparable greatness and majesty, or in the words of Paul, of “his eternal power and divine nature.” These days poets and philosophers proclaim as loudly as possible, “life is perhaps somewhat pleasant for some, but by far for most it is difficulty and grief, suffering and sorrow.” The study of nature and history changes little here. It may increase knowledge and improve the circumstances of life, but it can give us no assurance of the love of God. Creation preaches no loving God. Neither will we be convinced of that by the testimony of our conscience or the experiences of our heart, for as long as both live by general revelation, they are much more condemning than excusing toward

67. “Ins Innere der Natur dringt kein erschaffener Geist.” Tr. note: Bavinck is quoting a well-known saying of the Swiss anatomist, physiologist, naturalist, and poet, Albrecht von Haller (1708–77).

us and have need of atonement themselves. The necessity of a special revelation is negatively demonstrated nowhere more starkly than by the telling fact that all who deny it and who satisfy themselves with the content of revelation in nature and history lose the right and freedom to continue to believe in God's fatherly love in spite of his severity and greatness. History testifies in every century, but it pronounces this even more clearly and powerfully in these times in which science makes such a deep impression on us concerning the immensity of the universe and inexorability of the natural powers, that no other names for God seem to remain than that of "the Absolute," "the primordial cause of all things," "the life of all life," and "the power in all powers." The faith that is based on them may no longer boldly emphasize God's love; it is no longer capable of professing and testifying. Along with the content it has also lost the language of faith. It is impoverished for words not just theologically but also in preaching and prayer, on the sickbed and deathbed. It has to make do with certain general, vague notions and is continually burdened by a fear of science. In contrast, faith immediately finds solid ground under its feet when it stands upon God's *special* revelation, which comes to the human heart objectively in the person of Christ and subjectively in the testimony of the Holy Spirit. Then the love of God is poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us, and we are assured that no science or culture, no immense universe, and no mighty and merciless natural powers can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The truth of Christianity itself. Now if religion (not as religiosity but as genuine worship, as fellowship with the living God) presupposes such a special revelation both objectively and subjectively, then the present controversy takes on a very serious character. It is not about a few orthodox hymn tunes or dogmatic formulas but about the preservation of the Christian religion itself; that is, it concerns the truth, the "consummate spiritual and moral religion,"⁶⁸ as Ritschl describes the Christian

68. "vollendet geistliche und sittliche Religion"

religion. Moreover, it would be a superficial psychologist and historian who in the changing forms perceives nothing of the idea that is hidden underneath them and who, for example, does not know better than to regard the dogmatic controversy of the fourth century as of no higher value than that of a captious and impassioned dispute about a single letter in the word *homo-* or *homoiousios*. Christian theology has always occupied a different and a higher position. It avoided the error of symbolism, which confuses the language of religion with that of art, and maintained on the basis of God's self-revelation that we may speak of him in human terms since he is related to his creatures as their Creator and especially to human beings. Also, if this relationship did not exist, creation, regeneration, and worship would all be impossible, and there would only remain room for agnosticism, for there is no third way between anthropomorphism and agnosticism.⁶⁹ But for these same reasons Christian theology recognized that all of our thinking and speaking about God is finite, limited, and incomplete, not archetypal but ectypal, not divine but human, not adequate but analogical. We can actually better articulate what he is not than what he in fact is. As regards the Christian dogma par excellence, that is, the doctrine of the Trinity, it was readily admitted that the terms being, person, generation, spiration, etc. were deficient and only served as tools to maximally preserve the truth of the Scriptures against its opponents.⁷⁰ Calvin says that phrases like those the apostle Paul sometimes uses—for example, that God is an enemy of the people until they are received in grace through the death of Christ—accommodate our way of understanding so that we should better grasp how miserable and dreadful our condition outside of Christ is.⁷¹ The whole of Christian theology is even built on the assumption that it cannot

69. Antonin-Gilbert Sertillanges, "Agnosticisme ou Anthropomorphisme," *Revue de Philosophie* 9 (1906): 157–81; cited by Le Roy, *Dogme et critique*, 135n.

