

# THE WONDERFUL WORKS OF GOD

*Instruction in the Christian Religion  
according to the Reformed Confession*

Herman Bavinck

Introduction by R. Carlton Wynne  
Indexing by Charles Williams

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*The Wonderful Works of God:  
Instruction in the Christian Religion according to the Reformed Confession*

Originally published in Dutch (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1909) as  
*Magnalia Dei:*  
*Onderwijzing in de Christelijke Religie naar Gereformeerde Belijdenis*

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*In Memory of Jean Young Gaffin, 1936–2019*



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## Introduction

This new publication of Herman Bavinck's *Magnalia Dei*,<sup>1</sup> helpfully retitled as *The Wonderful Works of God*, testifies to the relevance and value of great theology. Few theologians have plumbed the depths, probed the richness, and proclaimed the scope of Scripture, of history and redemption, of Christ and his reign, as has Herman Bavinck (1854–1921). Beyond his brilliance in theology—or better, as an extension of it—Bavinck addressed topics as diverse as ethics, philosophy, psychology, education, society, and politics. He wrote with exquisite erudition, positioning each field as an organic constituent of his expansive, trinitarian theological vision of God and the cosmos.<sup>2</sup> For Bavinck, every endeavor, including the most mundane, is an occasion to praise God's name, for all things are organically and intimately connected under the sovereign sway of his hand as he carries out his works of creation, redemption, and consummation. In this way, the world-encompassing character of Bavinck's Reformed Christian outlook is a reminder never to despise the day of small things (cf. Zech 4:10).

1. Originally published in Dutch as *Magnalia Dei: Onderwijzing in de Christelijke Religie naar Gereformeerde Belijdenis* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1909). The subtitle in English reads, *Instruction in the Christian Religion according to the Reformed Confession*. A second Dutch edition was published in 1931 with slight modifications and a foreword by Bavinck's brother, C. B. Bavinck. An English translation by Henry Zylstra was subsequently produced under the title, *Our Reasonable Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956), and included a preface by Zylstra (see pages xxiii–xxix of this volume).

2. See James P. Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism: Towards a New Reading of Herman Bavinck's Organic Motif* (London: T&T Clark, 2012).

## Introduction

Bavinck's life as a theological titan began modestly.<sup>3</sup> Born on December 13, 1854, in Hoogeveen, the Netherlands, he grew up (and remained) a loyal son of the marginalized Reformed community that stemmed from an ecclesiastical separation known as the *Afscheiding*.<sup>4</sup> Bavinck's father, the deeply pious Rev. Jan Bavinck, played a prominent role in the dissenting denomination, the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk* (Christian Reformed Church). His mother, Gesina, strongly supported her husband in that regard, despite her family's formal ties to the mother church, the *Hervormde Kerk*. Young Herman received his early theological training at the small seminary in Kampen that had been organized by the Secession churches. But after only one year—and with his parents' blessing—he left Kampen to pursue more extensive training at the modernist University of Leiden. There, liberal professors broadened his mind but did not break his Reformed convictions. After a brief pastorate (one year in Franeker), Bavinck settled into life as a theology professor and church leader, first back in Kampen (1883–1901), and then later at The Free University of Amsterdam (1902–1921). From 1911 until his death a decade later, Bavinck also served as South Holland's representative to the First Chamber of the Dutch Parliament, applying his academic training and theology to the public square.

In *The Wonderful Works of God*, Bavinck the scholar reveals his core identity as a Christian, a lover of Scripture, and a worshipper of God. According to his original Foreword,<sup>5</sup> he intended the work to serve as “a handbook on Reformed theology” for ordinary Christians.<sup>6</sup> The reader should know, however, that this handbook is no less profound than his magisterial four-volume *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, translated and republished for the English-speaking world as *Reformed Dogmatics*.<sup>7</sup> In fact, *The Wonderful*

3. Two extensive biographies of Bavinck are R. H. Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck en zijn tijdgenoten* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1966) and Ron Gleason, *Herman Bavinck: Pastor, Churchman, Statesman, and Theologian* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010). A third, James Eglinton, *Bavinck: A Critical Biography* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020), is forthcoming.

