



The Bavinck Review

Volume 7 ✠ 2016

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The Bavinck Review

Volume 7



2016

The Bavinck Institute
Calvin Theological Seminary
3233 Burton St. SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49546-4387

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ISSN 2154-6320

The Bavinck Review

The Bavinck Review is a peer-reviewed electronic journal published annually in the spring by The Bavinck Institute at Calvin Theological Seminary.

Editorial committee:

James P. Eglinton
George Harinck
Cornelis van der Kooi
Dirk van Keulen
Brian G. Mattson

John Bolt, Editor

Laurence O'Donnell, Associate Editor

Members of the Bavinck Society receive a complimentary subscription to the *Review*. Back issues are made freely available on the Bavinck Institute website six months after publication.

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Please address all *TBR* inquiries to:

John Bolt, Editor
bltj@calvinseminary.edu

TBR has applied for indexing in the ATLA Religion Database, published by the American Theological Library Association, 250 S. Wacker Dr., 16th Flr., Chicago, IL 60606; E-mail: atla@atla.com; WWW: <http://www.atla.com>.

Contents

Editorial	6
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Articles

Knowledge according to Bavinck and Aquinas	
Arvin Vos	8

In Translation

Herman Bavinck's <i>Modernisme en Orthodoxie</i> : A Translation	
Translated by Bruce R. Pass	63

Pearls and Leaven

An Excerpt on Prayer from Bavinck's <i>Reformed Ethics</i>	
John Bolt.....	115

Bavinck Bibliography 2015.....	123
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Editorial

As this seventh volume of *The Bavinck Review* goes public, we accept, with chagrin, a deserved tardy slip. We were working on two very large projects, neither of which are quite ready, but both of which will yield rich and full content for volumes 8 and 9. Bavinck's anthropology will continue to occupy our attention. In the present issue we are pleased to publish Arvin Vos's second and final installment exploring Bavinck's epistemology in relation to Thomas Aquinas. Vos puts his rich background of scholarly work on Aquinas to good use in illuminating the complex structure of Bavinck's psychology. One of the works he mentions in his opening paragraph, Bavinck's *Foundations of Psychology* [*Beginnselen der Psychologie*] is also one of the two projects referred to earlier. It was translated into English by Dr. Jack Vanden Born as a Master of Arts in Teaching thesis at Calvin College in 1981. With the author's permission, we will be publishing this work for volume 8 of the *Review*.

For volume 9 we have in mind another dissertation on Bavinck's psychology and anthropology. Anthony Hoekema defended a dissertation on "Herman Bavinck's Doctrine of the Covenant" at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1953. What is not generally known is that this was Hoekema's *second* Bavinck dissertation at Princeton. On February 28, 1948, he submitted a different thesis to the Princeton Seminary faculty, "The Centrality of the Heart: A Study in Christian Anthropology with Special Reference to the Psychology of Herman Bavinck." For various reasons Professor Hoekema did not defend this dissertation but, five years later, the one on covenant. Though it was not defended, the first dissertation displays Hoekema's characteristically careful scholarship with special attention given to exegesis and biblical theology, and the work deserves to be given a wider readership. With the permission of the Hoekema family, and with an introduction by yours truly, we hope to publish the work for volume 9 of the *Review*.

The other material in this issue reflects one of our goals to make available newly translated Bavinck material. Bruce Pass's translation of the 1911 rectorial address, *Modernisme en Orthodoxie*, provides an important window into Bavinck's ongoing relationship with the liberal theology in which he was trained at Leiden University and whose questions were always on his mind. Here Bavinck opens his heart in a way that we do not often find in his writings. We are also providing another advance excerpt from the forthcoming first volume of the *Reformed Ethics*, this time on prayer. Among other things, Bavinck asks whether unbelievers have a duty to pray and whether God answers their prayers. The editing work on this volume is nearly complete, and it should be in the capable hands of the publisher, Baker Academic, by the time most of the Bavinck Society members read this editorial (i.e., by the middle of February 2017).

There is news on the Institute front as well. A new set of by-laws has been drafted for the Bavinck Institute at Calvin Theological Seminary and approved by the faculty. This paves the way for establishing a permanent collection of books and articles by and about Bavinck, the sources he used, key neo-Calvinist contemporaries such as Abraham Kuyper, the legacy of thinkers who followed him including J. H. Bavinck, G. C. Berkouwer, Klaas Schilder, Arnold A. van Ruler, and the biblical commentaries in the *Kommentaar op het Nieuwe Testament*, *Commentaar op het Oude Testament*, and *Korte Verklaring van de Heilige Schrift* series. This special collection will be housed in the Hekman Library's Heritage Hall on the Calvin campus and accessible to students and scholars working on Bavinck. Keep your eyes on the website (i.e., BavinckInstitute.org) for an announcement about the formal opening of the Bavinck Institute.

—John Bolt

Knowledge according to Bavinck and Aquinas

Arvin Vos (arvin.vos@wku.edu), Professor Emeritus,
Department of Philosophy, Western Kentucky University

In part one I examined Herman Bavinck's realist theory of knowledge both as set forth in his major work, *Reformed Dogmatics*, and in two later works, *Foundations of Psychology* and *Philosophy of Revelation*.¹ Especially in his dogmatics, Bavinck works out the presuppositions of his theology, articulating a realist account of knowledge, which he contrasts with the two major trends in modern philosophy: rationalism and idealism on the one hand, and empiricism and materialism on the other. Bavinck locates his own thought as standing in the realist Christian tradition beginning with Augustine and running through Aquinas and the Reformed Scholastics. While it is clear that Bavinck draws heavily on Aquinas, he seems to assume that there is no significant difference in the thought of his two great predecessors. I will argue that, with regard to the understanding of objectivity (i.e., the subject-object relation), there is a significant difference between Augustine and Bavinck on the one hand, and Aquinas on the other. Because a difference in the conception of objectivity has implications for almost every aspect of the discussion of knowledge, I will compare Aquinas and Bavinck on the main features of Bavinck's realism discussed in part one. I will begin with Aquinas's account of how things can be said to be known in the eternal exemplars, the divine ideas; in other words, how human reason participates in the divine light. At this point the similarities and differences between Aquinas's and Augustine's view—which is similar to Bavinck's—is most easily seen.

1. *Bavinck Review* 6 (2015), 9–36.

The Natural Light of Reason as a Participation in the Divine Light

Our strategy is to begin with the claim that the natural light of reason is a participation in the divine light. While all three authors agree that this is true, upon close inspection it becomes clear that Augustine and Bavinck draw different conclusions from this thesis than does Aquinas. Examining Thomas's thought we will see that Thomas finds in this doctrine only an account of the nature of the human intellect and not a justification of the truth of understanding. The reason for this difference is that we find in Thomas a different psychology of knowing, an account of the operations of the intellect in which knowing consists in assimilation of the known, rather than a confrontation with the object. For Thomas, the mind is that which makes all things and becomes all things. Embedded in this account is an alternative view of objectivity—one which is free from the ambiguities that we have noted in Bavinck's position.

To begin, then, it is claimed that intellect or the natural light of reason is an intelligible light participating in the divine light. Bavinck rightly observes that Thomas utilizes this image on a variety of occasions. For example, in the discussion of how God is known by us, Aquinas says that "the intellectual power of the creature is not the essence of God" but is "a participated likeness of Him." He continues:

Hence also the intellectual power of the creature is called an intelligible light, as it were, derived from the first light, whether this be understood of the natural power, or of some superadded perfection of grace or of glory.²

Elsewhere, as Bavinck notes, when arguing that the agent intellect is something in the soul, Thomas also speaks of it "lighting up the phantasms, as it were" (*ST* 1.79.4). Now "as it were" in both passages is Aquinas's way of indicating that to speak of the intellectual power as a light is a metaphor. The exact nature of this power will become clear only

2. *ST* 1.12.2. Citations from the *Summa theologiae* are from the *Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1, ed. Anton C. Pegis (New York: Random House, 1945). Latin citations are from the Blackfriars edition (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963ff.).

after we have examined his account of how the soul knows. Our concern here is how our reason being a participation in the divine light is understood by each author.

According to Bavinck, Augustine and Aquinas have similar views of how our reason participates in the divine reason. While their views may be similar, they are not the same, and understanding the difference between them will provide a key to Bavinck's position. Although Thomas professes to agree with Augustine's claim that "the intellectual soul knows material things in the eternal exemplars," when we look more closely at what he says, we recognize that there are significant differences between them. One might characterize the difference this way: Augustine holds that human reason is a participation in the divine light by virtue of what it does, seeing the truth in God, whereas Aquinas asserts that human reason's participation in the divine light is by virtue of what it is, intelligent being. Every point at which we will be comparing Bavinck and Aquinas will hinge on this difference. Ultimately, on this point Bavinck remains, though not without ambiguities, more Augustinian than Thomist in his thought. Close examination of Aquinas's interpretation of Augustine will identify the differences.

Regarding the role of the eternal exemplars in knowing, Aquinas explains Augustine's position in some detail, affirming his agreement with it, yet interpreting Augustine's words in a way that the latter would hardly recognize. It is significant that the position Aquinas ascribes to Augustine is similar, if not identical, to the view espoused by Bavinck.

Are the eternal exemplars (divine ideas) known from things, or are things known through the exemplars? As Aquinas notes, Romans 1:20 seems to affirm the former: "[T]he invisible things of God are clearly seen...by the things that are made" (*ST* 1.84.5 arg. 2). Again, he points out that to hold that our mind knows things in the eternal exemplars amounts to agreeing with Plato, "who said that all knowledge is derived from them (arg. 3; cf. *Republic* 507c ff.). According to Aquinas, Augustine disagrees with this view, for he holds that our knowledge is not derived from the eternal exemplars but rather "in the eternal exemplars":

If we both see that what you say is true, and if we both see that what I say is true, where do we see this, I pray? Neither do I see it in you, nor do you see it in me; but we both see it in the unchangeable truth which is above our minds. Now the unchangeable truth is contained in the eternal exemplars. Therefore the intellectual soul knows all truths in the eternal exemplars.³

In his response Aquinas observes that Augustine “was imbued with the doctrines of the Platonists,” that he adopted any teachings of the Platonists consistent with faith, and that he amended “those things that he found contrary to faith.” Plato held, Aquinas states, that “the forms of things subsist of themselves apart from matter.” The mind participates in these forms, called by Plato, and corporeal matter participating in the same idea becomes a particular thing. For example, corporeal matter by participating in the idea of stone becomes a stone, and our intellect participating in the same idea has knowledge of a stone. Augustine modified this position, eliminating the independent existence of the ideas, holding instead that the exemplars of all creatures exist in the divine mind and that “it is according to these that all things are formed, as well as that the human soul knows all things” (*ST* 1.84.5).

So far the account of Augustine’s position seems to be identical with Bavinck’s in all significant respects. “The Logos who shines in the world,” writes Bavinck, “must also let his light shine in our consciousness. That is the light of reason, the intellect, which, itself originating in the Logos, discovers and recognizes the Logos in things.”⁴ In both accounts mind and things receive their nature from God, and by virtue of this common origin the mind is fitted to know things.

3. *ST* 1.84.5 sed contra; quoting Augustine, *Conf.* XII, 25. The sed contra of the article usually presents the thesis that Aquinas will defend in his response. What is notable here is that Aquinas is affirming that Augustine is right, but only in Aquinas’s reply in the corpus do we find how “creatively” Aquinas is interpreting Augustine’s words. This discussion is also unusual in that Aquinas pauses to show how Augustine’s position differs from that of Plato. Clearly, Aquinas is trying to show how much agreement there is between his view and Augustine’s.

4. *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena*, trans. John Vriend and edited by John Bolt (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 233; hereafter *RD*.

While Augustine and Bavinck assert that the intellect knows all things in the eternal exemplars and use the metaphor of light to explain how this happens, Thomas goes beyond the light metaphor to examine how this knowing occurs. There are two ways, Aquinas states, that one thing can be said to be known in another: “as in an object itself known” or “in a principle of knowledge.” With regard to the first, knowing a thing as in an object itself known is like seeing “in a mirror the images of the things reflected therein.” Looking in a mirror, I can see reflected a chair standing behind me. In this way our soul in the present life cannot see all things in the eternal exemplars. (However, Aquinas adds, “the blessed, who see God and all things in Him, know all things in the eternal exemplars” in this way.)

Aquinas explains his second way in which things can be said to be known in another “as in a principle of knowledge” by using the analogy of the sun: “we might say that we see in the sun what we see by the sun.” What does this mean?

And thus we must needs say that the human soul knows all things in the eternal exemplars, since by participation in these exemplars we know all things. For the intellectual light itself, which is in us, is nothing else than a participated likeness of the uncreated light, in which are contained the eternal exemplars. Whence it is written (Ps. iv, 6,7), *Many say: who showeth us good things?* Which question the Psalmist answers, *The light of Thy countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us;* as though to say; By the seal of the divine light in us, all things are made known to us. (ST 1.84.5)

The key point is that Aquinas specifies that the human soul *participates* in the eternal exemplars rather than *sees* things in them; it knows by means of the light within us, a light received from God.

What does Aquinas mean by saying that “the intellectual light itself which is in us, is nothing else than a participated likeness of the uncreated light?” What does it mean that through this likeness all things are known to us? How does the soul participate in the eternal exemplars? First of all, participation in the eternal exemplars is not sufficient for knowledge—the position already attributed to the Platonists. By contrast, Aquinas asserts that, “besides the intellectual light which is in us, intelligible species, which are derived from things, are required in order that we may have

knowledge of material things....” He cites Augustine in support of this position:

Although the philosophers prove by convincing arguments that all things occur in time according to the eternal exemplars, were they able to see in the eternal exemplars, or find out from them, how many kinds of animals there are and the origin of each? Did they not seek for this information from the story of times and places? (*ST* 1.84.5; quoting *De Trinitate*, IV, 16)

The human intellect is a participation in the intellectual light, but Aquinas is concerned to show that this is not enough for knowledge and that Augustine concurs in this view: intelligible species derived from the senses are also required for humans to gain knowledge.

