

Nicolaus Steffens on Christianity as a Remedial Scheme

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Historical Introduction¹

Who was Nicolaus Martin Steffens,² who gave his inaugural address on 29 April 1896 as Professor of Theology in the German Presbyterian Theological School of the Northwest, Dubuque, Iowa?³

Steffens was born on 13 March 1839 in the city of Emden in the northwestern part of Germany, in the region Ostfriesland. He was baptized there two weeks later in the Reformed Church, the *Grote Kerk* (the location of the present Johannes à Lasco Bibliothek). The Reformed people in Ostfriesland were more strongly oriented toward the Netherlands than their co-inhabitants. They did not expect any good from the Hanoverian government and therefore tried to strengthen and secure their relationship with the Netherlands. They claimed the freedom to study with Reformed theologians at Dutch universities, continued to use the Dutch language in

¹This historical introduction to Nicolaus Steffens's inaugural address is a reworking of passages of my book: George Harinck, *"We live presently under a waning moon": Nicolaus Martin Steffens as Leader of the Reformed Church in America in the West in Years of Transition (1878–1895)* (Holland: Van Raalte Press, 2013).

²Due to the fact that Steffens lived in different countries during his life, his name was spelled in different ways, as Nicolaus, Nicholaus, Nicolaas, or Nicholas, and Marten or Martin. I follow the spelling of his name on the only official document bearing his name that I have found, the Kampen certificate of 1864.

³Steffens's address was originally published as Nicholas M. Steffens, "Christianity as a Remedial Scheme. The Inaugural Address of Rev. N. M. Steffens, D. D. at his Induction as Van Vliet Professor of Theology, April 29, 1896" in *Christianity as a Remedial Scheme. Inaugural Address of Rev. Nicholas M. Steffens, D. D. as Van Vliet Professor of Theology in the German Presbyterian School of the Northwest, with the Charge to the Professor by Rev. W. O. Ruston, D. D., Vice President of the Board of Directors* (Dubuque: J. J. Reed, 1896), 11–32.

their worship services, and insisted upon official impartiality so that they could maintain their own confessional tradition.

This resistance by the Reformed in Ostfriesland was too weak, however, to prevent or change the policy of *Eindeutschung*, the shift of cultural orientation from the Netherlands to the German nation state in the making. Their church was not allowed to separate from the official church and to found a free church. Nevertheless, some free churches were founded there in the 1850s under influence of the Secession in the Netherlands of 1834 and subsequent years, and inspired by Seceded Dutch preachers who visited Ostfriesland.⁴ In the spring of 1856, a *Gereformeerde Kerk onder het Kruis* (Reformed Church under the Cross) was founded in Emden. The authorities prohibited this church from obtaining a minister from the Netherlands, and in 1860 the church joined the group of *Altreformierte Kirchen* (Old Reformed Churches) in Bentheim, a small group of German Free Reformed churches. It is not clear why and when Steffens and his family joined this free church, but in 1863 he was registered as a member of this church that had between 150 and 200 members at that time.⁵

Steffens attended the Emden municipal gymnasium, or grammar school, where only German was spoken. In 1857 he became a teacher at a girls' high school in Oldenburg, a town between Emden and Bremen. After two years of teaching, the wanderlust got ahold of him. His local church was an *Altreformierte Kirche*. The same kinds of churches could be found in Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Scotland, and they kept in touch with each other. Maybe it was through these contacts that he traveled to Turkey and taught at the Free Church of Scotland's Italian School for Jews in Galata, Constantinople. There he met Jane Graham

⁴Hans-Georg Ulrichs, "'Wildes Zelotengeschrei,' oder: Der 'berüchtigte' Hendrik de Cock und der 'blödsinnige' Reemt Wiards Duin. Neue Perspektiven auf den kriminalisierten Anfang der altreformierten *Afscheiding* in Deutschland," in *175 jaar Afscheiding van 1834*, ed. George Harinck and Mees te Velde (Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 2012), 192n7.

⁵G.J. Beuker, *Gemeinde unter dem Kreuz. Altreformierte in Emden, 1856–2006* (Emden, 2006), 55.

Sutherland (22 March 1836 – 6 January 1917), a Scottish woman from Perth and a member of the mission team. They fell in love and were married in the mission chapel on 14 April 1862.

During his four years of missions and teaching work, Steffens decided to enter the ministry. As a result of the ongoing Dutch orientation of his home church, he focused on the Netherlands for his academic studies. The young couple moved to the Netherlands, and in September 1863 Steffens enrolled at the Theological Seminary (*Theologische School*) of this church.⁶ He might have studied theology in Constantinople as an autodidact or under supervision of a missionary, but whatever the reason he took his literary exam and his theological exams in the same week and graduated within a year on 19 July 1864 (cum laude, according to some.)⁷

From 1864 till 1872 he served congregations of the Altreformierte Kirche in Germany, the last one in Emden. From 1865 on, Steffens functioned as a theology teacher in his church and trained several young men for the ministry in his parsonages. Two characteristics stand out in Steffens's early years as a minister: he strongly defended the separation of church and state, and he promoted a broad Reformed church and criticized secession based on minor issues. In 1869 he attended the Synod of the Dutch Seceder Church in Middelburg, the Netherlands, as an invited delegate of the Altreformierte Kirche. There the majority of the Dutch Seceder congregations that had been dissenting and quarreling since the late 1830s were united, and a new name for the denomination was adopted: *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk*. This was a development Steffens

⁶ See: George Harinck and Wim Berkelaar, *Domineesfabriek. Geschiedenis van de Theologische Universiteit Kampen* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2018).

⁷ The cum laude is mentioned by Beuker, *Gemeinde unter dem Kreuz*, 80. This distinction is not recorded on the official document of Steffens's exam that has been preserved in the Joint Archives of Holland, Michigan. Beuker included the cum laude when he read in an article by B. H. Lankamp in *Der Grenzboten*, 6 May 1951, that Steffens had passed his exam "mit Auszeichnung" (with excellence). Lankamp may have found this qualification in the synodical archives of the Altreformierte Kirche. I thank Berthold Bloemendal for this information.

applauded. At the synod Steffens met Rev. Cornelius Van der Meulen (1800–1876) from Zeeland, Michigan, who represented the Reformed Church in America that was affiliated with the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk*.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, many members of the Altreformierte Kirche emigrated to the United States, in total thirty percent of the congregation from Ostfriesland and fifteen percent from Bentheim.⁸ And between 1854 and 1900 half of all the Ostfrisian pastors of the Altreformierte Kirche emigrated to America. It was hard to resist the exodus. Steffens's family was growing, his financial situation was weak, and the Altreformierte Kirche did not satisfy him. He decided to follow the emigrants.

Unlike the Dutch Seceders, most of Steffens's fellow emigrants from the Altreformierte Kirche joined the small denomination of the Christian Reformed Church, which had about eight thousand members in the early 1870s.⁹ But Steffens accepted a call from the German-speaking Reformed Church of Silver Creek, German Valley, on the prairies of northern Illinois. In Silver Creek, the parishioners of his Reformed Church were (with a single exception) all East Frisians, although Steffens knew only a few of them personally. His pastorate activated the congregation. He took a break from his pastorate in Silver Creek beginning in May 1875 and worked in the Avenue B and Fifth Street German Reformed Church in New York, but he was glad to return to German Valley after six months. In 1878 he accepted a call from the Reformed Church of Zeeland, Michigan. This was the beginning of a stay in western Michigan of seventeen years.

⁸Herbert J. Brinks, "Ostfrisians in Two Worlds," in *Perspectives on the Christian Reformed Church*, ed. Peter De Klerk and Richard R. De Ridder (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 22–23.

⁹See "Appendix. Denominational Statistics," in James D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America. A History of a Conservative Subculture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 222–23.

Steffens started his ministry in the Dutch settlements at a time of transition. The recent death in November 1876 of the acknowledged leader of the colony since 1847, Albertus Van Raalte (1811–1876), created uncertainty. How were the Dutch immigrants to proceed without Van Raalte's leadership? There were other concerns, too. In 1878 the General Synod of the Reformed Church requested the resignation of the theological professors at Hope College in Holland, Michigan. The Synod reckoned that the Reformed Church did not really need a second seminary besides New Brunswick Theological Seminary in New Jersey. The vast majority of the immigrant Hollanders believed a school of theological instruction of their own was a necessity for their survival as a group. Uncertainty crept in: Did they have to survive *as a group*? And distrust grew among them as well: Did the eastern churches really care about the churches in the west?

