

Two Hundred Years of Theology, Report of a Personal Journey

by Hendrikus Berkhof

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1990 Book Review

“A Personal Perspective on a Personal Journey”

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On Christmas, 1990, I spoke with Hendrikus Berkhof. His voice was strong, his mind clear; over the telephone one would not have known but that it was the same “Henk,” full of questions, intensely interested in all that was happening in the world and in the church – and, as always, there was his genuine interest in all that concerned me, my family and church. It was good to hear him thus, but even so I knew he was home for only a few hours from the nursing home where he now makes his home.

On May 26 Hendrikus Berkhof was stricken with a cerebral hemorrhage that left him unconscious for two weeks and hospitalized into September. I flew over to see him and his dear wife Corry the first week in July. During those days I could see him make a turn. He recognized me immediately and immediately spoke to me in English, although in very weak voice. With his one good arm he reached out to touch my face, a kind of blessing, realizing I had come to be with him. Paralyzed on his left side, he cannot yet walk and how much progress remains to be made cannot be predicted at this point. My Christmas conversation, however, convinced me that he will keep up the struggle; that great mind and heart will not be muted.

Perhaps the most moving aspect of our conversation was his expression of deep gratitude to God whose grace has been experienced richly as Henk and Corry have traversed this valley. In September they celebrated their golden anniversary. With his four children and their families gathered around him he spoke of the goodness and grace of God and God’s faithfulness in the present adversity. That this should be the case is no surprise to me; rather, it is precisely what I should have expected from this Christian gentleman, theologian, preacher, churchman and, for me, mentor and dear friend.

One of the highest privileges of my life has been the opportunity to study under Hendrikus Berkhof for four years in Leiden and then subsequently to know the richness of intimate friendship with him and Corry. In 1989 we spent ten days together in Scotland, studying together and touring the Highlands. He spoke of our special relationship and denied that it could any longer be termed that of mentor/student. But of course I know better. He will always be my teacher. More than any other he has shaped me as a theologian and pastor.

It was thus with great pleasure that I accepted the assignment of reviewing *Two Hundred Years of Theology*, with the request that I do more than review the book but also give a personal portrait of the author.

I received this work almost as a personal gift from my teacher. The two hundred years he surveys from his own personal perspective is precisely the course of theological development I studied with him from 1967 -1970. His *Christian Faith*, which, after five reprintings, was revised in 1986, will obviously stand as his statement of the Christian faith as it comes to expression within the Reformed tradition in the last quarter of the twentieth century. But *Two Hundred Years of Theology* reveals the man in the passion of his life – to bring to expression the Gospel in such a fashion that it engages the minds and hearts of the contemporary generation.

Obviously, to survey two hundred years of theology is to reflect on that endeavor to bring the Gospel to expression over many generations. But the sharp focus of the study consists precisely in the manner in which that task was executed in the several generations surveyed. There was much that transpired during the two-hundred-year period that receives no attention or is mentioned only in passing. Berkhof makes no claim to give a full review of theological inquiry for the period. His intention, clearly stated, is to trace the respective attempts to bridge the Gospel proclamation and modern thought.

Ever and again and with increasing intensity I asked myself how, speaking generally, these two can coexist.... (p. xi)

Modern thought, set in opposition to the Gospel, is the thought that arose in the epoch of the Enlightenment. (Berkhof uses the term “post-Enlightenment” to designate the two hundred years under review. That should not be confused with the designation of our present time as the Post-Enlightenment period in the sense of moving beyond the assumptions of the Enlightenment). Berkhof’s focus is theological thought in face of the assumptions of the Enlightenment.

In the eighteenth century...modern thought assumed the position of leadership in European culture. Since then, as “self-evident” truth in cultured circles, it stripped from the Christian worldview its halo of self-evident truth which it had held in Europe for almost a thousand years. (p. xii)

Berkhof was nurtured in the Reformed tradition as it came to expression in the Calvinism of the Netherlands. At the close of a long and fruitful career in the church and the university, preaching and teaching Christian faith, Berkhof surveys the dialogue of Christian theology and modern thought over the past two hundred years to satisfy his own curiosity first of all, for he recognizes that his whole ministry has been the articulation of the faith in the face of modern thought in the wake of the Enlightenment which overthrew all authoritarian structures in state and church and declared the autonomy of the human person. Berkhof's strength and great gift to the Reformed tradition and the whole church is the articulation of the faith in face of modern thought, having earned his right to address the contemporary scene because of the seriousness with which he has grappled with modern thought, doing so with sensitivity, genuinely seeking to hear and understand; doing so with openness and humility, seeking insight on the way to a deeper grasp of truth; doing so with appreciation for the positive aspects of the broader culture.

In his effort to understand and in his honest appreciation for the modern world of Western civilization he never lost sight of the fundamental contradiction of the sovereign and gracious Creator and the creaturely claim to autonomy – the discontinuity between God and humankind, the impossible gulf that separates the two, a gulf that can be bridged only from the side of God as an act of pure grace, a gulf that has been bridged in Jesus Christ.

For me, coming under the tutelage of a person of such breadth of scholarship who evidenced at the same time a deeply personal Christian experience and commitment to the faith in its Reformed perspective, but with the enrichment of broad ecumenical appreciation, it was a whole new world. I was amazed at the gap in my own theological education: thorough through the sixteenth century but almost totally lacking in the whole development of modern thought, the thought patterns that have shaped the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, thought patterns that must be engaged in any responsible proclamation of the Gospel in the contemporary world.

I may have been at fault, not being ready or willing to hear the claims of philosophical thinking in the wake of the Enlightenment. What I missed completely, for whatever reason, was the factor that changes everything – the rise of historical consciousness that developed on the continent in the eighteenth century and led to what is now taken for granted in our culture, namely, that all biblical, theological, philosophical and ideological statements are conditioned by the historical context in which they arise.

Fortunately, when the force of this revolution in human understanding took hold of me, I was under the careful and caring guidance of one whose whole life has been a passionate pursuit of bringing to expression the grace of God as it has been manifested in the ambiguity of the historical situation. *Two things became strikingly evident to me: my own orthodox Reformed faith understanding was not a timeless expression of eternal truth but a timely confession of Christian faith shaped in the tumultuous context of sixteenth-century Europe. Secondly, the whole development of modern theology which I had viewed negatively, as threat, was an attempt to translate the*

gospel into terms that took cognizance of the Copernican turn in human understanding effected by critical analyses of the knowing process and by the rise of historical consciousness. In other words, it was an attempt to do what the church is always called to do – to articulate the gospel in every generation and in the context of every historical epoch.

From Hendrikus Berkhof I learned to listen with appreciation and openness to the broad spectrum of expressions of the Christian faith in the respective periods in which they were articulated. I learned, to borrow Clarence Becker's phrase, that "the climate of opinion" in any given period is so powerful and controlling that often an honest attempt to bring the gospel to expression will end poorly with only a truncated message coming through. But even so I learned to value the effort and to learn, both from those efforts that were somewhat successful, and from those that lost the message in a maze of human reasoning.

Hendrikus Berkhof is a gifted scholar. To read *Two Hundred Years of Theology*, one recognizes immediately that one is reading an author who has a thorough grasp of the subject matter, who has fully digested the thought of the persons about whom he writes and that, with an encyclopedic grasp of the thought development, he is not content simply to render a survey but rather goes on to critique, to question and finally to put his own feet down over against that which he has set forth. His own account of the faith which one finds in his *Christian Faith* is thus his own; arising out of a thorough grasp of the tradition out of which he speaks, the whole development of dogma in the history of the church, and a broad engagement with modern thought.

The thinkers whom he treats in *Two Hundred Years*,

...tried, more or less deliberately, to build a bridge between the gospel and their secularized cultural environment, but did they succeed? Were they able to translate the gospel into modern language such that it could again be heard and understood in intellectual circles and elicit a genuine yes or no? But who is able to judge whether they achieved this goal? We probably cannot say more than this: from where we stand now, this or that attempt seems to us successful or unsuccessful. Such assessment is important, for we are in the same situation and can learn, both in a positive and in a negative way, from preceding generations. (p. xiii)

Berkhof invites us to join him in his personal journey through two hundred years.

Beginning with Kant, Berkhof recognizes that the dialogue of theology and modern thought is a dialogue between theology and philosophy. The great German philosophical tradition was carried on by those who had genuine theological interest and involvement. From the development of philosophy, theologians gained knowledge of the modern person's understanding of life. Throughout the study Berkhof will again and again point to the *Lebensgefühl*, life understanding, sense of life, that was influential in shaping theological expression. His survey will highlight those persons who acknowledged the

new situation for theology after the critical analysis of the knowing process by Immanuel Kant and insight in the milieu of modern thought to proclaim the gospel. Before we can fully appreciate the seismic shift in philosophical and theological thought effected by Kant's critical analysis of the knowing process we need some sense of the pre-modern world.

With the overwhelming influence of Aristotelian philosophy brought to the west by Averroës in the twelfth century, the Church was faced with the necessity of proclaiming its message in some sort of accommodation with Aristotle. Thomas Aquinas provided the synthesis which made room for Christian theology in an Aristotelian intellectual climate. This was a major accomplishment but the synthesis exacted a price: reality was now split into two realities, nature and supernature. A virtual metaphysical dualism was constructed separating the heavenly sphere from the earthly. For the latter, reason reigned supreme; the former was accessible to faith. Thus a bifurcation of reality resulted in a bifurcation of the knowing process. This split in reality would bear bitter fruit but it did forestall the onset of atheistic thought which became a dominant stream of modern thought in the period surveyed by Berkhof.

Berkhof begins his personal journey with the critical analysis of epistemology by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). His *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) is broadly acknowledged as the foundational work of German philosophy and, Berkhof contends, it must also be valued "as a radical new beginning for evangelical theology."

As a result of its appearance, orthodox scholasticism, rationalism, and supernaturalism found that, at a single stroke, the road forward had been blocked. In addition, the appearance of Kant's *Critique* meant...the birth of the new theology, or rather: the modern way of posing questions, and modern methodology, in theology. (p. 1f)

The pre-modern worldview had achieved a harmony between nature and grace, reason and faith, Aquinas offering the consummate articulation of that harmony. As James Miller writes:

By the eve of the birth of modern culture, the relation between Aristotelian science (including a geocentric cosmological model developed by the second-century astronomer Ptolemy) and Christian theology had become so integral that it was virtually impossible to determine where one stopped and the other began. As a consequence, it was difficult to see how a philosophical or cosmological challenge to the system of Aristotelian natural philosophy could be anything less than a challenge to theological orthodoxy as well. Thus, the stage was set for the Copernican-Galilean controversy out of which modern culture emerged and in which natural science as a discipline became independent of the intellectual or theological authority of the Christian church. (*Postmodern Theology*, p. 2)

Separating Thomas Aquinas and the Thomistic harmonization of the natural and the supernatural and Immanuel Kant are four centuries which saw the Renaissance turning

to the human subject, the Reformation which could only have happened in a culture already permeated by Renaissance influence but which some would contend was a detour, a conservative reaction rather than a development of the ferment of the fifteenth century, and the birth of modern philosophy in the work of Descartes. The linkage between the pre-modern culture described above and Kant's critical philosophy, however, should not be missed.