At this point it is good to recall that Bavinck too asserts the necessity for the senses to provide the data for understanding. Still this does not mean that there is complete agreement between Thomas and Bavinck. For Bavinck the primary function of the argument that our mind is a participation in the intellectual light is to guarantee the objectivity of our knowledge, to solve the subject-object problem. The conviction that our intellectual operations such as forming concepts, judgments, and conclusions correspond to reality, he asserted, “rests only in the belief that it is the same Logos who created both the reality outside of us and the laws of thought within us...” (*RD*, 231). Aquinas makes no mention of these matters but rather simply asserts that the fact that our mind is a participation in the divine mind is not enough to explain knowledge; one must also investigate the story of times and places, for initially we only have the possibility of understanding.

Why the difference? Specifically, why does Bavinck raise the issue of the subject-object relation while Aquinas is silent on this point? The reason, I believe, is that for Bavinck the natural light of reason, which is a participation in the divine light, operates by shining its light on objects and so brings to light the intelligible components in sense experience, and on this crucial point the objectivity of knowledge is based. By contrast, for Aquinas the natural light of reason as a participation in the divine light is not used to explain the objectivity of our knowledge. It is an account of what the mind is, not of how knowledge of truth is possible. To conclude,

Bavinck was right in his claim that Aquinas held the human intellect to be a participation in the divine light. God's very essence is to understand, but we share in understanding as is seen in the fact that we are able to understand both things around us, ourselves, and things above us including God.⁵ The difference between them is that Bavinck uses this thesis to defend the objectivity of knowledge, while Aquinas is silent on this matter. I will argue that this silence is not an oversight on Aquinas's part but stems from his conviction that knowing differs fundamentally from seeing. In short, the problem of objectivity is solved by Aquinas in his analysis of the operations of the intellect, not by an appeal to some form of divine illumination Augustinian or otherwise.

In order to defend this claim it will be useful to examine first Aquinas's account of truth, specifically how it exists differently in the senses and the intellect. After we have seen how truth is found in the intellect, then we will turn to Aquinas's account of the operations of the intellect in order to grasp clearly how the intellect acquires truth. Only when we have detailed the intellectual operations will the reasons for the difference between Bavinck and Aquinas on the problem of the objectivity of knowledge become clear.

The Agent Intellect or the Natural Light of Reason

As noted above, according to Bavinck God understands by his very essence, and we understand through participating in God's essence. Again, it is not enough for the Logos to work in the world, for the Logos "who shines in the world must also let his light shine in our consciousness. That is, the light of reason, the intellect, which, itself originating in the Logos, discovers and recognizes the Logos in things" (*RD*, 233). This, it will be recalled, was identified as "the internal foundation of knowledge (*principium cognoscendi internum*).⁶ Similarly, Thomas speaks of the natural light of reason. Bavinck's account of the operations of reason has

5. Again, another area of broad agreement is the necessity of the senses for knowing. The question will be how this role is described by each author.

already been given. The present question is whether Aquinas's account of the operations of mind is similar to that given by Bavinck or whether there are significant differences.

For Aquinas there is a double aspect of mind. It is both active and passive; it is what makes all things and becomes all things. Complicating his account is the claim that in the act of being receptive or passive, it is actualized. It will be useful for our purposes to examine these two dimensions separately. First, we will treat of mind as active and then in the next section examine how it is receptive. One should not expect this analysis to be easy. Aquinas comments that to know the nature of the soul requires "a careful and subtle inquiry" and for this reason "many are ignorant of the soul's nature, and many have erred about it."⁶

A brief sketch of the context in which Aquinas argued his position will show how significant this teaching is. In the thirteenth century there were fierce debates concerning the nature of the intellect, and Thomas was heavily involved in those discussions. Forcefully and repeatedly he defends the view that the human soul possesses an intellectual power and that this power is a participation in the divine understanding. The evidence for the latter point is found in the fact that our mind only participates in understanding; it is not wholly intellectual. What is wholly or essentially intellectual has complete understanding, and this is true only of God. Our own experience is that we are intellectual "in part," for our understanding is partial and incomplete. Another indicator is that we come to understand only slowly and gradually—not understanding initially and later coming to understand "by reasoning with a certain

6. *ST* 1.87.1. From what we have already seen, it is clear that Aquinas holds that the intellect knows itself through its own actions. There are two types of knowledge: first, when "Socrates or Plato perceives that he has an intellectual soul because he perceives that he understands"; secondly, "universally, as when we consider the nature of the human mind from a knowledge of the intellectual act" (*ST* 1.87.1). In other words, the first kind of knowledge is experience or awareness of the fact that one is thinking; the second is knowledge of "essence and nature." It is about the latter that Aquinas comments that many have erred and observes that the account of the intellect's nature and operations is anything but easy.

discursiveness and movement.” Our intellect “has an imperfect understanding, both because it does not understand everything, and because, in those things which it does understand, it passes from potentiality to act” (*ST* 1.79.4; cf. 1.79.2). Not only do we not understand everything, we also do not understand all of the time. From this evidence some philosophers concluded that there is only a separate intellect, that there is no agent or active mind in each human being—a position Thomas adamantly opposed. The most prominent exponent of the view that there is only one separate, agent intellect for all human kind was Averroes. Against this view Thomas argues that the agent intellect is something in the soul. He gives two arguments. First, even if there is a separate intellect, still it is necessary that there is in the human soul “some power participating in the superior intellect, by which power the human soul makes things to be actually intelligible.” Since it is true in nature generally that the operation of a higher power is carried out by a power in the individual, there is good reason to believe that it is also true for the human soul that it is through “some power derived from a higher intellect, whereby it is able to illumine the phantasms.” This argument is rooted in the metaphysical thesis that the performance of an action requires that the principle of that action is found in the being which acts. The fact that this capacity or power is itself a participation in a higher power does not negate this principle. In Aristotelian physics locomotion may ultimately be a capacity dependent on the sun, but still the fact that one moves means that the power of locomotion is within oneself. The situation is no different with mind. Thus the agent intellect, as a participation, must be in each person; this power, which is derived from a higher intellect, is in the soul and is that through which “it is able to illumine the phantasms.”⁷

Secondly, for Aquinas it is not enough to argue this point in general, but he insists that we experience this:

7. *ST* 1.79.4. In essence the Averroist position seems to amount to claiming that our experience of understanding is illusory; that, in fact, it is only the one, universal agent intellect which is operating in us, causing us to have the impression that we are understanding on the occasion of sense experience.

... we know this [that the power to understand is within us] by experience, since we perceive that we abstract universal forms from their particular conditions, which is to make them actually intelligible. (*ST* 1.79.4)

Here the same principle is at work, that is, if I am able to perform an operation, then the principle which is the source or cause of this operation must be in me. Here, however, Aquinas appeals to our awareness of understanding as a subject. We are conscious of the fact (“perceive”) that we understand. We experience our acts of understanding. And as actions are known through their objects, he specifies that in the action of understanding, we “abstract universal forms from their particular conditions.” In other words, what is only potentially universal is made actually universal by being made intelligible. We shall return to this point, but for now it will suffice to note the fact.

To begin, we need to specify the context of intellectual operations more precisely. Granted that the human intellect is an active power, then why do humans not always understand but need to go through a process of learning? Fundamentally, the answer is that the human mind starts with no content; it starts as a *tabula rasa*. In explaining this point—as is typical for Aquinas—he contrasts the way the mind works with the way the senses work. If the relationship of understanding to things were one of an active object to a power such as is found with a visible thing to the eye or even more obviously a sounding thing to the ear, then we would be able to understand all things immediately. But this is not the kind of relationship found between the human mind and its object.

In relation to things, the mind is both passive and active. Specifying both of these aspects is necessary to grasp Aquinas’s view of the intellect. First, then, for Aquinas the intellect is a passive power, taking *passive* in a broad sense because in being receptive it is also actualized. It is passive for it receives the form of things into itself. But this is only one aspect of mind. The other is that the mind is active; it possesses what Aquinas calls *agent intellect*. In short, citing Aristotle, Aquinas affirms that the mind both *becomes* all things and *makes* all things. This double aspect of mind contrasts with the senses, including the sense of sight. To put the point in more familiar terms, we experience passive or receptive aspect of mind in

that we gradually acquire a body of knowledge, develop expertise in a field. Commonly we describe this acquired expertise as having a “mathematical mind,” “political savvy,” and the like. Such a development does not just happen or grow naturally as one’s body does. Such expertise or mentality is acquired through a process of learning, of struggling to come to a clear understanding. And this capacity for learning is what Aquinas and the tradition in which he is working call “agent intellect,” the aspect of mind by which “*it makes all things*.”⁸

Granted that mind becomes all things, why does Aquinas also assert that it makes all things. Here there is a significant contrast between the mind and the senses. The intellect does not have an active object as do the senses but rather it is passive, receptive. It requires the data from the senses, for it is initially a *tabula rasa*. But the presence of data is not enough. It is through the active power of mind that the data of sense are recognized as meaningful. To use Thomas’s language, the intellect or mind is an active power “whereby objects are made to be in act.”⁹

The aim here has been to provide a preliminary description of agent intellect, the mind as active. This description is possible through analyzing its operation because we are aware of our questioning. What we have found is that Thomas provides a significant elaboration of the metaphor of seeing when he identifies the conditions for the operation of active mind. Granted that mind is active, then the question arises as to how it reaches its end; in other words, when and through what operations does it acquire truth.

8. *ST* 1.79.3. The position which Aquinas contrasts to his own position is that of Plato. According to Aquinas, Plato “supposed that the forms of natural things subsisted apart from matter, and consequently that they are intelligible.... And he called such forms *species* or *ideas*. From a participation in these, he said that even corporeal matter was formed...and also that our intellect was formed by such participation in order to have knowledge of the genera and species of things” (ibid.).

9. “Sensible things are found in act outside the soul; and hence there is no need for an agent sense.... [I]n the intellectual part, there is something active and something passive.” *ST* 1.79.3 ad 1.

Truth in the Senses and in the Intellect

“As *good* names that towards which the appetite tends, so *the true* names that towards which the intellect tends” (*ST* 1.16.1). The intellect naturally tends to the true, and the true consists in “a conformity of the intellect and things” (*De verit.* 1.3).¹⁰ Again, “truth is defined by conformity of intellect and thing” (*ST* 1.16.2). Repeatedly Thomas affirms this thesis. In Thomas, then, one has an unabashed affirmation of a correspondence theory of truth—the position which philosophers who hold the subject-object conception of truth find problematic, if not indefensible. Recall that at this point Bavinck relied on the Logos doctrine. Since the being of things remains outside of us—as a realist Bavinck maintains the distinction between ideas and reality—he asserted that “being itself therefore can never be approached by us” (*RD*, 231). By contrast, Thomas asserts “that which the intellect conceives as, in a way, the most evident, and to which it reduces all its concepts, is being” (*De verit.* 1.1). For Bavinck being cannot be approached; for Thomas being is what our mind naturally desires to know; it is that which is sought in all our inquiring, the goal of all understanding. For this reason *being* can be said to be “in a way” the most evident and that to which everything else is related. What accounts for this difference?

One way to gain an understanding of Thomas’s position is to examine the way he contrasts the presence of truth in the senses and its presence in the intellect. To argue that there is a significant difference implies that the analogy of the sun and the metaphor of seeing are just that—figures of speech and not descriptions of knowing. Thomas replaces the visual metaphor with an account rooted in psychological fact.

True expresses the correspondence of being to the knowing power, for all knowing is produced by an assimilation of the knower to the thing known, so that assimilation is said to be the cause of knowledge. (*De verit.* 1.1)

10. Citations from *De veritate* are from *Truth*, trans. Robert W. Mulligan, S.J. (Chicago: Regnery, 1952).

There are two points to consider: first, how truth is found differently in sense and in the intellect; secondly, in what operation truth is found in the intellect.

With regard to the first point, Aquinas holds that “truth is found both in intellect and in sense, but not in the same way.” Truth is in the sense “as a consequence of its act, for sense judges of things as they are.”¹¹ The senses report; they provide a content or data—for the eyes it is pattern of color, for the ears variation in sound, etc. This is as far as the senses go. If the content of sense experience is questioned, that is a result of the expectations of mind. In other words, when we question what we have seen or heard, it is our expectations that have not been met.

Sense experience includes more than just the reception of a content, for we are aware of sensing. Unlike biological activities such as digestion, the circulation of the blood, etc., which are on-going in our bodies without our being aware of them, sensing is an act of which we are conscious. And for this reason if one asks a person whether they have heard or seen something, typically they can respond either by describing the content of the experience or by focusing on the experience itself. Thus Thomas writes, “sense knows that it senses.” But an awareness of experience does not amount to a description of that experience, and this is precisely what the senses cannot supply. Thus, as Thomas states, “sense does not know its own nature.” The senses merely report what appears to them, and we are aware of both content and operation. Normally we attend to the content of the experience, but Aquinas holds that we can also attend to the experience itself. Insofar as there is content there is a correspondence between the sense and its object and hence truth in sense.

11. *De verit.* 1.9. In saying that the senses judge of things as they are, Aquinas is not claiming that there is never any error in the senses. There may be falsity in the senses “through their apprehending or judging things to be otherwise than they really are.” With regard to its proper object, error occurs “accidentally and rarely, and then because of an indisposition in the organ it does not receive the sensible form rightly.” The example cited is that because of an unhealthy tongue something sweet may taste bitter to a sick person. But with common objects such as figure, shape, etc. or with accidental objects even “a rightly disposed sense may have a false judgment” (*ST* 1.17.2).

By contrast, truth is not only in the intellect but is known by the intellect. Explaining this claim requires careful attention to Aquinas's precise words:

It [truth] is in the intellect as a consequence of the act of the intellect and as known by the intellect. Truth follows the operation of the intellect inasmuch as it belongs to the intellect to judge about a thing as it is. (*De verit.* 1.9)

In its act the intellect acquires a likeness of the thing known, which is a perfection or actualizing of itself, and reception of that likeness is in accord with its nature, for this is what is meant by the natural desire to know. This likeness in the intellect is different from the likeness existing in the senses; essentially it is the difference between idea and phantasm or sense image. In one respect truth is in the intellect in the same way that it is in the sense: when it grasps *what a thing is*. In this act the mind acquires some content, some idea, or some theory.¹² Aquinas often calls this the first act of the intellect: the point at which there is truth in the intellect, but not as known. In other words, one has an idea, but one has not reflected, not tested the idea; one has not yet asked *Is it so?*, has not yet judged whether one's understanding is correct.¹³ Very precisely and carefully Thomas distinguishes these two stages in the process of understanding:

12. In this connection it is possible to understand why Aquinas holds that understanding is passive in the broad sense, because it "receives that into which it was in potentiality"; but in this very receptivity it "passes from potentiality to act," or in other words, "it is perfected," realizes its end (*ST* 1.79.2). So for Aquinas the act of understanding is conceived as being both a reception of something from without and at the same time an actualization or achievement of its own end, a fulfillment of the natural desire to know.