The synodical decision came at an unfortunate moment. The small group of churches that had seceded from the Classis of Holland of the Reformed Church in 1857, and which would eventually be named the Christian Reformed Church, had started their own theological seminary in Grand Rapids in 1876. When the theological education at Hope College was suspended, this seminary had ten students. A few years later, in 1880, in Amsterdam, the *Vrije Universiteit*, essentially a theological school in the early days, was founded. Amidst these new developments, the closure of theological education at Hope College was a slap in the face of the Reformed Church in the west. What could these churches do to reverse this unhappy course of events?

Steffens arrived in the midst of this turmoil with an outsider's perspective. He cherished educational institutions. He had founded a provisional theological school in Veldhausen, Germany, and was one of the first in the United States to offer his support to the Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) and his *Vrije Universiteit*. Steffens's star in the colony soon rose. The General Synod of the Reformed Church appointed him as a member of the Council of Hope College in 1880. The Council elected Steffens as its president in 1883 and 1884. In 1881 he was the president

of the Particular Synod of Chicago. Far more visible to the average church member, however, was that when the editors of *De Hope* in 1879 asked for new contributors to their weekly church paper, Steffens turned up. Steffens, who was a polyglot, could write in Dutch and had a clear style and well-grounded opinions. Within a few years after he had arrived in the heartland of the Dutch immigrants, this German theologian was at the helm.

In 1882 his congregation in Zeeland was seriously harmed by the Masonic controversy. This was the final result of dissatisfaction over the way the General Synod had dealt with requests from the western classes to condemn membership in Masonic lodges and exclude these members (with a few exceptions they were all easterners, and especially ministers) from the church. When the General Synod in June 1880 did not declare lodge membership a reason for discipline, crisis broke out in the west. In this context the Christian Reformed Church made a positive impression on some in the Reformed Church, because of its more confrontational stand against Freemasonry.¹⁰ Forty percent of the 245 families of Steffens's Zeeland Reformed Church left, most of them transferring to the local Christian Reformed Church.¹¹ The situation in the First Reformed Church of Holland was even worse: this church was vacant at that moment and lost in 1882 not only the vast majority of its 40 families but also the Pillar Church building to the Christian Reformed Church. As mother church of the Reformed Church in Michigan, this congregation's edifice was a structure with an iconic value.

Steffens stayed calm amidst a storm of emotions and explained in *De Hope* that dissatisfaction with a single decision by a synod of a church that was Reformed in doctrine and government was no valid reason to secede from the denomination. Steffens explained to his western classis that

¹⁰ Harry Boonstra, *The Dutch Equation in the RCA Freemasonry Controversy, 1865–1885* (Holland: Van Raalte Press, 2008), 23–24.

¹¹ See *De Hope*, 20 April 1881; 17 April 1883.

synod could never have decided as it had wanted to. It was a principle in Reformed church order that discipline was not common and general but rather individual and explicit. If the synod would have decided in such a general way as proposed by western churches, it would have added new criteria to membership in the Reformed Church. In that way there was no end to adding new criteria. Why, then, not also officially exclude socialists or anti-prohibitionists? In the end about ten percent of Reformed Church members in western Michigan joined the Christian Reformed Church in the early 1880s. Steffens was deeply disappointed over the secessions and decided in 1882 to accept the call of the little flock in Holland, Michigan, in dire need and leave Zeeland. Now this German American was in Van Raalte's place; the mantle of the leader had fallen on his shoulders at a critical moment in the western Michigan settlements' history.

The Reformed Church had lost its dominant role in the Dutch communities of the west, not only numerically but also, as it would soon turn out, culturally. At first, however, the signs were promising. In June 1883 the General Synod of the Reformed Church decided to restore theological instruction in Holland, and a year later this body appointed Steffens as the first professor of dogmatic and polemical theology at what he himself preferred to call "Hope Seminary," although the formal name was Western Theological Seminary. He was the only teacher at that time, but in his acceptance address at synod Steffens said that "he was a Western man and believed he could work here with better effect than somewhere else."¹² For the next eleven years Steffens taught at the seminary; preached in Reformed churches in Michigan, Illinois, and Iowa; and published in *De Hope* and elsewhere.

Steffens started his work in the church in Holland and at Western Seminary in a divided community. The line of his argument against the church split was closely related to his view of the Reformed tradition.

¹² *De Hope*, 17 June 1884: "Hij was een Westersch man, en geloofde dat hij hier met beter gevolg kon werken, dan ergens elders."

He stressed that the Reformed tradition was much wider and yet less defined than many people thought it was. Reformed churches under the separation of church and state had abused their freedom by living out the tendency of theological and social specialization and of secession rather than striving for catholicity and community. He therefore was very pleased with Herman Bavinck's (1864–1921) Kampen rectoral address of 1888 on the catholicity of the church.¹³ He introduced his summary of this lecture in *De Hope* as follows:

We do this because we so often hear narrow judgments in our midst regarding the position the Reformed should take over against those we disagree with. Some get the idea *seceded* and *narrow* have the same meaning. This summary clearly shows how far from narrow-mindedness well educated Seceders are.¹⁴

He was a staunch defender of his ecclesiastical position, but he was not a stubborn hardliner. He stressed the importance of healing the wounds and of peacemaking, especially with those who harbored hard feelings toward the Reformed Church. “Because we love our people, we are able to change our mind, and to offer the hand of friendship to everyone who wants to follow the Lord, *albeit not together with us.*”¹⁵

¹³The address was published as: Herman Bavinck, *De katholiciteit van christendom en kerk. Rede bij de overdracht van het rectoraat aan de Theol. School te Kampen op 18 dec. 1888* (Kampen: G. Ph. Zalsman, 1888); English translation by John Bolt, “The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 27 (1992): 220–51.

¹⁴*De Hope*, 6 February 1889: “Wij doen dit omdat er in ons midden vaak bekrompene uitspraken vernomen worden aangaande de verhouding, die gereformeerden behooren intenemen tegenover andersdenkenden. Sommigen komen daardoor op de gedachte, dat *afgescheiden* en *bekrompen* hetzelfde beteekenen. Hoe ver echter goed opgevoede Afgescheidenen verwijderd zijn van bekrompenheid van geest, blijkt duidelijk uit het uittreksel.”

¹⁵*De Hope*, 17 November 1883: “Juist daarom, omdat wij ons volk liefhebben, kunnen wij van richting veranderen, en aan allen, die den Heere Jezus wenschen te volgen, *al is het dan ook niet met ons*, de hand van vriendschap bieden.”

According to his colleague at the seminary, Henry E. Dosker (1855–1926), “comparatively few men knew him intimately.”¹⁶ To the Dutch in Holland, the Steffenses were a bit aloof, not familiar like family. Dosker also noted that Steffens’s judgment of others and their work in general lacked appreciation and that he had difficulty accepting others’ criticism of him.¹⁷ It seems that Steffens was in many aspects not an easy man. He had a harmonious family, but as a family not originating in the Netherlands they lived somewhat secluded from the Dutch within the community of Hope College and the Reformed Church. The Steffens family usually spent their summer vacations in German Valley, Illinois.

Steffens followed ecclesial developments in the Netherlands closely and sympathized with the Neo-Calvinist movement of Kuyper, Bavinck, and others. Although he rejected the secessionist actions of 1882, he did approve of the *Doleantie* of 1886 and subsequent years in the Netherlands, where Abraham Kuyper and a Reformed group left the *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*. He had always stressed that a Reformed church was a church with a Reformed doctrine and presbyterial government, and thus he fully agreed with Kuyper’s thoroughgoing rejection of the bureaucracy of the *Hervormde Kerk*. When in 1892 two Reformed churches in the Netherlands merged, one originating in the *Afscheiding* of 1834 and the other in the *Doleantie* of 1886, hopes rose that the same might happen in the United States between the Reformed Church and the Christian Reformed Church.¹⁸ Steffens differed with the latter denomination on ecclesiology and complained about the narrow-mindedness of this church,

¹⁶ H. E. Dosker, in *In memoriam. The Rev. Nicholas M. Steffens, DD., LL.D. Professor of Theology at the Western Theological Seminary Holland, Michigan* (n.p., n.d.).