The Enlightenment was the flowering of the Renaissance turning to the human subject. The bold declaration was the autonomy of the human person no longer under the tutelage of authoritarian structures, be they ecclesiastical (church or Scripture) or socio-political. The early representatives of philosophy had never at the onset of the modern period remained faithful to the church and lived in two houses: their critical analysis of thought and scientific experimentation was carried on in the autonomy of human reason; their spiritual existence was the appropriation of God's grace, mediated through the church – this tidy possibility provided by Thomas' dual structure of reality. It was not long however before the modern thinker found the supernatural realm optional; the autonomous human person found that critical rationality was quite sufficient to deal with "the real world;" the church remained a spiritual home for those who needed it.

Enter Immanuel Kant. This is the beginning point of Berkhof's journey because Kant's analysis of the human knowing process changed everything. In his *Critique of Pure Reason* he destroyed the traditional proofs for the existence of God and struck terror in the hearts of conservative theologians. Actually his purpose was positive. He himself wrote, "I therefore had to abolish *knowledge* in order to make room for *belief*." For him faith and knowledge were complementary. They were separate but connected and both were necessary. It is Berkhof's contention that it was "Kant's purpose to save religion as well as the Enlightenment: in this double objective, we think, lay his deepest passion as a thinker." (p. 5)

Dividing the realm of knowledge into two fundamentally separate domains, he posited the world of *phenomena* and the world of the *noumena*. The former was accessible to human reason – empirical knowledge which was not a direct mirror of the natural world but the product of the interaction of the knowing mind and the data of the senses. This he called the knowledge of the phenomenal world.

The *noumenal* world consisted of things in themselves – the world apart from the activity of the knowing subject – that which simply was not available to empirical verification because no sensory experience was possible. For example, the universe as a causal whole, the human self as a free agent, and God. Yet precisely these three realities must exist, must be true. To cite James Miller again:

Therefore, though *knowledge* of the world as a whole, of the self, and of God were denied by Kant, *faith* in them, he argued, was absolutely necessary for practical reasons.

(*Postmodern Theology*, p. 5)

This assertion was set forth in his second critical work, *The Critique of Practical Reason*. It is this fundamental dualism that has characterized modern culture; it is the inheritance of the Enlightenment and it is the “climate of opinion” that has dominated the modern period, the milieu in which two hundred years of theology has been executed.

How did the Gospel come to expression in light of the limits of human knowing in a world where the authority of tradition and Scripture was no longer self-evident? This is Berkhof’s focus. He deals with the development of the German philosophical tradition because German philosophers were so theologically self-conscious and aware: Fichte and the beginning of the Romantic movement which included the great Schleiermacher who remained a theologian and pastor and sought to articulate the Gospel to its “cultured despisers,” many of whom made up his own circle of friends; and, of course, Hegel in whom German Idealism reached its fullest expression. Berkhof is comfortably at home in this philosophical dimension and is able to lift the philosophical threads that shaped the theological tapestry of the nineteenth century. Without some degree of philosophical orientation one can hardly begin to understand the theological thinking that came to expression in this 200-year period – or in any period for that matter.

How can we understand Schleiermacher, regarded as the father of modern Protestant theology, except in the background of Kant? If Kant successfully blocked the road to the knowledge of God through rational enquiry, through metaphysical speculation, then what road remains open and on what basis can knowledge of God be grounded? Schleiermacher turned to the interior life of the individual – to “the feeling of absolute dependence,” an experience he claimed was common to all humankind at some time or other. As Berkhof is careful to point out, Schleiermacher was not claiming that Christianity arose from the feeling of dependence; rather, this feeling is the human pre-condition for it. He was pointing to the place into which revelation enters.

Was he successful in bringing Christian faith to expression amidst its cultured despisers? Berkhof observes,

One can hardly say that history proved him right. What he took such pains to formulate as the method of theology after the Enlightenment has become, consciously or unconsciously, the common property of the greater proportion of theologians. But there were, and are, only very few “Schleiermachians.” The actual execution of his design has prompted many to admire but few to imitate him. For some it was too radical; for others too traditional; and, of course, both possibilities were inherent in this method. (p. 46)

Berkhof entitled the chapter “Schleiermacher’s Direction” because he understands Schleiermacher as having had a distinct base and goal.

The base was the modernity which he totally affirmed. The goal was redemption in Christ, a subject which in his own time he wanted to express in all its fullness. Throughout his lifetime he was on his way from that base to this goal. (p. 48)

Berkhof's sense is that he was so caught up with the base that it is questionable whether he really reached his goal. Barth wrestled with Schleiermacher throughout his remarkable career. Strong rejection alternates with obvious admiration as Barth deals with this one who so strongly shaped the nineteenth century, which Barth had so strongly rejected in his own radical turn from his inherited liberalism to the theology of the Word. Berkhof, observing the whole movement from Schleiermacher to Barth, renders the opinion that

They were both in motion from the same base (*Woher*) to the same goal (*Wohin*)... (p. 49).

Only viewed thus in their commonality of concern, Berkhof contends, can the great difference between them come to light. The delight and profit of accompanying Berkhof on his journey is to learn from him the relationships and inter-connections that constitute the theological landscape of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He concludes the chapter on Schleiermacher with this paragraph:

It is no accident that suddenly we have moved from Schleiermacher to our own time. As the first to think through so deeply the problems of modern theology, he is just as up-to-date and relevant for us as he was for his contemporaries. Perhaps we have to say: more relevant. For in his day most theologians had as yet no inkling of what the problems were and could therefore lightheartedly shrug off Schleiermacher's answers. The bigger the blueprint, the longer the time before it takes effect. (p.49)

We will go on to deal with Ritschl and the line of German theological development, but we must note here another alternative to Kant's destruction of a reasoned proof of the existence of God. Schleiermacher moved to the interior life of the human subject; the Danish Lutheran theologian, Søren Kierkegaard, in strong reaction against Hegel's idealism, pointed to the concretely existing individual who is confronted by the revelation of Jesus Christ and is called to conversion, to the leap of faith in the moment of decision.

Sketching Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*, Berkhof writes,

Only in the paradox of the God-man can one lay hold of the unity of the eternal and the historical; and this paradox is only acknowledged in faith. This faith has nothing to do with one's intelligence or will. It is itself as much a paradox as the paradox with which it enters into a positive and happy relationship. Faith, therefore, is purely a gift received in the "moment" in which the eternal appears in time and by which the learner becomes "contemporaneous" with the teacher. In this contemporaneity, this leap from sinful alienation from God into existence, the historical distance from Jesus, who is now contemporaneous, falls away. (p. 74)

Kierkegaard reacted strongly against Hegel not only, but also against confessional orthodoxy of his day, for there too, he claimed, the individual was pushed aside just as much by universal and objective truths.

Berkhof sees Kierkegaard as an important figure in the relationship between culture and gospel:

He brought the Christian faith into conflict with the *Zeitgeist*, doing this, however, in the concepts of that time. Having in his language become an idealist to the idealists, he proclaimed to them the faith in a new way so that it no longer appeared to them as something antiquated but as a stumbling block and folly. He did not do this by way of a fresh interpretation of dogma and tradition.... The new and contemporary dimension consisted in the fact that he focused the whole of revelation on the goal of subjectivity and by that means placed it in a new light. (p. 76)

Was Kierkegaard the “most thoroughly reflective completion of pietism”? Berkhof raises the question but notes this critical difference:

Whereas pietism presupposed and maintained the orthodox system of doctrine, Kierkegaard made its content existential.

Kierkegaard failed to impact his own time and subsequent decades took little note of him, but the alternative he posed to both the liberalism flowing from Hegel’s idealism and confessional orthodoxy came to flower in the twentieth century in the early Barth and in the theology of Rudolf Bultmann.

Following a discussion of Hegel and the Hegelian left, those thinkers that moved from Hegel’s system to atheism, Berkhof discusses “the after-effects of idealism in theology,” portraying the two streams that issued in confessionalism and liberalism. Berkhof points out:

Two theological points of view were dominant here...: One could either, in company with Hegel, look in Christianity for the truth of universal reason (and run the risk of subordinating the gospel to the spirit of culture (*Kulturgeist*), or one could join Schleiermacher in proceeding from the independent source and nature of the gospel (and run the danger of isolating the gospel from the culture). This contrast led to two distinct theological schools. (p. 62)

The first school, the liberal wing, Berkhof designates as the “Hegelian school” but he does not deal with this line because it lies outside his sharp focus. The second school, “the confessional group, the theology of mediation, gets major treatment because precisely here the bridge between gospel and culture was the center. The roots of this theology lie in Schleiermacher but there was little of the brilliance of Schleiermacher and the effectiveness of the movement was slight in terms of negotiating a dialogue with

culture. It did serve to strengthen the church – it was, in Berkhof’s words “an ecclesiastical modality;” it had “a saving influence internally.”

Both the liberal and mediating theological groups declined abruptly with the rise of Ritschl’s influence in the 1870’s. This causes Berkhof to raise questions directly related to his own special interest.

Both schools wanted to translate Christian truth into the idiom of modern consciousness (*Lebensgefühl*). And for both, this *Lebensgefühl* was unquestionably the atmosphere created by German idealistic philosophy. In that regard, however, both were fundamentally wrong. Already when those schools arose, idealism was close to its demise. (p. 68)

The important insight here is that theologians that valued being up-to-date – related to the climate of opinion of the day – failed to sense that their cultural context was moving beyond them. Here is Berkhof’s statement:

The worlds of Feuerbach and Comte, of Marx and Engels, the achievements of science, technology, and industry, the struggle of the working class, the “signs of the times” of 1848, and later the German translation of Darwin’s main work (1863) – all these events and influences occurred out of the hearing range of theological studies and lecture halls.... The theologians could not find a point of contact in the new empiricistic, naturalistic, and atheistic culture of Europe, as they had found it in the world of idealism. (p. 68)

Berkhof does not fault theologians alone for this failure to sense where modern thought was going. Even “enlightened” members of the educated class shrank back from the forward movement of Enlightenment thought. Idealism as far back as the Hellenistic beginnings of the church, seemed the gospel’s native air; with this new intellectual climate there seemed no possibility of establishing a relationship.

Albrecht Ritschl, according to Berkhof, was the first “to fling a plausible bridge in German theology to the *Lebensgefühl* of realism.” In the decade of the 1870’s Ritschl’s work had a major impact because, Berkhof contends, “what many scholars had felt unconsciously came suddenly to the surface: liberal and mediating theology had attempted to relate the gospel to a world that was no longer there.” What these theologians in both camps failed to recognize was that to make the gospel audible in the modern world requires the change of conceptual apparatus and theological language with the changing cultural climate and this means as well that any such theological construction will, given time, become obsolete.

Berkhof gives a sympathetic treatment of Ritschl, acknowledging his considerable shortcomings, but valuing him for his serious effort to give voice to the gospel in a shifting cultural scene.

The cultural mood in Germany turned more and more to the world of experience and the natural laws governing it. The reality of space and time gained much more weight and a much clearer autonomy than an idealistically disposed mind could handle. Still, this reality was not experienced in a deterministic fashion. The experience of the mechanisms of nature went hand in hand with a strong sense of progress, of human freedom and power. Humanity is clearly not a product and plaything of the powers of nature but superior to them as their ruler. By utilizing the predictable laws of nature humanity can establish a realm of progress that becomes ever more free. (p. 115f)

This was the cultural mood into which Ritschl addressed his theological understanding. He moved from Hegelian idealism to open-minded research utilizing the historical-critical method. He was serious, disciplined, wanting to be “heart and soul, a believing Christian, and at the same time belonging with the entire fabric of his life to his own culture and time.”

