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6. JESUS — MAN AND (ALSO?) GOD

It is immediately clear that the above title is not the usual way in which the confession concerning Jesus Christ is stated. Two considerations prompted this formulation. On the one hand, it is derived from the already often mentioned interview of Niek Scheps with Berkhof (*Kerknieuws*, January 9, 1981:2) where in reply to the question: “Do you regard Christ also as God?” Berkhof answered: “Yes, but then one needs to place the emphasis on that little word *also*”.¹ On the other hand, the formulation of the title is an attempt to convey from the outset where the emphasis in Berkhof’s Christology lies; what his attempt at mediation between the ‘contra-elements’ in Christ — *vere deus et vere homo* — involves; and how his reinterpretation or reconstruction of the *doctrina de Christo* differs from traditional Christology. Whether this formulation is correct and does justice to Berkhof’s view and intention, will have to be established by tracing and following his line of thought concerning Jesus.

6.1 Continuity in discontinuity

Berkhof’s Christology is probably the most controversial and widely criticized aspect of his theology. One has only to review the number of articles which appeared soon after the publication of his *Christelijk geloof* to appreciate this fact.² E.P. Meijering, a former student and later junior colleague of Berkhof at the University of Leiden, but moreover a close acquaintance for the greater part of forty years until Berkhof’s passing, mildly echoes this sentiment when he states: “His views concerning God’s defenceless superior power, God’s changeable faithfulness, and concerning the Trinitarian and Christological dogmas remain extremely strange to me”³ (1997:8). Indeed, there are Dutch theologians who are convinced that, as regards his theology in

¹ Dutch: *Beschouwt u Hem (Christus — JPG) ook als God? Ja, maar dan moet je wel de nadruk leggen op het woordje ook.*

² See among others the articles of G. de Ru: Wat dunkt U van de Christus?, and A. Geense: De plaats van de christologie in ‘Christelijk Geloof’ van H. Berkhof, in: *Kerk en Theologie*, 26, 1975, 289-314. Also the series of articles by G.C. Berkouwer in: *Gereformeerd Weekblad*, 23 January – 19 March 1976; C. Graafland: Nieuwe bezinning op het Christelijk Geloof, in: *Theologia Reformata* 17, 1974, 86-105, and his Enkele aspecten van de christelijke geloofsleer bij dr. H. Berkhof, in: *Theologia Reformata* 19, 1976, 37-55. Cf. also Graafland’s article: Berkhof’s Theologie in het licht van de Gereformeerde Traditie, in: E.Flesseman-van Leer et al. *Weerwoord, reacties op dr. H. Berkhof’s Christelijk Geloof*. 1974, 44-54. Also L. Bakker. Twee vragen aan Berkhof, in: *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 14, 1974, 266-285.

³ Dutch: “Zijn beschouwingen over Gods weerloze overmacht, Gods veranderbare trouw, en die over het trinitarische en christologische dogma blijven voor mij erg vreemd.”

general, and his Christology in particular, Berkhof at some stage or another switched track — from a more or less formal though not uncritical adherence in principle to the traditional reformed view, to a far greater and clearly liberal stance. Thus M. de Jonge recalls Berkhof's concern as rector of the Seminary of the Netherlands Reformed Church at Driebergen (1950 -1960) that the reflection on doctrine and preparation for the ministry should continue in accordance with Scripture. In fact, he states, it remained characteristic of Berkhof to question Bible exegetes in order to ensure that *in dogmaticis* he proceeded on the right track (1974: 116). Klaas Runia, on the other hand, in his book *The present-day Christological debate*, does not hesitate to classify Berkhof among those Protestant theologians who have abandoned the Confession of Chalcedon (1984:66-77). According to J.T. Bakker, Berkhof's *Christelijk geloof* could be a fine test case for the freedom of movement in theology in the Netherlands (1976:143). This, of course, raises the question to which Meijering refers when he mentions how with the passing of time he witnessed changes in Berkhof's views: to what extent can one speak of continuity and discontinuity in Berkhof's thinking? Meijering points out, however, that pinpointing the where and when of the upshift in Berkhof's point of view, or at least in the expression of his point of view, remains an intriguing undertaking. For though Berkhof was averse to extremes, especially to a floundering back and forth between extremes, it is true to his spirit to encounter both continuity and discontinuity in his work. Nevertheless, according to Meijering, until the middle of the nineteen-sixties Berkhof met with approval from those who theologically stood to his right and who formed the majority in the church. Thereafter, however, he appealed more to all the theologians and intellectuals who stood to his left (Meijering 1997: 8, 11). It comes to mind that W. H. Velema once remarked in conversation (Dec.1984), that in his opinion Berkhof changed track after the publication in 1960 of his book *De mens onderweg* (Eng.: *Man en route*). Meijering concurs in that he too mentions this work as a turning point. There, he states, Berkhof was still in agreement with the Christological dogma, while later in *Christelijk geloof*, where one recognizes much of his previous publications, one becomes aware that he speaks a different language (Meijering 1997: 152, 130).