4. The *Afscheiding* refers to the “Secession” of churches in 1834 from the National Dutch Reformed Church (*Hervormde Kerk*) after the latter had drifted from biblical orthodoxy and embraced increasing state control of church affairs.

5. Here translated into English for the first time by Gray Sutanto. See pages xxxi–xxxiii of this volume.

6. See page xxxiii of this volume.

7. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008) (hereafter cited as *RD*). Cornelius Van Til called this work “the greatest and most comprehensive statement of Reformed systematic theology in modern times.” Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Nutley, NJ: P&R, 1974), 43.

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*Works of God* is a compendium of that grander work, chiseled and polished for popular use. As one reviewer wrote in 1910,

None but a learned man could have written this book, but he has hidden his tools. He gives us the results but not the process of his work. Although he has laid aside his scientific armor, he speaks to his readers in a scholarly manner. His book does not smell of the air prevailing in the halls of the University, and yet we feel instinctively, that a master speaks to us. Nothing in the book is trivial, everything is handled with utmost care.<sup>8</sup>

It is safe to say that this book is one of the richest, clearest, and most persuasive single-volume accounts of Reformed theology ever produced for a wide audience. It captures the essence of that theology as it arises from Scripture and, along the way, both explains it and edifies the reader. That said, this Introduction offers only a few observations regarding how and why this book emerged and what its practical relevance is to us today.

Bavinck wrote *The Wonderful Works of God* in 1909 during an especially prolific decade following his assuming the chair of theology at The Free University of Amsterdam (*Vrije Universiteit*) in 1902.<sup>9</sup> The prior occupant of that chair, who had left a year earlier to become prime minister of Holland, was the founder of The Free University, Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920). Bavinck’s name is frequently spoken in the same breath with Kuyper’s—usually, though, with an emphasis on Kuyper as the famous pioneer of the neo-Calvinist movement in the Netherlands, with Bavinck cast as his irenic and gifted acolyte. During these years in Amsterdam, however, Bavinck’s more congenial disposition, brilliant scholarship, and distinct theological emphases were proving that he was not, as one obituary put it, “destined to live in Abraham Kuyper’s shadow.”<sup>10</sup>

8. Nicholas M. Steffens, “Review of *Magnalia Dei* by Herman Bavinck,” *Princeton Theological Review* 8, no. 3 (1910): 508.

9. Valentine Hepp, *Dr. Herman Bavinck* (Amsterdam: W. ten Have, 1921), 290–91. In addition to writing numerous articles and reviews during this period, Bavinck published works on Christian worldview, a Christian view of science, pedagogical principles, the life of the poet Willem Bilderdijk, evolution, the Christian family, and modern thought. For an annotated list of Bavinck’s bibliography by year, see Eric D. Bristley, *Guide to the Writings of Herman Bavinck* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008).

10. Valentine Hepp, “Levensbericht van dr. Herman Bavinck,” in *Handeligen en mededeelingen van de Maatschappij der Nederlandsche Letterkunde te Leiden, over het jaar 1922–1923* (Leiden: Brill, 1923), 113. George Harinck cites the following translation by John Bolt in “Herman Bavinck and Geerhardus Vos,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 45 (2010): 18 fn 1: “His

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The year he published *The Wonderful Works of God*, Bavinck was busy revising and expanding his *Reformed Dogmatics* (1906–1911), originally penned while he was in Kampen. In addition to that significant undertaking, he had just delivered his highly regarded Stone Lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary during his second trip to the United States.<sup>11</sup> In their own distinct ways, both *Dogmatics* and the Stone Lectures affirm Bavinck’s breathtaking thesis that God’s historical self-revelation, in nature and in Scripture, leads people, through Christ, to the triune God, and therein displays his immanent glory through the organic interconnectedness of all things, addresses the most vexing questions of life, underpins the integrity of every field of human inquiry, and fulfills the deepest longings of the human heart.<sup>12</sup>