¹⁷ H. E. Dosker to H. Bavinck, 21 December 1892. Bavinck Papers. Historical Documentation Center for Dutch Protestantism, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

¹⁸ See John H. Kromminga, “Abandoned at the Altar,” in *The Dutch and Their Faith. Immigrant Religious Experience in the 19th and 20th Centuries. Proceedings of the 8th Biennial Conference of the Association for the Advancement of Dutch American Studies, September 20 and 21, 1991* (Holland, MI, 1991), 71–84.

but in the end he felt theologically more at home with the Christian Reformed Church.¹⁹ In June 1892, the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church, with 103 of 117 votes, called Steffens as a professor of systematic theology in a new chair, created on its professor Geerhardus Vos's (1862–1949) advice, at their theological seminary in Grand Rapids.²⁰ This call might have been a surprise to the Reformed Church, but it underlines Steffens's ambivalent position at Western Seminary, his marginal position within the Reformed Church, and his sympathy for his Christian Reformed brothers.

In his letters to Kuyper, Steffens explained that the Reformed tradition in America could never have the same impact on church and society that it had achieved in the Netherlands. His observation was that irenic and modern ideas had a hold on American Reformed and Presbyterian churches and the United States in general. The small Reformed community of the Dutch in the west could not change this course of the nation. Steffens himself did try to communicate the Reformed tradition to an American audience, but editors on the East Coast did not always publish his contributions. And even within his own Reformed Church, the opposition against his staunch Reformed opinions grew.

Steffens was an autodidact who had no favorite in theology. But this changed shortly after 1880, when he presented himself as an ardent supporter of the *Vrije Universiteit*. He praised its theological professors for not wanting to merely return to the Reformed orthodoxy of the seventeenth century but rather to aim at a theological renewal of this tradition. What Steffens appreciated in Neo-Calvinism was the combination of staunch Reformed orthodoxy and catholicity. He was outspoken in his admiration, more so than the Seceders in the Netherlands. While promoting the new developments in Dutch Reformed theology, Steffens

¹⁹ N. M. Steffens to A. Kuyper, 25 January 1891, *Kuyper Papers*. HDC.

²⁰ See *Gedenkboek van het vijftigjarig jubileum der Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk A.D., 1857–1907* (Grand Rapids: Semi-Centennial Committee, 1907), 102.

criticized other new developments in theology within and outside the United States. He soon realized that by stressing the Reformed dogmatic tradition, he was promoting and opposing the same developments as Benjamin B. Warfield (1851–1921), professor at Princeton Theological Seminary. Steffens concluded that within his own church he alone remained to defend the Reformed tradition. After the mid-1880s, leading ministers in the Reformed Church did not focus on a relationship with the Christian Reformed Church anymore but became more oriented toward the American religious scene.

Steffens promoted a direction the Reformed Church leaders appreciated to a certain extent but did not follow. The difference between Steffens and his colleagues in the Reformed Church was evident in their hesitancy to appropriate the term *Calvinist*. Calvin and Calvinism were not popular in nineteenth-century American culture.²¹ Steffens, by contrast, had no reservations at all: “Our principle is Biblical—we admit and we glory in it; but the emphasis we put upon it is truly Calvinistic.”²² When introduced in the United States, Kuyper’s theology and world and life view were explicitly labeled as Calvinist, to distinguish these from the older Reformed or Presbyterian traditions in America. Adding to this, Steffens’s colleagues were more strongly oriented toward American theological traditions than to Dutch Kuyperianism. Tired of the opposition of his colleagues against his staunch Reformed opinions, Steffens felt himself isolated within his own community and without prospect to make a change for the better.

Steffens had been personally acquainted with Kuyper since 1886, when Kuyper asked him to look after his twenty-year-old son, Frederik, who

²¹Thomas J. Davis, “Images of Intolerance: John Calvin in Nineteenth-Century History Textbooks,” *Church History* 65, no. 2 (June 1996): 246. In the United States, Calvin was seen as “an authoritarian theocrat who preached an authoritarian and despotic God. This Calvin threatened the freedom. . . . Thus, Calvin became the very image of intolerance.”

²²N. M. Steffens, “The Principle of Reformed Protestantism and Foreign Missions,” *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 5, no. 18 (April 1884): 246.

would come to Michigan and stay there for some years. In the mid-1890s he assisted translators of Kuyper's *Encyclopaedie*, and in early 1898 Steffens translated the Dutch text of the fourth Stone Lecture on science that Kuyper was to deliver in October of that year at Princeton Theological Seminary. In 1903 he wrote an introduction to a German translation of one of Kuyper's works. They met each other two times. The first time was in 1893 at the General Synod of the Gereformeerde Kerken in Dordrecht, the Netherlands, where Steffens represented the Reformed Church. And when five years later Kuyper traveled from Princeton to the Dutch American communities in the west, Steffens met him in Orange City.²³

When Bavinck visited Michigan in the summer of 1892, he and Steffens met for the first time. In 1908 they would meet again in Holland, and this time Bavinck stayed at Steffens's house. Bavinck's wife noted, "Herman finds him the only scholar, thus far, with whom he agrees."²⁴ In 1893 Steffens quoted lengthy clauses from Bavinck's article on the future of Calvinism to defend the solidity and the non-exclusive character of Calvinism.²⁵ Steffens was very active in introducing Neo-Calvinism to the western branch of the Reformed Church. New books, brochures, and articles by the Dutch Neo-Calvinists, especially Kuyper and Bavinck,

²³ See George Harinck, "A Triumphal Procession? The Reception of Kuyper in the USA (1900–1940)," in *Kuyper Reconsidered. Aspects of his Life and Work*, ed. Cornelis van der Kooi and Jan de Bruijn (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 1999), 280.

²⁴ V. Hepp, *Dr. Herman Bavinck* (Amsterdam: Ten Have, 1921), 221; quote on 302: "Herman vindt hem den eenigen wetenschappelijken man, waar hij tot dusver mede overeenstemt."

²⁵ *De Hope*, 27 December 1893. Steffens referred to Bavinck's article "The future of Calvinism," *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 5 (1894): 1–24.

were enthusiastically introduced by him without his favoring one over the other.²⁶ In 1894 Steffens announced the release of Kuyper's *Encyclopaedie*.²⁷

For Steffens this was a defining moment in the history of Reformed theology. He was enthusiastic about this *Encyclopaedie* that was aimed at modern culture and modern issues and at the same time was strongly rooted in the Reformed tradition.²⁸ Since he was in the last year of his stay at Western Seminary, he no longer had the opportunity to introduce this book into the curriculum. He did, however, encourage local churches to provide their ministers with this book: "Don't rest before all ministers in our churches have Dr. Kuyper's *Encyclopaedie* on their shelves."²⁹ Time and again he showed himself an advocate of Neo-Calvinism in the church and in educational institutions. "Our seminaries ought to enable our young men to form for themselves a correct view of the universe and of human life in harmony with the Calvinistic system," he wrote in 1901.³⁰ Thanks to Steffens, the names Kuyper and Bavinck became well known among readers of *De Hope*, and Kuyper's devotional volumes in particular were advertised widely.

Steffens especially promoted the Neo-Calvinist stance on the relationship between science and religion by opposing a separation of these two and defending the premise that scientific work is rooted not in reason but

²⁶ According to Eugene P. Heideman, *The Practice of Piety. The Theology of the Midwestern Reformed Church in America, 1866–1966* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 143, 194, theologians in the RCA in general favored Bavinck over Kuyper. Heideman wrote a dissertation on Bavinck: *The Relation of Revelation and Reason in E. Brunner and H. Bavinck* (Assen: Van Gorcum, Prakke & Prakke, 1959).

²⁷ A. Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie der heilige Godgeleerdheid. Deel een: Inleidend deel* (Amsterdam: J. A. Wormser, 1894).

²⁸ *De Hope*, 25 April 1894.

²⁹ *De Hope*, 19 September 1894: "Rust niet eerder, totdat alle leeraars onzer kerken Dr. Kuyper's *Encyclopaedie* in hunnen boekenkast hebben."