Berkhof himself indicated how since the autumn of 1965 and especially after writing his *Openbaring als gebeuren* (published in 1970 in the compilation *Geloven in God*), he had changed. Not only did the change involve a different style of writing, which he described as more open and free, less assertive, yet always linked with the language of experience, but also a change in his way of thinking. It was the time when, as he put it, theologians began thinking ‘from below’, in conformity with the trend towards empiricism which was then taking place throughout Western culture. In this climate he wrote his *Christelijk geloof* (1973a), in which, he states, he finally discovered, after a search of many years, a way of giving expression to his view on Christology which was very clear to him, but was much contradicted by others and gave rise to disagreement (Berkhof 1981g:18, 19; M. Bauman 1990: 69). Berkhof believed in the changefulness and changeability of man (Meijering 1997: 8). He also did not believe in what he terms a consistent truth which only had to be passed along. Indeed, it was his conviction that the Holy Spirit has placed us in a critical and liberating to and fro between situation and gospel, that theology goes its way, that there is only a *theologia viatorum* (a theology of wayfarers), that in fact theology itself is the way (Berkhof 1981g:21).

While Berkhof always considered himself a Protestant of Reformed origin (Berkhof 1982: 8), he identified himself with a small, but growing group of theologians who no longer felt themselves bound to what was deemed the traditional interpretation of the Christian faith (Berkhof 1981h: 67). Indeed, he was of the opinion that liberal theologians, in virtue of their liberalism, accomplish much more than their orthodox colleagues who are more concerned with the exposition of the given content of Scripture or the treasures of tradition (Berkhof 1989: xiv). Like so many after World War II, he too, wished to overcome what was considered the sterile contrast between orthodoxy and liberalism, not by ignoring the differences between these theological positions, for that is a sign of spiritual laziness and even recklessness and would not bridge the gap between them, but by sharply analyzing them to discover their truth element and relativizing them in the light of the Truth which is Christ (Meijering 1997: 8). In this regard Berkhof frequently quoted what he called the lovely expression of Chantepie de la Saussaye Sr.: “take away from the error its truth, and you take away its power” (Berkhof 1976b: 71). Nevertheless, Berkhof was very much aware that the semblance of heresy could easily appear when someone focused on unre-

solved or avoided problems which threatened the established doctrinal tradition. In an interview with Michael Bauman, Berkhof significantly remarked: “Some people say to me, ‘Hendrikus, you are a remarkable fellow. In every book you develop some new heresy!’” To which he adds: “By being a bridge builder and by tying together things that have been unconnected, I have perhaps not been keen enough to the dangers of theological error. Because of my ecumenical inclinations I can too easily fall into heresy” (Bauman 1990: 69, 74). Fortunately, he points out, today we are more careful of labelling someone as a heretic. In our pluralistic age, he states, ‘heretic’ has become a name of honour rather than a word of abuse. We tend to forget that a person may be swept along by various experiences to such an extent, that his personal faith and his theology touch the nerve of the tradition of faith. The question is, however, who is qualified to determine this or to reprimand the errant. We do not believe in the authoritative utterances of popes, bishops, or synods anymore (Berkhof 1982: 27). Remarkably enough, Berkhof states, our word ‘heresy’ comes from the Greek *αἵρεσις*, which means ‘choice’ (Berkhof 1976b: 65). Berkhof has indeed made some radical choices — none the least in his Christology.

From the above it may seem that the fact of discontinuity in his thought has been established without doubt. Yet, the question as to the extent of the discontinuity still remains. Or, to put it somewhat differently: is there continuity in his discontinuity? Or more precisely, was the discontinuity perhaps latently present all the time, only to surface later specifically? While Berkhof was convinced that the history of the early Church was as important, if not more so, than the history of the Reformation (Berkhof 1946:10), it seems that he always had reservations concerning the decisions taken by the so-called ecumenical councils of the 4th and 5th centuries. Although this sentiment is not stated *expressis verbis*, traces of it are discernable in the way in which he portrays the events at these councils in his early works.⁴ Interwoven between statements, in true Reformed orthodox style, attributing the outcome of Nicaea to the guidance of the Holy Spirit who time and again calls the church back from false doctrine to obedience to the Word, there is a rather negative evaluation of the Nicene formulation, *homo-ousios* (that Christ is of the same being or substance as the Father). Berkhof describes it as a vague, suspect, empty, deliberately incomprehensible, and multi-interpretable formulation, which many did not comprehend, and no one

⁴ Cf. his *De gezagsgrond van het oecumenisch dogma* (1937); *Geschiedenis der Kerk* (1942); and *De Kerk en de Keizer* (1946).

desired, but in which everyone could recover his own ideas, and which was therefore more or less acceptable to all. Indeed, it was a formulation which, amidst the power-struggle of the vying bishops and patriarchs, and the religious policy of Constantine, served to lull the church. At the same time, however, it stifled the quest for the truth — all for the sake of political unity in the Empire (Berkhof 1942: 70, 71; 1937: 155; and 1946: 57).