70. Cf. my *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:309. Ed. note: cf. 2:329–34; Loofs, *Dogmengeschichte* 4th ed. (Halle: Niemeyer, 1906), 750, 881.

71. Calvin, *Institutes*, II.xvi. 2; cf. Scholten, *De Leer der Hervormde Kerk*, 5 vols. (Leiden: P. Engels, 1848–52), 1:413–15.

consist in a literalistic reproduction of the Holy Scriptures but that it must develop itself independently and freely, bound only to its object, taking a position in special revelation and thereby conjoin itself to the consciousness and life of the times in which it appears and labors. This is how the church fathers proceeded as they attempted to make the Christian truth their own with the assistance of the philosophical modes of thoughts of their time. The Reformers went to work no differently when they purified confession and theology of the Jewish and pagan errors that had crept in and preached the divine truth once again in such a way that it commended itself to the consciences of the people.

It is the same with evangelism, which nowadays is on the minds of all Christians and especially those of the Reformed confession. Both science and life place before us a number of formidable problems whereby Christianity more than ever has to demonstrate its catholicity and show that the Gospel is a message for all peoples, times, and conditions. If we thereby proceed from the conviction of faith that general and special revelation come from the same God whose absolute transcendence above all creatures does not preclude his affinity and his fellowship with humanity, then evangelism may be difficult and may bring along with it a great many dangers of error and deviation, but it is not impossible to fulfill. It is one and the same true and living God who revealed his mercy in Christ and who also testifies to his eternal power and divine majesty through the medium of recent natural and historical scholarship. It is impermissible, then, to close oneself off from the world and to disdain the knowledge that God in his providence is making available to us in this century on every front. We oppose the tactic of Julian the Apostate who deprived Christians of science and the right to teach and in the name of orthodoxy wanted to drive them back onto the obsolete standpoint. We assert the right to teach, using all the resources that science and culture put in our service, in order to better understand God's truth in general and special revelation and make it our spiritual possession more intimately than before. So we are grateful that we gain deeper insight into the organic character of revelation and inspiration, that the historical circumstances under which the prophets and apostles appeared, spoke,

and wrote may be ever better understood by us, that we can more accurately trace out the paths down which Christ has led the founding of his church and the development of his truth. In principle, this has been recognized by theology in all times. Exegesis and dogmatics as practiced in the Christian church continually reckon with the fact that the prophets, for example, employed Israelite concepts and imagery in their portrayal of the future, that the apostles preached the Gospel in the language of the people that was then in use, and that Christ himself lived in the midst of his people as an Israelite. Moreover, if the Scriptures say that in the past God spoke to our forefathers at many times and in various ways, that the Word proceeded from him but comes to us by means of the prophets and apostles, that according to the flesh Christ is descended from the patriarchs, and that God opened the hard heart of Lydia under Paul's preaching, then [we too must follow suit]. The preceding gives us the right and the obligation to research the psychological and historical conditions in which revelation, inspiration, incarnation, and regeneration have occurred and to cast light on the organic character of all these wondrous facts. All of Scripture preaches the unity of God, that is, the unity of the God of nature and of the God of grace, and therefore it cannot dualistically separate creation and recreation, for it always binds them organically and harmoniously together. Discerning and demonstrating this connection, therefore, belongs to the task of scholarly theology. Scholarly theology would, however, disregard its calling and exceed its powers were it to conclude from the connection and analogy of nature and grace to the identity of both, or, as with mysticism, sacrifice nature to grace, or with rationalism, grace to nature. The condition under which and the manner in which an occurrence takes place are quite different from the cause from which it arises and the content that it includes. In nature and history, in physical and psychical life, in the intellect and the will, in creation and recreation, laws do not occupy the first place, but differential *forces*; forces everywhere work according to their own way. Therefore the conflict in religion and theology in principle concerns the content, that is, the reality of divine revelation. With any dogma in Christian religion and theology, whether it concerns the world or humanity, Christ's person and

work, his benefits or the means of grace, it always has to do with God himself, to do with fellowship with the One whom to know is eternal life.⁷²