³⁰ N. M. Steffens, "Calvinism and Theological Crisis," *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 12 (1901): 223.

in a world and life view.³¹ He stressed this point in an article in the *Presbyterian and Reformed Review*:

Calvinism is not only a system of theology, it is also a Christian view of the universe and of life, a *Welt- und Lebensanschauung*, as the Germans call it. It is said that religion is a private affair. Indeed it is, but it is vastly more. It is an affair not only of the individual but also of the human race in all its relations. A Christian has a right to say: *Homo sum, et nihil humani a me alienum puto* [I am human and regard nothing human as foreign to me]. Calvinism is in earnest when it says by the mouth of Thomas Chalmers: Christianity is true humanity. We cannot and we will not separate the realm of nature from the realm of grace.³²

Kuyper in the Netherlands followed the developments in the United States and applauded the activities of Steffens and other Americans in *De Heraut*:

In America, like in all churches, one has been towed by *Vermittlung* [mediating] theology far too easily, and it is only in the last decade, that against this dubious theology a reaction came to the fore. We thank this reaction in the first place to the courageous acts of the theologians Warfield, Steffens, and Vos, whose influence is still rising.³³

After a difficult start, Western Seminary started to flourish in the 1890s, but in 1895 the German Presbyterian Theological Seminary at Dubuque, Iowa, called Steffens as a professor. This call had been prepared for some months. There had been a vacant chair at this seminary since the summer of 1894. Warfield was eager to provide this seminary a future; he had known about Steffens's dissatisfaction with the situation

³¹N. M. Steffens, "Wetenschappelijk geloof" voor de derde keer," *De Hope*, 7 September 1887.

³²Steffens, "Calvinism and Theological Crisis," 222.

³³*De Heraut*, 8 November 1891: "... in Amerika, gelijk in alle kerken, veel te gemakkelijk door de Vermittelungs-theologen op sleeptouw laten nemen, en het is eerst in het laatste decennium, dat juist tegen deze bedenkelijke theologie zekere reactie openbaar werd; en aan deze reactie danken we in de eerste plaats het moedig optreden van de hoogleeraren Warfield, Steffens en Vos, wier invloed steeds klimmende is."

in his church and had suggested him in Dubuque as a candidate. Acting president Adam McClelland (1833–1916) replied, “The name of doctor Steffens was already before us, and your hearty commendation will doubtless increase our interest in his appointment to the vacant chair. I shall place your letter where it is likely to do the most good in the line indicated by you.”³⁴ Steffens visited the school, founded in 1852, at the end of November 1894, and as *De Hope* wrote, “The Reformed Church in this country, east and west, looks forward anxiously to the decision his reverence will make.”³⁵ Steffens accepted the call. He did not feel at home anymore in the Reformed Church in its present condition, as he wrote to Warfield:

Comparisons are odious, they say, but I cannot help saying that the Presbyterian Church compares favorably unto ours, which seems to love peace better than truth. The wrangle between our people and the Seceders in our immediate neighborhood is deplorable and alas! there is no end to it. I am between two millstones; I sympathize with the seceded brethren in their love for the truth, but their ecclesiastical position I cannot share. I begin to feel that I am out of place here.³⁶

Early in June he preached for the last time in his former congregations in Holland and Zeeland, his last official act in the Reformed Church before he transferred in Dubuque to the German wing of the Presbyterian Church. He now laid down his chief editorship of *De Hope*. In Dubuque new tasks awaited him as editor of *Der Presbyterianer*. On 12 June 1895 Steffens and his wife, with their daughters Mary and Isabella, left Holland

³⁴ A. McClelland to B. B. Warfield, 3 September 1894: “As always so now I have received and read your letter with great pleasure, the more because it expresses and manifests such interest in our seminary,” *Warfield Papers*. Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Libraries.

³⁵ *De Hope*, 5 December 1894: “Dat de Gereformeerde Kerk in dit land, Oost en West, angstvallig uitziet welk besluit Z.Ew. in dezen zal nemen, zal wel niet behoeven te worden gezegd.”

³⁶ Steffens to Warfield, 16 November 1894, *Warfield Papers*.

by boat, waving farewell to a crowd of more than a hundred people, and traveled to Silver Creek and then seventy miles west to Dubuque.

While traveling west, Steffens read the first volume of Bavinck's *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, recently published.³⁷ The theology of Princeton and of Neo-Calvinism had been his beacon of hope in the west. At Dubuque Steffens kept in touch with the "rabbis" in Princeton and with the Neo-Calvinists. He might have been too independent to be called a Neo-Calvinist, but Kuyper saluted him as a fellow-thinker by publishing in full his inaugural address "Christianity as a Remedial Scheme" at Dubuque in *De Heraut*.³⁸

The original English text of this inaugural address follows below. The original page numbers are shown in brackets.

Christianity as a Remedial Scheme³⁹

[11] Mr. President and Members of the Board of Directors:

I assure you, dear brethren, that I feel the solemnity of this hour. Although I have completed my first year's work in your service, I have today officially taken upon my shoulders the task you have entrusted to me. It is indeed a difficult work I have to do in your midst. The year, now belonging to the past, has taught me many lessons with regard to the special difficulties surrounding us in our peculiar sphere of labor. But apart from these, it is always a task of paramount importance to prepare young men for the ministry and to take active part in the discussion of the

³⁷ *De Hope*, 12 June 1895.

³⁸ *De Heraut*, 13 September 1896. Kuyper published the address under the title "Het christendom, herschepping" [Christianity: Recreation].

³⁹ Originally published as Nicholas M. Steffens, "Christianity as a Remedial Scheme. The Inaugural Address of Rev. N. M. Steffens, D. D. at his Induction as Van Vliet Professor of Theology, April 29, 1896" in *Christianity as a Remedial Scheme. Inaugural Address of Rev. Nicholas M. Steffens, D. D. as Van Vliet Professor of Theology in the German Presbyterian School of the Northwest, with the Charge to the Professor by Rev. W. O. Ruston, D. D., Vice President of the Board of Directors* (Dubuque: J. J. Reed, 1896), 11–32.

great theological questions of our times. In our days, days of restlessness, worldliness and unsettled opinions, days of a pronouncedly anti-dogmatic character, it is indeed an herculean task to uphold the banner of Reformation Theology. If the source of our strength and wisdom were not inexhaustible, well might we shrink from entering upon such a tremendous work. Our Lord, however, who calls His servants to the post assigned to them, is our constant guide and strong tower. In His strength and wisdom I also glory, and upon His mighty arm I desire to lean.

I have had some experience in the work, whereunto you have called me. Dogmatic Theology has been my chief study in the past twelve years, and you have called me to a similar work. In particulars my work in your Seminary may differ from what I have been accustomed to, essentially it is the same.

It is not my intention to lay before you a program of my work in your midst as Professor of Dogmatic Theology. [12] I know it is often done at such a service as has brought us together at this place, but it seems to me rather monotonous to repeat what has been said so often and by many so well.

Instead of this I desire to discuss with you a thought which has occupied my mind for a long time. It is apparently commonplace, and yet it is indeed full of depth and meaning. I read it many years ago in a popular religious book and it attracted forthwith my attention. *Christianity is a Remedial Scheme*. My first impression was: What a happy expression! But when I began to analyze its contents, I soon saw the fulness of its meaning. Allow me to ask your kind attention, while I attempt to set before you *Christianity as a Remedial Scheme*.

The question has often been asked in times gone by, and it is still occupying the minds of all earnest seekers after truth: What is the nature of the Christian religion? The importance of a correct answer to this question we all undoubtedly concede. All our expectations and aspirations are wrapped up in it. Christianity is the reality of realities, if true; it is the greatest and most cruel delusion, if not based on facts. But even in case

we are convinced of its truth, yea, just on account of our convictions, we desire to know how great the treasure is which God has given us in the Christian religion. A partial view of it may help us to understand some of the details, a complete and correct conception, however, will bring to light the glory of God revealed in it as a scheme, whereby the eternal designs of God for the world and the human race are carried out and brought to perfection. No wonder then, that the question about the nature of the Christian religion comes up again and again, and that everyone is concerned about the correctness and sufficiency of the answer given to it.