13. Often Thomas refers to the second act of the intellect (i.e., judgment) as the act of "composing and dividing," as in *ST* 1.16.2, where the title of the article reads: "Whether Truth resides only in the intellect composing and dividing?"; cf. *De verit.* 1.3. This rather cumbersome way of speaking of judgment stems from Aristotle. Aquinas also speaks of the second act of the intellect simply as "judgment," as when he asserts that the intellect "judge[s] about a thing as it is" (*De verit.* 1.9).

[A]lthough sight has the likeness of a visible thing, yet it does not know the comparison which exists between the thing seen and that which it itself is apprehending concerning it. But the intellect can know its own conformity with the intelligible thing; yet it does not apprehend it by knowing of a thing *what it is*. When, however, it judges that a thing corresponds to the form which it apprehends about that thing, then it first knows and expresses truth. (*ST* 1.16.2)

Sense receives a content, and that is as far as the senses are able to go. By contrast, intellect receives a content (species) into itself, some essence, some *what*—whether substance or accident makes no difference here—but this constitutes only the first stage in knowing. Truth is known by the intellect and expressed by the intellect only when a judgment is made, when one concludes either *it is so* or *it is not so*—“it” referring here to the content in the mind.

What Aquinas is describing is a familiar sequence. Initially something is brought to our attention. If time and energy suffice, then we may begin to puzzle about it. In the extreme it may keep us focused for days on what is dismissed by others as an arcane issue found in dusty old books. The goal, however, is not to puzzle but to discover, to have the “ah-ha” moment when “the light dawns,” the moment when one believes that one has come up with some insight great or small because one has identified some intelligible aspect in the data of experience about which one was puzzling. But coming up with an idea is not enough. There is ever the demand by intellect that one’s idea be well grounded, and for this one must return to the data. Does the insight I have gained explain relevant aspects of the situation? Are the conditions which are specified in the explanation as formulated actually present in the data? Or is there contrary evidence? Does my idea have to be tweaked in order to account for all aspects of the data? If we are satisfied that the relevant aspects have been accounted for, that the specified conditions are actually present in the data, then we conclude so. If not, then one does not affirm, and one must either withhold judgment or affirm only with some measure of doubt or hesitation.

What is happening in the foregoing account? According to Aquinas, the intellect is, like the senses, aware of its own act; in other words, we are conscious of understanding—as is abundantly clear from the above

account of our experience. But when we understand we are not satisfied with just having the experience of insight, the moment of discovery. No matter how exciting it may be, there is always a supervening question, a demand that we cannot ignore: Is my discovery correct? Is my idea an adequate account of the evidence. As Aquinas states:

And truth is known by the intellect in view of the fact that the intellect reflects upon its own act—not merely as knowing its own act, but as knowing the proportion of its act to the thing. (*De verit.* 1.9)

That the intellect knows, that is, is aware of, its own act we have already affirmed. Now the question is what is meant by saying that it knows “the proportion of its act to the thing.” As already noted, the first act of the intellect is realized in some idea, some content. The question is whether the content is in proportion to the thing—the thing as presented by the data from the senses. “[S]ince the speculative intellect is receptive in regard to things,” writes Aquinas, “it is, in a certain sense, moved by things and consequently measured by them” (*De verit.* 1.2). Although the formulation here applies most directly to a particular form or content and a specific thing, the fact is that both content and thing typically stand in a larger field of relations. As we all experience, no sooner have we answered one question than another appears, typically arising from related data.

Without going into detail about how discoveries in related areas repeat and so a body of knowledge gradually develops, it will suffice here to note Aquinas’s account elsewhere of the intellectual virtues of science, understanding, and wisdom, which for our purposes can be seen as elaborations of the conditions of judgment, of recognizing when what has been conceived corresponds to reality. The complexities of knowing when what one has conceived can be affirmed are too various to elaborate here. Suffice it to say that when the judgment one is affirming is of limited scope about precisely limited or defined matters, one can easily reach a high level of certitude. This is one of the attractions of mathematics for example. By contrast, in the natural sciences such certitude is not possible because closure is hardly ever—perhaps never—possible, for there always remains the possibility of the discovery of new ranges of data that may render former hypothesis seriously inadequate as one saw in astronomy

after the flood of data from the Hubble telescope. Or again, it may be that the same set of data may possibly be explained utilizing other explanatory principles. Hence what Plato called dialectic and what is caught in Thomas Kuhn's notion of a "scientific revolution."¹⁴

Here the question is this: how is it that mind can reflect on its own act, whereas the senses are not able to do so? Aquinas explains the matter this way:

This proportion [the proportion of the act to the thing] cannot be known without knowing the nature of the act; and the nature of the act cannot be known without knowing the nature of the active principle, that is, the intellect itself, to whose nature it belongs to be conformed to things. (*De verit.* 1.2)

This analysis carries the knowing process back to its foundation: the intellect is aware of itself, aware that its orientation is to be conformed to things. The desire of our understanding is to mirror reality, and not just this or that aspect of reality as is the case with the senses, but the goal of mind is being, the real, ultimately to know everything about everything—something that no human will ever manage, but nevertheless a goal which inspires each person to his or her daily effort to push back the boundary of ignorance just a bit further. Again, intellect is not satisfied with grasping a *what*, because we recognize that our discovery may be just a bright idea, something lacking basis in our experience. And so we reflect,

14. Today in the context of the natural sciences we are most impressed with the possibility of change on the empirical side, the possibility of additional data. But there is change possible on the intelligible or logical side also in that another organizing principle may be used to explain the same data as in, for example, the shift in chemistry from phlogiston to the periodic table of elements. The latter kind of change is noted by Aquinas in the context of the discussion of the Trinity. There he observes that sometimes reasoning does not provide "a sufficient proof of a principle, but as showing how the remaining effects are in harmony with an already posited principle: as in astronomy the theory of eccentrics and epicycles is considered as established, because thereby the sensible appearances of the heavenly movements can be explained; not, however, as if this proof were sufficient, since some other theory might explain them." And this he states is the case with arguments about the Trinity: "that is to say, given the doctrine of the Trinity, we find arguments in harmony with it. We must not, however, think that the trinity of persons is adequately proved by such reasons" (*ST* 1.32.1 ad 2).

we ask whether the formulation of our insight is adequate, does it account for the relevant evidence? If so, we affirm; if not, we deny or retract; if the evidence is not conclusive, we conclude to some mode of possibility or probability. When challenged we trot out our reasons—the evidence we have marshaled for our thesis. If there are no data to challenge our claim, then we conclude that our formulation is adequate, that we have reached fact. And why do we do this? Because to be intelligent is to do more than spin theories, it is also to verify one's theory no matter what field—in daily experience, in the sciences, in ethical issues, or in philosophical thinking. No doubt the criteria for affirmation will vary widely according to the area of one's endeavor, but the basic pattern remains the same: experience stimulates inquiry, and inquiry results in understanding, and understanding calls forth the question *Is it so?* Moreover, the process is recurrent, and so judgments cluster into bodies of knowledge as patterns found in experience are more fully articulated and affirmed. Nor does the process of checking end with the individual claim, for as we noted briefly whole ranges of judgments may be abandoned when another means of organizing the materials is discovered.

Enough has been said to explain why Aquinas was not concerned with the objectivity of knowing when describing the mind as being a participation in the divine Logos. Whereas Bavinck remains in the Platonic/Augustinian tradition of describing knowing as being a kind of seeing, Aquinas, while employing this metaphor on occasion, provides an account of knowing that explains knowledge as resulting from judging, the second act of the intellect, an act which has only a very limited role in Bavinck's account of knowledge—a matter which we will take up after further clarification of the process of knowing.

A very significant difference between the two positions follows from this analysis. Recall that Bavinck asserts, "Being itself therefore can never be approached by us; it is a fact that has to be assumed and constitutes the basis of thought" (*RD*, 231). For Aquinas, by contrast, the good that intellect seeks is being, for it is the nature of the intellect to be conformed to things. This conformity is grasped only in the second act of the intellect, in the act of judging. As a participation in the divine mind, our

intellect has the capacity to judge, and in the act of judging it is conformed to reality and measured by reality. Here there is no appeal to an Augustinian type of illumination theory to defend the objectivity of knowledge; inversely, where a clear recognition of judgment (the second act of the intellect) is absent, one should not be surprised to find doubts about the objectivity of knowing as we see in Bavinck.

How the Soul Understands

So far we have examined truth as known in judgment, the second act of the intellect. Now we must turn to simple apprehension, the first act of the intellect in which the intellect acquires a likeness of the thing known or apprehends what a thing is prior to forming a judgment about that thing (*De verit.* 1.3). We must look more closely at the how ideas are generated by the mind. Here, too, the test will be whether Aquinas provides an alternative superior to both rationalism and empiricism, a *via media*, as Bavinck thought, and whether Aquinas's account is similar to Bavinck's or differs from it in any significant way. We know already that in some way the content of mind must be derived from the senses. Now we look to Aquinas's account of how the mind is both passive or receptive and active.

Early views: materialism and Platonism (ST 1.84.1). Like Bavinck, Aquinas begins his discussion of understanding by contrasting the materialist and Platonist positions, approximately what Bavinck describes as empiricism and rationalism. The earliest philosophers were materialists, Aquinas observes, that is, they “thought there was nothing in the world save bodies.” Today they might call themselves physicalists, but all agree that only what is present to the external senses is real, and all that is real can in principle be grasped by the senses. Now bodies constantly change, Aquinas observes, and so these materialists held that “we can have no certain knowledge of the reality of things.” The mind cannot form a stable judgment about what is constantly changing, and so they concluded that no knowledge is possible. Heraclitus is cited as an example

of this perspective.

Plato wanted to “save the certitude of our knowledge of truth,” Aquinas states, and so he posited a separate genus of beings, the *forms* or *ideas*. It was supposed that particular things participate in these immaterial forms and that all knowledge was a grasp of these forms and not of particular sensible things. Aquinas rejects Plato’s view for two reasons. First, immaterial and unchanging forms cannot give knowledge of changing things, and so this view makes natural philosophy (roughly our empirical sciences) impossible. Second, he argues—as Plato himself already did in the *Parmenides*—that introducing a realm of ideas which “differ in being” from sensible things is of no use for understanding sensible things (i.e., master vs. master itself, student vs. student itself, etc.), for although the ideas have relations with each other, and although particular things relate to one another, there are no relationships between these two orders of things.

Not content with simply pointing out the inadequacies of Plato’s solution, Aquinas analyzes how Plato went wrong. This analysis goes to the heart of the matter for Aquinas. Plato recognized that knowledge is possible through “some kind of similitude.” After all, if what we think is not like what we are thinking about, then clearly we must be mistaken. However, with regard to this likeness Plato mistakenly thought that “the form of the thing known must of necessity be in the knower in the same manner as in the thing known itself.” Plato unlike the materialists recognized that “the form of the thing understood is in the intellect under conditions of universality, immateriality, and immobility.”

One can see in this characterization how Plato grasped that ideas differ from sense experiences. Every idea is *universal*, for it is a single content which can be applied to an indefinite number of situations or sets of data which are similar in the relevant way. Our ideas are also *immaterial* because they do not include particular aspects of each of the things for which it stands such as that the thing is here or now or that it is composed of some particular wood, stone, or other material, for example. Finally, while the particular things identified or named by an idea are subject to change, the idea as thought is not changing, rather it is characterized by

immobility. We may change our idea, but then we have a new, different idea; the original, discarded idea remains a possible thought. Plato in recognizing these significant differences between the data of sense and ideas in the intellect brought about a most important advance in philosophical analysis.

Nevertheless, Aquinas asserts that Plato made a mistake in claiming that the idea or form of the thing known must exist in the knower the same way as in the thing known. In other words, just because our ideas are universal, immaterial, and unchanging, this does not mean that their object must have these same characteristics. Like Aristotle, Aquinas often appeals to the senses for an analogy to elucidate what is happening with the understanding. He notes that for sight, whiteness can be of greater or lesser intensity or be present with or without another quality such as sweetness. So the sensible form can exist in one way in things which are external to the soul and in another in the sense which receives the form. Granted that this is the case for the senses, there is no reason why the intellect cannot “according to its own mode” receive “under conditions of immateriality and immobility the species of material and moveable bodies; for the received is in the receiver according to the mode of the receiver.” The same “what” or content can exist in different ways both as particularized and in the mind as a content that has the potential to refer to many individuals.¹⁵

To sum up our findings so far, Aquinas clearly sides with Plato as opposed to the materialists. The materialists have no place for immaterial and unchanging ideas or forms because they failed to distinguish the mind or understanding from the senses. Plato did, and Aquinas agrees with him that the ideas in our minds are universal, immaterial, and unchanging. However, he does not agree that the objects of these ideas

15. Note that just the opposite relationship exists in the artistic experience, for in any of the arts it is the conception in the mind of the artist which directs the making, and multiple copies of the idea can be produced. The one representation in the artist’s mind is the source of multiple works, which is just the reverse of the situation with knowledge, where multiple particulars are represented by a single content in the mind. In both cases the same likeness or form exists in different ways in the mind and in things.

need to exist in the same way. Hence he denies the need for Plato's ideas or forms to account for human knowing of material things. However, if there are no independently existing forms, then a new problem, or set of problems, appears. As noted, Aquinas says that the intellect receives the ideas "according to its own mode"—under conditions of immateriality and immobility. But particular things are material and changing. How can there be an unchanging knowledge of a changing thing? How can the same form come to exist in the mind that exists in particular things? In what way is the form the same and different in the mind and in things? Is there a process by which the form comes to exist in the mind? If so, what is it?