In similar vein Berkhof treats of the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD). Here, too, the Chalcedonian Definition (that Christ is one Person with two natures — divine and human — and that these two natures are without confusion, without change, without division, without separation) is surrounded by statements in dialectic tension. On the one hand this greatest of the councils of the ancient church is portrayed as succumbing to imperial pressure and its decision depicted as not what could be called ecclesiastically legal. Yet, on the other hand, the Lord once again provided, despite the human confusion and the wrong intentions, that what His church needed was achieved — the protection of the mystery of the incarnation of the Word against every interpretation which could only lead to hybridization and violation. The mystery, however, remained unresolved. The truth was like a narrow pathway between two ravines. Chalcedon never ended the strife. It only admitted and formulated the insolubility of the mystery (Berkhof 1942:74-77). While Berkhof's criticism of the Chalcedonense is not as harsh as that of the Nicene formulation, he leaves no doubt as to its inadequacy. For the biblical motif, he states, was hidden under and connected to much that was human — all too human (Berkhof 1937: 162).

In the light of the above, it seems quite feasible to conclude that the discontinuity in Berkhof's theology c.q. Christology — in the sense of critical reservation regarding traditional orthodox doctrine — had a longer history than is usually thought. What Berkhof said of other theologians in his review, *Een kwarteeuw theologie*, is without doubt equally true of himself: that it was not a matter of 'trimming their sails to the wind', but rather of a realization of their own train of thought for which, in the previously prevailing climate, they did not have the thought forms at their disposal (1975a:163). Clearly, this was the case with Berkhof too, as is confirmed by his statement quoted above, that while writing *Christelijke geloof* he discovered, after a search of many years, a way of giving expression to his view on Christology. That

way, strangely enough, was *via*, among others, the concept of ‘covenant’, which, as *terminus technicus* in dogmatics, he previously considered to be exegetically and dogmatically precarious! (*Vide* my chapter 2, pp.30-31 where his change of mind was discussed). Berkhof’s discontinuity reveals a remarkable continuity!

According to Berkhof, when the Christian Church became an established entity, it tried to avoid the implications of its confession — conflict and persecution. To the same extent its confession of Jesus as God and Saviour lost its power and became merely a correct doctrinal statement. By saying that however, Berkhof does not mean to deny the relevance of such statements as orientation-points for our belief and as an inspiration for our action and passion. On the contrary, he emphasizes that we need such statements to become aware of the adventure and risk in which we involve ourselves, when we opt for faith in Christ. That is why the early church fought such a long and bitter fight in order to find an adequate Christology. It heard Jesus ask: Who do Hellenistic men say that I am? At Chalcedon it formulated its answer: You are truly God and truly man, two natures in one Person. This answer was so straightforward and impressive, that it has defied the ages and still is the official Christological confession of the majority of the Christian churches. “However,” Berkhof states, “I wonder whether this is a sound enough situation. Christ asks us: But who do you, Christians of the 20th century in a secularized Europe, say that I am? We cannot refer back to the answer of our Hellenistic ancestors. We live in a different world. Their answer cannot be our answer... Their answer is only relevant in a philosophical climate which is characterized by concentrating on the concept of ‘substance’... For us the expression (one person consisting in two natures) is hardly meaningful, because it omits what we think is primarily relevant: Christ’s work for us. Our thinking is not expressed in terms of substance but of function. A substance without function and effect upon our existence would be completely irrelevant to us. The Chalcedonian answer cannot satisfy us, because of its dualistic character. How can we conceive of Christ as composed of two mutually excluding realities, divine and human? What then is the nature of the one person? That question was not answered in Chalcedon... and this is the decisive question for us, because Christ as our Saviour is ‘the one mediator between God and men’” (Berkhof 1973c: 300-301).

Jesus did not offer a Christology, Berkhof states. He offered himself, and He invites us to seek the name by which we can confess what He means to us (Berkhof 1973c: 298). Our task now is to determine by what name Berkhof confesses what Christ means to him.