In approaching this question I start with an axiom. I fully and earnestly believe, that God has revealed Himself in the Holy Scriptures. God in Christ is the wonderful picture the Holy Ghost has drawn on the pages of Holy Writ. This picture of God's own fingers is the beauty of [13] the Bible, the mystery of its unity as an organism and the proof of its Divine authority. All revealed knowledge concerning God we draw from this source, and even natural theology has to acknowledge the Bible as its guiding star, if it desires to be kept from going astray. If we seek an answer to our question: What is Christianity? we have to go to Him whose handiwork it is. Christianity is not the production of Peter or Paul, it is God Himself who has created it. Neither the reason nor the church has any authority to settle our question in an arbitrary manner. They may assist us in finding out what the Holy Scriptures teach regarding this matter, for our method of investigation is both rational and historical, but direct authority they have none. All answers given to our question have to be judged by the standard, given us by God Himself.

If some might be disposed to question the validity of this axiom, laid down by me, I answer: Axioms cannot be subjected to a lengthy process of reasoning, they have simply to be accepted or rejected. We need a starting point, "*Voraussetzungslosigkeit*," as the Germans call it, i.e., to start without any presuppositions, is an impossibility. Not even Naturalists, who claim to be preeminently scientific, because they consider the things which can be weighed in the balances and measured with the measuring rod, can prove

the correctness of their theories without the help of an axiom. Ernest Haeckel, e. g., the most consistent follower of Darwin, believes— mark well, believes, not knows—that upon a certain time, perhaps billions or trillions of years ago, matter, which had been—why, he does not tell us—inert up to that moment, began to move. He cannot explain how this came to pass, but it is nevertheless his firm conviction, that such a mysterious event occurred, whereby the evolution of all individual existences in the heavens and on the earth, which have since that time begun their course, became possible. This axiom is Haeckel's substitute for the first article of our undoubted Christian creed, "I believe in God, Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth." Do you expect me to discuss the respective [14] merits of these two axioms? There is nothing to discuss; you have to reject the one and to accept the other. And as your faith is, so your choice will be. In my estimation the axiom I have laid down as my guiding star in all my investigations is more rational than Haeckel's, and explains far better the true nature of Christianity than his the evolution of our present world in all its cosmical glory. As a *dos moi pou sto* mine is a firm rock, his nothing but quicksand.

I therefore with a good conscience invite you to put your feet upon the impregnable foundation offered to us in the Holy Scriptures. The mechanical theory of the universe cannot be explained without faith in some axiom or other, should we then be ashamed to own that we are unable to explain correctly the true nature of Christianity without the axiom, laid down by me, that God has revealed Himself unto us in Christ and that He has made known to us everything concerning Christianity, which is emphatically the work of His hands, and by no means the device of a man?

Turning now to the subject in hand, it seems to me, that the Holy Scriptures point to Christianity as a Remedial Scheme. Christianity is not the first work of God. He was the Creator first and after that He revealed Himself as the Savior. It is a great privilege to confess our faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord, who saved us and procured for us the glorious liberty of the sons of God, but this part of our creed rests upon the first, wherein

we confess our faith in God, Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth. The order of creation precedes the order of grace. God has created the world for His own glory; He has introduced Christianity into a sinful world in order to restore it to its pristine glory, and to bring it to perfection in harmony with His original design.

All this is clearly taught in the Holy Scriptures. The twenty-four elders, whom John saw in a vision, fell down before Him that sat on the throne, saying: "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created."—Rev. 4:11. It is true, the revised [15] version renders it somewhat differently, saying: "Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive the glory and the honor and power: for Thou didst create all things and because of Thy will they are, and were created." It seems to me, however, that the authorized version interprets the original *dia to thelema sou* very properly, and in harmony with the use of the preposition *dia*, when construed with the accusative. It is not the arbitrary will of God, whereby heaven and earth were brought forth, but the intelligently working will of God, who desired to reveal His glory in the work of His hands. Paul teaches the same, when he closes the doctrinal part of his epistle to the Romans, exclaiming in devout admiration: "For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things; to whom be glory for ever. Amen."—Rom. 11:36. God in His wisdom designed this world, in His power He carried His design into execution, ergo it is His work, wherein He delights. We are not simply called upon to believe that no creature has aided our God in the creation of the world, which is a mere truism, but that it is our duty, as creatures of His hand, to glorify Him in all our actions, because the world is created for Him. Many of our contemporaries, who worship at the shrine of eudemonism, may judge this a strange doctrine, but it is nevertheless taught in the Bible from the beginning to the end.

God endowed man with all the gifts necessary to glorify Him. He gave him this world as an inheritance, a world which was very good, when it left the workshop of the Almighty. Man himself was created in the image

of God and after His likeness, perfectly qualified to reflect the Maker's glory and to proclaim the name of his God to the ends of the earth.

In his natural relation to God man was perfect. Without any *donum superadditum* he had communion with his God, who in His condescending love entered into a covenant with him. There was no missing link in paradise. No Mediator was needed, no Savior, no Bible, no revelation of grace and mercy. Adam was a perfect creature in a [16] perfect world. Indeed the order of creation preceded the order of grace.

But alas! sin entered into the world. By an act of disobedience Adam and Eve fell and carried the world along with them in their fall. They ate of the forbidden fruit; instead of glorifying their God, they rebelled against Him. The problem of the origin of sin is a tremendous one, not easily solved. It is, however, a fact, that sin and misery, which have entered into this world in paradise, have become universal. Human nature is corrupt; guilt is universal.

Mankind needs a remedy, if God's design for this world is not to fail. Or has the entrance of sin into this world had such an effect upon God, that He gave up His original plans? If that had been the case, the triumph of sin would then have been complete. The eternal God, however, is not to be thwarted in the carrying out of His purposes by any inimical power in heaven or on earth or in hell. He loved the world, which was the work of His hands, too much for that. He could have annihilated it, for He is El Shaddai, great also as a destroyer; but no, we are told, that His thoughts are full of Divine love. "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."—John 3:16. He did not destroy His handiwork, but sent a remedy to restore it.

Truly this remedy of God for the sin of the world is found in Christianity. The Lord is not only willing to save some individuals, on the contrary it is His will, that this world, which He created, shall be saved. Individuals, yea hosts of men, will be found lost at the end, as the Scriptures clearly teach, but the human race, and the world, its dwelling place, will come

forth out of the fiery trial of the latter days in resplendent glory. “For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved.” –John 3:17. God’s remedy is a veritable panacea; it is, in the fullest sense of the word, universal in its character, power and adaptability. But are we not taught that God saves the elect? Certainly. We believe [17] with all our heart in the truth, that the grace of God, which saves, is particular, and not universal.

But this is not the whole truth, revealed to us in the Holy Scriptures. When we view humanity as a series of individuals, then certainly “some are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death.” But we must not forget, that the human race also is a unit; in its connection with the first Adam in a lost condition, saved as a race in Christ, the last Adam. In Christ those, who belong to the elect of God, form this unity. They are the renewed human race, the bride of Christ, the posterity of the last Adam, if I may use such an expression, whom God in the end, when His remedy will have worked out all the purposes for which it was sent, will place in a world, which in all essential features will be the same which He created, but full of the glory of the Lord. It is true, there will be forever the dark background of the abyss, where the second death will reign everlastingly, but God’s work, heaven and earth, created by Him, will appear as the full development of all the gifts, wherewith He had adorned it in the morning of creation. Then it will be fully understood, that the order of creation is not only the first, chronologically considered, but also the last and only abiding one, differing from its condition in the beginning as the full grown fruit differs from the blossom of spring. In the consummation of all things, creation will be the perfect reflection of the glory of God, who has not only brought it into existence by the Word of His power, but also, in spite of sin and devil, to its perfect development. Then it will also appear, that the historical development of creation is not a *progressus in infinitum*, but a movement towards the goal, which God in His infinite love and wisdom has set it. And that this goal is reached at last we owe to God’s own remedy, the Christian religion.

Sin is, we do not doubt it, a tremendous power. And yet the world is not changed into sin, as if it were its substance. If this were the case, no remedy could remove it. The world, having been transformed into sin, could not be reclaimed. Happily sin is an accident, fearful, we concede, [18] in its nature and effect, but yet an accident. It is, as it were, an episode in the historical development of creation, an episode, which may have retarded, viewed from a human standpoint, the course of God's designs in history, but which cannot undo forever the work of God. This accident has been the occasion of the revelation of God's wonderful grace in providing for this sin-sick world of ours, as the only remedy, Christianity, able to cope with this fearful power of sickness and death in all its forms.