It is clear that by accepting Plato's advance upon the thought of the pre-Socratic materialist philosophers, Aquinas has a lot of explaining to do. As, it might be added, do all philosophers since Plato. One might say that much of modern philosophy is devoted to dealing with this issue—the relationship between extended substance and thinking substance, between impressions and ideas, between apperceptions and the categories of the mind. Recognizing that we have a perennial philosophical problem here, we will do well to examine closely how Aquinas works out his solution.

On the mode of understanding (ST 1.84.3). One possibility is that the mind understands physical things through its own nature. Aquinas asks, does "the soul understand corporeal things through its essence?" The obvious answer is no, for initially our minds are, as Aristotle noted, like a blank slate on which nothing is written. Materialists would seem to be committed to some form of this thesis: that the mind knows through its essence. Like knows through like, and if things are material then the mind must be too. As noted above, Bavinck traces such a tendency, and such would seem to be the underlying rationale in the attempts to develop materialist theories of mind even today.¹⁶ Aquinas

16. *RD*, 220; cf. David S. Sytsma, "Herman Bavinck's Thomistic Epistemology: The Argument and Sources of His *Principia of Science*," in *Five Studies in the Thought of*

summarily rejects knowing by essence.

Better known is a variant expression of knowledge coming through essence; namely, that “the soul understands through innate species.” In responding to this question, Aquinas recalls that at first we are only potentially able to know. On both the level of sense and understanding we actually come to know after being potentially able to know. Sensible objects, acting on the senses which are potentially able to sense, cause a person to actually sense as when a vibrating object causes a noise through which we hear. Similarly, it is, Aquinas says, through “instruction or discovery” that we come to understand. So

we must say that the cognitive soul is in potentiality both to the likenesses which are the principles of sensing and to the likenesses which are the principles of understanding.

Hence the soul does not have innate species but is initially in potentiality to such species. Note that the point being established here is that both the senses and the mind are in potentiality to their respective acts, but this does not mean that the relationship to their respective objects is the same. Indeed it is obvious that they are different: sensible objects are said to act on the senses, but intelligible objects are not said to act on the understanding; rather they are said to enter the understanding through “instruction or discovery.”

Philosophers have given alternative accounts for why the soul does not always understand. Aquinas distinguishes his account from the one given by Plato. For Plato the soul initially does not understand because the human soul is in the body and the body hinders it in its normal operation, and that is why the soul, though it naturally possesses intelligible species, is not able to access this content. Aquinas responds to this claim in two ways. First, he denies the fact: he asserts that is not the case that we are unable to grasp what is naturally known as in the case of first principles. “[N]o man forgets what he knows naturally, e.g., that every

Herman Bavinck, A Creator of Modern Dutch Theology, ed. John Bolt (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2011), 22.

whole is larger than its part, and the like.”¹⁷ Second, Aquinas rejects the Platonic conception of human nature: Plato for whom the fact that the soul was in the body was an unnatural condition could argue that the body was a hindrance to the soul, but for Aquinas as a Christian the soul belongs naturally to the body. And the natural operation of a thing cannot be hindered by what belongs to it naturally. In addition, Aquinas asserts that the view that ideas are innate is proved false by the fact that if a person lacks a sense, knowledge of what is apprehended through that sense is also lacking as with the case of a person born blind. If there were innate likenesses of all intelligible things in the soul, this would not be the case.

It is time to take stock. Knowledge for Aquinas comes neither from the essence of the soul nor from innate ideas. Rather sense knowledge comes through the action of sensible objects on the senses, and understanding comes by instruction or discovery. So now we can rephrase our question: what happens in instruction or discovery?

Already one answer to this question has been rejected. Among the objections which Aquinas cites is the *Meno* in which Plato shows that an untaught person can, if questioned in an orderly fashion, acquire knowledge. If not Plato, then at least others have taken this as a sign that there are innate species, which are recovered or recalled through the questioning. Aquinas, however, is not convinced. He replies that although in the process of questioning knowledge is produced in the student, it is not because the student had knowledge previously, but the knowledge is produced then for the first time. When questions are put in an orderly way, then “they proceed from universal self-evident principles to what is particular” (ad 3), so that the student is able to progress by moving from what is naturally known to conclusions that follow. Whether the process is

17. Every person who grasps what is meant by *whole* and what is meant by *part* cannot refrain from assenting to this statement. Not assenting is irrational, not intelligent. If a person questions this principle, then one would suspect that in some way there has been a misunderstanding of the meaning of the terms *whole* or *part*. Or maybe the person is just not rational, and therefore, being unable to grasp this basic principle, is not capable of reasoning at all.

by questioning or by asserting makes no difference. In other words, lecturing may be just as effective as using the Socratic method; the goal in both cases is for the moment of discovery to occur in the student.

Whether knowledge is acquired through separate forms (ST 1.84.4). So far we have seen that Aquinas asserts that ideas come to exist in the mind through either discovery or learning. Now we ask, how does learning occur?

Today we naturally expect to answer this question by an appeal to psychology. We expect to be told what actions or activities result in learning. However, for the ancients, and Aquinas as well, psychology tends to be subordinated to metaphysical categories, so psychological data are described using metaphysical terminology. Accordingly the question about the nature of learning is posed this way: does the content that is gained in learning come from separate forms?

In considering this question, one of the objections that Aquinas presents—that is, one of the arguments for the thesis that knowledge is acquired through separate forms—identifies the underlying pattern in the philosophers who take this position. Basically, the argument is that knowing is like sensing, or as more commonly expressed, fundamentally knowing is seeing. What is meant is that knowing is not actually the same as seeing, but it is very similar to what happens when we see; it is seeing in a metaphorical sense.

The intelligible is to the intellect as the sensible to the sense. But the sensible species which are in the senses, and by which we sense, are caused by the sensible things which actually exist outside the soul. Therefore the intelligible species, by which our intellect understands, are caused by some things actually intelligible, existing outside the soul. But these can be nothing else than forms separate from matter. Therefore the intelligible forms of our intellect are derived from some separate substances. (arg. 2)

This view is based on the assumption, as noted above, that the relation of the subject is over against an object; in knowing the subject is confronted by the object. This is the view which we saw Bavinck struggling with.¹⁸

18. In this context it is worth noting that this assumption is also built into the

As so often, Plato was the first to make this claim. He held, Aquinas says, that the forms of sensible things subsist by themselves without matter such as “the Form of Man-in-himself” and that these forms are participated in by both our soul and by corporeal matter, as already noted above. Aristotle, however, argued vigorously against the view that sensible things could have their forms subsist without matter. Aquinas notes some of the history of the debate on this issue. Avicenna, a Muslim theologian living in the 11th century CE, argued that “the intelligible species of sensible things, instead of subsisting in themselves without matter, pre-exist immaterially in some separate intellects” (corpus). He posited a series of separate intellects, the last of which he called the *agent intellect*, and claimed that from this intellect the intelligible species flow into our souls and sensible species into corporeal matter. In addition, he insisted that the intelligible species do not continue in the soul, but that with each new sense experience the soul needs to turn to the agent intellect in order to acquire the species (form/content) once again. So knowledge for him is not innate, as for Plato, but acquired on the occasion of learning. Clearly this is a more subtle position which conforms more closely to our experience of understanding. It also incorporates significant features found in the modern idealist tradition.

Aquinas is not impressed. Again, the first reason is not psychological but in this case related to his anthropology. If one adopts the view that the forms flow into the mind from a separate intellect, then there is no reason for the soul to be united to the body. For Aquinas, the soul does not depend on the body for its existence, but rather it depends on the body for its proper operation; namely, to understand. However, if one claims that the soul has the capacity to receive intelligible species only through the influence of certain separate principles and not from the senses, then the soul would not need the body to understand. So then there would be no reason for the soul to be united to the body.

A more nuanced version of the same appeal to separate forms asserts that the soul does need the senses in order to understand but only so that

philosophical tradition which appeals to possible worlds to account for knowledge.

it can “be awakened by them to the consideration of those things whose intelligible species it receives from separate principles.” However, even this does not satisfy Aquinas, because again this “sleep” or “forgetfulness” occurs because of the soul’s union with the body. Also, the sense would have no role except removing this obstacle, and so the reason for the union with the body remains unexplained. Avicenna also suggested that the senses rouse the soul to turn to the agent intellect in order to receive the species, but this too does not satisfy Aquinas. If it were natural for the soul to understand through species derived from the agent intellect, then the soul could turn to that intellect through its own nature or by another sense, but then once again we would not have the phenomenon of a person lacking a sense having no knowledge of the data of that sense (e.g., a man born blind not having a knowledge of colors). And so Aquinas concludes that knowledge is not acquired through separate forms. We learn, but exactly how we learn remains to be determined.

Whether the soul knows material things in the eternal exemplars (ST 1.84.5). At this point Aquinas turns to Augustine’s view, which we already examined in the context of the image of the divine illumination: the Logos doctrine. So it will be possible to be brief.

Does the human soul know all things “in the eternal exemplars?” The divine ideas are known in that they are a principle of human knowledge. It can be said that “what we see in the sun we see by the sun,” for it is by the power of the sun that we are able to see, so also “the human soul knows all things in the eternal exemplars, since by participation in these exemplars we know all things.” Why? “The intellectual light itself,” continues Aquinas, “which is in us, is nothing else than a participated likeness of the uncreated light, in which are the eternal exemplars.” In short, our capacity to understand, our intellect, is for Aquinas a manifestation of the divine light within us. In this discussion Aquinas has turned the focus from what we *do* to what we *are*: by virtue of having minds, having the power of understanding, each person’s capacity to know is a sharing in the divine intelligence.

Granted that we have a capacity to know, the next question is this: how does this power or capacity function? It is one thing to say that the human mind has been made with a proper function. One might describe this as a theological thesis, and an appropriate one for a Christian theologian. But this does not remove or replace the philosophical task of understanding our understanding. There remains the task of determining the nature of proper functioning, giving an account of the psychology of knowing.

A beginning has been made in Aquinas's analysis of Augustine's position. As we saw he observes that the intellectual light by itself is not enough for understanding, but in addition we need the intelligible species which are derived from things: although things occur in time according to the eternal exemplars, nevertheless in order to learn about things philosophers had to seek "for this information from the story of times and places." For Aquinas there is both an internal and an external cause of knowledge. Our next task will be to explore the relationship between these two causal elements.

How intellectual knowledge is derived from sensible things (ST 1.84.6). Having critiqued the most significant accounts prominent in his day—all appeals to innate ideas and separate forms—Aquinas now turns to giving an account of how intellectual knowledge is derived from sensible things.

Materialists of all ages have claimed that knowledge is caused by sensible things. Aquinas was familiar with this position as set forth by ancient atomism. He cites Democritus who is said to have held that knowledge is caused by a "discharge of images." Today with the extensive development of neural psychology, the claim is likely to be couched in terms of neural process. Aquinas would, I suspect, be no more impressed with proponents of cognitive science today than he was with Democritus. The problem with Democritus and other early philosophers, he says, is that they failed to distinguish between intellect and sense. In other words, they recognized only material causality which leads to reductionism and not the possibility of different levels of formal cause. We must now

explain the implications of this assertion. For Aquinas, the senses are required for knowledge, but their role remains to be defined.

If the materialists treat understanding as if it were just another sense, the opposite error is characteristic of the Platonists. They held that the body does not feel but rather the soul feels through the body, through monitoring bodily changes. Lurking just beneath the surface here are issues that emanate from thinking of the soul as a substance using a body, which is well known in modern philosophy as the problem of relating thinking substance and extended substance. Aquinas's own view is in conformity with his account of the soul as being the form of the body. Hence for Aquinas, as for Aristotle, sense and understanding are different from one another, and having sense experience involves the body. "[T]o sense is not an act of the soul alone, but of the composite." So it is held to be possible for sensible things to have an effect on the senses.

Although sensible things have an effect on the senses, they do not cause understanding. If they did, then everyone could be a Galileo or Newton, or rather no one would be known for their discoveries because learning would be merely a matter of having the right experience. Still, experience is relevant. Data from sensible things are needed for understanding. The problem then is to define their role precisely. Aquinas asserts that "something more noble" than sense is required, an active principle. The active principle is nothing other than the agent intellect which he has already argued is a principle in every human soul. It is this agent intellect—active mind, wonder, or desire to know—"which causes the phantasms received from the senses to be actually intelligible, by a process of abstraction." Phantasms, or sense images, are only potentially intelligible; they are something which can be understood, but as images they are merely the data of color, figure, sound, etc. These elements differ from one another, but to identify significant relationships in them is the work of mind. Identifying relationships within and among the features of the sense image is the work of active mind, agent intellect, "by a process of abstraction." Precisely what the process of abstraction is will need to be explained later. For now it is necessary to focus on the secondary or subordinate role of the data of sense experience.

Experience is a partial cause of knowledge: “on the part of the phantasms, intellectual knowledge is caused by the senses.” What kind of cause are the phantasms? The fundamental fact is that “the phantasms cannot of themselves immute the possible intellect.” What Aquinas is asserting is that images alone do not suffice for knowledge; by themselves they cannot produce ideas. Something more is needed. Thus, on the most elementary level, to have an image of an animal is different from being able to name or identify it. What role does the image have in this transition? Aquinas specifies the role of sense data this way: “it cannot be said that sensible knowledge is the total and perfect cause of intellectual knowledge, but rather is in a way the matter of the cause.”¹⁹

Sense knowledge is “in a way the matter of the cause?” What does this mean? What Thomas is claiming is that the cause of knowledge is the agent intellect and that for agent intellect the sense image, the phantasm, is *something like* matter. Matter in an Aristotelian context is that which is potential, that which has within it the possibility of receiving form through the action of some agent. Here it is important to be thinking of the Aristotelian conception of matter and not matter as substance as found in modern philosophy and modern science. Here the appeal is to the original context from which the term was taken: matter is like wood, capable of being shaped into a range of possible forms. And this corresponds to our experience. The data of the senses are open to a variety of interpretations, of conceptualizations, being treated differently depending on what question is being asked. But agent intellect is precisely our capacity to inquire, to question. And so we have according to this account nothing to inquire about until we have experience, but having experience does not determine what question(s) we shall ask. Yet depending on the question, different aspects of the data will be relevant.