6.2 Israel — the approach from behind

Berkhof emphasizes that we cannot understand Christ unless we also understand God's way, his centuries-long association with Israel as the Old Testament describes it, regardless whether Christ is the continuation or the radical turning-point, the fulfilment or the end of that way. There is an intrinsic connection between Christ and the Old Testament. His significance depends on the experiences and results of that preceding way. God pursues a unique course through history and the appearance of Jesus Christ was not an isolated epiphany, but a decisive phase on a way which had begun ages ago, a way which took the shape of an electing, guiding, judging, and saving concern with one special people. Indeed, the assumption of the entire New Testament is that the way of Israel and that of Jesus Christ are together the *one* way of the *one* God (Berkhof 1985⁵: 221, 222). In the context of Christology, Berkhof calls this the approach *from behind* (265).

Berkhof's Christology is therefore preceded by an exposition of his view concerning Israel — a theme, he states, which has often been misappreciated and neglected in the Christian faith due to an *un-historical vertical Trinitarian mode of thinking*. What is over-looked, is that there are not only vertical incursions from eternity, as though after a period of divine inactivity Jesus drops out of heaven, but there is also a horizontal course of God with us through time which is of great theological importance. "We must break radically, also methodologically, with a mode of thinking that approaches Christ apart from Israel, for the result is almost always that he is put in (ethical, idealistic, existentialistic, futuristic, revolutionary, etc.) frameworks that are familiar to us, but which do not fit him" (252). Berkhof's main concern is thus not with the Old Testament as a book, although he constantly refers to it, but with the faith and the history of the people of Israel to which this book bears witness (221), and how this relates to Christ. Thus, to get a grip on his Christology, we must first follow his thinking concerning Israel.

In his Berkelbach-Lectures, *Herinnering en verantwoording*, Berkhof emphasized that his is “an outspoken Israel theology” (Berkhof 1976b: 74)⁵, even going so far as to make the effective power of Christ’s resurrection in history dependent on the eventual salvation and restitution of Israel both spiritually and geographically. As he put it in his *Christ the meaning of history*: “In the victory over the great scandal in history — Israel’s disobedience — the power of the resurrection will become evident or it will not become evident at all. The faithfulness and sovereignty of God are at stake” (Berkhof E.T.1979a:134, 135). To which Herman Ridderbos commented that Berkhof should be more sparing in his use of words (1958b: 98). While I mention this in passing, it is not without significance.

In Berkhof’s view, the Old Testament can no longer be read as a book of messianic ‘predictions’ or ‘basic Christological truths’, as the authors of the New Testament did, and the Christian Church in imitation often does. Such interpretations were based on the exegetical and hermeneutical methods (of allegory and typology) of their own time and generation and cannot simply be taken over. However, in his view, these interpretations serve as an invitation to following generations to seek the connection between Christ and the way of Israel using contemporary methods of exegesis. For us, after the Reformation, and especially after the Enlightenment, this means to begin with the Old Testament itself and ask in the first place what the Old Testament writers themselves mean with what they say. Faith in Christ is not thereby set aside, for He was God’s next and decisive step as a continuation of the way He had gone before with Israel. Indeed, “Christ is both *Lesevrucht* and *Leseprinzip*, the ‘result’ and the ‘principle’ of our reading of the Old Testament. He is both in this sequence” (Berkhof 1985⁵: 225, 226).

Israel’s religious history, however, is much broader than what is depicted of it in the Old Testament. The latter is rather an elucidation of this history from the perspective of the radical faith in Yahweh, the one imageless God, introduced by Moses, preached by the prophets, and which persisted against all opposition. For Berkhof “the

⁵ English: Recollection and Accountability. *Vide* also his *De Messias Jezus, Israël en de kerk*, in: *Wending* 5, 1950-1951, 393-404; *Christus de zin der geschiedenis*, 1958; *Hoe leest het Nieuwe Testament het Oude?*, in: *Homiletica en Biblica*, I in 22, 1963, 241-245; II in 23, 1964, 1-6; III in 23, 1964, 25-29; *Om het verbond*, *Miniaturen* 3, 1966; and *Hermeneutiek van het Oude Testament*, in: *Postille 1971-1972*, 7-21; *Israel as a theological problem in the Christian Church*, in: *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 6, 1969, 329-347.

way of Israel” comprises the struggle of this original Mosaic-prophetic faith in Yahweh with idolatry, the traditional powers of naturalism and nationalism, and its victory which took shape in the formation of the canon, in which Israel contrary to its natural religious impulses once and for all recognized and established the norm for its religious beliefs and life. The Old Testament canon itself is therefore a decisive element in the way of Israel since its three-fold division — law-prophets-writings — gives a recognizable structure to and a clear indication of the direction of the way of Israel (227-229).