It is notable that in this context—of perfecting his comprehensive *Reformed Dogmatics* and publishing his Princeton lectures on the universal significance of revelation—Bavinck chose to distill for a popular audience the theology so critical to the *Dogmatics* and the lectures.<sup>13</sup> Generated alongside those works, *The Wonderful Works of God* shows that he believed the infallible truths of Scripture are meant to shape the mind and life of every Christian, whether in the proverbial ivory tower or in the pew. He under-

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[i.e., Bavinck’s] greatness would have been brought into brighter light had he not been destined to live in the shadow of Abraham Kuyper.” For comparisons of Kuyper and Bavinck, see Harinck, “Herman Bavinck and Geerhardus Vos,” 18–19; John Bolt, “Editor’s Introduction,” in *RD*, 1:15–19; Bolt, “The Imitation of Christ Theme in the Cultural-Ethical Ideal of Herman Bavinck” (PhD diss., University of St. Michael’s College [Toronto School of Theology], 1982); J. Mark Beach, “Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, and ‘The Conclusions of Utrecht 1905,’” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 19 (2008): 11–68; R. H. Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck als dogmaticus*, Academisch Proefschrift, Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1961), 13–64.

11. The Stone Lectures were immediately published in Dutch, German, and English. For an annotated edition in English, see Herman Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation: A New Annotated Edition*, ed. Cory Brock and Nathaniel Gray Sutanto (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2018).

12. Consider, e.g., the following two quotes, which reflect the structural centers of each work, respectively: “The world itself rests on revelation; revelation is the presupposition, the foundation (*grondslag*), the secret (*geheim*) of all that exists in all its forms.” Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation*, 24. “The Christian mind remains unsatisfied until all of existence is referred back to the triune God, and until the confession of God’s Trinity functions at the center of our thought and life.” Bavinck, *RD*, 2:330.

13. For insight into Bavinck’s engagement during this period with a “new cultural modernism,” see James D. Bratt, “The Context of Herman Bavinck’s Stone Lectures: Culture and Politics in 1908,” *The Bavinck Review* 1 (2010): 4–24, esp. 13–24.

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stood that sound doctrine fuels and informs the godliness that God seeks throughout his church (cf. 1 Tim 6:3; Titus 1:1), not just among her teachers. The present work is Bavinck's attempt to facilitate and promote the knowledge of God among his people through an orderly and accessible account of what Scripture teaches.<sup>14</sup>

*The Wonderful Works of God* also reflects Bavinck's historical and cultural consciousness. He appreciated how the theology of Scripture, perennial in its substance, must meet every generation in fresh ways, and that the church is to 'guard the good deposit' (2 Tim. 1:14) entrusted to her against attacks from new enemies. With this book, Bavinck assumed for himself the church's ongoing task to confess in new language "the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 1:3). He did so as a Reformed theologian with keen insight into the challenges of modern life.

Though we live a century after Bavinck, the obstacles to doctrinal health that he confronted—information overload that saps spiritual vitality, a waning interest in knowledge of God, an increasing disregard for godliness—still face us today. Some of these obstacles have grown to mammoth proportions in our digital age, consumed as it is with both self-expression and self-pity. *The Wonderful Works of God* is medicine for those suffering from such spiritual malaise and from the frenetic pace of life. It redirects our gaze outward and upward to God in all of his revealed glory. In these ways and more, this twentieth-century work speaks powerfully to twenty-first century Christians.

Another example of Bavinck's awareness of the times appears where he flags "the temptation, assaulting us from all sides, to limit the special revelation to ever narrower confines, to the person of Christ, for instance, or, worse yet, to deny it altogether and to make it a part of general revelation."<sup>15</sup> Today even the place of general revelation is being squeezed out by countless ideologies and stifled by identity politics. Though secular elites

14. This volume includes an extensive Scripture and subject index (see pages 551–656 of this volume), developed by Charles Williams, to aid the reader. Two other notable works of Christian instruction by Bavinck are his books on Christian confession (*The Sacrifice of Praise*, trans. and ed. Cameron Clausing and Gregory Parker, Jr. [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2019]) and on the role of the Spirit in salvation, especially his work at the beginning of the Christian life (*Saved by Grace: The Holy Spirit's Work in Calling and Regeneration*, ed. J. Mark Beach, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman [Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage, 2008]). Alongside *The Wonderful Works of God*, these books make up what Scott Swain calls 'a kind of catechetical trilogy' worthy of the church's study and reflection. Scott Swain, "Foreword," *Sacrifice of Praise*, xiv.