But note that Aquinas did not say, “the matter of the cause” but rather “in a way” the matter of the cause. To make the data of sense merely matter for the intellect would seem to give too little weight to the

19. “...non potest dici quod sensibilis cognitio sit totalis et perfecta causa intellectualis cognitionis, sed magis quadammodo est materia causae.” *ST* 1.84.6.

forms as existing in the data and give the impression that mind can order matter with little or no limitation. In another work Aquinas uses a different formulation to describe the relationship between agent intellect and the phantasms (sense images): he says that the sensible acts as an “instrumental and secondary agent” (*De verit.* 10.6 ad 7). In this formulation the subsidiary role of the sensible and the primary role of active mind are maintained.

What is an instrumental agent or secondary agent? In general, it is whatever is in the employ of, or used by, a higher agent. The soldier is an instrument of the general, the army of the ruler, and so forth. Again, the analysis is often used of tools: so a shovel is an instrumental cause for a workman, a violin for a violinist, etc. Still the secondary agent contributes order to the experience. The implication of this formulation is that the data supplied by the senses are used by mind for it to come to understand things, but that they also make their specific contribution.

Both descriptions lead to the same conclusion. The mind uses the phantasms, the data of the senses, for its own purpose. This fundamental fact is what distinguishes Thomas’s realism from ancient materialism and modern empiricism: the data of sense are not enough to cause knowledge, but they are employed by intellect in the generation of knowledge. Still, to conclude on this basis that Thomas tends to a rationalist position is hasty in the extreme. Recall that it has already been explained that Aquinas argues that properly speaking, truth is found in the intellect only in the second act of the intellect, in judging, and not in the first act of the intellect, in grasping what something is. But for the phantasms to be made intelligible is precisely to indicate in some manner a *what*, a quiddity, whether it be essential or accidental in the thing. Hence it is not surprising that Aquinas follows the present discussion with an explanation of how mind returns to the phantasms in order to actually understand.

Finally, above it was said that the agent intellect makes the phantasms intelligible by “a process of abstraction.” Abstraction will be treated in due course, but first it is necessary to explain what is involved in “understanding actually.”

Understanding actually (ST 1.84.7). So far we have arrived at the state in which one has grasped some content, what Aquinas calls a likeness or what it is (quiddity), the state of having discovered an idea or in more complex cases a theory. It will be useful to note briefly how for Aquinas the acquiring of a likeness relates to the second act of the intellect, judgment. And the immediate concern is what conditions are necessary for the performance of this act and, when successful, the conditions for applying this knowledge.

Why is having an “intelligible species” not enough? This is the question of Platonists of all ages, for those who consider knowing primarily as being in some fashion like seeing. In other words, it is the position of all who consider knowing to be a kind of confrontation between the subject and the object. As is his wont, Aquinas formulates this view succinctly:

...the intellect is made actual by the intelligible species by which it is informed. But if the intellect is in act, it understands. Therefore the intelligible species suffices for the intellect to understand actually, without turning to the phantasms. (arg. 1)

What evidence is there to show that we can actually understand only by “turning to the phantasms?” First, if the intellect did not make use of a corporeal organ in order to understand, it would not be hindered in its operation by a “lesion of the corporeal organ,” by some flaw in the functioning of the corporeal organ. But such is not the case. There are two situations which must be taken into account. First, the acquisition of new knowledge and, secondly, when using knowledge previously acquired:

...for the intellect to understand actually, not only when it acquires new knowledge, but also when it uses knowledge already acquired, there is need for the act of the imagination and of the other powers. (corpus)

This explains why understanding is not possible if our senses are disordered or our memory of the data fails. Aquinas adds that this also explains why when we try to understand something, we construct an image: a person “forms certain phantasm to serve him by way of examples, in which as it were he examines what he is desirous of understanding.” Similarly, when trying to get someone else to understand, we will often

cite an example on the basis of which “he can form phantasms for the purpose of understanding.”

This is the way the human mind works according to Aquinas. Other intellectual beings may have minds that work differently, angels for example, but the proper object of the human mind is the nature existing in corporeal matter:

... the proper object of the human intellect, which is united to a body, is the quiddity or nature existing in corporeal matter.... Now it belongs to such a nature to exist in some individual, and this cannot be apart from corporeal matter; for instance, it belongs to the nature of a stone to be an individual stone, and to the nature of a horse to be an individual horse, and so forth. Therefore the nature of a stone or any material thing cannot be known completely and truly, except in as much as it is known as existing in the individual.

But as we have already seen it is the senses and secondarily the imagination which grasp things in their particularity.

Now we apprehend the individual through the sense and the imagination. And, therefore, for the intellect to understand actually its proper object, it must of necessity turn to the phantasms in order to perceive the universal existing in the individual.

For this reason, proper operation of the senses is required for intellect to make appropriate judgments. Just as a smith does not seek knowledge of a knife except for the purpose of producing this individual knife, so Aquinas says, “the natural philosopher does not seek to know the nature of a stone and of a horse, save for the purpose of knowing the essential properties of those things which he perceives with his senses” (*ST* 1.84.8). And so the natural philosopher cannot be a judge of natural things, unless “he knows sensible things.” And so it is that the intellect requires that the senses function well to complete its own operation. If the senses and the imagination are not functioning well, then reflection and judgment are not possible.

Abstraction

We have been analyzing how actual understanding is possible only when the mind “turns to the phantasms in order to perceive the universal

nature existing in the individual.”²⁰ The nature that is universal in the mind is particular in things. Does this not mean that the mind fails to understand things as they are? And so we need to clarify what Aquinas means when he says that the agent intellect “causes the phantasms received from the senses to be actually intelligible, by a process of abstraction” (*ST* 1.84.6).

Bavinck also contends that

the universality we express in a concept does not exist as such, as a universal, apart from us. Things are particular, individual. Universality, then, has its basis in things and is abstracted from them and expressed in a concept by the activity of the intellect. (*RD*, 231 [amended])

Thus far Aquinas agrees. How then does his account of abstraction differ from Bavinck’s? It is both simpler and more complex.

According to Aquinas what is proper to the human intellect is “to know a form existing individually in corporeal matter, but not as existing in this matter.” He continues, explaining what it means to abstract: “But to know what is in individual matter, yet not as existing in such matter, is to abstract the form from individual matter which is represented by the phantasms” (*ST* 1.85.1). So far so good, but what is required at this point is an account of what is involved in the process of abstraction. Aquinas’s answer is that abstraction is “a simple and absolute consideration” (ad 1). “Simple and absolute consideration” is a function of the fact that one is able to ask different questions of the same set of data. This element was foreshadowed when it was asserted earlier that the phantasms are “in a way the matter of the cause” of knowledge, or alternatively, “instrumental and secondary causes.” In other words, Aquinas in speaking of a “simple and absolute consideration” is pointing out the fact that we attend to different aspects of the sense data, sense image or phantasm, depending on our interest. To state the point in more familiar language, it is possible to focus on one aspect of the data and ignore others. It is possible to identify some elements in experience as being relevant and not to attend

20. “[C]onvertat se ad phantasmata, ut speculetur naturam universalem in particulari existentem.” *ST* 1.84.7.

to others because they are irrelevant. Relevance and irrelevance are determined by the question that is being asked. It is agent intellect, our capacity to question, which sets the criterion for what is relevant and what is irrelevant.

The first point which Aquinas makes is that no error results from this selectivity. And to show this he appeals to a simple case in sense experience. It is possible to consider the color and similar properties of an apple without any consideration of the apple, “for an apple is not essential to color, and therefore color can be understood independently of the apple” (ad 1). Here, it should be noted, the criterion is given as to when abstraction is possible: it is possible to abstract from what is not essential to what is being considered; or stated negatively, it is not possible to abstract from what is needed to understand.

Building on this illustration, Aquinas argues that the same procedure is possible when one is considering an individual thing, what he calls “abstracting the universal from the particular” or what is the same, “the intelligible species from the phantasm.”

In the same way, the things which belong to the species of a material thing, such as a stone, or a man, or a horse, can be thought without the individual principles which do not belong to the notion of the species. (ad 1)

Again, the point to note is that it is possible to abstract, to select some elements in the data or image, and to ignore what does not belong to the content, the notion, of the species. While a phantasm is always of stone, of wood, etc., which possesses a particular set of characteristics such as size, color, location, and existing at some time, no error results if these are not attended to. Isolating the relevant aspects, and “expressing in word what we understand” is what it is “to consider the nature of the species apart from its individual principles represented by the phantasms.” And so, though it would be false to think of the species of stone as if it did not exist in matter, there is no problem if the same species exists in one way in the thing being understood and in another way in the mind—as particularized in things and as universal in the mind.²¹

21. “If, therefore, the intellect is said to be false when it understands a thing

For it is quite true that the mode of understanding, in one who understands, is not the same as the mode of a thing in being; since the thing understood is immaterially in the one who understands, according to the mode of the intellect, and not materially, according to the mode of a material thing. (ad 1)

The point is that a species can exist in two ways, and if one considers it from the point of view of its content, then only its intelligible dimensions are relevant.

There are two ways in which a species exists, and it has different characteristics depending on whether it exists in individuals things or in the soul. Already in his early work *De ente et essentia* (ca. 1252–1256) Aquinas noted the difference between these two ways of existing and the implications of each. Considered in itself, as species or essence—the term Aquinas uses in this early work—such a nature is “neither one nor many.”²² However, as found in things, the species has “multiple existence because of the different singulars.” The existence of these individuals taken singly is not required for considering the species. So, it does not belong to a species, say man, considered in itself (absolutely) to exist in any particular thing or in the mind.

Therefore the nature of man absolutely considered clearly abstracts from any sort of existence, but in such a way that it does not prescind from either of them. The nature considered absolutely is what is predicated of all individuals.

The result is that

human nature itself exists in the intellect as abstracted from all individuating characteristics; therefore it has a uniform notion in all individuals outside the soul, because it is equally the similitude of all and conducive to the knowledge of each insofar as they are men.

otherwise than as it is, that is so, if the word otherwise refers to the thing understood; for the intellect is false when it understands a thing to be otherwise than it is.... But it is not so, if the word otherwise be taken as referring to the one who understands.” *ST* 1.85.1.

22. *De ente et essentia* c. 2. Citations are from Ralph McInerny, *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Writings* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1999); the following several citations are from p. 38.

To repeat, considered in itself, an essence (species or form—use what term you wish) has neither universality nor individuality attached to it; but as it exists in the mind it is universal, as existing in things it is individual.

In the same context Aquinas goes on to clarify that even though the species as existing in the intellect is a universal in relation to things outside of the mind, as it exists in this or that intellect it is something particular in each mind:

[A]lthough this nature as understood has the notion of universality as it compares to things outside the soul, because it is the similitude of all, none the less insofar as it exists in this intellect or that it is a particular understood species.²³

To sum up, for Aquinas, one can consider an essence absolutely, that is from the point of view of its intelligible content, and then it is neither universal nor particularized. However, as species or essence exists, it is particular as found in things and universal as found in the mind.

For Aquinas the abstraction of the universal from the particular is one of several ways in which the mind is able to abstract. Abstracting from the here and now is to consider a thing apart from its spatial and temporal conditions. But with some things having spatial and temporal characteristics is part of what they are, and so this must be incorporated in any account of their nature. So, Aquinas states that the species of man cannot be “abstracted by the intellect from *flesh and bones*.” To do so would be to misunderstand human beings, for humans are bodily beings. Retained in the content then is what he calls *common matter*.

For Aquinas there are still other ways in which we can abstract. Thus when doing mathematics it is not relevant whether we are counting horses

23. *De ente* c. 2. Aquinas notes that Averroes was mistaken on this point: “from the universality of the intellectually grasped form he [Averroes] wanted to conclude that there is one intellect in all men. This falls short of the truth because the intellectually grasped form has its universality not according to the existence which it has in an intellect, but according as it is related to real things as a likeness of them” (par. 61). Aquinas continues using the analogy of a statue which has its own individual existence as it exists as a particular statue, but has “the character of commonness according as it is the common representation of many.”

or cows or people because we are interested in quantitative relationships and not the thing being counted. In Aquinas's language:

Mathematical species...can be abstracted by the intellect not only from individual sensible matter, but also from common sensible matter. But they cannot be abstracted from common intelligible matter, but only from individual intelligible matter. For sensible matter is corporeal matter as subject to sensible qualities, such as being cold or hot, hard or soft, and the like; but while intelligible matter is substance as subject to quantity. (*ST* 1.85.1 ad 2)

There is yet another level of abstraction in which things are considered even apart from their quantitative aspects, "common intelligible matter," and this is found when one treats such topics as *being* and the like which can exist without matter.

What ties all these types of abstraction together (often called "degrees of abstraction") is that in every case the goal is to identify what is significant in the image and to form a representation of this content in the mind. At the same time, there is the fact that elements present in the sense data (phantasms) are left aside as being irrelevant to the issue at hand.

The distance between sense image and understanding can be illustrated in another way. Typical for us is the experience of having some familiar content acquire a new significance, but such a change occurs only if we are inquiring or have a question. Now it is true that sometimes such discovery occurs at unpredictable moments—recall Archimedes hitting upon a solution and running naked through the streets of Syracuse or the tale of Newton sitting under an apple tree—but without a question the data of sense remain something simply present rather than the bearer of a significant content. Aquinas states the matter in this way:

...phantasms, since they are images of individuals, and exist in corporeal organs, have not the same mode of being as the human intellect. But through the power of the agent intellect, there results in the possible intellect a certain likeness produced by the turning of the agent intellect toward the phantasms. (*ST* 1.85.1 ad 3)

The primary cause of understanding is agent intellect, our capacity to wonder, as Aristotle referred to it, the capacity to question. The result is the production of a likeness of what is in the thing in the mind—the possible intellect. Thus Aquinas continues:

This likeness represents what is in the phantasms, but includes only the nature of the species. It is thus that the intelligible species is said to be abstracted from the phantasm: not that the identical form which previously was in the phantasm is subsequently in the possible intellect, as a body is transferred from one place to another.