When I look back on the path travelled from the point that has now been reached, it does not seem to me to be in conflict with the point of departure. This may well be so if the conception of the world that recent natural and historical scholarship presents could only be interpreted monistically. But monism in its various forms is so firmly contradicted by the diversity that exists in the world, and it sacrifices so recklessly the differences and contrasts to be found among creatures to an abstract and vague formulation that it summons pluralism and polytheism to life as a reaction against it. Although it appears justified in appealing to the unity and order in the world, to the relationship and analogy of all creatures, its popularity and influence must be attributed above all to the fact that it ingratiates itself to the spirit of this century, which is characterized in every place by its strong opposition to all inequality. Now, the relationship of unity and diversity is a problem that has always been on the agenda. Parmenides and Heraclitus, Spinoza and Hegel, pantheism and polytheism, Buddhism and Parseeism have always stood opposed to one another, but in practical terms it has never been as significant as it is in our days. The whole world appears to be in mutiny; men no longer want to be men and fathers, women no longer women and mothers, children no longer children, workers no longer servants, citizens no longer subjects. Following in the footsteps of the French Revolution, socialism declares every inequality as originating from the poor arrangement of society so that in the essence of the matter the social question does not agitate for higher wages and shorter hours but opposes every difference in station of life and finds its solution only in the promise of utopia. Christian theology, however, allowing itself to be instructed by the Holy Scriptures, took a different and deeper view of reality, and it proclaimed, especially in the mouths of Augustine and Calvin, that all difference and inequality among creatures had its final cause and deepest ground in the one, wise, and holy

72. That is indeed the unity in diversity of which Dr. Hylkema speaks and that the words of Dr. Kuyper he cites express so beautifully. *Oud en Nieuw Calvinisme*, 290–94.

will of God Almighty. Thus, there is indeed a unity that holds everything together, but this unity is not to be found within the world itself by erasing the differences and contrasts; it rests in the hand of Him who as King of kings reigns over all things. In this conception of the world that is not negated by recent scholarship but on the contrary is enriched and confirmed by it, there is also a place for special revelation and the Christian religion. For the world is not one in the monistic sense. On the contrary it is infinitely diverse, diverse in creatures, in gifts, in forces, in laws, in operations. In the rich, multifaceted world special revelation occupies a place of honor, for it bears its own character, has an independent content, is ruled by its own law, and forms the basis and content of the Christian religion, which is ruled by the law of the Spirit of life in Christ who sets us free from the law of sin and death. Everything is held together by the almighty, wise and holy, merciful and gracious will of him who is our Father in heaven—in heaven, in order that we may not think of his heavenly majesty in a earthly way, and *yet* our Father in order that we should trust at all times with childlike fear and reliance on him.

A retrospective of the school year 1910–1911. This confession has been the strength of the Free University since its founding and has continued to be so during the year past. It has fallen to me now to speak to you briefly about the year. As ever, this year was one of adversity and loss but also of progress and profit. As the University grows older, it sees the number of those who collaborated in its founding and attended its opening dwindle. A quarter of the group of founders have passed away this year: Mr. F. N. van der Meulen from Weesp; Dr. P. J. Hoedemaker, President of the Dutch Reformed Churches of Amsterdam; Mr. E. G. Wentink from Schalkwijk; and Mr. J. van Alphen from Hengelo. In addition to being a founder, Dr. Hoedemaker was a lecturer in theology at our academy from 1880 to 1887, but in the final year, because of a difference of opinion with his colleagues about the church question,⁷³ he