Turning from Hegelian idealism to Kant’s critical idealism, he fluctuated in his relationship to Kant but seemed finally convinced that metaphysics and natural theology were no longer options. He held that the knowledge of God is realized only in the act of faith – faith directed toward the saving activity of Christ. Religious knowledge he claimed consists in value judgments, a term by which he is best known and most misunderstood. Berkhof cites him thus: “It is the duty of theology to conserve the special characteristics of the conception of God, namely, that it can only be represented in value-judgments.” Berkhof observes:

He intends to maintain the uniqueness of the Christian faith as a way of access to the “conception of God” through trust in Jesus Christ – apart from any ground other than that given in the unity of revelation and faith. In that context he utilized Kant to the extent Kant is useful... (p. 121)

Berkhof defends Ritschl against a common misunderstanding that with the concept of value judgment he delivered the Christian faith to pure subjectivism. But, Berkhof counters, the word *value* was much in vogue at the time and it intended to represent the autonomy of the world of the mind *vis-a-vis* the mechanism of nature. Berkhof cites two significant statements in which Ritschl explains his use of the word:

Religious knowledge moves in independent value-judgments, which relate to man’s attitude to the world, and call forth feelings of pleasure or pain, in which man either enjoys the dominion over the world vouchsafed him by God, or feels grievously the lack of God’s help to that end. (*Justification and Reconciliation*, p. 205, cited in Berkhof, p. 122).

In Christianity, religious knowledge consists in independent value judgments, inasmuch as it deals with the relation between the blessedness which is assured by God and sought by man, and the whole of the world which God has created and rules in harmony with His final end. (p. 207)

Ritschl is striving to explain the relationship between divine providence and human dominion over the world. He also used the concept in dealing with the divinity of Christ and religious knowledge. Berkhof sets forth Ritschl's intent sympathetically but acknowledges that

the word *value judgment*...is misleading; it creates the impression that it is solely grounded in subjective human appreciation, as a postulate or projection, without having an objective context. Ritschl's line of thought was not at all intended anthropocentrically but relationally and functionally... : in the face of the saving encounter with the Christ of revelation a person finds himself forced to make this judgment. (p. 123)

Ritschl was welcomed by many who "in the age of Emperor Wilhelm II understood and welcomed this presentation of the gospel as moral power." Others saw it as "a betrayal of the gospel to the spirit of bourgeoisie" and Berkhof observes that this is the fate of every theology that seek to articulate the gospel for its own time and culture. In any case he "let the voice of the gospel and the voices of the Reformation speak again."

One of his students who was to become the philosopher of religion of the religious-historical school, Ernst Troeltsch, described Ritschl's position thus, according to Berkhof:

In his relation to history Ritschl remained stuck halfway. In this respect he seems to identify with the historical consciousness which marks the modern mind, though at bottom he is not modern at all but still supernaturalistic. One cannot simultaneously recognize the limited individuality and many-sided dependence of all historical figures on the one hand, and on the other, infer from the historical process the absoluteness of Christianity and its founders.... (p. 129)

That was Troeltsch's conclusion and he turned away from Ritschl developing to the full the implications of historical consciousness which he faulted his teacher for failing to do. Berkhof's journey continues with a discussion of the alternative positions of Troeltsch and Wilhelm Herrmann who was deeply impacted by Ritschl and developed the line of thought he found in Ritschl in his own impressive work.

We begin with Herrmann because he developed the intention of Ritschl's theology. What impressed him about Ritschl, Berkhof notes, was his fundamental theme: "The calling of people to relate and conduct themselves as free personalities within a determined world." Like Ritschl he found the highest of religion and morality united in the figure of Jesus.

Faith and knowledge were held distinct as was true in Ritschl following Kant's critical philosophy. This separation of faith and knowledge was evidenced in "his persistent struggle against any form of confusion between a personal faith in Christ and faith in the authority of Scripture, dogma, or creed:

They cannot bring about a saving personal encounter; they appeal to our thinking only as law. Religion is a totally independent world, though closely bound up with morality, because it relates us to divine revelation and must be the answer to the misery of our moral condition. (p. 144)

Herrmann was more concerned for the solidity of his philosophical base than was Ritschl. Kant loomed large, “whose mighty thoughts emerge increasingly in almost all domains of human learning as the silent governor of all true research.” Herrmann valued Kant “because in every connection he has placed the value of faith, its independence from science, in the clearest light.”

Berkhof offers an illuminating image by which to understand Herrmann in relation to the question of Berkhof’s quest – how in modern thought and culture the gospel was brought to expression.

When I read Herrmann what emerges in my mind is the image of a rock in the midst of a rising flood. In Ritschl the rock of moral autonomy still had a broad surface. Now, however, with the waves of the flood rising higher and higher, it became much narrower. The parts that are closer to the sea – like corporeality, psychological development, history, social relationships, and the authority of Scripture and Christian tradition – have clearly been inundated. Herrmann now withdrew to the narrow center, to individual (though conceived as interpersonal) inwardness where the individual is in communion with God through “the inner life of Jesus.” With a splendid sort of consistency, he devoted his intellectual powers to the defense of the peak of that rock. (p. 146)

The rise of the historical-critical method of biblical research led Herrmann to realize that the certainty of faith could not rest on the probable results of historical criticism. Faith does take shape in history but its basis is above history and beyond the reach of historical research. “The inner life of Jesus” which comes to expression in the narratives about him, legendary as well as historical, bring our personhood into contact with the reality of Jesus’ personal life. Berkhof dates Herrmann’s complete divorce between revelation and history around 1910, the period of the heated debates about the historicity of Jesus. The Ritschlian school attacked Kähler’s distinction between the *historische* Jesus and the *geschichtliche* Christ. This distinction which, as Berkhof notes, can only be made in German, became very influential.

It gained broad acceptance because it promised a separate but peaceful relationship between the gospel and modern historicism which could serve as a bomb-proof bunker for faith in Christ. (p. 147)

In his *Ethik* Herrmann entered into dialogue with the intellectual *Umwelt* and thus Berkhof focuses on that work first because in it “a bridge was built between the gospel and the modern world.” In human encounters in which trust relationships grow we recognize an “unconditional demand” and a longing to achieve “a different life than nature can furnish us.”

In religion man is referred to the “inner situation of human individualism” in which “he is faced before a power before which all resistance is excluded because he knows himself to be totally dependent on it in free surrender.” (p. 147f)

Herrmann’s other major work *Der Verkehr des Christen mit Gott* describes how the encounter with the superior personal life of Jesus proceeds and effects inner human renewal. How does the saving experience of the grace of God come about? Herrmann’s stress is on inward transformation – concrete human experience.

A fact of redemption, for a person who wants to escape the bondage of his own powerlessness, can only be that which transforms him inwardly. That, however, is effected only by his own experience, not by that which he is merely told about. Hence we call a ‘fact of redemption’ the inner life of Jesus which became known to us in contact with the tradition. (p. 148)

How does the process of becoming known actually occur?

The personal mystery of Jesus is mediated to us through the transmission of his image. In that context we discover that “the Christ of the New Testament displays a firmness of religious conviction, a clarity of moral judgment, a purity and power of will, as they occur together in no other figure of history. (p. 148)

Sounding like Luther, Herrmann writes,

God takes our self-esteem and creates for us an unbreakable spirit; he destroys our joy in life and makes us blessed; he kills and makes us alive. (*Der Verkehr*, p. 94, cited in Berkhof, p. 149)

Berkhof points out the difference with Luther being that for Luther it is the power of the law that kills while for Herrmann it is a natural human experience, an experience common to Christians and non-Christians. This was the *Lebensgefühl* of Herrmann’s Europe. The Gospel meets this need reflected in the common human experience.

Berkhof puts the critical question to Herrmann’s formulation: “Is the God who is complementarily related to our needs still really God? Or is he perhaps only the projected reflection of human ideals and human misery? Berkhof notes, as we shall see later, that in the year Herrmann died (1922), the revised edition of Barth’s *The Epistle to the Romans* appeared. In it Barth, Herrmann’s admiring student, concluded that indeed Herrmann’s God was a human projection, not the “wholly other” of biblical revelation.

Two alternatives flowed from Ritschl: Herrmann’s development of Ritschl’s intention and, from Ritschl’s student Ernst Troeltsch, a rejection of the attempt to ground faith in inner experience, thereby finding an absolute ground in history. With Herrmann, Troeltsch was recognized as the leader of German Liberal theology. But Troeltsch took another path. Recalling the image referred to above, Berkhof writes,

He [Troeltsch] also saw that the rock of ethical freedom and, connected with it, of the gospel was inundated by the deterministic-historical way of thinking in vogue. But he did not believe that he could occupy and hold a small peak as a last resort. He left this tight spot and plunged into the stream. To him an absolute moment in history was a contradiction in terms. For that reason he had to disagree with Ritschl and Herrmann, who sought to lift Jesus out of history with its laws of analogy and correlation. It is true everywhere and for everyone: history is an ever-moving stream in which the movement of each drop is determined by the mass of water that proceeds it, and each drop shares in determining the direction of what follows. That is the fundamental view of “historicism,” another term for determinism applied to historical reality. (p. 150)

In that paragraph, Berkhof pictures vividly the climate of opinion created by the rise of historical consciousness and the rise of historical consciousness has marked all subsequent modern thought as indelibly as has Kant’s analysis of the human knowing process.

Troeltsch admired Herrmann’s work but concluded that Herrmann had failed to ground faith in an historically unconditional place; rather, his orientation to “the inner life of Jesus” was “time conditional,” thoroughly enmeshed in the stream of history.

Troeltsch endeavored to rescue Christian faith and ethics from the historical relativism which appeared all-encompassing. For him the historical as such can have only relative significance. However, utilizing metaphysical psychology, he developed his “philosophy of values.”

Whereas the natural sciences look for causality and universality, the science of history looks for the individuality which expresses itself in the realization of transindividual values in history. (p. 152)

With this theory of the transhistorical values realized in history in the individual, Troeltsch believed he had overcome relativism. History has not a limitless number of competing values; “such values are exceedingly few in number” and “disclosures of really new goals for the human spirit are rare indeed.” By what criterion are such disclosures to be judged? Berkhof cites the following statements from Troeltsch:

We may likewise understand the criterion of evaluation as something that emerges within the movement of life as a result of a universal perspective on the one hand, and involvement in the movement on the other.

The converging lines evident in these basic features suggest, however, a normative, universally valid goal toward which the whole is directed.

It is the concept rather, of a common, orienting goal that may from time to time manifest itself in history in clear and distinct preparatory forms but always remains a goal “out in front.”