The law (*Torah*), Berkhof states, is the story of God’s gracious coming to Israel in deliverance and law-giving, and in the establishment of the covenant, to which the people as a whole and the individual must respond. Through all of Israel’s history runs the awareness that she was covenantally related to God. Though there is more to the encounter between God and Israel than can be expressed in the term *covenant*, nevertheless, the picture of a covenant obtained and held a dominant place. Indeed, *covenant* and *history* are so much its two integral constituents, that Israel’s way can be summarized as covenant history. It concerns a covenant which makes history in realization, failure, and expectation; and it concerns a history which lives from a constant accompaniment which exceeds human powers to make history. The core and common denominator of Israel’s way may rightly be expressed in the often recurring statement: “I will be your God, and you shall be my people” (229).

According to Berkhof, *the covenant is unilateral in origin*. In His grace and free favour God takes the initiative, and in an act of election turns to a group of nomadic tribes (‘I will be your God’), and makes them Israel. Thus, the covenant is primarily *a promise of God’s deliverance and protection*. It points — backward and forward — to deliverances on the basis of which Israel is invited to trust in the promise. As divine pledge, *the covenant is always (also) directed to the future*. God guarantees that in the future He will repeatedly show the same grace and great power as He has done thus far, and some day will definitely have the final word for the benefit of His people. While the concentration is on Israel, the covenant has *a universal purpose*. The God of the covenant is at the same time the God of the whole world. It will be seen that Yahweh’s special concern with Israel also served the purpose of eventually including all people in His redemptive work. However, that grand perspective, Berk-

hof points out, was visible only sporadically and at certain peaks. The covenant thus also *passes through several stages of history*. It comes to stand in the context of social and international relationships, going through a process of individualization, and becoming a dynamic, critical concept, a high standard by which the conduct of the nation and the single individual is judged (230-231).

The covenant involves not only *promises* ('I will be your God'), but also *commands*, i.e. *the Law*, ('you shall be my people'). Thus, in Berkhof's view, the covenant is *unilateral in origin, but bilateral in purpose. It cannot function without man who re-ponds to it*. God asks trust and obedience from His covenant partner. That is spelled out with the establishment of the covenant at Sinai (sequel to the great redemptive act of the exodus from Egypt) in the "ten words" (Decalogue), dealing with the relationship to God and to fellow-man, and to which all kinds of laws were later added. Beginning with the reminder of the deliverance from the Egyptian bondage, it is apparent that the intention of the law as *the instrument of the covenant* is not at all threatening, but rather admonishing and primarily inviting. Israel is invited to stay with her deliverer in the safety of the covenant promise. Nevertheless, it demands *absolute trust and obedience*. Israel must give up all her own securities, confidently wait for the words and deeds of her God, and follow His voice. Though such an attitude goes right against human inclinations, it remains absolutely necessary if man is to find his life and his happiness in the covenant. For all who withdraw themselves from this grip of the law, the Covenant Partner changes into an opponent. According to Berkhof, this covenantal obedience concerned three specific areas: *the cult* (removal of sin and renewal of covenantal fellowship by means of sacrifice), *ethics* (emphasis on suppressed groups — widows, orphans, slaves, the helpless, strangers), and *the legal system* (equality before the law, equal distribution of land, and the combating of poverty). In the course of the history of the covenant these three spheres of life became much developed and refined. Amidst all this the *covenant signs* — *the land Canaan, the Sabbath, and circumcision* played a concrete role. Within the framework of the covenant there was no room for an absolute monarchy. Thus, Israel's covenantal life is often called a *theocracy*. The king, as the covenant mediator between God and the people, was the first who was obligated to keep the covenant law. Significantly, the kings of Israel and Judah are remembered only or mainly for their deeds of covenant faithfulness or unfaithfulness. Thus, Israel's covenantal life embraced everything —

from the outward structures to the innermost recesses of each individual life. Law, cult, social relationships, politics, morality, custom, all aim to express that Yahweh is Israel's God and that Israel is His people (231-233).