Again, the point is that the species which exists as individuated in the thing has come to have an existence in the mind, for the mind becomes all things. The species as a likeness in the mind is a single content which has the potential to stand for an indefinitely large number—indeed an infinite number—of individuals.

So far the focus has been on the number of ways in which agent intellect—the mind—can be selective in the quest for understanding. For Aquinas, however, this does not adequately account for the activity of mind. The content of sense not only may be attended to selectively, but also it may be idealized in order to facilitate understanding. “Not only does the agent intellect illumine phantasms, it does more; by its power intelligible species are abstracted from phantasms” (ad 4).

First, what does it mean “to illumine”? According to Aquinas, “the sensitive part acquires a greater power by its conjunction with the intellectual part.” In other words, our senses are more informative when they are directed by the mind. We focus on certain details as we are looking for something; to listen intently is again to try to isolate a particular sound; with touch we may attend to one or other aspect. In all cases, the senses supply more significant information because of being directed by mind.

But there is more: “...through the power of the agent intellect phantasms are made more fit for the abstraction of intelligible intentions from them.” Here another aspect comes to the fore. It is the possibility of discarding or ignoring dimensions of the data presented by sense and even modifying what is found in the particular case in order to facilitate understanding. Here the role of imagination, as Aquinas notes elsewhere, comes in, for with regard to phantasms there are two operations in the sensitive part of the soul: being receptive, what is impressed on the senses from without, and secondly “formation,” where the imagination forms for

itself an image of an absent thing or even something that never existed.²⁴ To cite a simple case, we draw a visible figure but think point, line, etc., when doing geometry.

For Aquinas, then, “to illumine” is the action of agent intellect interrogating the data supplied by sense in order to acquire within itself a likeness or content so that the species or essence comes to exist in another way, under conditions determined by the power in which it has been received. This is what it means to say that the agent intellect abstracts from the phantasm; it produces in the possible intellect a content which it finds in the images provided by the senses—a content that is universal.

To sum up, for Aquinas, abstraction is the process by which the agent intellect identifies what is significant in a particular context and causes that content to come to exist in the possible intellect. As found in the mind, the species is universal, for it is a single content that potentially stands for many. Complexity is found in the fact that it is possible to abstract in a variety of ways. Here the ruling principle seems to be that what is not relevant in a particular context can be left aside. But the primary point is that abstraction consists in identifying the significant; “simple and absolute consideration” is to focus on one or more elements in the data, and what is focused on depends on the question which one is asking. So phantasms are “in a way the matter of the cause of knowledge,” but agent intellect is the primary cause.

Species as That By Which We Understand

It is time to take stock, to remind ourselves where the problem lies. After

24. Because the universal is always and everywhere, some have concluded that they are eternal (*ST* 1.16.7 arg. 2). To this Aquinas replies that universals are everywhere and always in that they “abstract from time and place” (ad 2). It does not follow from this that they are eternal, unless there is an eternal intellect. So there is eternal truth only in God’s mind. “Because our intellect is not eternal, neither is the truth of enunciable propositions, which are formed by us, eternal, but it had a beginning in time. Now before such truth existed, it was not true to say that such a truth did exist, except by reason of the divine intellect, wherein alone truth is eternal” (ad 4).

explaining that the universal does not exist apart from us but “has its basis in things and is abstracted from them and expressed in a concept by the activity of mind,” Bavinck asserts that “in entertaining concepts we are not distancing ourselves from reality but we increasingly approximate it.”²⁵ To many, he suggests, it will seem that “in the process of forming concepts and judgments and conclusions, we are increasingly moving away from the solid ground beneath the edifice of our knowledge and are soaring into the stratosphere.” But having assured the reader that this is not the case, he reveals his own uncertainty in the matter.

It seems strange, even amazing, that, converting mental representations into concepts and processing these again in accordance with the laws of thought, we should obtain results that correspond to reality. Still, one who abandons this conviction is lost.²⁶

And so, as we have seen, Bavinck appeals to the doctrine of the Logos as the source of reality and the laws of thought to guarantee “an organic connection and correspondence between the two.” While Aquinas agrees that God is creator and hence source of reality, including the human mind, which as we saw is a participation in the divine knowing, he does not use this fact to build a bridge between the mind and reality, to defend the objectivity of knowing. The question here is this: why does Aquinas

25. *RD*, 231 (amended). The following citations are from the same passage.

26. It is significant that in this context Bavinck has lumped together the forming of concepts with forming judgments and conclusions. The formulation reveals a lack of awareness of the difference between the first and second acts of the intellect as described by Thomas and noted above. In short, it is one thing to come up with a concept—this was the focus of the first six articles of *ST* 1.84, whereas the last two turn to the conditions of judging, which for Thomas is the affirming or denying of the content that has been acquired. In Bavinck’s formulation, forming concepts obviously refers to what Thomas calls the first act of the intellect, and “conclusions” is another way of speaking of the second act of the intellect. What the process of forming “judgments” is for Bavinck is unclear in the passage. It may refer to the fact that we form propositions, for in understanding any image several concepts will be needed to identify the relevant aspects one has grasped and to specify the relationship among them. The point is that Bavinck is not clearly separating the process of formulating what one has grasped in the quest to understand from the process of evaluating such content, of asking whether it is so.

not feel the need to invoke the Logos doctrine in order to guarantee objectivity? The answer, I believe, is because Aquinas has a well worked-out doctrine of judgment, of the first and second acts of intellect. Further evidence for this claim is found in his discussion of the role of the intelligible species in knowledge.

The above account of abstraction as an action of the agent intellect producing a content or species in the possible intellect raises a new issue. With regard to the content produced in the possible intellect, is this content or likeness what is understood, or is it that by which we understand? In modern philosophy, beginning with Descartes philosophers held what Locke called “the Way of Ideas.” What we know are our ideas, and what is uncertain, and for some even impossible to determine, is their relationship to things. Bavinck writes in a context in which the modern conception is the received view, and his way to resolve this problem is, as we have seen, is to invoke divine assistance. Critical to understanding how Bavinck differs from Aquinas is to recognize that on this issue Aquinas takes the opposite position from modern philosophers. The content or species in the mind is that by which we understand. Why Aquinas takes this position and how he defends it is our next topic.

“Some,” Aquinas writes, “have asserted that our intellectual powers know only the impressions made on them.... According to this theory, the intellect understands only its own impressions, namely, the intelligible species which it has received” (*ST* 1.85.2). For two reasons he rejects this view. First, if what we understand is the intelligible species in the soul, science would be concerned not with things but only with our ideas. Secondly, then it would follow that “contradictories could be true.” In fact, “every opinion... would be equally true.”

Instead, Aquinas asserts, the intelligible species must be “that by which it [the intellect] understands.” Thomas argues the point with care. First of all, he reminds us that there are two types of actions. Some actions are oriented toward some external end. Heating and cutting are cited as examples. In general, any art which results in the making of some object illustrates the point. Through their actions carpenters make buildings, sculptors statues, and so forth. “Each of these actions proceeds

in virtue of some form.” The thing produced will be a likeness of the conception with which the craftsman was working. Understanding is an action that generates a likeness that remains within the agent: “the form from which proceeds an action remaining in the agent is a likeness of the object.” And it is by this likeness that the intellect understands:

Hence, that by which the sight sees is the likeness of the visible thing; and the likeness of the things understood, that is, the intelligible species, is the form by which the intellect understands.

In other words, the result of conceiving an idea is an intelligible species, a content, and this is the means by which the mind understands. But by virtue of understanding being a conscious act, it is also possible to focus on the operation of understanding and the product of understanding.

[S]ince the intellect reflects upon itself, by such reflection it understands both its own act of understanding, and the species by which it understands. Thus the intelligible species is secondarily that which is understood; but that which is primarily understood is the thing, of which the species is the likeness. (*ST* 1.85.2)

“The intellect reflects upon itself,” Thomas says. As we saw above, understanding is not only a conscious act, an act of which we are aware, but also it understands its own act. Here you will recall that Thomas draws a distinction between intellect and the senses. We are conscious when we sense things, so we can answer the question, “Did you see that?” However understanding goes further: we are not only aware of having some understanding, experience the fact that we understand, but we want to know whether our understanding is adequate; are the conditions specified in our conception an account of what is found in the thing as given through the data of the senses? The intelligible species, therefore, is not what is understood but rather is what the mind produces in itself in order to grasp reality. And so “we say that the thing actually understood is the intellect in act, because the likeness of the thing understood is the form of the intellect...” (*ST* 1.85.2 ad 1). So, the “abstracted intelligible species” is not what is actually understood; rather “it is the likeness thereof” (ad 2).

To drive the point home, Aquinas offers yet another clarification. The phrase can have two meanings: “the thing which is understood, and the fact that it is understood.” Similarly:

The words mean two things, the nature of a thing and its abstraction or universality. Therefore the nature itself which suffers the act of being understood, or the act of being abstracted, or the intention of universality, exists only in individuals; but that it is understood, abstracted, or considered as universal is in the intellect. (ad 2)

So far, the discussion has focused on the reception of a content by the intellect and the conditions of the generation of such a content. But the mind is not merely receptive of content; once we have understood we want to give expression to our understanding.

Here Thomas once again begins with analysis of the situation with the senses in order to explain the operations of intellect. There are, he remarks, two operations in the sensitive part of the soul. One operation is limited to “immutation,” to reception of some content. “[T]hus the operation of the senses takes place when the senses are impressed by the sensible” (ad 3). There is, however, on the same level an operation which he calls “formation.” There is “formation, inasmuch as the imagination forms for itself an image of an absent thing, or even of something never seen.” Similarly, both of these operations are found in the intellect.

For in the first place there is the passion of the possible intellect as informed by the intelligible species; and then the possible intellect, as thus informed, then forms a definition, or a division, or a composition, which is expressed by language. And so, the notion signified by a *term* is a definition; and a *proposition* signifies the intellect’s division or composition. Words do not therefore signify the intelligible species themselves; but that which the intellect forms for itself for the purpose of judging of external things. (ad 3)

Terms and propositions are our means of expressing what we have come to understand.²⁷ They are an expression of a content grasped by mind

27. For Aquinas language is the outer presentation of the truth found in the mind: “The truth of enunciations is nothing other than the truth of the intellect. For an enunciation resides in the intellect and in speech. Now according as it is in the intellect, it has truth of itself, but according as it is in speech, it is called enunciable truth, according as it signified some truth of the intellect, and not because any truth residing in the

through receiving the species of what one sought to understand. As with the intelligible species so the expression of that understanding in words is only a means or is what is secondarily understood, for it is a likeness in the mind of the nature itself in the thing. Here is a realism which is rooted in the mind's awareness of its own nature—that its aim is to be conformed to reality, to mirror reality.

The Range of Reflection and Judgment

At a time when intellectual virtue is a lively topic of debate in some quarters, I would be remiss if I did not add a few comments on Aquinas's view of this matter. It is one thing to refer to reflection and judgment, or the second act of the intellect, and to locate it in relation to the first act of the intellect, but more is needed to lay out its significance.

Aquinas holds that there are habits and virtues not just in the practical or moral order but also in the intellectual order. There are habits of mind which enable us to function well in the quest for truth, which is the good that intellect seeks. He identifies three habits of speculative mind or intellect: wisdom, science, and understanding (*ST* 1–2.57.2). Truth can come into the mind either as “known in itself” or as “known through another.” Now “what is known in itself is like a principle, and is perceived immediately by the mind.” The habit which enables the intellect to consider such a truth is called, “understanding.” It, Aquinas adds, is “a firm and easy quality of mind which sees into principles.” On the other hand, there are truths which are known through another, and here there are two cases: “A finish at an ultimate in some class; second; at an ultimate with respect to all human knowledge.” The first case is called the “habit of science,” which consists in the capacity of reasoning “to what is ultimate in this or that class of knowable truths.” The second is wisdom,

which considers the highest and deepest causes, as is described in the *Metaphysics*. Rightly, then, it judges and orders all things, because there can be no complete and embracing judgment except by going back to first causes. (*ST* 1–2.57.2)

enunciation, as though in a subject” (*ST* 1.16.7).

In relation to Bavinck, this account of wisdom, science, and understanding brings us into the realm of the Logos doctrine and the associated claims regarding the common notions. For Aquinas this means that mind is intelligent, not merely intelligible; that it operates according to internal norms, and these he typically calls “naturally known first principles.” While the mind operates according to these principles from the time one begins to understand, to give an account of them requires a sophisticated self awareness, the capacity to be aware of one’s intellectual operations and being able to describe them and their relationship to one another. Spontaneously, we wonder even as children, and as understanding develops we gradually become aware of our own intellectual operations with their preconditions and effects.

With regard to what Aquinas calls “naturally known first principles” and what Bavinck names “common notions,” while Bavinck tends to speak of the common notions as innate, it appears to me that there is no significant difference between this and Aquinas’s description of them as naturally known. Both authors typically refer to the whole being greater than the part as something naturally known, and neither, so far as I am aware, attempts to give a complete enumeration of these principles.

Enough has been said to grasp the sweep of Aquinas’s analysis. Reflection and judgment are found everywhere when we move from merely entertaining an idea to affirming its content. More extensive analysis would detail the differences between understanding and science and between degrees of certitude found in different discussions. Here it is enough to recognize that mind seeks to know everything about everything. Its goal is being, all that is—from the most trivial details about particulars to the divine majesty. Nothing is beyond the range of the human desire to know. But it is also recognized that we are not pure intellects. For us knowledge comes by reflecting on experience, initially of the outer senses but also on our experience within. According to Aquinas, though we will never master all there is to know, nevertheless in various areas and in varying degrees we are able to know truth. And this is our situation, the human situation, as *homo viator*.

Conclusion: Bavinck's Thomistic Realism

From the foregoing analysis it is abundantly clear that Sytsma is correct in asserting that Bavinck's realist epistemology is largely Thomist in inspiration, utilizing materials not just from Thomas but also his predecessor, Aristotle, and some of Thomas's followers among the Reformed Scholastics. And yet the above analysis leads to another conclusion also; namely, that there are some significant differences between Aquinas's and Bavinck's views. We will conclude then by noting these similarities and differences, identifying the source or sources of these differences, and evaluating their significance.