At this point, Berkhof indicates, Troeltsch moves from the historically empirical to metaphysics. Berkhof cites Troeltsch further:

This idea [namely, of an absolute goal] requires *a turn to the metaphysical*, a retracing of all man’s goals and orientations to a transcendent force that activates our deepest stirrings and is connected with the creative core of reality. The various eruptions, breakthroughs, and manifestations of the higher spiritual life are rooted in the goal-oriented character of this force. It stands over against what is merely given in nature and turns up at different points – ...till it has found concentrated expression, from that point on pressing forward to goals that exceed all knowledge and imagination. This is the permanent element in *the concept of evolutionary development*, which in this case signifies not only a postulate that accompanies all faith in the spiritual life but also a fact of experience that has been manifested with some degree of clarity. (p. 152f)

From this position Troeltsch went on to claim for Christianity the highest level of the apprehension of truth. Berkhof comments,

It would seem that, with this “absoluteness of Christianity,” an “absoluteness” based on historical development (because “absolute truth belongs to the future and will appear in the judgment of God and the cessation of earthly history.”) Troeltsch came very close to a kind of Hegelian pantheism and immanentism. Over against this, however, there is a strong personalism, because for Troeltsch as a modern person it is precisely the personalistic legacy of Christianity which constitutes a connection of culture, individual life, and progress. (p. 153)

Herrmann and Troeltsch carried on a dialogue about the place of history in Christian experience. Troeltsch rejected Herrmann’s appeal to the personality of Jesus while claiming that although mediated by history, what came to expression of the inner life of Jesus was above history and beyond the reach of historical-critical research. Herrmann found it impossible to accept Troeltsch’s idea of development which brought with it the possibility that Jesus might in the future be superseded by a greater revelatory concretion in event or person. In the final analysis they were not so far apart except that Troeltsch appealed to the socio-psychological reality of the Christian community.

In Troeltsch’s essay “The Significance of the Historical Existence of Jesus for Faith,” he dealt with the question whether the Christian church can have a future apart from its being grounded in the historicity of Jesus. Berkhof points out,

He denies it on grounds of social psychology; without a fellowship, a cult, and a historical personality to ground it, only an individualistic spirituality remains. As

such a historically based cult community, Christianity can well maintain itself, even by historical-critical norms. (p. 155)

Thus he is close to Ritschl and Herrmann. However, the difference between them lies in the fact that for Troeltsch, his claim is grounded in social-psychology; it is not for him a dogmatic pronouncement. But Troeltsch wearied of the struggle to claim absolute value out of history and historical development. A concluding sentence of his significant *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* reads, “The Truth is – and this is the conclusion of the whole matter – the Kingdom of God is within us.” World War I dealt his view that European culture was the highest stage of ethical-cultural development a blow.

Universal history, which was once his starting point, now became a question to him. He began to see that even his central idea of “personality” lacked universal historical validity but was typical for one culture – namely Western culture. Even the basis of his historicism became historicized. Against a boundless relativism he sought shelter in a pantheistic metaphysic....(p. 157)

Berkhof concludes the discussion of these two giants of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries under the heading “Convergence and Contrast.” They illustrate two ways in which, “while affirming the contemporary deterministic-empirical culture, one can still speak of ‘the absoluteness’ of Jesus or of Christianity.” Both sought to save faith and modern culture. But Berkhof claims,

In their attempts at reconciliation neither Herrmann nor Troeltsch could in the end avoid returning to the supernaturalism they despised. In the case of Herrmann, Jesus – with his unique inner life – remained the big exception and the great miracle in the midst of history. Troeltsch radically exposed himself to the temptation of contemporary culture. But for him, too, Jesus remained the hitherto unsurpassed high point in the great movement of the Spirit. For the sake of redemption of the human personality neither was able to abandon faith in the personhood of God. For the salvation of human beings both men reached for a Beyond – Herrmann for the inner life of Jesus beyond observable history, Troeltsch for the kingdom of redeemed spirits, also beyond history. (p. 160)

Concentrating on his own focus in this survey, Berkhof reflects on the contrasts and the convergence of the alternatives followed by Herrmann and Troeltsch. He contends that in the effort to reconcile the gospel and modern culture, one can begin at either pole. The gospel cries out for concentration on the one thing necessary; culture ventures into the full spectrum of life in the world. Beginning with either pole it is difficult to do justice to the other. Finally both Herrmann and Troeltsch experienced and expressed Christian faith entirely within the framework of the cultural presuppositions of their time. After the crisis of World War I both thinkers’ influence waned; yet, the significant intellectual and spiritual effort of both has gained a new hearing. Berkhof claims we have still not been able to free ourselves from the choice between the two and the struggle in which they engaged continues to challenge us into the present.

We move now to the next generation, to students of Herrmann, who appeared for a brief time to be one in their development and radicalization of Herrmann's effort to find a secure place for faith to rest beyond the relativities of history and the acids of historical research. Karl Barth's *Romerbrief*, first edition, sent shock waves through the world of academic theology and philosophy and his salvo was affirmed by Rudolf Bultmann. Under the title of "The Split in the Herrmann School" Berkhof discusses these two formidable theologians and their followers. The word "split" indicates that the time of apparent agreement was brief; in Bultmann and Barth alternative answers were given to questions of faith and history.

Understandably, Berkhof can do little justice to the gigantic theological enterprises of Bultmann and Barth in two chapters comprising about 45 pages. Yet the treatment is helpful because of his sharp focus – the deeply felt chasm between the cultural assumption of their *sitz-im-leben* and the gospel.

Bultmann followed his revered teacher, Herrmann, who thoroughly mistrusted historically ascertainable facts as vehicles of revelation. Bultmann's mistrust was even greater – closer to Troeltsch at that point, although repeating Troeltsch's attempt to find some absolute point amidst history's relativities. In Bultmann, "the Christian experience of faith is not in the conventional sense 'grounded'; it implies a radical release from empirical certitude."

Berkhof suggests that Troeltsch's influence may have caused Bultmann to radicalize Herrmann's position.

The Achilles' heel of Herrmann was, certainly, that for his faith in Jesus he needed a little segment of history, namely, "the inner life of Jesus" or the "secret of his Person," however nonvisual it might be. Troeltsch did not believe in this rock as a place of refuge to which one could go in the midst of the flood of historical determinism. And Bultmann...had to concur here with the opponent of his teacher. However, unlike Troeltsch he did not plunge into the sea, but believed he could find revelation concerning the sea above the inundated rock, in a higher atmosphere which the flood could not reach, in the free air of human existence addressed by God, on a level of reality which can only be reached by a radical detachment from the world. (p. 164f)

Here we hear the echoes of Kant's distinction between pure and practical reason; the historical Jesus belongs to the first, the preaching of the crucified Jesus to the second. Bultmann was concerned only with the "that" of the life of Jesus; nothing beyond the "that" of his historical existence is relevant for faith. Even Herrmann's "inner life of Jesus" was surrendered to the relativization of historical criticism. As Berkhof explains,

Bultmann wanted to sever the last remaining connection between *Historie* and *Geschichte* in order to protect the faith from any and every critical assault on the part of science. (p. 165)

Barth's *Romans* impressed Bultmann. Here he heard an undergirding and development of Herrmann's theology. Bultmann, a trained New Testament scholar did object to Barth's interpretation of Paul and he criticized Barth's understanding of the relationship between revelation and history, an understanding similar to Herrmann's, falling short of the radical disjunction of faith and history which Bultmann advocated. Berkhof feels that from the beginning Bultmann was more interested in Barth's statements about the human self than he was in Barth's primary concern to point to the goodness of God and the objectivity of the Word of God.

Berkhof points to the center of Bultmann's concern in his analysis of human existence which he gained from the early Heidegger, who for a time was his colleague at Marburg. Heidegger's philosophy of existence presented Bultmann with an understanding of the human condition into which the gospel is proclaimed. Berkhof cites Bultmann's statement:

For the existential interpretation of human existence says precisely that the human subject (or human being, I might also say) is not without his world, nor even without God insofar as the philosopher regards it as legitimate to speak about God, so that self-understanding is *also* understanding of (God and) the world. (p. 168f)

Is this "natural theology" or a Christianized Heidegger? Berkhof contends the two converge in Bultmann and offers as evidence Bultmann's statements in his essay "The New Testament and My Theology:"

...according to Heidegger the "mundaneness" of the world "causes people to be satisfied with an illusory existence; as a result they miss out on "the reality of existence." This condition of lostness is what the New Testament calls "sin." According to Heidegger people must now lay hold of existence on their own: Become what you are! (p. 169)

Philosophy believes it is enough that one be shown one's true nature but Bultmann denies philosophy's self-confidence.

People must first be liberated from themselves. This happens through the message of Christ, through the forgiveness of sin, by which alone people receive the "freedom for obedience," surrender to the love of God, and therewith the authenticity of their existence. (p. 169)

During the fifties Bultmann's influence was powerful and pervasive. His existential analysis of the human person who is addressed by the Word of God, the proclamation of the Christ of faith apart from any rooting in history beyond the "that" of Jesus' existence, enabled him to deliver the gospel safe from the relativities of historical research, research in which he himself was a master. But with the advent of the next decade the pendulum began to swing back and the climate of opinion was shifting. The

Bultmannian school was beginning to fall apart. First the work of Ernst Kasemann who actually stepped outside the Bultmann circle with its existentialist interpretation of the gospel, but then by Bultmann's students Ernst Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling who remained with the existentialist understanding but who sensed a need for a broader place to stand in concrete history, there was a return to interest in the historical Jesus, to something more than the "that" of his existence.

Berkhof views this move on the part of the Neo-Bultmannians as a shift from idealism to empiricism which was similar to the shift that had occurred in the previous century.

A theological generation grew up for whom the language of the great predecessors was no longer intelligible. However diverse Barth, Brunner, Bultmann, Niebuhr, and Tillich were, their basic concepts like "revelation," "Word of God," "absolute and infinite Being," even the vocable "God," all belonged to a conceptual *Überwelt* which was not open to empirical verification....I see no indication that the Neo-Bultmannians consciously involved themselves in this shift toward empiricism. But since 1950 it was in the air, expanded rapidly, and manifested itself in many areas. The "shift" from "Christ" to "Jesus" belongs entirely to this new climate. For many during these years it made the gospel credible again to have it anchored in the historical Jesus. (p. 175f)

Berkhof points out that this was really a return to Herrmann who also had to proclaim the gospel to a generation under the strong influence of empiricism. He never gave up the connection to empirical history. Bultmann argued with his students who moved back to the concern with the historical reality of Jesus and Berkhof comments:

In my opinion, the conflict between Bultmann and his disciples has not been resolved. His disciples were stronger in their accentuation of the essential continuity between Jesus and Christ...Bultmann's second objection against his disciple-critics is one they could not, in my judgment, invalidate: the post-Easter kerygma is not identical with the message of Jesus and does not (very often – I would prefer to say) refer back to the message and conduct of the earthly Jesus. (p. 177)

As the debate came to sharp focus the questions that were clearly at issue were:

Is the historical necessary to the explanation of the kerygma (Bultmann, Marxen)? And: is this minimal history sufficient for the explanation of the kerygma (Künneth)? By answering the first question in the negative one remains strictly within the existentialist framework. By answering the second question in the negative one breaks out of this framework in favor of an ontological mode of thought. (p. 178)

The climate of opinion permeated with a move to the empirical opened up a return to concentration on the historical ground of faith especially in the work of a circle of young

scholars around Pannenberg. Berkhof explains this move as reflective of the way Troeltsch posed the issue.