But if sin is an accident, does not then Christianity also share in this character of an episode? Indeed it does. Its nature as a remedy indicates it. As a remedy it certainly will cease to exist, when it has fulfilled its mission. The new heavens and the new earth need no longer a remedy; the ransomed people of God, dwelling in their inheritance, are forever free from sickness and sin. Of the celestial city it is said in the vision of the prophet: "And the inhabitant shall not say: I am sick; the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity."—Isa. 33:24. With the guilt of sin all its concomitant features have disappeared forever. In the future state of confirmation, sin is eliminated once for all. In this light we understand, what Paul means, when he says of Christ: "And when all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him, that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all"—1 Cor. 13: 28. As Mediator Christ has then fulfilled His mission, but as Head of the redeemed race He will be forever glorified as the only source of its eternal blessedness. The realm of grace is succeeded by the realm of glory, which knoweth no end.

From the outline given above, which of necessity had to be brief on account of the little time at my disposal, it is easily seen, it seems to me, that the view of Christianity as a Remedial Scheme is of eminently scientific value in Dogmatic Theology. I do not propose to advocate it as

a central principle in order to construe upon it as a foundation our system of theology. For that we need a basis that knows [19] no change or modification. We do not forget that Christianity has become a necessity in the development of the world on account of man's disobedience and fall, and will cease to exist as a Remedial Scheme, as soon as the cure is completely effected. God is the Author of heaven and earth, the Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the rock of salvation for all who trust in His name. He, therefore, is the only adequate principle of a system of theology. Theology must be theological in its character, theological even in its conception of anthropology and everything connected with it. I at least am firmly convicted, that the foundation of a system of Christian doctrine is the revelation of God Himself.

It seems to me, however, that we do well to use the great truth, we are now discussing, as a corrective. We all as a rule are apt to become one-sided, when an important idea or fact has taken hold of us. Theologians especially, at least as far as my experience goes, are liable to be very dogmatic. They contend for the truth, but sometimes it happens to them, that they fight for contorted views of truth, and then their position is stubborn dogmatism. We stand, therefore, in need of a monitor, who keeps us from going astray, or from making a caricature of truth, whereby it is transformed into a lie, which in its nature is contorted truth.

It is apparent that Christianity, considered as a Remedial Scheme, emphasizes the soteriological character of our religion. It presents itself as God's answer to an anxious sinner's query: What must I do to be saved? Christianity provides for the needs of fallen humanity. A dogmatic theologian does well to be always mindful of this fact. A system of theology without the soteriological leaven in it may be a lofty speculation about God and divine things, but it is by no means a faithful representation of God's revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ. Soteriology, therefore, ought to have a prominent place in a system of Christian doctrine.

Contemporaneous theology stands in need of such a reminder. There are some, who advocate as the central principle of their system the fatherhood

of God and the [20] brotherhood of man. There is a grain of truth in this statement. God has revealed Himself as Father and He brings about the true brotherhood of man. Who is there to deny it? It is a truth, more solid than a rock. Many of our contemporaries, however, make a caricature of this truth and thereby transform it into a lie. They convoke parliaments of religion on the strength of their principle and try to establish them by the fact that God is the Father of Christians, Jews, Mohammedans and heathens as such, and that all are brethren.

A few things, however, are forgotten by these liberal men. Are they aware of the fact, that God is a consuming fire, and that the human race is lost in Adam? Do they remember Christ's agony and cruel death on the cross? Or are these fundamental doctrines a thing of the past? If that were the case we might say: O Paul, thou hast been mistaken in being willing to bear the offense of the cross of Christ! Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, Greeks, Barbarians and Romans, who combined in their enmity against Christ, were the children of God and the brethren of the humble followers of the crucified Savior. Take away soteriology from your system of doctrine, and the fatherhood of God becomes a sham and the brotherhood of man a cruel mockery. We ought to leave such a barren theology to the old rationalists, who discoursed so sentimentally about the Father above the stars and the glorious unity of mankind.

We repeat, the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man are very precious to us. We long for a realization of such a condition in this sinful world of ours. But as long as the cross of Christ is considered a stumbling block, which has to be removed, in order that the dear heathen may not be offended, the day of its realization is yet far off. Theologians, who tremble at the Word of God and know the fulness of God's grace, revealed in Christ, will insist upon it, that the doctrine of God's fatherhood ought to be intimately connected with soteriology. It is Christ, who leads us to the Father and unites us in one happy family through faith in His name. Let us covet the truth, not its caricature.

Christianity is God's only remedy for sin, hence [21] Christianity is the only true religion. This also is a strange sound in the ears of many of our contemporaries. Schleiermacher's influence upon the development of theology in the nineteenth century has been mighty indeed. The effects of his definition of religion as the feeling of absolute dependence are felt even among us, who live at the end of the century which opened when he began his career. His influence has been deepened and widened in our day by the study of the history and philosophy of religions. We confess, that these modern sciences have a great charm, and we are the last to dissuade anyone from the study of them. If they prove anything, they show the original unity of the human race, according to the order of creation. Religion is not a *donum superadditum*, but a part of the natural heritage of man. He was created a moral and religious being, destined to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. However true this may be, we are at the same time convinced, that natural religion does not and cannot save a man. Sin has so corrupted our nature, that the order of creation without the introduction of the order of grace, is utterly unable to save us, and to re-establish our former estate. It is not by the covenant of works, as the older theologians would express it, but by the covenant of grace, that we are saved. Soteriology elevates Christianity to the position of the only and universal religion. It offers a remedy to all, who stand in need of salvation. We feel inclined to call upon the theologians of our age to beware of being carried away by the study of comparative religions or of losing sight of the cross of Christ and the salvation this cross alone imparts. When we behold in the false religions of the heathen elements of truth, let us be glad to see, that Christianity, which also teaches those truths, is meeting human aspiration and needs, but let us not for a moment assume, that on account of the few remains of God's gifts to mankind, these several religions are sufficient for the salvation of those, who live up to their convictions.

Soteriology, furthermore, has no place in the system of those who are the followers of Darwin and Herbert Spencer. [22] The theory of evolution cannot look upon Christianity as a Remedial Scheme. The Christian

religion, according to theists, who favor this philosophy, is the highest form, which the religious germs [origins] have assumed, since the process of evolution began. Christianity accordingly would be the latest achievement in the development of the religious spirit in man, whilst viewed as a Remedial Scheme it is the restoration of sick humanity to a state of former health. We know there are hosts of preachers and many theological professors, who maintain that they are able to combine both views, or to harmonize evolution and redemption. We confess that we are unable to see how this is possible. They tell us that theologians have been obliged to adjust their views in harmony with the results of scientific investigations more than once. They point to the Copernican system and the revolution it caused in theology, or to geology and the influence its discoveries had upon our interpretation of the Bible, or to modern astronomy and the modifications of our theory of the universe, which resulted therefrom. It is true the development of science may help us now and then to understand our Bible better than ever before, but we deny that the theory of evolution is a result of scientific investigation. It is in our materialistic age, what Hegel's philosophy was for the men that flourished fifty years ago, an attempt to explain the principles of being. Evolution and redemption are antipodes; if the one is true, the other cannot be true. God, however, has revealed in His Word, that He has bestowed upon mankind Christianity as a remedy to restore it to former health, therefore evolution has to be rejected. Christianity was not latent in protoplasm. It was sent from heaven. Its evolution began, when the Son of God was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary.

The synthetical philosophy of Herbert Spencer exerts a tremendous influence at present upon theologians. We have to set our faces against it with all the energy we can command. Let us study the aspect of Christianity as a Remedial Scheme and the result will be such a theory of the [23] universe as will enable us to overcome completely the materialistic and mechanical views of our times.

The dangers alluded to are doubtless great, but they are not yet the greatest. We represent Reformed theology, and more particularly that form of it, which is commonly known as Calvinism. Are we on the lookout against the danger which results from a neglect of soteriology? I fear we are not always as circumspect as we ought to be. We have to be on our guard against onesideness in our work as dogmatic theologians.