With regard to similarities, according to Bavinck rationalists hold that only thinking yields knowledge, empiricists hold that sense perception alone is the source of knowledge, and realism recognizes that both the senses and the mind contribute to knowing. For a realist the intellect begins as a *tabula rasa* and so derives its content from the senses, but it also has its own nature and own way of operating and so is not simply passive as modern empiricists have held. Clearly Aquinas is in full agreement with these general features of realism as Bavinck describes them. The fact of broad agreement is undeniable.

Bavinck's emphasis on natural certainty as the starting point of a theory of knowledge fits with Aquinas's perspective. As we saw Aquinas holds that first principles are naturally known and that we are aware of knowing even if giving an account of it is a subtle and difficult matter. And yet in this matter there is also a difference of emphasis that can provide insight into how Bavinck differs from Aquinas. There are various elements at work in the emphasis on natural certainty.

First, Bavinck's insistence on natural certainty is a consequence of his concern to oppose the influence of materialism. Thus he asserts natural certainty on the intellectual level, which is not to be explained on the physiological or neural level. This pre-rational certainty arises through the operation of the senses, through natural processes which are not the cause of perception, for "perception is a psychic mental act, not to be explained on the level of neural process" (*RD*, 228). In a similar manner Aquinas asserts that sensing is an act of the composite, and the operations of the

senses are caused by an impression of the sensible on the sense “by some kind of operation.” Thus both authors acknowledge that there is some kind of physiological process involved in sensation, but both recognize that explanation of perception is not to be found on that level. Thus they avoid the tendency to reductionism.

Second, natural certainty is a claim about the reliability of the senses. For Bavinck natural certainty is a rejection of skeptical views that appeal to the unreliability of the senses. Bavinck has almost nothing to say about the problem of the senses being deceptive. Every human being, he remarks, accepts the reliability of the senses. In this regard he is again very much like Aquinas who treats error in the senses briefly. As already noted, Aquinas holds that there is truth in the senses, but not as known by sense, and falsity exists in them in the same way. In other words, the sense is true when it apprehends things as they are, but falsity may also exist through the senses “through their apprehending or judging things to be other than they really are” (*ST* 1.17.2). With the proper objects of the senses error occurs, according to Aquinas, “accidentally and rarely” because of the organ being indisposed and the like. The issue is not a major one for Aquinas, because he assumes a self-correcting process of learning which enables one to separate the faulty impressions from the correct ones. Also, complete certitude is not anticipated on the sense level. This is a point we will return to later.

A third aspect of natural certainty according to Bavinck is that it is “the indispensable foundation of science.” In this regard natural certainty seems to be the certitude common in ordinary, everyday experience, the communication involved in daily life. “Scientific knowledge,” continues Bavinck, “is not a destruction but a purification, expansion, and completion of ordinary knowledge” (*RD*, 223). In general, in this regard also Bavinck agrees with Aquinas. Bavinck rejects the claim that science deals with things as they are in themselves and that in daily experience we deal only with secondary qualities. While Aquinas did not face this issue in its modern form, he similarly rejected the views of the ancient materialists, especially the atomists, whose account of thought, soul, and the like being really composed of atoms was similarly a claim that reality is composed of

atoms as opposed to the way things appear to us—an earlier version of the distinction between primary and secondary qualities.

Fourth, another aspect of natural certainty for Bavinck is that it supplies a starting point for knowing. Natural certainty is “not born out of a syllogism, nor is it supported by proof; it is immediate, originating spontaneously within us, along with perception itself” (*RD*, 223). It is, to use a term from contemporary philosophic discussions, properly basic. Here one finds Bavinck’s parallel to Aquinas’s analysis of understanding as a grasp of the starting points of the various sciences.

Fifth, another feature of natural certainty for Bavinck is that it is “the foundation and starting point for all other certainty” (*RD*, 223), including mind. Here Bavinck, parts company with Aquinas, for he construes the certainty of intellect to be similar to that found on the level of sense. Because the senses are passive and the objects of the senses active, the sensible representation depends on, or is a product of, what is external.²⁸ Thus Bavinck asserts that in the mental representation “there must be an element that points directly back to reality.” Aquinas makes no such claim, rather he asserts that “understanding has an operation in which the body does not share” (*ST* 1.84.6). For the mind seeks truth as known, and this is not reached until there is both some content which has been discovered (the first act of the intellect) followed by reflection and judgment (the second act of the intellect). In judgment there is a return to the data. This means that when the conditions specified by the propositions are found to be present in the data it is possible to affirm; or alternatively, if the conditions are not found to be present because some elements remain unexplained, then one denies or withholds judgment.

Bavinck makes no mention of judgment, the second act of the intellect. It appears to me that the result is that he tries to find in the mental representation itself a justification for its truth, hence his positing in it an element that points directly back to reality. Bavinck does not say;

28. Note the fact that often we look, or listen, etc., for some content does not contradict this point. Even when the senses are directed by understanding, their operation remains a receptivity of an active object.

nor does he identify this “reality pointing” element. Indeed, he does not say that there *is* such an element, but that there *must be* this element. He also calls it “the essential distinguishing mark” that indicates that a representation “represents that reality ideally.” But what is this element? One might agree that this content points back to reality because it is derived from sense data. But this will hardly suffice. What one wants to know is not its origin, but rather whether what has been formulated is an adequate representation of the sensed object. To use one of Aquinas’s terms, has the intellect been properly measured by the thing? If not, then mind has failed in its quest to mirror reality.

The reason Bavinck’s description is not clear is, I think, is because his model for understanding is taken from the senses. This can be seen also in the fact that the issue of natural certainty arises again:

In the case of the concepts that the intellect forms from mental representations, one again faces—but now with even greater urgency—the question raised earlier in the case of the images of perception: What is the relation between these intellectual concepts and the world of reality? (*RD*, 230)

This question is an urgent one for Bavinck, and not an issue for Aquinas, because Bavinck lacks an account of judgment. For Aquinas in reflecting and judging the mind grasps reality. Bavinck, by contrast, having no worked out account of judgment attempts to find in the concept a basis for affirming the real.

I have described the difference between Bavinck and Aquinas as stemming from the fact that Bavinck describes sensing and knowing as being essentially similar, whereas Aquinas holds that there are similarities but also a fundamental difference between the two. Another way to describe the difference between the two authors is to note that there is an empiricist element in Bavinck’s view. Here I will borrow Bernard Lonergan’s description of empiricism. According to Lonergan, empiricism arises from confusing “extroversion with objectivity.”

For man observes, understands, and judges, but he fancies that what he knows in judgment is not known in judgment and does not suppose an exercise of understand-

ing but simply is attained by taking a good look at the “real” that is “already out there now.”²⁹

In claiming that the representation includes an essential distinguishing mark that indicates that it represents reality, Bavinck is subsuming the content of judgment into the natural certainty of the representation.

This conflation of the presence of the thing with objectivity has consequences elsewhere. These consequences are evident when we compare Bavinck’s and Aquinas’s accounts of abstraction. For Bavinck it is the process in which “the intellect isolates from sense perceptions that which is universal,” for sense grasps the particular, and science is of the universal (*RD*, 229). For Aquinas, by contrast, abstraction is the process in which the mind (the agent intellect) grasps an intelligible element in the particular and makes it come to exist in itself (the possible intellect). What comes to exist in mind is a content—call it *essence*, *idea*, *representation*, *concept*, or what have you—which has been removed from its individuating conditions. This resulting content is universal in nature, for it is a content that may be applied to other sense experiences where the individuating conditions are different but the content grasped is the same; hence the possibility of a new application of the content without a new, different understanding.

Instead of focusing on the shift from the individual to the universal, Aquinas explains abstraction as being a function of the question that is being asked, as the selectivity of mind at work. And so, depending on the question being asked different aspects of the same thing may be abstracted. But whatever element is abstracted—in other words, whatever element is isolated for consideration—no falsity is implied so long as it is not claimed that the abstracted aspect exists apart from the other elements present in the particular. From this fact follows the relevance of the types of abstraction discussed earlier.

29. F.E. Crowe and Robert Doran, eds., *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, vol. 3, *Insight: A study of Human Understanding*, 5th ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 437.

Bavinck's analysis provides a case study of what happens when one simplifies the knowing process by omitting judgment and patterning the knowing process on sense, specifically on the sense of sight. Abstraction comes to have a different meaning, and there is no indication of how the abstracted content conforms to reality. And so the Logos doctrine is used to justify objectivity. In essence this view is a variation of the Augustinian claim that we see the truth in God.

Unlike for Aquinas for whom abstraction is an operation of agent intellect, and therefore intelligence at work, for Bavinck abstracting the universal appears to be an unconscious process which is followed by the intellect assimilating this universal component and incorporating it into itself, which makes it a possession of mind. "Realism," thus writes Bavinck,

...was doubtlessly correct in assuming the reality of universal concepts, not in a Platonic or ontological sense prior to the thing itself (*ante rem*), but in an Aristotelian sense in the thing itself (*in re*) and therefore also in the human mind subsequent to the thing itself (*in mente hominis post rem*). The universality we express in a concept does not exist as such, as a universal apart from us. In every specimen of a genus, particularly individualized and specialized, however, it has its basis in things and is abstracted from them and expressed in a concept by the activity of intellect. (*RD*, 231 [amended])

The complexity in Bavinck's description arises from the fact that he has not completely broken with an assumption shared by rationalism and empiricism; namely, that knowing is essentially a specialized kind of looking. In other words, as asserted above, Bavinck patterns knowing on sensing. If knowing is, as Plato was fond of saying, seeing, then it is true that "science always consists in a logical relation between subject and object" (*RD*, 214), for knowing will be conceived as a kind of confrontation with an external object. By contrast, for Aquinas the focus is on how the mind assimilates reality, so that the goal of mind is to become all things.

Since in the act of sensing we are aware of sensing, and since as Aquinas noted sense does not know its proportion to its object, there follows from Bavinck's way of conceiving of knowing the problem that "we remain inside the circle of our representations and never come into contact with the thing itself, only with our representation of the thing"

(*RD*, 216). Even more problematic with this conception is knowledge of our own self, for “[w]e cannot put ourselves at the window in order [simultaneously] to see ourselves pass in the street” (*RD*, 216; quoting Scherer). As we have already noted in detail above, for Aquinas, we do not remain inside the circle of our representations, because they are the means by which we know, and they are themselves known only reflexively. They are fashioned by the mind in order to grasp what is essential in the thing as revealed through data from the senses, both outer and inner; but it is also possible to switch from focusing on the content of knowing to the operations of knowing—the present analysis being a case in point. But representations are means because they are needed in order to reflect and make a judgment. And it is in reflection that there is a return to the data. Only when the conditions specified by the representations are found in the presentations of sense, then we naturally affirm “it is so”; or when the conditions are not met, we naturally deny. To affirm when the data do not support one’s conception is unjustified, perhaps even rash. To fail to affirm when evidence from the senses is adequate is to be obtuse, or even stupid.

Although Bavinck affirms that “in entertaining concepts we are not distancing ourselves from reality but we increasingly approximate it,” he expresses surprise that this is so. The question is why he finds this surprising, because for Aquinas this would not be surprising in the least. For Aquinas further understanding is always a return to the source, to penetrate ever more deeply into the matter supplied by experience. Being, as was already noted, is for Aquinas what “intellect first conceives as, in a way, most evident and to which it reduces all its concepts.” In other words, from beginning to end, the operations of understanding are oriented toward the goal of discovering *what is*. It appears that for Bavinck the situation is different. For him forming concepts and judgments appears to move away from the solid ground, the natural certainty of sense experience. “It seems strange,” he writes,

even amazing, that, converting mental representations into concepts and processing these again in accordance with the laws of thought, we should obtain results that correspond to reality. (*RD*, 231)

This amazement makes sense if one's conception of objectivity is rooted in empiricism. For as already noted, natural certainty as Bavinck describes it has an affinity to empiricism, whose criterion of what is real is what is out there (hence available to the senses). For Aquinas, by contrast, natural certainty properly understood is simply grasping that the conditions specified by everyday understanding are confirmed by experience. In other words it is another example of the pattern of experience and understanding culminating in a judgment that affirms that the conditions specified are in fact fulfilled.

Bavinck's account of knowledge is certainly realist in intent, but the psychology implicit in his account fails to describe how knowing is different from sensing. The result is an account of knowing in which the basic underlying metaphor is borrowed from the sense of sight. From this factor follow the difficulties that have been noted and a number of others as well.³⁰ Bavinck's final word is that things remain outside of us. "Being itself therefore can never be approached by us; it is a fact that has to be assumed and constitutes the basis of thought" (*RD*, 231). For Aquinas it is not so; being is what first enters into the intellect, for even if we know nothing else and we cannot identify what we are perceiving, we are still able to say there is something appearing to us in experience. As our grasp of a thing expands, we penetrate ever more deeply into its reality. And even though every understanding is limited and partial, for we are able to grasp only one thing at a time, still when one question is answered another can be raised, and what was matter—incidental and abstracted from in the first case—may become the aspect of the thing that is the focus of succeeding investigations. Far from agreeing that being itself can never be approached by us, Aquinas would assert that the aim of all knowing is to grasp being, that our knowing is progressive, penetrating ever more

30. For example, the problem just mentioned by Scherer: self knowledge. If knowing is conceived of as being like sensing, then one cannot both be in the street and in the window at the same time. However, if knowing is conceived of as an assimilation of mind to reality, then one of the things that can become the focus of understanding is one's own experience of understanding including its conditions, operations, and results.

fully into the realm of being. Admittedly, the quest for knowledge will never come to an end, for we humans begin knowing nothing, with a *tabula rasa*, and so we will not in this life reach complete knowledge of everything; we remain persons desiring to understand, *homo viator*.

To conclude, Bavinck's epistemology is certainly inspired by Thomas, but in surprising and significant ways he departs from his thirteenth-century mentor. Bavinck's account of knowledge lacks the clarity found in Aquinas. Thomas articulates clearly how understanding contrasts with sensing. Bavinck does not. The result is that Bavinck is at loss to explain the objectivity of knowledge, and so he develops the Logos doctrine to defend the objectivity of thought. For Aquinas the human mind is also a participation in the divine intelligence—"the light of Thy countenance O Lord, is signed upon us"—but for him this means that through the capacity created in us including the capacity to judge, to affirm or deny, or withhold judgment, "all things are made known to us" (*ST* 1.84.6).