The gospel must not be positioned as far from history as possible but be understood altogether as historical power and as answer to the quest for truth in history. It seemed the path of theological development had curved back to where it was in 1910. The alternatives were still the same. (p. 178)

But with our move to the Post-Bultmann School we have moved too fast, for we must backtrack and pick up the other student of Herrmann, generally acknowledged as the greatest theological thinker of the twentieth century, Karl Barth. Berkhof knew him personally and respected him deeply. While maintaining his own independence, he nevertheless himself was significantly impacted by this great man.

Berkhof opens the chapter with the interesting development of Barth, biographical information so necessary to understanding him and the revolution he ignited. He cites the following statement of Barth from the preface to the second edition of his *Romans*:

If I have a system it is limited to a recognition of what Kierkegaard called the “infinite qualitative distinction” between time and eternity, and to my regarding this as possessing negative as well as positive significance: “God is in heaven, and thou art on earth.” The relation between such a God and such a man, and the relation between such a man and such a God, is for me the theme of the Bible and the essence of philosophy. Philosophers name this *krisis* of human perception – the Prime Cause; the Bible beholds at the same cross-roads – the figure of Jesus Christ. (p. 194f)

These are weighty sentences, Berkhof writes. He locates the respective emphases in Barth’s development. The *Romans* work came out of Barth’s turn to the interpretation of the Bible. With his friend Thurneysen he was disillusioned with involvement in the Social Democracy movement which failed to mobilize resistance to the war and together they were looking for a place to stand – a “crisis” brought about by the need to preach weekly. The first edition of *Romans* (1919) was the eruption of all that was stirring in the young Barth as he moved away from the nineteenth century with its classic liberalism, struggled with the Bible and the darkness that enveloped the continent torn apart with war.

The first edition of *Römerbrief* was not a product of a finished theological position. Berkhof speaks of “The Detour of the First Edition of *Römerbrief*.” Berkhof cites Busch, Barth’s biographer:

In Barth, the question of according God a place of central importance was becoming more and more fundamental. And since he had met Blumhardt, it was very closely connected with the eschatological question of the Christian hope. (Busch, *Karl Barth*, pp. 87, 89, cited in Berkhof, p. 186)

Berkhof points out that Barth wrestled with the question of how the Kingdom of God manifested itself tangibly in a world hostile to God.

In the grip of this question Barth had read Romans with the excitement of a discoverer. For him it became primarily the great witness to the absolute priority of God, visible in the work of Christ and the working of the Spirit, the Spirit who in an organic process, on the basis of Christ, transformed creation into the glory of Christ. This working of the Spirit is the inner side – perceptible to the eye of faith – of our secular exterior side. Ontology, objectivity, realism, and universalism – these are the categories which here determine Barth's exposition of Paul. Paul helped him to proclaim the superior power of God in an alienated world and even to make it visible for those to whom this is given. (p. 186f)

The publication of *Romans* sent shock waves through the philosophical and theological centers of the continent. Educated in the finest tradition of German culture, Barth's move was incomprehensible to his teachers. It appeared that he had joined the side of orthodoxy. But, Berkhof contends, he was still far from the Reformation tradition and had no real appreciation for the classic teaching of justification. In the years following the publication (1919-1922), Barth continued to grope and feel his way. Berkhof, tracing the various ideas and persons that influenced Barth, concludes,

I doubt that it was philosophical influence which helped Barth negotiate the great switch-in-subject which initiated in the 1916 lecture about "The Righteousness of God" and following the detour via the theology of Württemberg (The first edition of *Römerbrief*), provisionally found its "final" form in the second edition of *Romans*. According to Barth's own sense of the matter, he owed the sudden shift in direction from the first to the second edition of *Romans* to an "inspiration" which at first even frightened himself.... If one nevertheless thinks here of extra theological influences, it makes more sense to look for them in the realm of the negative, in the disillusionments he suffered, especially after the war, from the liberal theology of experience on the one hand, and from social democracy on the other. These disillusionments drove him past all the relativities of human life to God – as the origin, the judge(crisis), and the hope of all that is known. In contemplation of the absolute God the merely human was condemned and redeemed to the status of relativity and so made bearable. In the first edition of *Römerbrief* Barth still viewed the relationship between God and the world as harmonious, organic, more or less perceptible. In the second edition of *Romans* discontinuity and imperceptibility predominate. God is no less present than before but his presence had fundamentally become "imperceptible," "lightning-like." (p. 197)

Berkhof raises the question how in the space of four years Barth could read the same Pauline letter so differently. He is convinced the answer lies not in the domain of intellect but "in the depths of his *Lebensgefühl* (sense of life)." Educated in the Ritschlian theological school, the advancing secularization ate away at the ground on which faith rested. In Herrmann there was a thin ridge still rising above the flood; for

Troeltsch even that was gone, although he still sought the absolute in history's relativity. For Barth, Berkhof contends, the "base" is totally gone.

"History" is completely secularized and the event of the world of God is now "verticalized." God's work in the world has lost its final vestiges of perceptibility. The retreat has become a clean break...the second edition of *Romans* is also a document of that cultural epoch and the *Lebensgefühl* which was part of it.... A new, intensely painful experience of the godless world and, on the basis of that experience, a new quest for the God of the Bible – these two factors determined Barth's groping progression during these years. (p. 198)

Though he revered Herrmann, Barth nevertheless had to take leave of him. Bultmann had not noticed the "switch-in-subject" in the second edition of *Romans* and interpreted Barth in line with Herrmann. And there was structural similarity between Barth and Herrmann, as Moltmann points out:

The "defenseless non-groundability of religious experience" in Barth becomes, in theologically consistent form, the "transcendental subjectivity" of the self-revealing God, a process in which the "self" retains all the attributes, all the relations and distinctions in which it had been formulated by Herrmann. (p. 199, quoting Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, p. 54)

In a lecture in 1924 Barth pointed out where he separated from Herrmann. It was not a repudiation but rather a radicalization of Herrmann.

Herrmann tried to ground his theology on "experience," on "the facts we ourselves experience," but in the section cited by Barth he continues: "But its *beginning* and its end is nonetheless man's humbling of himself before the unsearchable." Therefore, if experience lives from that which transcends experience, and if this is its beginning even, then "the unabrogable subjectivity of God" has become the starting point of our thinking, and it "becomes obligatory to ask whether dogmatics does not have to begin where Herrmann ends." (p. 199)

Surveying the whole of Barth's theological enterprise, Berkhof holds that the relationship between Barth and his teacher must be characterized as "ambivalence" rather than a "break." Barth's strong stress on "the unabrogable subjectivity of God" led to differences: no point of contact in ethics; stress on the Word event; more space for salvation-historical facts, especially the cross and resurrection; a wider use of scriptural witness, including the Old Testament; and emphasis on the priority and superordination of justification over sanctification and of faith as acknowledgment over trust; also, a higher valuation of the church, its office, and its confession. But there were similarities as well:

The twin pillars of his mature thought as it comes to expression in his *Church Dogmatics* are thus Christocentrism and, as its counterpart, the radical repudiation of natural theology. With these positions Barth was not in opposition

to the nineteenth century but to the Ritschl–Herrmann line of thought within that century. But when secularization advanced still more, Barth withdrew revelation even further from the world. It was not the “*diastasis*” which distinguished him from these predecessors but the degree of radicalism with which it was applied. Herrmann found final support in “the inner life of Jesus.” Barth also gives that up and then severs the connection between *Geschichte* and *Historie*. But is that a possibility if one wants to proceed on the basis of Jesus Christ, inclusive of his “historical” appearance? (p. 200)

Berkhof claims Barth could not do it even in the second edition of *Romans*. He quotes from *Romans*:

In the Resurrection the new world of the Holy Spirit touches the old world of the flesh, but touches it as a tangent touches a circle, that is, without touching it. And, precisely because it does not touch it, it touches it as its frontier – as the new world. The Resurrection is therefore an occurrence in history, which took place outside the gates of Jerusalem in the year A.D. 30, inasmuch as it there “came to pass,” was discovered and recognized. But inasmuch as the occurrence was conditioned by the Resurrection, in so far, that is, as it was not the “coming to pass,” or the discovery, or the recognition, which conditioned its necessity and appearance and revelation, the Resurrection is not an event in history at all. (p. 201 from *Romans*, p. 30)

Later, in *Church Dogmatics*, Berkhof writes, Barth attempted to bring *Geschichte* and *Historie* closer together but even there “failed to reach clarity on this decisive issue in modern theology.”

Berkhof moves to Barth’s relationship to Schleiermacher which, in his early years, was unambiguous; he set himself over against Schleiermacher’s anthropological starting point, the grounding of religious reality in the “feeling of absolute dependence.”

Despite his great admiration for Schleiermacher’s magnificent achievement, in general he found himself rejecting Schleiermacher’s theology. This rejection went so far that he closed with the question, “How can the idea [the idea that Schleiermacher has brought us to a dead end] be squared with the providence of God which rules over his church?” and with the observation: “What remains is clearly – and I do not see how it can be avoided – the possibility of a *theological revolution* [Barth’s italics], a fundamental NO! to the entire body of Schleiermacher’s teaching concerning religion and Christianity.” (p. 202)

A bit later Barth treated Schleiermacher’s thought again, concluding that he “allowed himself to be forced into the fundamentally unworthy position of an apologist” because at bottom he was interested in Christianity “only for the sake of culture.” Yet Barth was never through with Schleiermacher. In 1968 he wrote,

I am certain of my course and of my point of view. I am, however, not so certain of them that I can confidently say that my “yes” necessarily implies a “no” to Schleiermacher’s point of view. For have I indeed understood him correctly? (p. 203)

He ends, Berkhof writes, with the same ambivalence we saw above over against Herrmann. It is interesting to note here that in his revision of *Christian Faith*, Berkhof himself added a section on Schleiermacher’s appeal to experience.

In the mid-1920’s, Barth seemed to have found his place to stand and he wrote *Die Christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf*. But after discovering the theological method of Anselm of Canterbury, he wrote a book on Anselm’s method and started over with his own dogmatics, this time calling it *Church Dogmatics*.

The title *Church Dogmatics* brings out, for Barth, the binding force of the faith which underlies all dogmatic thought. Connected with this in Anselm’s thought is that reality precedes possibility, not vice versa. “I believe in order that I may understand” (*Credo ut intelligam*). The content of faith does not permit itself to be grounded by the human intellect but only to be unfolded by reflection. (p. 206)

Berkhof concludes the chapter on Barth by raising the critical question which will be taken up in his next chapter, an interesting debate about Barth’s method that took place in the Netherlands.

For us it is decisive to see how Barth gave up the goals of liberal theology and left its path behind him in order now to fall into line with classic theology as it was given its shape by Athanasius and Anselm, by Luther and Calvin. After the Enlightenment and after Schleiermacher, one can still do this with impunity? At no time in his life did Barth take this question lightly, but after intense struggle he nevertheless answered it in the affirmative. His students adopted his answer as self-evident and repressed the question. However, the question must make itself heard again, despite or precisely because of Barth.

In the post-Barthian period Berkhof points out that question again became the central problem of theology.