73. Tr. note: Bavinck is referring to what would become known as the *Doelantie*, the schism in the *Nederlands Hervormde Kerk* led by Abraham Kuyper in 1886.

himself realized an obligation to resign his post. Notwithstanding, he remained afterwards a warm and able defender of Reformed principles and as such has been a rich blessing to many. Mistert Wentink and van Alphen belong not only to the founders of the University but also continued on for many years as directors of the Higher Education Association, serving it with their gifts and abilities. Their affection remained unwavering until they stepped down; the latter still demonstrates his love even after his death through a substantial legacy. On the Oversight Committee, in accord with article 201 of the Higher Education Act, two places have become vacant, one through a sad accident that befell the Hon. J. C. de Marez Oyens from Partenkirchen in South Beieren, which brought his rich and much appreciated life to an end on August 3 of this year, and the other through the death of Mr. P. J. van Beijma on October 6 last year. Through his impartial goodwill and friendly interest Mr. Van Beijma also gained the hearts of our circle.

Apart from that, we have been protected from grievous loss by the good hand of God. The six commissioners for the formal link between the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands,⁷⁴ and the theological faculty of the Free University acquitted themselves of their task with commendable zeal and saw their mandate renewed at the most recent Synod. Only in the Board of Directors has there been any change as Mr. Tijo H. van Eeghen's term expired and was not eligible for renewal. We would have been as glad to retain him as he was to stay on. Therefore with gratitude for his service rendered we wish him a warm farewell. Meanwhile, we take heart that his place will be filled immediately, in accordance with the election at the annual meeting, by Mr. H. Bos of Rotterdam whom we warmly welcome to the Board of Directors in the name of the Senate and whom we wish profitable and fruitful service in his new capacity.

74. Tr. note: the denomination Bavinck is referring to here is the *Gereforeerde Kerken Nederland*, which was formed in 1892 by the merger of the two groups of churches that broke away from *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk* in 1834 and 1886 respectively.

Also the Board of Directors⁷⁵ proved its earthly instability in spite of its exemption from the clause concerning compulsory retirement. The cause this time, however, was not of the sorrowful type. In the course of the academic year a rumor spread that the Free University had been left a share of an important bequest; one spoke of tons of gold and of more than a million, but nobody knew for certain, not even the outgoing Rector. At the annual meeting of the Higher Education Association held at Zwolle on July 6 the chairman made an announcement at the behest of the Directors, lifting the corner of the veil that shrouded this mysterious bequest from our curious eyes. According to the announcement the Rev. C. L. D. van Coeverden Adriani, who died in Velp on January 21 of this year, had established a trust in his will consisting of the entire estate of the deceased in the form of an interest-generating property and capital fund for the purpose of promoting of tertiary Christian education, including studies in preparation for the same, and more specifically, Christian education on a Reformed basis. Accordingly, it has been placed at the disposal of the Free University on the understanding, however, that the theological faculty receive no share of the monies of the trust. The sum from the annual interest from the capital and the annual net income of the land that shall remain after all other obligations have first been met is stated in the will, but it is completely unknown to us. Although, for the uninitiated much mystery still surrounds this bequest, the chairman of the annual meeting, Hon. S. de Vries Czn.,⁷⁶ who in his various official and non-official capacities always keeps his cool and is always conscious of what he says, dared to allude to a “royal decree.” On his authority we receive these terms, and from our side we also extend our heartfelt thanks to Mrs. de Wed van Coerverden Adriani, who gave her full assent and blessing to her husband’s will. This trust, however, came to us at the loss of Dr. H. Franssen as a Trustee. The will specified that its executor, to which Dr. Franssen was nominated and after long consideration accepted,

75. “College van Curatoren”

76. Tr. note: the abbreviation “Czn.” stands for “Corneliszoon,” i.e., “son of Cornelis,” a way of distinguishing this Simon de Vries from others who bear the same name.

combine this post with the Trusteeship of the Free University. While he thus departs us in the one function, he returns indeed in an different but no less important capacity, and we hope that in this new role he may be active in the service of our university for many years to come.