15. See page 28 of this volume.

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have ostensibly moved beyond the rationalistic philosophies of the Enlightenment, the current fixation on the ultimacy of lived experience presents a new form of rationalism that is immune to self-criticism. The twenty-first century needs to be humbled, as much as any previous period, by the light of God's redemptive word. So it is good that, likely in response to his observation above, Bavinck devotes four chapters in the work before us to the topic of revelation: the first two introduce and treat of the real but limited value of general revelation, and the next two deal respectively with the manner and content of special revelation. In these pages, Bavinck shows us how the reality of God's self-disclosure disrupts every sub-Christian and non-Christian theory of knowledge. He also displays his thorough commitment to the historical pluriformity of God's special revelation and, given the noetic effects of sin, its necessary role for reading general revelation aright. At every point, the reader finds in *The Wonderful Works of God* no "presuppositionless investigation"<sup>16</sup> of God's revelation in history, but a penetrating exposition that assumes and declares Scripture's self-attesting power and Christ-centered beauty. Incidentally, these are features that also lie at the heart of Geerhardus Vos' biblical theological scholarship and Cornelius Van Til's Reformed apologetic approach, and their insights owe much to Bavinck's historically minded dogmatic outlook, even as those eminent scholars have refined and extended it in their own ways.

*The Wonderful Works of God* is a signal work. In it, Bavinck conveys how scriptural theology and churchly confession through the ages can and must sweetly correlate.<sup>17</sup> He exhorts us to adhere to the ecumenical creeds of the Christian tradition and to the confessions of the Reformed faith, shunning all bare biblicism. He also encourages us to purge from past theological formulations all that is "not according to Christ" (Col 2:8) and to proclaim in new ways all that the Spirit says in the Scriptures. The church will fulfill this holy calling only by drawing upon the infinite resources laid up in the risen Christ. As she does, the same Christ will cause her to sing with the Psalmist, "One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts" (Ps 145:4).

Read this book slowly. Here is a profound yet accessible work from a man who was not only attuned to his culture but was absorbed with Christ and his gospel. Almost 100 years after Bavinck's death, we still need to hear

16. See page 46 of this volume.

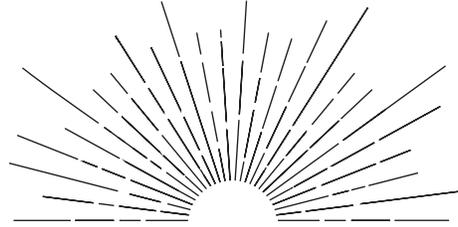
17. Note the original subtitle to *Magnalia Dei* in footnote 1 above.

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what he says. May this new publication of Bavinck's enjoyable handbook stimulate its readers to realize afresh this most practical end of all theology, namely, to worship God in the wonder of his works.

R. CARLTON WYNNE  
Glenside *July, 2019*

[Pages xxii–xxxiv have been removed from this preview]



# THE WONDERFUL WORKS OF GOD



## *Man's Highest Good*

**G**od, and God alone, is man's highest good.

In a general sense we can say that God is the highest good of all His creatures. For God is the Creator and sustainer of all things, the source of all being and of all life, and the abundant fountain of all goods. All creatures owe their existence from moment to moment solely to Him who is the one, eternal, and omnipresent Being.

But the idea of the highest good usually includes the thought that this good is also recognized and enjoyed as such by the creatures themselves. And that is of course not the case for inanimate and for non-rational creatures. The inanimate ones have only an existence, and have no principle of life at all. Other creatures, such as the plants, have a principle of life in them, but are devoid of any awareness. The animals, it is true, have received in addition to their existence and their life a kind of awareness, but it is an awareness which can take note only of the visible and sensuous things around them. They are aware of earthly but not of heavenly things; they are aware of the actual, the pleasant, and the useful, but they have no notion of the true, the good, and the beautiful; they have a sensuous awareness and a sensuous desire, but they are therefore also satisfied by the sensuous and cannot penetrate through to the spiritual order.