Barth’s influence was dominant from 1930-1960. His power of thought and consistently thought through position was cogent but not without its detractors. Brunner’s position was mediating in regard to the question of the “place” in the human person where revelation is received. Paul Tillich opposed Barth’s “Kerygmatic” theology with his own apologetic approach, a theology of correlation which finds the human question answered in God’s revelation.

It was Dietrich Bonhoeffer who expressed for many the weakness of Barth’s approach. Berkhof writes of Bonhoeffer’s critique of Barth in his *Letters From Prison*:

Bonhoeffer is at his most genial when in these letters he treated the system which imprisoned him essentially as part of the past and concentrated totally on the rise of the new, “mature,” radically secularized “religionless” man. When the Letters were published this secularized sense of life (*Lebensgefühl*) was fully on the march, and people even spoke of a second Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*). (p. 209)

Bonhoeffer had become a disciple of Barth and they maintained a close personal bond but his prison experience moved him away from Barth’s theology. He characterized Barth’s position as a “positivism of revelation” (“take or leave it”) – a poignant criticism, and Barth was stung by it. Bonhoeffer ushered in the post-Barthian era. Berkhof observes,

It arose directly from his analysis of the new cultural epoch. In the anthropocentric age in which Barth had sought his way as a theologian, his starting with God as the subject of faith and theology was a liberating new beginning. In Bonhoeffer’s time this point had already become self-evident in theology. But in the period which he foresaw, such a starting point would be completely unintelligible. For the people for whom the wording hypothesis “God” would be a total redundancy, “the authority of the Word of God” would only constitute a double enigma: first, because they would accept nothing on authority any more and, second, because they could not handle the idea of a “speaking God.” (p. 209f)

Berkhof sees Barth’s starting point heavily influenced by the collapse of German cultural assumptions in the aftermath of World War I. There was a felt need for “a basic foothold in a higher, supramundane reality.” But in the post-World War II days the pendulum swung back. For different reasons, neither Barth nor Bultmann were ever able to ground the Word in history, within this-worldly existence.

Technology in the after-math of the war also had a transforming effect on society. Life was understood as being shaped “from below.” Berkhof chooses the work of H.M. Kuitert of the Free University in Amsterdam as the representative of those who sought to come to terms with the new *Lebensgefühl*. Kuitert came under Barth’s influence through his teacher, G. C. Berkhouwer. Berkhof indicates that his understanding of Barth and subsequent departure from Barth center in Barth’s phrase “the unabrogable subjectivity of God.” Berkhof quotes Kuitert:

For Barth revelation is an immediate occurrence; it is the speaking God himself....that is the figure of the transcendental subjectivity *in optima forma* to which Barth adhered throughout his entire life. (p. 213)

Kuitert sees the line back to Herrmann and Kant here and claims that thereby Barth freed himself from any attempt to ground the knowledge of God either in history or in religious experience. But, Kuitert objects, Barth thus identified his faith concept with the subjectivity of God. Berkhof explains,

Barth claims an exceptional position for his own theological approach. He bases this on the subjectivity of faith granted us and realizing itself within us. Thus he excused himself from all discussion and from the necessity of giving an account of his thoughts. To the legitimate question: How do you know? He has no answer. (p. 213)

Barth did later appeal to the biblical witness and the tradition of the church but the relationship between Scripture and the immediacy of the knowledge of God remains unclear. Barth also came to view the role of history more positively but even so God's acts in history are alien to history itself. Kuitert insists that the alternatives cannot be avoided.

Either the vocable God remains empty, or it receives an arbitrary content from within subjectivity, or it receives its content [i.e., we predicate] from within [historical] experience. (p. 214)

Barth operates in a closed circle. Another Dutch theologian, Sperna Weiland, describes Barth's theology as "a house without doors." Berkhof explains,

With its unreasoned appeal to revelation it withdraws from communication with the outside world and culture in general. (p. 214)

Kuitert's challenge to Barth's approach engendered a lively debate within the Netherlands, young Barthians coming to the master's defense. Our interest here, however, is in Kuitert's alternative. In a new cultural milieu Kuitert felt the need to deal with prologomena in the traditional sense. As Berkhof points out,

We must start with "man," on an "anthropological floor" which believers and unbelievers have in common. Thus Kuitert again picks up the theme of the "apologetic" theology which Tillich opposed to the "kerygmatic" theology of Barth. (p. 220)

Kuitert insisted that theology can claim to be a science only if it is willing to do more than simply bear witness, even though it cannot provide "verification" in the sense of the natural sciences. Theology must be descriptive in character:

It examines religion and religions, and thus makes also God an object of its intellectual striving. (p. 220)

The phenomenon of faith, Kuitert contends, can be described on three levels: anthropological, historical and institutional. On the first level, Kuitert deals with primal faith or basic trust. One trusts oneself to what one cannot as yet perceive. This basic trust has Christian-theological relevance. It does not turn theology into anthropology but humankind is bound to this "anthropological floor" in speaking about God.

On the historical level Kuitert turns to the phenomenology of religion. Basic trust comes shaped in the form of a concrete religion. Berkhof points out,

All religions have “God” as their point of reference. This does not mean, however, that the differences between them are immaterial. It is often certain very distinct experiences which press people to pronounce the name “God”: as an expression of meaning. Such experiences are only possible within certain frameworks of interpretation. (p. 221)

Herein lies the possibility for testing plausibility. Built into faith, Kuitert insists, is an argument which makes an appeal to experience. Berkhof cites Kuitert:

The grounds of faith therefore consist in that which religious people sense as the footprints of God in our world of experience. (p. 221f)

When those footprints are no longer discernible, religious faith dies a slow death. Kuitert uses as an example the death of the fertility religion in the ancient Near East.

When trade and industry, and finally artificial fertilizer, undermined the decisive role of the fertility of the earth, it turned out that what people took to be the footprints of God were not that at all. (p. 222)

Kuitert also speaks of a religious conviction which is turned into a “search hypothesis” which guides one in the search for God. Without some such hypothesis, he claims, we perceive nothing of God in the world and whatever is perceived of God is dependent upon the search-hypothesis with which one begins. Such a hypothesis is not an end in itself; rather, the end is the personal experience of God and the experience of salvation.

Kuitert’s third level is the institutional. The Christian search-hypothesis takes the form of Christian doctrine.

Berkhof gives his own appraisal of the debate between Kuitert and the post-Barthians. He puts the issue in sharp focus:

The question I have to answer is: For the interpretation of the gospel in today’s world, does Kuitert offer a better starting point than Barth? The weakness of Barth’s position is well known: since he starts with God, he does not seem to reach real people. Kuitert starts “from below;” can he, from this direction, arrive at the God of the gospel, the father of Jesus Christ? ...The Christian faith orients itself to the footprints of God in the way and work of Jesus. His footprints can never be surpassed. How can one arrive at an assertion about them if even this faith ever has to be confirmed in history as it unfolds? (p. 226)

Berkhof points out that Kuitert’s reference to the historicity of God and the claim that God is love are Christian assertions with no plausibility granted by outsiders. We are dealing with assumptions of the western Christian tradition and, Berkhof writes, we are

thus revolving within a cultural circle facing the same problem that Troeltsch faced – trying to find an absolute point within the history of religion. In contrast to Troeltsch, Kuitert is not looking for an absolute point but “for that which in history has proven itself tenable.” He is looking for certain presuppositions that will make dialogue with outsiders possible. But, Berkhof concludes, that

...what emerges is that we are led, also from below, into a closed circle in a way similar to that of which Barth was accused with his starting point “from above.” It is of no help that this closed circle is presented as a concentration of experiences. For the people who have had no such experiences themselves, these experiences are transformed into authorities. (p. 227)

And so, Berkhof asks, “Does Kuitert essentially understand Christian faith differently from Barth?” He takes Kuitert’s own statements that the knowledge of God is the fruit of God’s self-revelation and that a God humans can account for can never be the true God. Thus Berkhof contends,

These statements, as also the theory of plural search-constructs, negate the capacity of the anthropological floor to support an accounting for the faith in dialogue with outsiders. In one’s belief one clearly has to do with a closed circle. (p. 227)

Berkhof holds that Barth’s contention that only by starting with God does one come to God is confirmed by Kuitert by his own affirmation and, negatively, by the failure to ground an alternative approach. Barth’s weakness remains. Berkhof concludes,

Both Barthians and post-Barthians live from the questions their counterparts do not answer. (p. 228)

Berkhof concludes his journey with chapters on “Immanent Transcendentality: The Catholic Bridge,” “North America: From Social Gospel to Neo-Orthodoxy,” and “Paul Tillich: The Bridge of Correlation.” The chapters are interesting and well-done giving the survey a broad ecumenical and geographical spectrum, an important inclusion because the central question of the book comes into focus from new angles as was the case earlier in a chapter on Anglican theology and a chapter on Conservative theology which treated the work of Martin Kähler.

The treatment of Catholic theology deals most extensively with Karl Rahner as might be expected, but Berkhof also lifts up the thinking of Maurice Blondel and Henri de Lubac who made valuable contributions to the effort to bridge the gulf between gospel and culture. Berkhof notes the advantages with which Catholic theology begins over against Reformed theology, beginning as it does with the assumption of harmony between nature and grace, thanks to the synthesis worked out by Aquinas, whereas Reformed theology begins with the contrast between sin and grace. Aquinas, responding to the dominant influence of Aristotle brought to the west by Averrhoes, was carving out a place for the gospel in a world being shaped by the Aristotelian philosophy of nature.

Berkhof says that one might have hoped that once again such an effort might have been made over against modern thought in the wake of the Enlightenment but, he claims, such an expectation has not been realized largely because of the suspicion with which the dominant curial theology in Rome has viewed such attempts:

Fundamentally, the Roman hierarchy has continually sought, right into modern times, to rescue the validity of Thomistic thought, whereas thinkers it mistrusted wanted to make Thomas' intent and motive operational again under changed conditions and with new, hence with non-Aristotelian, categories. (p. 229f)

Having to fight their own hierarchy, Catholic theologians have been paralyzed in their struggle to engage modern thought, and the intramural battle has again and again been settled unilaterally in an authoritarian fashion. Nonetheless, Berkhof points to impressive achievements in Catholic theology.