The writings (*K^etubim*), Berkhof states, preserve for us the personal response of the believing Israelite to the covenantal encounter and his relationship to Yahweh. Here we hear the voice of man as he relates to God in confession of guilt and thanksgiving, in doubt and exultation, in meditation and lament. This response given by many or by representative individuals (poets and thinkers) was regarded as normative by later generations. Though such utterances of personal faith are also found in parts of the law and the prophets, the most important of these occur in the Psalms and in the Wisdom Literature (Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes). According to Berkhof, the attitude to which the covenant and the law aim to bring man is most aptly expressed in two verbs — *to walk* and *to wait*. While the covenant with its redemptive deeds and its laws offer man a firm and safe order by which to live — *walking* in the statutes of Yahweh — at the same time Yahweh is the God whom man cannot manipulate or get in his grip, to whom he must surrender his life in full confidence, upon whom he must *wait*, looking all the time for new indications of His saving presence. In the daily practice of the life of faith, Berkhof points out, this duality of *walking* and *waiting* includes a wide spectrum of situations and attitudes ranging from *despair* (due to God's hiddenness and the mystery of His government of the world) to *ecstasy* (on account of His deliverances). This duality is aptly expressed in the recurring term: *the fear of the Lord*, a term suggesting distance and subjection, trust and surrender, humility and intimate affection. According to Berkhof, Israel's real covenant history runs from the law to the prophets. That is the main stream. The writings form a sidetrack. Their presence, however, attest to the fact that Israel's collective response, which is so predominantly negative in the law and the prophets, was not the sole response. In the everyday life of individuals there was indeed much true piety (233-235).

Prophecy (*Nebiism*) in Israel was a very varied phenomenon with a long and diverse history without parallel in any known religion. According to Berkhof, the intention of the prophets was to give a critical assessment of Israel's behaviour from the perspective of the covenant and to pinpoint without reserve the powers which estranged Israel from her God. Thus, they relentlessly exposed the sins of naturalism,

nationalism, ritualism, and individual and national egoism. The prophets were neither predictors of the future, nor preachers who sought to warn Israel and call her to repentance. In his view, only in a few cases did the prophets warningly put the people before a choice. For the most part the so-called *writing prophets* assume that the opportunity for a choice is past and that God's judgement upon Israel's disobedience is imminent. In contrast to the covenant promise, God has become the enemy of His own people, because as a whole they have forsaken Him. Israel's rejection by her God is therefore an accomplished fact. *Prophecy*, Berkhof concludes, *is the announcement of the total failure of the saving covenantal experiment which God had begun with this people*. The Old Testament depicts the way of Israel as an irreversible way from the establishment of the covenant to the failure of the human partner. No other people have described their history, including their great men, in such radical critical terms (236-238).

Israel's rejection, however, is only half the truth. Despite their radical proclamation of judgement, pre-exilic and exilic prophets did not believe that this would be the final word of the great Covenant Partner, but spoke of a new and gracious return of God after the judgement to change the lot of His covenant people. The ground for that will not be repentance or a more God-fearing life, but solely and entirely the *faithfulness of Yahweh* who, notwithstanding Israel's breaking of the covenant, determined to fulfil His promises. Thus the one-sided faithfulness of the great Covenant Partner triumphs over the unfaithfulness of His human partner. Remarkably, Berkhof points out, the motive for this expected new beginning is not God's love, but His holiness (Ezekiel 36:22). The uniqueness and exaltedness of His deity make it impossible for God to let His gracious purposes ultimately depend on man (Hosea 11:9) (238, 239).

What the future will be like in which the faithfulness of God will triumph, varies considerably and is partly dependent on the situation from which the prophet looks toward the hoped-for future. Far more important than the varying suppositions and expectations as to the time, Berkhof states, was the undergirding certainty shared by all that an age of salvation was coming, solely on account of the faithfulness by which God unilaterally stands by His promises (239). According to Berkhof, partly by the exilic and pre-exilic prophets, partly by their followers, the return of the people from

the Babylonia captivity was seen as the fulfilment of the promises of salvation, as the affirmation of God's faithfulness, and as the beginning of the new age. However, back in the land once promised, then lost, and now given again, it became steadily clearer that the new age had not yet arrived. Thus, after the exile, Berkhof maintains, the question became pressing: *where is the man who by his covenantal obedience is to give shape to God's faithfulness?* To this question, Berkhof points out, the post-exilic centuries had a multiplicity of answers ranging from *an obedient remnant* of the people to the appearance of *a mysterious servant of the Lord* who through His substitutionary suffering achieves salvation for Israel and the nations. In Berkhof's view, the post-exilic period is characterized by the alternation between *hope* and *despair*. Pious thinkers tried to combine their trust in God's covenant faithfulness toward man with what they saw human life, also in Israel, was like, and it filled them with despair. They saw the horizon, the union of heaven and earth, recede as they saw Israel's way continue, yet they kept hoping and believing in this union (240-243).