For man the case is quite different. He is a creature who, right from the beginning, was created after God's image and likeness, and this Divine origin and Divine kinship he can never erase or destroy. Even though he has, because of sin, lost the glorious attributes of knowledge, righteousness, and holiness which lay contained in that image of God, nevertheless there are still present in him "small remains" of the endowments granted him at creation; and these are enough not merely to constitute him guilty but also to testify of his former grandeur and to remind him continually of his Divine calling and heavenly destiny.

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In all his thinking and in all his work, in the whole life and activity of man, it becomes apparent that he is a creature who cannot be satisfied with what the whole corporeal world has to offer. He is indeed a citizen of a physical order of affairs, but he also rises above this order to a supernatural one. With his feet planted firmly on the ground, he raises his head aloft and casts his eye up in a vertical look. He has knowledge of things that are visible and temporal, but he is also aware of things that are invisible and eternal. His desire goes out to the earthly, sensuous, and transient, but it goes out also to heavenly, spiritual, and everlasting goods.

Man shares his sensuous awareness and his sensuous consciousness with the animals. But over and above those qualities he was endowed with an understanding and a reason which enable him to think and to raise himself up out of a world of sensuous images to a world of incorporeal thoughts and to the realm of eternal ideas. Man's thinking and knowing, although bound to his brain, are nevertheless in their essence quite entirely a spiritual activity, far transcending the things he sees with his eye and handles with his hand. By means of such thought he establishes his connection with a world which he cannot see and touch but which is just as actual and which possesses more of essential reality than does the corporeality of the earth. What he is really seeking for is not a tangible reality, but spiritual truth, a truth which is one, eternal, and imperishable. His understanding can find rest only in such an absolute Divine truth.

Just so, too, man shares his sensuous desire with the animal. Consequently he feels the need for food and drink, for light and air, for work and rest, and he is dependent upon the whole earth for his physical existence. But, quite above this level of desire, he received a will, which, guided by his reason and conscience, reaches out to other and higher goods. The pleasant and the useful, although they have their value in their place and at their time, do not satisfy him; he requires and seeks a good which does not become good because of circumstances, but which is good in and through and for itself, an unchanging, spiritual, eternal good. And his will, again, can find its rest only in such a highest, absolute, Divine goodness.

Both of these, the reason and the will, have, according to the representation of the Holy Scriptures, their roots in the heart of man. Concerning that heart, the author of the Proverbs says that it must be kept with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life (4:23). Even as the heart in the physical sense is the point of origin and the propelling force of the circulation of the blood, so also it is spiritually and ethically the source of the higher life in man, the seat of our self-consciousness, of our relationship to God, of our subservience to His law, in short, of our whole spiritual and moral nature.

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Hence all of our rational and volitional life has its point of origin in the heart and is governed by it.

Now we learn from Ecclesiastes 3:11 that God has set the world in the heart of man. God makes everything beautiful in His time, He makes everything happen at the right moment, at the moment He has fixed for it, so that history in its entirety and in its parts corresponds to the counsel of God and exhibits the glory of that counsel. And God has placed man in the midst of this world totality, and has set the times in man's heart, in order that he should not rest in the external, visible manifestations but should instead seek out and come to know the eternal thoughts of God in the temporal course of nature and of history.

This *desiderium aeternitatis*, this yearning for an eternal order, which God has planted in the heart of man, in the inmost recesses of his being, in the core of his personality, is the cause of the indisputable fact that everything which belongs to the temporal order cannot satisfy man. He is a sensuous, earthly, limited, and mortal being, and yet he is attracted to the eternal and is destined for it. It is of no profit to a man that he should gain wife and children, houses and fields, treasures and property, or, indeed, the whole world, if in the gaining, his soul should suffer loss (Matt. 16:26). For the whole world cannot balance the scale against the worth of a man. There is no one so rich that he can by any means redeem the soul of his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him; the redemption of the soul is too precious for any creature to achieve (Ps. 49:7-9).