Preceding his treatment of Rahner, Berkhof summarizes the significant efforts of Blondel and de Lubac to do again what Thomas did: that is, to hold together in a greater unity the duality of nature and grace. In their work one sees the advantage of Catholic theology with its assumption of harmony between nature and grace. These thinkers recognized that in the modern world Thomas' nature-grace continuum had resulted in a divorce of the two realms, leaving the whole development of nature to the secular sphere and thus to human autonomy. Writing at the time of Vatican II, de Lubac warned against "The dualist or, perhaps better, the separatist thesis:"

While wishing to protect the supernatural from any contamination, people had in fact exiled it altogether – both from intellectual and from social life – leaving the field free to be taken over by secularism. Today that secularism, following its course, is beginning to enter the minds even of Christians. They too seek to find a harmony with all things based upon an idea of nature which might be acceptable to a deist or an atheist: everything that comes from Christ, everything that should lead to him, is pushed so far into the background as to look like disappearing for good. The last word in Christian progress and the entry into adulthood would thus appear to consist in a total secularization which would expel God not merely from the life of society, but from culture and even from personal relationships. (cited from *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, pp. xi-xii on p. 239f)

The Catholic theologian that receives the fullest treatment by Berkhof is Karl Rahner who made the principle of transcendentality the basis of his theology, applying it across the full spectrum of dogmatics. Berkhof defines the approach thus:

The principle of subjectivity has for its counterpart that of transcendentality because "this subject is fundamentally and by its very nature pure openness for absolutely everything, for being as such." This experience is called *transcendental* experience because it belongs to the necessary and inalienable structures of the knowing subject itself, and because it consists precisely in the transcendence beyond any particular group of possible objects or of categories. Transcendental

experience is the experience of transcendence, in which experience the structure of the subject and therefore also the ultimate structure of every conceivable object of knowledge are present together and as identity. (Berkhof, p. 242 cites Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, p. 20)

Transcendence as “experience,” Berkhof indicates, derives not from Kant’s analysis of the knowing process, but from the phenomenology and the analysis of existence. Another citation from *Foundations* is helpful:

Whenever man in his transcendence experiences himself as questioning, as disquieted by the appearance of being, as open to something ineffable, he cannot understand himself as subject in the sense of an *absolute* subject, but only in the sense of one who receives being, ultimately only in the sense of grace. In this context “grace” means the freedom of the ground of being which gives being to man, a freedom which man experiences in his finiteness and contingency, and means as well what we call “grace” in a more strictly theological sense. (Rahner, *Ibid*, p. 34)

Has Rahner, in attempting to avoid the new-scholastic dualism of nature and grace, let nature pass into the realm of supernatural grace? This is Berkhof’s question. He finds Rahner denying that. Rather, he advocates “a sort of supernaturalization of what we call ‘nature’.”

For him creation and created human nature must be understood solely as the infrastructure of the grace-conditioned unity of the Creator and the created in the incarnation of God, and in the final goal of the beatific vision of God based on it. (p. 244)

Rahner denies the existence of “pure nature,” and the possibility of human existence as autonomous. Rahner contends:

Our actual nature is *never* ‘pure’ nature. It is a nature installed in a supernatural order which man can never leave, even as a sinner and unbeliever....And these ‘existentials’ of man’s concrete, ‘historical’ nature are not purely states of being beyond consciousness. They make themselves felt in the experience of man. By simple reflection on himself, in the light of natural reason, he cannot simply and clearly distinguish them from the natural spiritual activity which is the manifestation of his nature. (from “Nature and Grace” in *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 4, p. 183, cited on p. 245)

Berkhof’s discussion of Rahner’s complex thought continues but this is perhaps enough to enable us to hear Berkhof’s critique. He points to the continuing dichotomy of nature and grace that shines through the more modern existential language, a different dichotomy than one finds in Reformation theology, the dichotomy of sin and grace. Still, Berkhof notes, the liberal and mediating theologies of post-Enlightenment

Protestantism in their engagement with modern thought struggled to express the nature-grace relationship and came very close to the manner of Thomas Aquinas as he sought to express the gospel in a thought-world dominated by Aristotle. Berkhof writes,

Nature – in other words, the created structure of human existence – is for all of them the infrastructure which persists despite and in sin, an infrastructure on which the grace of revelation builds and without which it would be unintelligible. (p. 253)

For Berkhof Rahner's grand theological enterprise fails because he has subordinated the sin-and-grace dichotomy to the nature-and-grace dichotomy and the nature-and-grace relationship is, in Berkhof's view, all too harmoniously construed. He concludes,

As a result this grand theological project seems to overshoot the goal of a confrontation between the gospel and the modern world. For the (restricted) application of the notion of transcendentality we should – presumably – not go beyond the boundaries set by Blondel. (p. 255)

Berkhof concludes his journey with a visit to the American scene beginning with the theology of Jonathan Edwards and Horace Bushnell, then the Social Gospel movement and the work of Walter Rauschenbusch, and finally a treatment of the Niebuhrs, thinkers for whom he has high regard. He reserves a chapter for a treatment of Paul Tillich.

Tillich's method of correlation, the gospel as the answer to the human question, is precisely the focus that Berkhof has kept through his journey of 200 years. Tillich's life and vocation began in Germany. His war experiences destroyed the idealistic foundation of his thought. A man of great giftedness and broad interest, he was engaged with the full spectrum of cultural experience. Fleeing the Nazi plague, he came to this country to continue his long and fruitful career. Berkhof notes that, as a thinker and a Christian, Tillich had always lived and thought in the context of the polarity between question and answer. This formed the foundation of his mature theology and, consequently, he became for many "the bridge builder between their personal problems and the gospel." His method was correlation. Tillich described it thus:

The method used in the theological system and described in the methodological introduction of the first volume is called the "method of correlation," namely, the correlation between existential questions and theological answers. "Correlation," a word with several meanings in scientific language, is understood as "interdependence of two independent factors." It is not understood in the logical sense of quantitative or qualitative coordination of elements without causal relation, but it is understood as a unity of the dependence and independence of two factors. (*Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2, American edition, p. 13, cited in Berkhof, p. 289)

Berkhof raises the question whether then God in self-revelation is dependent on the human subject. He gives Tillich's response that in God's self-manifestation God is dependent on the way the human person receives that manifestation. As Brunner declared the divine-human encounter means something for both sides. For theology this means:

Theology formulates the question implied in human existence, and theology formulates the answers implied in the divine self-manifestation under the guidance of the questions implied in human existence. (*Ibid*, Vol. 1, p.61, cited in Berkhof, p. 290)

Berkhof discusses the method explaining Tillich's contention that to raise the question belongs to the essence of human existence. Tillich favors the word "quest" rather than question. The quest is present whether or not it comes to expression; it is fundamentally singular and it rises out of the depths expressing one's "ultimate concern." Out of the human depths, the quest arises out of the human predicament, the experience of self-alienation, dread, brokenness, despair. It represents a search for integration, harmony, reunion with the true self. It is philosophy's task to take account of all of this and to render a right analysis of human existence. Every human being, Christian or not, must be able to fathom life's final questions and, doing so, will be confronted with the gap in human existence, a gap which cannot be bridged. One discovers a question without an answer.

The description of Tillich's thought sounds like a re-run of Heidegger's Existentialist analysis of the human situation but, as Berkhof indicates, what distinguishes Tillich is the ontological framework of his thought – a shift also apparent in the later Heidegger.

Tillich's interest in the human quest is its theological value. He acknowledges that his analysis of the human situation derives from his historical context; the quest will differ according to the epoch. For the Church Fathers it was the quest for immortality; for the Reformation it was the quest for the justification of the sinner. Whatever the historical period and the quest, Tillich contends however that all the ultimate questions circle around the opposition between "finite" and "infinite," "human existence" and "absolute being." This is the quest that comes to expression in modern existentialism. The respective epochs of human history will have variously shaped quests but they will all be fundamentally oriented to the relationship between existence and essence.

The answer does not lie within the question; it comes from without. The human subject is the question; God in self-manifestation is the answer, an answer not at human disposal.

The two poles, question and answer, form an ellipse, the image of Tillich's system. Philosophy, in an attitude of objectivity, is concerned with the question; theology is existentially involved in the answer.

The center of Tillich's theology is the paradox that universal being manifests itself in a historical person. The unity of the absolute and the finite, foolishness to philosophy, is the great miracle in which light we live and think.

Berkhof notes that Tillich presented his doctrine of faith as "answering theology" in contrast to Barth's "theology of proclamation." He also spoke of his work as "apologetic" theology as against Barth's "kerygmatic" theology – helpful contrasts by which to gain a feel for these two giants. And Berkhof points to Tillich's popularity in the fifties and sixties in a theological world sighing under "the burden of Barth's rigorous theology of the Word." The alternative Tillich offers appears simple and convincing. But on closer scrutiny questions arise.

Did Tillich correctly understand man's existential quest (if we may speak of it in such general terms)? Is not giving answers as essential to human beings as asking questions? (p. 295)

Berkhof doubts if human self-understanding can be captured in the word quest. Tillich struggles to give logical explanations of his correlation scheme but, Berkhof points out, he operates within a circle and intentionally so.

Immediately at the outset of his prolegomena he introduced the concept of the theological circle. Like all humanities, theology is based on "mystical experience" and rests therefore on a "mystical *a priori*." Besides, it works with the norm of the Christian message, and so its circle is narrower than that of the philosophy of religion. (p. 296)

Tillich sought to narrow the gap between philosophy and theology, having admitted the circle, by claiming that modern philosophy bears a Christian stamp. Berkhof quotes him accordingly:

In this sense [in the sense of a philosophy 'whose existential base is historical Christianity'] all modern philosophy is Christian, even if it is humanistic, atheistic, and intentionally anti-Christian. (1:27)

And again:

The modern vision of reality and its philosophical analysis is different from that of pre-Christian times, whether one is or is not existentially determined by the God of Mount Zion and the Christ of Mount Golgotha. (1:27, cited in Berkhof, p. 296)

The marks of the Christian tradition simply cannot be erased from the face of modern thought. Berkhof renders his conclusion regarding Tillich's system thus:

...in Tillich the answer shapes the question – as a rule by selection from given materials. Only the person who already knows the answer knows wherein the

true question consists: the question from within his anxiety, estrangement, and guilt (fundamentally Tillich's anthropology is reformationally pessimistic) is for healing, salvation, and reconciliation and therein for the meaning of life and the courage to be. But can one view this question as a universally human question (since after all modern existentialism is a post-Christian phenomenon)? (p. 296)

Tillich himself realized that the claim to universal validity could be called in question as he himself reflected on modern culture and Asiatic religions. But Tillich concluded that

...nevertheless we must hold before all these groups the "mirror" of human misery, show them "the structures of anxiety, of conflict, of guilt," because these structures mirror what we are, and if we are right, they are in other people also, and they will concur with our analysis.

Whether we are successful is in question; we take the risk. In this regard Tillich turns to pedagogy:

There are two principles we should follow in the religious education of our children. The first is that the questions which are really in the hearts of the children should be answered and the children should be shown that biblical symbols and the Christian message are an answer to just these questions. And secondly, we ought to seek to shape their existence in the direction of the questions which we believe are the more universal ones. This would be similar to what we do with primitive people in the mission field. We seek to answer *their* questions and in doing so we, at the same time, slowly transform their existence so that they come to ask the questions to which the Christian message gives the answer. (*Theology of Culture*, pp. 202-3, 205-6, cited on p. 297)

Has Tillich offered an alternative to Kerygmatic theology? This is the question Berkhof's interest raises. Whatever one may say, Berkhof argues, the gap between Tillich and Barth is much narrower than either suspected at the time. Referring back to Schleiermacher, Berkhof writes,

As in Schleiermacher, so in Tillich, human self-understanding is not identical with the question to which revelation gives an answer; it is only the "place" (Schleiermacher) at which man finds himself and at which the gospel "calls" him. Nevertheless, like Schleiermacher and differently than Barth, Tillich avoids – as long as possible – presenting the transition to faith in the God-given answer-and-question as a break with the presupposed human understanding of existence. God is at work everywhere, and hence there is a "latent Christianity" everywhere, which can, however, only be discovered in the light of Christ. Barth also asserts that the creation is "the external ground of the covenant" and that there are therefore many "lights of the world"; indeed, Jesus Christ, precisely in his exclusiveness, is universally inclusive. While Tillich would say that the right question is selected from the given situation in the light of the gospel, Barth would say that the gospel itself first creates in man the question appropriate to it.