The central principle of our system is in its nature theological and not soteriological. I have said I do not wish to modify, far less to reject this principle. I am satisfied that the general tone of our theological discussions would be far more healthy than it actually is, if the true Calvinistic spirit were revived. Religion is not in the first place love to one's neighbor, whatever our ethical friends may say, and how necessary it may be to manifest our religion in love, but it emphatically consists in the true fear of God, which is the result of faith and knowledge. This being my conviction, I am not prepared to retract anything of what I have said about the theological character of our system. I am constrained, however, to add the caution, that it ought to be our earnest endeavor to bring our theology into close connection with our anthropology, by means of soteriology.

Not all who profess to take kindly to the Calvinistic system do this. Alexander Schweizer of Zurich and J. H. Scholten of Leyden professed to be great friends of the theology of the Reformed Church. It cannot be denied that they have drawn the attention of theologians to the great treasures, that are found in the writings of the great men who flourished in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries in the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland. They did it in a time, when the common judgment about Calvinism seemed to be that it would never again be revived. We owe these men a debt of gratitude for their persistent efforts to open the eyes of theologians to the vigor [24] and beauty of a system, reviled by many, but understood by only a few.

But why was it, that these men were such great friends of the doctrines of the Reformed Church? It can hardly be said that they took a great fancy to the doctrines the Reformed Church confesses. They esteemed

the principle, which formed the basis upon which the doctrinal structure was reared. Both found this principle in the doctrine of God, although in the formulation thereof they did not entirely agree. But it must be acknowledged, that they have exerted a great and beneficial influence upon the development of Reformed theology by establishing the fact, that the character of Calvinism is theological rather than anthropological. The revival of Calvinistic theology would have been very problematical, if these men had not drawn the attention of theologians to the hidden treasures alluded to above.

The soteriological element of Calvinism, however, which is very prominent in the standard works of Reformed theologians, was entirely modified by these men. They belonged to the liberal school, which eliminates everything of a supernatural character from the theological system. It is on this account easily understood, that they had nothing in common with the evangelical faith of the Reformers and the so-called scholastic theologians of the seventeenth century. Schleiermacher, and not Calvin, was their teacher. It was the dangerous element of Calvinism, in its supralapsarian form, if I may say so, which attracted them. It agreed with their philosophical views; at least they thought so. The pious feeling of absolute dependence and a deterministic psychology and metaphysics were the ingredients of their peculiar theological tendency of thought. It was a kind of Calvinism in the superlative, wherein their spirits, accustomed to view the relation between God and the world from the standpoint of immanency, found rest. They seemed to think that the harmony between faith and knowledge was established by means of a pantheistically tinged supralapsarianism. Calvinism became in their hands universalism, i. e. the restitution of all things, and Christ the [25] *anthropos pneumatikos*, who leads all men to perfection. The theology of blood, the vicarious suffering and death of Christ had no place in their system. Not even theology proper remains in its essentials untouched. The doctrine of the Holy Trinity is entirely discarded, and the Godhead of Christ denied. This is proof enough that they cared more for the relation of this world to God than

about God Himself. If they had understood the mystery of godliness in the manifestation of the Savior, they certainly would not have made a caricature of Calvinism.

Let us beware of such a position. An a priori construction of a theological system on the basis of an abstract principle out of connection with the order of grace, which for sinners is of primary importance, must of necessity lead to pernicious error. There is no Christian theology possible without the redemption of Christ as a chief cornerstone. Calvin's theology was by no means a mere human speculation in the spirit of an idealistic philosophy. In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, the masterpiece of Reformed theology, he speaks not only of the knowledge of God the Creator, but also of the knowledge of God the Redeemer, and he does not forget to show, how the grace of God is received and which are the external means of grace, instituted by God. It is true, his system is decidedly theological, for even in speaking of Christ, he dwells with emphasis upon the fact, that it is God the Redeemer, who has given us the Savior. But he cannot be accused of onesidedness. He is mindful of the *meden agan* not only in regard to the form but also to the subject matter. His system is well balanced; the order of creation and the order of grace are harmoniously blended. It is rational but not rationalistic; theological but not speculative. The Reformers were led to God by Christ, how could they forget Him as the Redeemer and the Logos?

To be in harmony then with the theology of the Reformed Church means to emphasize the unity of theology and soteriology, or in other words to view Christianity as a Remedial Scheme. If we forget this cardinal point, we are [26] no longer in harmony with the faith of our fathers, yea, it must then be said of us, that we have made a caricature of their principles.

How dangerous it is to be too exclusively theological is seen in the history of the Oriental churches. All who are acquainted with the present condition of those churches will certainly agree with me, when I maintain, that they give scarcely any signs of life. In the field of theological

investigation their influence upon the development of Christian thought is almost nil. And yet these churches were the leaders of theological thought during the first centuries of the history of the Church. With gratitude we remember what has been done by them for the historical development of the doctrines of God and of Christ. Later ages have speculated a great deal about the doctrines of the Trinity and of the person of Christ, but whether they have succeeded in adding much to our stock of knowledge, is a question, which I at least am not prepared to answer in the affirmative.

How then do we account for the present petrified condition of these churches and the poverty of their theology? If I am not mistaken the answer to this question is found in the entire lack of interest in soteriology. The *Logos* was everything; the *Soter* and the *soteria* were of little account. The place of soteriology was taken by a senseless worship of images and a strict adherence to the so-called orthodox faith, i.e. the theology of the Niceo-Constantinopolitan creed. This confession is strictly theological, whilst the subjective elements of the Christian religion have been left entirely undeveloped. The soteriological element in the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church is far from satisfying a truly evangelical mind; but compared with that of the Oriental churches, it deserves a great deal of praise. We do not wonder that the Roman Church is in this respect far ahead of her Greek sister, and we ascribe this difference not entirely to the wonderful machinery of its hierarchy, but in part also to the better development of soteriology.

Augustine, the greatest Western Church Father, shows, what a power there is in a man, whose theology is a [27] combination, well adjusted, of theological and soteriological elements. He was in his times the champion of Trinitarianism. If we are not mistaken, we may look upon him as the man, in whom the development of the doctrines, connected with this great mystery, found its ablest interpreter. And yet, how great was his name in the soteriological questions which began to move the Christian world, when Pelagius began his course. In Augustine we see how beautifully theology and soteriology grow up together, when the latter gains strength

from the former, whilst the former is kept in the right place by the latter. In Pelagius we learn the same lesson negatively; for his theological system proves that a stunted theology will result in a meagre soteriology, whilst an impoverished soteriology will undoubtedly result in a lifeless theology.

Enough has been said to convince us of the necessity to cultivate soteriology in connection with theology proper. We must not forget, however, that soteriology may not usurp the place we have assigned to theology. If we fully understand what it means, when we call Christianity a Remedial Scheme, we will be kept from erroneous positions and crooked representations on the other side of the question. Many there are, however, who make soteriology too prominent in their system. We do not say anything against a man who writes a monograph on soteriology. It is a good thing to write books on some special doctrines, for it will certainly result, as Julius Mueller has said, in a better understanding of the entire system, provided its organical connection with the other parts, which are not discussed at the time, is not lost sight of. But if Christianity is viewed as "*Erlösungsreligion*" (religion of redemption) in too narrow a sense we then certainly lose in breadth of view, what we may gain in intensity.

The first mistake generally made when Christianity is viewed from an exclusively soteriological standpoint, consists in looking upon the Christian religion as something absolutely new. It is then no longer a Remedial Scheme, but a substitute for the old, which is entirely set aside. There [28] may be some truth in it, when we view Christianity as the economy of the Spirit, as compared with the economy of the letter, but even in the relation between the Old and New Testaments an organical link is found, which allows us to look upon the New as a development of the Old. But when we compare the order of grace with the order of creation, it ought to be clear to every unsophisticated mind, that the former is the restorer of the latter and by no means a new creation. And yet there are many forms, wherein this tendency in theology appears. We have no time to present all of them, but have to confine ourselves to a few.

This tendency appears in a wrong conception of the doctrine of regeneration in its two meanings, regeneration of man and of the world.