\* \* \*

As it happens, there are many who are perfectly willing to grant this so long as only sensuous pleasures and earthly treasures are involved. They readily acknowledge that such things cannot satisfy man and do not correspond to his high destiny. But they judge quite differently when the so-called ideal values—science, art, culture, the service of the true, the good, and the beautiful, the living for others, and the aspiration to serve what is called humanity—enter into the picture. But these things, too, belong to the world of which the Scriptures say that it and all its desirableness pass away (1 John 2:17).

Science, knowledge, learning is certainly a good gift, coming down as it does from the Father of lights, and therefore to be highly prized.

When Paul calls the wisdom of the world foolishness with God (1 Cor. 3:19), and when he elsewhere warns against philosophy (Col. 2:8), he has in mind that false and vainly imagined wisdom which has not acknowledged

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the wisdom of God in His general and special revelation (1 Cor. 1:21) and has become vain in all its imaginations (Rom. 1:21). But for the rest Paul and the Holy Scriptures in their entirety raise knowledge and wisdom to a very high plane of importance. It could not be otherwise. For the whole Bible affirms that God alone is wise, that He has perfect knowledge of Himself and of all things, that by wisdom He established the world, that He makes its manifold riches known to the church, that in Christ are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and that the Spirit is the Spirit of wisdom and knowledge searching out the deep things of God (Prov. 3:19; Rom. 11:33; 1 Cor. 2:10; Eph. 3:10; and Col. 2:3). A book which proceeds out of thoughts like those cannot put a low estimate on knowledge, nor can it despise philosophy. On the contrary, wisdom is better than rubies, and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it (Prov. 13:11); it is the gift of Him who is the God of knowledge (Prov. 2:6 and 1 Sam. 2:3).

But what the Scriptures require is a knowledge which has the fear of God as its beginning (Prov. 1:7). When it severs its connection with that principle it may still, under false pretenses, bear the name of knowledge, but it will gradually degenerate into a worldly wisdom which is foolishness with God. Any science, philosophy, or knowledge which supposes that it can stand on its own pretensions, and can leave God out of its assumptions, becomes its own opposite, and disillusiones everyone who builds his expectations on it.

It is easy to understand this. For, in the first place, science or philosophy always has a special character about it and can become the portion of only the few. These select ones, who can devote their whole lives to the discipline of learning, can traverse only a small part of its terrain, and they remain strangers to the rest. Whatever satisfaction knowledge can give, therefore, it can never, because of this special and limited character, satisfy the general deep needs which were planted in human nature at creation, and which are therefore present in everybody.

In the second place, philosophy, whenever after a period of decay it enters upon a period of revival again, always begins with an extraordinary and exaggerated expectation. At such a time it lives in the hope that by means of continued serious investigation it will solve the riddle of the world. But always after this young over-excitement the old disillusionment enters in. So far from decreasing, the problems increase as the study proceeds. What seemed to be self-evident proves to be a new mystery, and the end of all knowledge is then again the sad and sometimes despairing confession that man walks about on the earth in riddles, and that life and destiny are mysteries.

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And, in the third place, it is well to remember that philosophy or science, even though it could arrive at much more certainty than it is now able to achieve, would still leave the heart of man unsatisfied. For knowledge without virtue, without a moral basis, becomes an instrument in the hands of sin for conceiving and executing greater evil, and then the head that is filled with knowledge enters into the service of a depraved heart. In this sense the Apostle writes: Though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and have not love, I am nothing (1 Cor. 13:2).

The same holds true of art. Art, too, is a gift of God. Just as the Lord Himself is not truth and holiness alone but also glory, and one who spreads the beauty of His name abroad over all His works, so it is He, too, who by His Spirit equips the artists with wisdom and understanding and knowledge in all manner of workmanship (Ex. 31:3 and 35:31). Art is therefore in the first place an evidence of man's ability to do and to make. This ability is spiritual in character and it gives expression to his deep longings, his high ideals, and his insatiable craving for harmony. Besides, art in all its works and ways conjures up an ideal world before us, in which the discords of our existence on earth are purged in a gratifying harmony. Thus a beauty is disclosed which in this fallen world had been obscured by the wise but is discovered to the simple eye of the artist. And because art thus paints for us a picture of an other and higher reality, it is a comfort in our life, it lifts the soul up out of consternation, and fills our hearts with hope and joy.