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

Translated by Bruce R. Pass (brucepass@gmail.com),
PhD candidate at the University of Edinburgh

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 Gereformeerde en Moderne Theologie, Beschouwingen naar aaleiding vande 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. Kuyper," *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, "ethicals" 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 *Gereformeerde 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.

Pearls and Leaven

An Excerpt on Prayer from Bavinck's *Reformed Ethics*

John Bolt (bltj@calvinseminary.edu), Calvin Seminary

The first volume of Herman Bavinck's *Reformed Ethics* is divided into two books: I. Humanity before Conversion; II. Converted Humanity. In Book II, after chapters on "Life in the Spirit," "The Shape and Maturation of the Christian Life," and "Persevering in the Christian Life," Bavinck devotes the lengthy chapter 11 to the pathologies and diseases of the spiritual life. These include pathologies of the mind (gnosticism, intellectualism, doctrinalism, rationalism), of the heart (mysticism, Quietism, antinomianism), and of the will (Pietism, Methodism, fanaticism, moralism). Bavinck spells this out in terms of distinct ecclesial pathologies: (a) in the intellectual school or group: confessionalism leading to separatism and idolatry of a denomination; (b) in the emotional school or group: indifference, dismissal of the church, eschatological excess; (c) in the school of the will: rejection of the church as it is in favor of a different and better church, leading to donatism. Bavinck summarizes this as follows:

Accordingly, we have three major illnesses of the spiritual life: aridity, which has a confession but no life; morbidity in the narrow sense of the word: false mysticism and false experiential faith; and lethargy in which energy for action is lacking.

Bavinck then goes on to explore the roots of these pathologies with a thorough biblical-theological examination of the struggle between "flesh" and "spirit" even in believers, temptation, and spiritual abandonment.

This is the background and lead-up to chapter 12, "Restoration and Fulfillment of the Christian Life." Here he explores the spiritual disciplines that provide remedy to the diseases and help prevent further

spiritual disorder. He considers eight means toward personal renewal: prayer, spiritual meditation, reading the Word of God [lectio verbi divina], hymn singing, solitude, fasting, vigils, and vows. Prayer takes up most of the attention, considering the essence of prayer as a duty and a good work, biblical teaching on prayer, the subject and object of prayer (human beings and the triune God), the content of prayer, the manner of prayer, and answers to prayer.

Bavinck derives the essence of prayer from biblical teaching which he develops through an extensive word-study of the key Old Testament Hebrew and New Testament Greek terms for prayer. He examines seven New Testament terms and, after listing the first six, our excerpt begins with the last one, Εὐχαριστία. It is included because it showcases Bavinck's method. Readers of the *Reformed Dogmatics* know—and will find confirmed in the *Reformed Ethics*—that Bavinck valued and used the tradition of Reformed orthodoxy. All one has to do is check the 70-page “Combined Name Index” for the four volumes (*RD*, 4:825–94) and see the numerous references to names like Petrus van Mastricht, Bernhard de Moor, Amandus Polanus, Francis Turretin, Campegius Vitringa, and Gisbert Voetius. In fact, one need go no farther than this brief excerpt to see evidence of it. At the same time, however, Bavinck became acquainted with modern biblical scholarship during his study years at Leiden University, and while he kept his distance from its more critical postures, he did on the whole believe it had been a positive development.¹ His questioning of the way in which orthodox theologians like De Moor applied the fourfold Greek terms for prayer in 1 Tim. 2:1 to dogmatic/theological categories warrants speaking of his “cautious sympathy” for the tradition of Protestant orthodoxy.

Aside from this little biographic nugget, the excerpt demonstrates Bavinck's wonderful combination of clarity in making elementary distinctions and pastoral concern to answer real questions that Christians

1. E.g., Herman Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 22–24.

have about prayer: Do unbelievers have a duty to pray? Is God pleased when unbelievers pray? Does God answer the prayers of unbelievers?

Herman Bavinck on Prayer

New Testament Greek Terms for Prayer

Αἷτημα, τό:

Ἑρωτάω:

Ἐπιθυμέω:

Δέομαι:

Προσευχή, ἡς, ἡ:

Ἑντευξις, εως, ἡ:

Εὐχαριστία, ας, ἡ: thankfulness, gratitude, giving honor and praise to God (Eph. 5:4). In 1 Timothy 2:1 we therefore find (?)² reference to prayers for averting evil [δέησις], petitioning for the good [προσευχή], intercession for others [ἐντευξις], and thanksgiving [εὐχαριστία]. Calvin also judges that this text refers to different kinds of prayers.³

In general prayer consists of people who know and sense their dependence upon the true God—trusting his promises, for Christ's sake (in Christ's name)—and calling on him for help for physical and spiritual

2. Ed. note: The question mark was inserted by Bavinck himself. Apparently he was less than fully convinced about the dogmatic categories applied to the terms in 1 Tim. 2:1 by the tradition of Reformed orthodoxy represented here by Bernhardus de Moor, *Compendium theologiae christianae*, 7 vols. (Leiden: Johannes Hasebroek, 1761–71), 5:23. Here is De Moor's Latin exposition of the four Greek terms: δέησις = ad malorum Deprecationem; προσευχή = bonorum Petitionem; ἐντευξις = pro aliis Intercessionem; εὐχαριστία = denique *Gratiarum Actionem*. We have here solid evidence for Bavinck's cautious sympathy for the tradition of Protestant orthodoxy. Sympathy, because he does, after all, pass on to his Kampen students orthodoxy's traditional categories here. At the same time he shows hesitation that undoubtedly reflected the more modern biblical scholarship he had encountered at the University of Leiden. His own exegetical practice is more sophisticated and less dogmatic.

3. *Institutes* III.xx.28.

hardship or giving thanks for received benefits.⁴ These can be divided in several ways;⁵ according to form, for example, distinguishing proper, formal prayers⁶ from quick prayers.⁷ The latter are expressed without any preparation, suddenly, caused by one or the other thing, accident, disaster and so on. Some pious people for example constantly say, “O Lord!” “O my God!” or “Have mercy on me!” These outbursts are usually very brief, consisting of one or two phrases or sentences. On such occasions Roman Catholics may use the Lord’s Prayer or only make the sign of the cross, thereby expressing all the virtues of faith. We can distinguish mental prayer from spoken prayer.⁸ There are different prayers for different occasions: ordinary times and extraordinary times. Prayers differ according to content: there are prayers of petition and prayers of thanksgiving. Prayers of petition can be further divided into those asking for something good to happen and those that pray for evil to be averted.⁹ These prayers apply to spiritual as well as physical benefits. Finally, the subject can be an individual person in private or public as well as corporate/communal prayer in the home or the church. One can pray for oneself by oneself or intercede for others.

The Human Subjects of Prayer

Only humans pray. Animals do not pray since they cannot know God’s majesty and are unable to know and acknowledge their dependence on him. When Scripture speaks of birds and animals calling out to God (Ps. 147:9; cf. 104:27; Joel 1:18; Jonah 3:7–8), it is speaking figuratively. It is

4. Cf. Calvin, *Institutes* III.xx.2; Zacharias Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, Lord’s Day 45.

5. Gisbert Voetius, *De praktijk der godzaligheid: τα ασκητικά sive Exercitia pietatis* (Gorichem: Paul Vink, 1664), 115.

6. “schietsgebeden”

7. “preces ejaculatoriae”; see Voetius, *Ασκητικά*, 125–34.

8. “orationes mentalis” and “orationes vocales (orales)”

9. “toebidden” and “afbidden”

an idle question whether prayer is situated more in the will or in the mind.¹⁰ Just like faith, prayer is an act of the entire human being: it is a longing, desire, sighing, lamenting (situated in the will) but also asking, speaking, knowing, and so on (in the mind).¹¹ Prayer is an act of our consciousness, lifting up our spirit or mind to God¹² to which we are driven by an act of the will (we desire something or want to give thanks for something). Furthermore, the subjects of true prayer are regenerated people;¹³ they alone possess “a Spirit of grace and pleas for mercy” (Zech. 12:10); they alone can worship “in spirit and truth” (John 4:23).¹⁴ “In spirit” means spiritually, inwardly, not in all kinds of ceremonies and outward appearances, bound to place; “in truth” means in accordance with God’s being, in accordance with the true God. In fact, even the Christian does not know how to pray properly (Rom. 8:26), neither what to pray or how,¹⁵ because of weakness and lack. Therefore the “Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.”

The duty to pray, as with all good works, is also required of unbelievers even if they cannot pray correctly and truthfully.¹⁶ Moreover, the same law that obligates them to pray also enjoins them to pray correctly and well in spirit and in truth. If they are unable to do this, it is their own fault. It is therefore not correct to say that this obliges unbelievers to

10. The former view is held by William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, ed. and trans. John Dykstra Eusden (Boston: Pilgrim, 1968; rpt. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 258 (II.ix): “Prayer is a devout presentation of our will before God so that he may be, as it were, affected by it.” The latter view by Gisbertus Voetius, *Ασκητικά*, 94.

11. Johann Franz Buddeus, *Institutiones Theologiae Moralis* (Leipzig: Thomas Fritsch, 1727), 319.

12. “mentis elevatio ad Deum”

13. B. de Moor, *Comp. Theol.*, 5:27; Buddeus, *Institutiones*, 321v.

14. “ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ”

15. “τί; καθὸ δεῖ”

16. Cf. Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, trans. Henri De Vries (1901; repr. Chattanooga, TN: AMG, 2001), 662–68 (III.41, “Prayer of the Unconverted”). Ed. note: Bavinck’s original source was *De Heraut* 580 (February 3, 1889).

sinful prayer, to sinning in their prayers, and that it is therefore better simply to let it go. Besides, while unbelievers may lack spiritual awareness they nevertheless have a rational natural awareness of their own dependence and of God's greatness and goodness.¹⁷ "And it is certainly much better that unrenewed men should pray to God in some manner, with a natural conviction of their wants, and an acknowledgment of the Majesty and goodness of God, than that they should not pray at all. The mere fact of their praying, so far as that is concerned, is not displeasing to God, though the sin which cleaves to it is justly condemned."¹⁸ This is true even when the way someone prays is wrong as we can see in the case of Ahab whose self-abasement pleased God (1 Kings 21: 27–29) and the Ninevites (Jonah 3:8–10). "To do a good thing in a defective manner is a smaller evil than to omit it altogether."¹⁹ It is therefore "the duty of parents to instruct and habituate their children, from their earliest childhood, to prayer, and not to wait till they can discover in them the marks of regeneration. For who knows at what time, and by what means, the Spirit will first exert his saving influence? One thing is certain, while believers alone can pray aright, their faith was bestowed on them for the express purpose that they may continue in prayer."²⁰

17. Ed. note: cf. *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:241–43.

18. Herman Witsius, *Sacred Dissertations on the Lord's Prayer*, trans. William Pringle (Edinburgh: Thomas Clark, 1839; rpt. Escondido, CA: 1994), 56 (Dissertation II), <https://app.box.com/shared/j394fosmof>.

19. "Minus malum est bonum facere cum defectu quam prorsus omittere"; Witsius, *Lord's Prayer*, 56; Latin original: Witsius, *Exercitationes in Orationem Dominicam*, in *Exercitationes in Symbolum quod Apostolorum dicitur*, 2nd ed. (Franeker: Johannes Gyselaar, 1689), II.xx., <https://app.box.com/shared/j394fosmof>.

20. Witsius, *Lord's Prayer*, 56; cf. B. De Moor, *Comp. Theol.*, 5:27.

Are these prayers of unbelievers answered?²¹ Old Testament Wisdom provides a negative answer: “If anyone turns a deaf ear to my instruction, / even their prayers are detestable” (Prov. 28:9). In John 9:31 the man blind born says to the Jews: “We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person²² who does his will.” This expression is true in this context, namely, concerning someone who asks God for a miracle. However, other passages in Scripture affirm this saying in much more general terms: “If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, / the Lord would not have listened” (Ps. 66:18); “The Lord is far from the wicked, / but he hears the prayer of the righteous” (Prov. 15:29); “When you spread out your hands, / I will hide my eyes from you; / even though you make many prayers, / I will not listen; / your hands are full of blood” (Is. 1:15); “The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working”²³ (James 5:16; cf. 4:3: “You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions”); “The Lord is near to all who call on him, / to all who call on him in truth. / He fulfills the desire of those who fear him; / he also hears their cry and saves them” (Ps. 145:18, 19); “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed?” (Rom. 10:14); “But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways” (James 1:6–8).

God therefore sometimes does grant the wicked what they pray for, but actually he is then not answering their prayer but enforcing his

21. Ed. note: We have broken up Bavinck’s very long original paragraph, which might give the mistaken impression that he is starting an altogether different topic here. The Scripture passages he now goes on to discuss come directly from the beginning of Witsius’ Dissertation III, “On the preparation of the mind for right prayer” (*The Lord’s Prayer*, 57). The content is thus intimately connected with the questions about the prayers of unbelievers that closes Dissertation II (p. 56).

22. “θεοσεβής” = “God-worshipper.”

23. “Πολὺ ἰσχύει δέησις δικαίου ἐνεργουμένη.” Buddeus, *Institutiones*, 321.

counsel, showing his benevolence.²⁴ Here is what belongs to a prayer “that truly pleases God and that he listens to”:²⁵ we must truly know our need and misery so that we humble ourselves before the presence of God’s Majesty; “God opposes the proud / but shows favor to the humble” (1 Pet. 5:5; quoting Prov. 3:34). God does not answer the proud pharisee (Luke 18:9–14). The wicked do not pray to the true God, or they do not pray about the right things, or they pray feigningly, or simply out of habit, or without trusting God’s promises, or apart from Christ the Mediator, or with persistent sin, or with distrust and doubts, without faith.²⁶

24. Buddeus, *Institutiones*, 322.

25. *Heidelberg Catechism*, Q. 117.

26. Ursinus, *Commentary*, Q. & A. 117.

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