The way of Israel in the Old Testament thus has neither a climax nor an end. It does not peter out, but ends in a multiplicity of vague tracks. "The Old Testament is a narrative without conclusion, a history without fulfilment", he states (Berkhof 1971: 20). The deepest cause of this lies in the covenant theme itself and its problematic which had not been brought to a solution. How God's wondrous covenant faithfulness toward a guilty people could also make the human partner faithful had not become convincingly clear. This provisional end-result might lead to a negative evaluation of the entire way of Israel in the Old Testament were it not for the fundamental presupposition *that Israel acted vicariously for all mankind*. That Israel's salvation to come was regarded as being of decisive significance for all the nations, also implies that Israel, in her refusal to follow God on His redemptive way, bears vicariously the guilt of all men and the condemnation of all, and is thus driven into this impasse. For this vicarious calling and role of Israel Berkhof uses the term *experimental garden*. For him, this term not only conveys fairly accurately to modern readers the ultimate purpose of Israel's way, but also links up with the Old Testament picture of Israel as a specially cultivated and tended vineyard from which a greater yield might be expected, but whose unproductivity arouses the greater anger of God (Berkhof 1985⁵: 243, 244).

Berkhof points out that Israel was probably only at times aware of this election to vicarious service for the good of the whole world, and then only in a small minority. While election formed the presupposition of the entire way of Israel, this exceptional advantage over the nations at the same time overburdened her. Election meant that vicariously Israel clashed with the law of God and came under His judgement. She was no better or worse than other nations, yet her guilt and fate disclose the way of the whole human race. The abiding relevance of the Old Testament is that the experimental garden, Israel, has shown once and for all how unfruitful we humans are in our faithfulness to God and our neighbour, and also how unimaginably faithful God remains to His mankind which ever and again seeks life apart from Him (244, 245).

Thus, the Old Testament discloses a covenant structure, a gracious disposition from God involving two parties, who relate *inter-subjectively* to each other, whose attitude and behaviour are always mutually co-determinative, resulting in an intensifying and never-ending dialectic: the faithfulness of the great Covenant Partner over against the unfaithfulness of the small covenant partner. The normativity of the Old Testament for us lies not in regarding it as an inspired communication of eternal truths, but in reading it historically as a record of the way God has gone with Israel by which He also shows and readies for us the way to fellowship with Him (246-248).

According to Berkhof, God's way with Israel in the New Testament begins with the ministry of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus the Messiah. This, he states, is more than a matter of historical sequence. Jesus cannot be understood apart from John's preaching. John sums up the whole of Israel's way in the Old Testament and brings it to a climax. All the elements in the law and the prophets are again found in John. In him there is once again the great tension of the covenant: how can God's faithfulness carry through in spite of man's unfaithfulness? John's prophetic preaching however, had an apocalyptic edge. It was precisely this element (the belief in the imminent end of the world and the irrevocable judgement upon it), to which Jesus (with His proclamation of the glad tidings of the Kingdom that has come with its gifts of grace) failed to correspond, that caused John to doubt whether Jesus was the 'stronger one' who was to come (Matthew 3:11; 11:2-6). Only against this background could Jesus' preaching of the new age that had come be experienced as a liberating event. Both proclamations belong together (250, 251).

In contrast to John's view of the covenant event between God and Israel ending in a great judgement despite this final sign of God's faithfulness, Jesus saw it as His calling to play a unique and definitive role by intervening on God's behalf to resolve the conflict between God's faithfulness and man's unfaithfulness. Jesus saw Himself as *Israel's representative*, the obedient man sent by God, in whom the covenant would obtain stability, thus fulfilling Israel's way so that the blessed rule of God could pave its way through the world. Thus, Berkhof states, Jesus' mission had *a divine background* and *a human foreground*, which are the reverse of each other. The *divine background* consists in Jesus' unique bond with God, who in Him manifests his faithfulness to his people. This is indicated by the titles — *son of God, son of man, servant of the Lord, messiah* — which Jesus gave Himself, or which were ascribed to Him either by those around Him or by the later Christian church. All are reminiscent, according to Berkhof, of the prophetic expectations of a person or a group who, vicariously and on behalf of guilty Israel, will realize the covenant. The *human foreground* consists in Jesus' coming on behalf of God with the glad message of the coming Kingdom precisely to the lost house of Israel, to those who totally despair of sharing in it themselves because they fall outside the code of conduct of the covenant and law which promises entrance to eternal life. In Jesus appears Trito-Isaiah's messenger of salvation (Isaiah 61:1f; Luke 4:18f) in whom the Kingdom of God is breaking through ("has already come upon you"), because he came to complete God's way with Israel (*fulfil the law and the prophets*) through a supreme gesture of love and reconciliation from the side of the Covenant Partner who had always remained faithful — a gesture consisting in the sending of a human partner who vicariously confirms the covenant for the people and brings the Kingdom near (251, 252).