But, though it is much that art can accomplish, it is only in the imagination that we can enjoy the beauty which art discloses. Art cannot close the gulf between the ideal and the real. It cannot make the *yonder* of its vision the *here* of our present world. It shows us the glory of Canaan from a distance, but it does not usher us into the better country nor make us citizens of it. Art is much, but it is not everything. It is not, as a man of distinction in its domain once called it, the holiest and noblest thing, the one and only religion and the one and only salvation of man. Art cannot reconcile for sin. It cannot cleanse us of our pollution. And it is not able even to dry our tears in the griefs of life.

As for culture, civilization, humanitarianism, the life of society, or whatever one may call it, that, too, cannot be denominated the highest good of man. No doubt we have some right to speak of a kind of progress in humanitarian ideas, and of a development in philanthropy. When we compare how the poor and the sick, the miserable and the destitute, the widows and the orphans, the insane and the imprisoned were frequently dealt with in former ages with the way in which they are very generally treated now, we certainly have cause for happiness and gratitude. A spirit of tenderness and mercy has

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come up which seeks out the lost and has compassion upon the oppressed. But right alongside of this our present time shows us such a fearful pageantry of gruesome vice, of mammonism, prostitution, alcoholism, and like abominations, that we are embarrassed to answer the question whether we are moving forwards or backwards. At one moment we are optimistic, but the next we are plunged into deep pessimism again.

Be that as it may, this much is sure, that if the life of service for humanity, of love for the neighbor, is not rooted in the law of God, it loses its force and its character. After all, the love for one's neighbor is not a self-vindicating thing which comes up quite spontaneously and naturally out of the human heart. It is a feeling, rather, and an action, and a service, which require tremendous will-power and which must be constantly maintained against the formidable forces of self-concern and of self-interest. Moreover, such love of the neighbor frequently gets little support from the neighbor himself. People generally are not so lovable that we should naturally, without exertion and struggle, cherish and love them as we do ourselves. Indeed, the love for the neighbor can maintain itself only if on the one hand it is based on, and laid upon us, by the law of God, and only if on the other hand that same God grants us the desire to live uprightly according to all His commandments.

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The conclusion, therefore, is that of Augustine, who said that the heart of man was created for God and that it cannot find rest until it rests in his Father's heart. Hence all men are really seeking after God, as Augustine also declared, but they do not all seek Him in the right way, nor at the right place. They seek Him down below, and He is up above. They seek Him on the earth, and He is in heaven. They seek Him afar, and He is nearby. They seek Him in money, in property, in fame, in power, and in passion; and He is to be found in the high and the holy places, and with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit (Isa. 57:15). But they do seek Him, if haply they might feel after Him and find Him (Acts 17:27). They seek Him and at the same time they flee Him. They have no interest in a knowledge of His ways, and yet they cannot do without Him. They feel themselves attracted to God and at the same time repelled by Him.

In this, as Pascal so profoundly pointed out, consists the greatness and the miserableness of man. He longs for truth and is false by nature. He yearns for rest and throws himself from one diversion upon another. He pants for a permanent and eternal bliss and seizes on the pleasures of a moment. He seeks for God and loses himself in the creature. He is a born son of the house

### *Man's Highest Good*

and he feeds on the husks of the swine in a strange land. He forsakes the fountain of living waters and hews out broken cisterns that can hold no water (Jer. 2:13). He is as a hungry man who dreams that he is eating, and when he awakes finds that his soul is empty; and he is like a thirsty man who dreams that he is drinking, and when he awakes finds that he is faint and that his soul has appetite (Isa. 29:8).

Science cannot explain this contradiction in man. It reckons only with his greatness and not with his misery, or only with his misery and not with his greatness. It exalts him too high, or it depresses him too far, for science does not know of his Divine origin, nor of his profound fall. But the Scriptures know of both, and they shed their light over man and over mankind; and the contradictions are reconciled, the mists are cleared, and the hidden things are revealed. Man is an enigma whose solution can be found only in God.