In Tillich the classic doctrine of “common grace” regains the place it had lost in Barth. (p. 297f)

Berkhof’s critical question put to Tillich’s method is whether the answer of the gospel does not remain in the grip of a non-evangelical formulation of the question and therefore suffer distortion. Berkhof must conclude that it is impossible to view Tillich’s theology as a genuine bridge between the gospel and modernity, but this conclusion, he maintains, does not diminish the significance of this great theologian.

Berkhof’s journey is concluded but he pauses to take a backward glance over the way he traveled. He begins his review with the question “What really happened?” He acknowledges that the reader may have experienced confusion; yet, one need not despair for, contrary to what many theologians – and the evangelical church tradition – generally maintain, theology is not a heavenly enterprise but a form of human scholarly quest involving trial and error. Theology is not like the natural sciences where progress is possible, one generation building on another (although Thomas Kuhn has called that in question even in the physical sciences). Rather, in theology and the humanities in general, there is not progress; rather,

Here one ...moves continuously in a circle around one’s object, ever and again viewing it from a different angle – and the angle changes with the experiences and predicaments of every given cultural epoch.... We are talking about a search, a questioning, an encounter, an interaction. Here neither subjectivism nor objectivism but inter-subjectivity is, in many cases, the highest obtainable measure of objectivity. (p. 299f)

For theological method, this means that systematic-theological conceptions are the ways in which the Christian community gives an account of the gospel as its source and norm. The Western world out of which Berkhof speaks and in which his journey was taken is a culture estranged from the gospel and that is the challenge to the church – to bring the gospel to expression in such a fashion that it might again become a vital option. Theology serves an intermediary function interrogating the gospel from within its experiences within the culture. The theologian stands not outside, but within the culture, sharing consciously or unconsciously its experiences and presuppositions. The theologian stands between the gospel as a normative word and concrete human experience. He or she is in an encounter situation, more existential than in the other humanities because of the ultimacy of the issues involved.

The best theologian is not the person who knows how to escape the dangers inherent in this process of encounter, for such people do not exist; the best theologian is the person who is most aware of these dangers and hence practices modesty and caution in what he says. (p. 300)

Commenting on the modern culture, Berkhof holds that the presuppositions given with the Enlightenment have remained essentially intact: the autonomy of the human

person, the objectivizing and manipulating of nature, and the marginalizing of God. But experience has been varied:

Great technical achievements, wars, revolutions, environmental exhaustion, etc., can change people's views and conduct and force them to modify (not, however, to abandon) the presuppositions. The theologian will sense all this and in his feedback situation and mediating activity question the gospel from changing points of view. (p. 301)

As Berkhof has indicated throughout the journey, this has been the case: Schleiermacher within the perspective of German idealism; Ritschl in the light of the realism of the technical-industrial world; Barth in the collapsing German culture after World War I. The situation in which theological formulation comes to expression is dynamic, calling forth different nuances and emphases at different times – not surrendering the gospel to the spirit of the times – but speaking in timely fashion the judgment and grace that the gospel offers.

Theology appears chaotic and many theologians have given it a bad name by condemning the thinkers of the preceding generation for interpreting the gospel falsely. But, queries Berkhof,

...was the interpretation of the previous generation really false? And did the succeeding generation then do it right? Against their better knowledge many theologians still seem to proceed from a static, unhistorical, freely available "truth" and to believe that it is most safe within their keeping....In contrast my journey has taught me that the basic concerns and aims of the several schools, modalities, and generations have much more in common than concentration on the larger and smaller differences...would ever lead one to suspect....For me as an observer the journey has been an exercise in tolerance. (p. 301)

So that's what happened. Was it legitimate? That is Berkhof's next question. The great degree of commonality discovered among the respective theological schools does not lead Berkhof to a kind of relativistic mix without distinctions. There is room for mutual criticism and correction – a function he himself has executed with brilliance. The most fundamental question to be raised is the question with which he opened this study: Is an understanding possible between the gospel and the presuppositions of our modern culture? Modern culture's presuppositions are described in the Old and New Testaments as sinful. Is the effort to relate these two worlds a hopeless enterprise?

No. Central to both worlds is the human person and salvation. Human revolt is not a modern phenomenon; it is recorded as early as Genesis 3 and finds expression throughout the biblical story.

Now the man who breaks his ties with God because he respects his salvation is there when God is not is nevertheless not abandoned by God,....God pursues this wayward human being with his judgment and grace. And judgment stands in the service of grace. Though man wants to live without God, God does not want to

live without man, and therefore man is never God-less....Whatever may have motivated the theologian not to take the godlessness of modern man with total seriousness – in the light of the gospel this attitude must at least in part be regarded as legitimate. (p. 302)

The task, to be legitimate however, must involve both dialogue and dispute. The gap may not be patched over; rather it must be uncovered in order that it may be bridged. Berkhof points to Paul as a model of one who was in solidarity with his culture because of a greater solidarity with the gospel: “I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessing.” In I Corinthians 9:19-23 solidarity with Paul’s world is stressed. In I Corinthians 1:18-31 however, the break with his culture comes to expression. The message is a stumbling block and foolishness but is nonetheless proclaimed as God’s power of salvation. Paul in Athens, Berkhof contends, was right on, illustrating “the double solidarity, the mutual contradiction, and the conflict.”

From this evidence one can infer that the relationship between the gospel and the world is dialectical, ever swinging back and forth between yes and no. The question concerning legitimacy can thus be answered with the observation that everyone is justified in his theological methodology provided that when he says yes or no he bears in mind the counterpart and brings it to his audience in one way or another. (p. 304)

Berkhof explicates the key word dialectic by continuing with Paul. In Philippians 3:4b-14, the autobiographical paragraph relating Paul’s movement from his Jewish experience to his experience of Christ, Berkhof points out a perspective not often appreciated. Paul, the Jew, was on the way. He was not pointing to that experience as a time of darkness and despair. Rather he speaks of his experience of Christ as so much more. The encounter with Christ brought him into crisis. He then moved from the crisis into Christian existence. There was continuity and break.

Speaking of the theologians he has surveyed in this journey of two hundred years, Berkhof says, they were determined from the beginning to be Christian, but they wanted also to be modern people.

On that basis they want to start their intellectual journey, traveling in the direction of the gospel. What unites the beginning and the end of the journey is the time of man and his salvation. In the course of that journey it has to become apparent sooner or later, however, that the road is not at all as innocuous as it seemed in the beginning. The wanderer is thrown off course. He experiences the transvaluation of his values. Gain becomes loss and what he prided himself on turn to “refuse.” But the crisis does not mean the end of the road. After the crisis there awaits him a road that does not end within our world and time, one on which large differences of opinion can and do arise among travel companions, on which all sorts of lapses and aberrations are possible. (p. 305f)

That says Berkhof is the journey that has been going on now for nearly two thousand years. On the journey everyone must travel by himself. This road is itself the Truth.

One does not “stand” in the Truth but “walks” in it on the way toward the goal that is not attainable this side of eternity. (p. 306)

Berkhof does not want to be understood in an individualistic fashion. There is a broad community with intensive interchange. There is the swing of the pendulum as the way develops.

...The Spirit finds theological reflection where it is initially at home, however “carnal” that home may be. The Spirit then leads us toward a crisis in our thinking. After the crisis our thought has to and is allowed to proceed under the guidance of the motto “I believe in order that I may understand.” However, just as our thinking *before* the crisis is threatened by an uncritical modernity, so *after* the crisis there is the danger of scholastic sterility. The gospel is the great non-self-evident factum which is ever threatened by betrayal on our theological journey. (p. 306f)

Berkhof then relates the question of legitimacy to the key word “dialectical.”

I now venture to say: the measure of legitimacy belonging to a given theological method or system corresponds to the measure in which it is involved in the double movement toward crisis and away from crisis. (p. 307)

Over the two hundred years, Berkhof observes, we have seen liberal theologians who in their movement toward the gospel stopped short of the crisis and we have seen, too, orthodox theologians who detached the gospel from the arena of struggle, thinking mistakenly they could begin the process of thinking beyond the crisis. The greatest theologian is one who consistently “plumbed and pondered the double movement: the one toward the crisis and the one following the crisis.” Paul remains for Berkhof the model. In the last two hundred years Berkhof points to Schleiermacher and Barth. Both were one-sided on opposite sides; yet the crisis was evident in both. Berkhof raises the question whether a person can ever think on some level beyond such one-sidedness. That for him is a major question. What one gains in comprehensiveness one loses in power.

A third question in this backward glance is “Did it mean anything?” Berkhof uses “mean” in the sense of succeed – was the goal achieved? His answer is in the negative. With certain exceptions “secularized culture manifested polite indifference if not outright intolerance.” Orthodox theologians have been no more successful. Being regarded as they were, outsiders, some were respected for that but considered even less credible than their liberal colleagues.

But Berkhof qualifies his negative response. Outside not much impact was made, but within the churches the work done has been crucial, enabling many brought up within the church to remain within it or to return to it.

They have been useful, if not for the penetration of the light of the gospel, then for the presence of the gospel in the intellectual world. (p. 309)

The efforts of theologians have thus been more successful in conserving the faith than recruiting people from outside.

Berkhof concludes this retrospective with a final question: “Now what?” Today, Berkhof claims, theology on a world scale appears more confusing than ever. But actually this has a positive side because there is a broad and diverse interest in theological reflection.

Everywhere large groups are joyfully discovering that they themselves, each in their own uniqueness, are known and called of God. In all these new theologies the word *experience* serves as a point of entry.... In the 1970s one often had the feeling that in the multiplicity of experiences and the demand of “contextuality” arising from them, the oneness of the object, the universal cause of the gospel, threatened to disappear from sight and that only a tower of Babel was left. (p. 310)

Such was not the case, however, Berkhof contends, for even academic theology in the West operates out of its own *sitz im Leben*.

The real difference lies in the cultural, social, and political climate from within which people are trying to discover the gospel and to which people want to communicate it.

The recent plurality of theologies can be explained by younger theologians beginning their journey from within their own experiences (blacks, women, liberation theologians, etc.). But Berkhof argues,

...they must sooner or later push their own experiences toward the crisis of the gospel and walk a road on which they do not harden into an ideology but let their experiences be criticized, corrected, deepened by the crucified and risen Lord, and placed in *his* context. (p. 311)

Does two hundred years of theology in the West, which coincides with the heyday of Western bourgeois culture, constitute an epoch on its last legs? Berkhof thinks not. The issues of struggle for this post-Enlightenment period are to be found in the biblical record as well and non-Western theologies display the same experience-revelation tension that has characterized Western theology. However, Western theology will lose its predominance; it will die in its Western-ness in order to rise again in globalism and pluralism will be more extensive.

The process is ongoing – taking the road that leads into crisis of revelation and emerging from the crisis able to incorporate our experiences into a new experience.

We must again and again start within our respective contextualities in order then to fuse our context increasingly with the context of the gospel, in a way such that the message gains superiority over all that which emerges from our situational analyses.... Everyone who spends so much time in the *praeambula fidei*, be it of a sociological, linguistic, philosophical, or political nature, is in danger of losing the chance to enrich his *Umwelt* with the great and new experience of the Word of God. (p. 312)