Besides the changes in the Board of Directors, the faculty give the impression of rock-solid permanency. There has not been the slightest change fortunately neither through sickness, emeritation, or death, but also unfortunately nor through addition or expansion. The present Rector would especially have liked to announce an increase in the number of professors, but he had to content himself with the wish that the report on this item may be more momentous and more prolix in the following year. As the sober task of considering the way in which blessings could be multiplied falls to him, he shall take the liberty to once again intimate the request that the already long-standing intention to renovate a hospice might at last come to fruition. The need is almost universally recognized. The costs are no longer an obstacle. There remains only a little will power and perseverance. What these can achieve has been demonstrated in brilliant fashion this year with the opening of the psychiatric and neurological clinic. The erection of this building is the fruit of years of labour and the answer to many prayers. The wish that a medical faculty at the Free University might be founded, in particular one with a chair in psychiatry, was already expressed in 1887. Since then the matter has remained on the agenda, and a contract between the Association for the Christian Care of the Mentally Ill in The Netherlands and the Association for Higher Education on a Reformed Basis finally materialized on April 9, 1907.⁷⁷ In September of that year Dr. L. Bouman was nominated as professor, and that had the further result that the act for the building of a clinic was powerfully taken in hand. In particular the inspiring perseverance of the chairman of the Association for Christian Care of The Mentally

77. "Vereeniging tot Christelijke verzorging van krankzinnigen in Nederland; Vereeniging voor Hooger Onderwijs op Gereformeerden grondslag." Ed. note: The second named society was the "owner" of the Free University. This coming together of two separate organizations is an excellent illustration of Abraham Kuyper's social vision, commonly known as "sphere sovereignty."

Ill, Prof. L. Lindeboom is to be thanked that in spite of all manner of difficulties the building work was undertaken. The foundation stone was laid early in 1909. On November 3, 1910, the psychological and neurological clinic was opened in the presence of the Rector of our university. Now all fears are put to shame, and all anticipations have been exceeded; faith has achieved the victory over all manner of concerns and difficulties. Science and compassion have entered into a lovely partnership in the clinic, and the Free University has taken an important step forward on the path toward its goal.

For a number of years in succession the number of students remained stable or even declined. This past year it increased. At the beginning of my term as Rector, 132 students presented themselves for the census, and one more law student enrolled soon afterwards. The spring term suddenly brought us 7 students from South Africa, all of whom had already completed their candidacy exams at the Theological College at Stellenbosch yet still wanted to make acquaintance with our university and attend lectures for a shorter or longer time. They were followed before the long break by two ministers from the Christian Reformed Church in America who, although they had already been active in the ministry for some years, could not suppress the desire to further their studies at our college and where possible graduate with a doctorate.⁷⁸ It goes without saying that we highly prize the interest we are generating more and more from overseas. We are small in number and power, but the unity of all those who profess the same principles strengthens us and makes great things possible. Of the 7 students from South Africa only 4 stayed with us until the long break in order to still leave some time for a visit to the

78. Ed. note: Samuel (Sietze) Volbeda (1881–1953) graduated from Calvin Theological Seminary in 1904, served two Christian Reformed Churches between 1904 and 1911, and received a ThD from the Free University in 1914. He then joined the faculty of Calvin Seminary until his retirement in 1952, serving as its President from 1944 to 1952. Ymen Peter De Jong (1876–1958) was ordained in 1905, served 2 Christian Reformed Churches between 1905 and 1911, and received a DD from the Free University in 1913. He served Grandville Avenue Christian Reformed Church, which became the largest congregation in the CRC during his ministry, from 1917 to 1945.