Regeneration of man, according to this view, is the creation of a new substance in man. Melancthon's synergism has had a baneful influence upon many orthodox theologians in their attitude to the doctrine of regeneration. Melancthon's pendulum swung from the *stock and stone* view of the Augsburg Confession to the other extreme of synergism; the pendulum of many theologians, who feared that the doctrine of total depravity might suffer loss by such a tendency swung back to an ultra-passivity. They magnified soteriology, making of man a new creation without any connection with his former self. It is hardly an exaggeration to maintain that they teach that God was unable to restore a sinner to communion with Himself; instead of renewing him, the *anthropos* as such was destroyed and a new man arose in his stead. The expressions, old and new man, used in the Bible, were interpreted as meaning the annihilation of man and the creation of a Christian in his stead. How wrong this position is, will be seen, when we remember that man was not in a lost condition because he had ceased to be a man, but because he had become a sinner. Sin had to be eliminated from his system by imparting new life unto him; this is the reason why regeneration was a necessity. Regeneration was the remedy, appointed by God, to accomplish this end. On the basis of the old, the new arose; the personality, created by God, remained; only its quality was changed. This view is in harmony with Christianity as a Remedial Scheme; if the former view is taken, Christianity is no longer a remedy, but a new creation.

[29] In harmony with a wrong view of man's regeneration is generally connected an erroneous conception of the regeneration of the world. We look upon the final consummation of all things as an *apokatastasis ton panton* in the sense of a perfect realization of all the designs of God the Creator, by means of the great remedy He has given in the Mediator. Those, however, who look upon Christianity as a new creation are forced by their principle into the supposition that this world will be annihilated

to make room for the new heaven and the new earth. Reformed theologians, as a rule, have been kept from entertaining such a monstrous idea, but Lutheran theologians, during the reign of Lutheran orthodoxy, believed in a universal annihilation of this universe. This was in harmony with their soteriological principle, which postulates a new creation in man. They were but consistent in extending their view of the *paliggenesia* to the entire universe.

The so-called Christo-centric theology has the same tendency in making Christianity to be something entirely new. We have to Christologize our system, we are told. How have we to do it? In the sense of a [Isaac] Dorner, who makes the idea of the God-man the essential characteristic of religion? It is not clear to my mind that this idea can be established on an a priori basis. God has revealed Himself in Christ, who is indeed the Godman, but the Scripture tells us that He was sent into the world to seek and to save that which was lost. Certainly the Godman is the object of our worship, but as conceived by the speculative theologians of the middle of this century, He is a riddle, and the whole world becomes more and more an indissoluble enigma. It is true, God has created the world by the Logos. But did He do it by Him as the Godman? Speculative theology leads to the brink of pantheism and does not magnify soteriology.

Or have we to follow Ritschl in confining, as it were, our system to the development of the Christian doctrine of justification and redemption? Are we prepared to leave all the treasures of theology for what he styles: “the historical Christ”? Do we know what this position entails? We have to give up natural theology on the one hand and on the other the mystical union with the living Christ, who is sitting at the right hand of God and is present with us unto the end of the world. Are we willing to pay such a price? I am not.

[30] Nothing remains then for us but to take the so-called evangelical view of Christology, which narrows our theology down to a doctrine of salvation. It may be very popular with people who tell us ad nauseam that religion is a private affair, which must abstain from meddling with

things outside its sphere. It divorces Christianity and creation, faith and knowledge, theology and soteriology. It concerns itself with the salvation of men, but leaves everything else in the hands of the world. It contents itself with cultivating its religious garden, surrounded by high walls and shut out from communion with the rest of God's creation. If it is a dreadful undertaking to secularize religion and theology, it is certainly no less calamitous to confine theology within its narrow religious bounds.

I do not hesitate to call such a view baneful in its results. In the Middle Ages it created monasteries and the ridiculous distinction between *religiosi* and *seculares*, the law and the evangelical counsels, and in our own time it results in sectarianism and an atheistical state. In an analysis of Christianity it may be proper to begin with the soteriological question of the Heidelberg Catechism: What is thy only comfort in life and death? but in the building up of our theological system I at least prefer the question of the Assembly's Shorter Catechism: What is the chief end of man? It was but natural that in the beginning of the Reformation the great question which agitated the hearts of men, was not the true conception of a theological system, but the way of salvation. It was, however, as natural that men's minds began afterwards to turn to other questions, such as touched upon the building up of a system of theology on the foundation of the Reformed religion. It was a logical process whereby the question of the Heidelberg Catechism: What is thy only comfort in life and death? was developed into that of the Shorter Catechism: What is the chief end of man?

Reformed theologians ought not for a moment to consider the advisability of transforming their theology into Christology. But who does, you say? Everyone who makes Christology his central principle. A theologian of the Christological school may not discard theology proper entirely, but he will be obliged to stow away his knowledge of God in his Christological system. It may be true, that a Christological theologian may object, when I tell him that he makes soteriology to rule over his theology, by telling me that he [31] beholds the Father in Christ. It cannot be denied, Christ

told Philip: "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father." Christ leads us back to the Father, whom He glorified in this world. And we follow Him, when we delight in what Zinzendorf sneeringly called the God-Father theology of the Reformed Church. In Christ we truly behold the Father; Christ the Redeemer clears away the mists, which had come in between us and heaven. The Lamb of God points to our heavenly Father and reveals to us His majesty as the Holy One of Israel and His condescending love as God the Redeemer; the risen and ascended Savior opens heaven to our view and fills us with adoration and praise. In behalf of soteriology itself we protest against Christology as a central principle of theology.

In close connection with this soteriological or Christological theology we generally find a narrow view of Christianity in its relation to the world. Our theology claims this world in the fullest sense for God and Christ. We believe that God has endowed this world with many gifts which ought to be exercised and developed. Think of the organization of mankind in family life, in society and the state. These institutions are of Divine origin and appointment. They have been modified by the entrance of sin and perhaps the introduction of the state may have been made necessary on account of sin, but God did not annihilate the original condition, wherein man was created to glorify his Master. A pietistical view of Christianity leaves all these forms of human life either entirely out of consideration or treats them in a partial manner. Salvation of man from guilt is its chief topic, which absorbs almost everything else. Our theology enables us to see God's footsteps in all this. We believe that God is in history, that science, literature, art and industry, in short our civilization in all its branches is not to be left to the devil as his special domain, but has to be looked upon as a gift bestowed upon creation and redeemed by grace. Chalmers uttered a great word when he said: "Christianity is true humanity." The ancients expressed the same idea, when they said "*Gratia naturam non tollit, sed sanat.*"

This is the glory of a theology which views Christianity as a Remedial Scheme. We do not wish to minimize sin or the glory of the Redeemer

and His work, but we desire to emphasize the truth, that sin did not undo God's work, and that the Redeemer did not bring forth a new creation, but rescued the old.

[32] Calvinistic theologians, as a rule, have kept this in view in building up their system of theology. But I do not wish to be understood to say that they have always been consistent or that they have reached perfection in this respect. I admire the work of the Reformers and the theologians of the seventeenth century, but if I were to say that they have scaled all the mountains of difficulty or brought to view all the glories of God's revelation in grace and nature, it certainly would be blind enthusiasm and gross exaggeration.

There are many lines which have not yet been followed up to the end. The union of natural and revealed theology has been accepted in principle, but not yet carried out to its fullest extent. The doctrine of common grace, *in nuce* found in the works of our best theologians, has not yet been developed as it should be. Other doctrines as e.g. predestination need to be stated anew, in connection with the history of mankind as a whole, whilst eschatology especially is to a great extent still a barren wilderness. Truly there is yet room at the top. Theology is by no means a fossil. It is on the contrary full of life. The churches are full of practical work in our day and we rejoice in it, but they ought not to forget the necessity of developing theology in order that they may have a good theory whereon to build. If I may use the expression, they, especially their leaders, ought to work as professionals, not as amateurs.

I desire to do my part in this work. I call upon you all to sustain me and the school, wherewith I am connected. You, gentlemen, as a Board of Directors, have a great opportunity in working for this school and in putting it upon a solid foundation. It needs your utmost care.

I desire to do this work in fellowship with you, professors of our school. We have to do it shoulder to shoulder, working with untiring zeal and unflinching faithfulness.

I desire to do it for you, young brethren, who confide in me as one of your guides and teachers. If we, professors, are faithful in the discharge of our duties and you in yours, then certainly the blessing of the Lord will follow us.

I desire to do it for the Church, in order that loyalty to her principles, doctrines, discipline, and worship may be increased and her reason to exist may appear above doubt and reproach. In God we trust. His cause we desire to champion. Let our strength and wisdom be found in Him, in Him alone. *Soli Deo gloria.*