Seminary in Princeton. The new semester brought 25 new students, 12 in theology, 7 in law, 3 in arts, and 3 in medicine. This is now our actual situation: there are 149 students enrolled at our Academy of which 77 are in theology, 44 in law, 15 in arts, 6 in medicine, 4 in science, and 3 in arts and law. During my tenure as Rector there were altogether 9 graduands: 5 in theology and 4 in law. Doctoral examinations were completed by 2 students in arts and by 3 in law. Candidacy exams were done by 2 students in the arts faculty and by 4 in the law faculty. In the theology faculty 8 students passed their candidacy examinations and 7 passed with distinction. 3 theology students passed their preliminary exams, and 6 law students passed with merit. Of the new students 3 passed the entrance exam for the commencement of studies at the university. Although the life of some students left something to be desired and the Senate was required to exercise discipline, there is still much good to speak of, even when we enlarge our perspective and also think of the Reformed students who on account of the imperfections of our college seek their education at the public universities. The student association, *Their Union*,⁷⁹ which came into being on February 9, 1886, at Leiden under the name of Hendrik de Cock and in 1905 the took name of “Community of Reformed Students,”⁸⁰ on February 9 of this year celebrated the resplendent occasion of its twenty fifth anniversary, which was attended also by the Rector of the Free University. Just think that this union, having begun with five members, now numbers 117 original members and 85 current members. These numbers speak of unimaginable progress and promise good hope for the future. If I may still add something to all of this now: the hospice is in a flourishing state under the careful leadership of Mrs. Janssonius; the dreariness of the library has been brightened up by the assiduous helpfulness of Dr. J. C. Breen; his assistant, Mr. Van Oversteeg has advanced our university by looking after the administrative requirements steadfastly and with exemplary zeal; Mr. B. J. Muller has requested and received permission to resign as beadle in the new semester and will be

79. “Hunne Unie”

80. “Societas Studiosorum Reformatorum”

replaced by Mr. G. van der Steen. Mr. Van der Steen's willingness to serve well suits him for this task. With that I have come to the end of my faithful account of our academy's fortunes.

In the flourishing state of affairs to which the fate of our university seems to have turned in spite of considerable flaws, I now hand over its leadership to you, my colleague on the faculty, Prof. Dr. Robertus Hermanus Woltjer, who has been nominated by the directors as Rector for the coming year. I do this cheerfully and wholeheartedly because I relieve myself by stepping down from this honor, and you certainly feel honored by the responsibility, which has for you all the charm and attractiveness of something new. The position of a Rector of an academy is indeed only a shadow of what it was in earlier times. The constitutional and parliamentary forms of government at work in academic circles restricted the power of the Rector and diminished his glory, but it is still an office that can nevertheless swell the heart. For what power and honor does the Rector not hold! At our academy his powers still wait for a regulation of specialized instruction, because the voluminous body of our statutes, regulations, ordinances, and rules, etc. still contain serious gaps. However, the unwritten law, which is stronger than any regulation, still attributes to him many powers and privileges. He summons and presides over the meetings of the Senate and can convoke as many as he deems necessary and profitable. At meetings he does not have the highest [position], but he still has the first and the last word. In processions, for example, to and from the great hall he has the preeminence, and he even walks in front of the Trustees. He represents the Senate on official matters as they come up, receives an audience with the Queen, and is invited to attend the ball or reception when her Majesty makes her annual visit to our capital city.

In order that he not succumb under all these pressures, he has the beadle at his disposal, he enjoys the seat of honor at meals, and he begins the exercise of his office after the census, which is an advantage not to be sneezed at. However great all these powers and privileges may be, I still confer them in complete trust on you, Professor Woltjer, knowing that love for our university fills your heart and respect for its laws and

character is a feature of your orderly spirit. May God grant you the privilege of governing this college with wisdom and power and to bring it to greater prosperity in the coming year. I conclude your proclamation to Rector with the exclamation, “The Rector is dead, long live the Rector!” and may the university prosper!

I have spoken.⁸¹

81. Tr. note: Bavinck concludes with the Dutch equivalent of the Latin *dixi*, which was the closing word of a classical oration.