Israel, Berkhof points out, responded to this highest affirmation of God's covenant faithfulness with an equally striking *rejection*. Jesus is condemned to death through Israel's religious representatives and leaders who act vicariously for the whole people.⁶ With this rejection once again and now even more critical than ever before faithfulness and unfaithfulness came to stand over against each other. According to Berkhof, the decisive factor in this rejection was Jesus' radicalness, revealed in His totally distinctive relationship to God as *the one sent by the Father*; in His unbounded grace even toward those who did not keep the law; and in His relativization

⁶ It must be noted that in the fifth edition of *Christelijk geloof* (1985⁵) Berkhof has rewritten the paragraph on the rejection of Jesus entirely. What follows here is according to the revised version.

of the law by means of His twofold commandment of love. Whereas Israel's representative leaders considered Jesus' actions as blasphemous (*the sin for Jews*) and as a dangerous claim to power (*the sin for Romans*) and therefore rejected Him as undermining tradition and authority, Jesus and His followers, however, understood this rejection as in accordance with the entire Old Testament history of unfaithfulness. It is precisely these divergent interpretations of Jesus' ministry, Berkhof maintains, which to the present day still separate Jews and Christians from one another, despite some signs of mitigation in this sharp controversy of late. In view of Israel's *experimental garden character*, however, Berkhof is of the opinion that in the rejection of Christ Israel had acted as God's chosen representative of the "no" with which mankind is inclined to respond to the radicalness of this God. Israel's representatives who rejected Jesus are thus at the same time the representatives of the whole of mankind, and those who reproach the Jews for having crucified Jesus have not yet realized what actually took place there and then. Significantly, Berkhof states, the New Testament sees the fact that Pontius Pilate was instrumental in sentencing Jesus to death as symbolic of the role of the nations following on and alongside of that of Israel. Indeed, the apostle Paul, who first and most deeply considered the rejection of Jesus by his people, recognizes God Himself behind it, and even sees in it a redemptive event otherwise the salvation would not have come to the nations. For Paul the restoration of Israel is to be sought by making her jealous of the richness of the faith among the nations (Rom. 11: 11-32). The Christian Church, however, Berkhof states, has not only lagged far behind Paul's views, but for centuries she has even pursued the opposite direction. Yet, by laying the guilt for the crucifixion solely at the door of the Jewish people, she has not only lost sight of Israel's representative character, but has also failed to recognize her own helplessness to demonstrate the richness of her faith to Israel (253, 254).

What followed Jesus' rejection and death is described by Berkhof as *a remarkable breakthrough*, but also as *a disappointing delay*. The extraordinary events of the resurrection, the outpouring of the Spirit, the work of conversion and renewal, and the inclusion of the nations in the salvation of Israel through the work of missions, were seen by increasing numbers of Jesus' followers as happening according to the Scriptures and as the fulfilment of the promises pertaining to the new age of salvation. Jesus' suffering came to be seen more and more not as a sign of failure, but as

the vicarious and reconciling suffering of the servant of the Lord (Isaiah 53); not merely as the expression of man's guilt, but especially as its eradication, as the radical and definitive cancellation of debt which was expected as condition for and element of the messianic era. Those among Israel who thus read these events in the light of the Scriptures, Berkhof states, saw the new age as having fully broken through. They were in the midst of the last days, waiting only for the completion and climax — the kingdom of perfect peace about to embrace the whole earth with Israel and her messiah at the centre. All the emphasis, however, was on the joy over the present, which appeared to guarantee the early realization of that future (254, 255).

Disappointing, Berkhof remarks, was the fact that Israel as a whole did not take part. Both in Palestine as well as in the Dispersion it was soon clear that the majority of Israel refused to take on its task as the bearer of the messianic renewal movement. The rejection of Jesus perpetuates itself in the rejection of the message of the resurrection. The age of salvation has arrived, the signs are present, but it does not carry through. The nations flow into it, but Israel stays out. She perseveres in the old attitude displayed to-ward the earthly Jesus, and before that to Moses and to the prophets. Whatever the decisive historical, psychological, and religious reasons for that attitude in the period 30-50 AD may have been — *being blinded* (2 Cor.3:14f.) or *refusal to live from grace* (Rom. 10) — the Jewish-Christian community saw behind it the continuation of the unfaithful partnership about which the Old Testament writes. God's covenant lawsuit with Israel remains undecided. Once again, after so many times, the horizon of the kingdom of peace recedes. The fulfilment has come in the resurrected Jesus and His Spirit, but the consummation cannot come so long as the ways of Israel and of the body of Christ (built up of Jews and Gentiles) remain separate. Jesus, the bringer of the end-time, remains *precursory*, the great Precursor, who by His obedient humanity, sacrifice and resurrection breaks open the way to the future — nothing less, but no more either. This delay, Berkhof points out, did not cause a crisis in the Christian community, but something no less serious began to happen. The community began to write off the Jews. She saw herself as the terminal point of all God's ways. The pain over the incompleteness of the situation was felt less and less (254-256).

From the perspective of the New Testament, Berkhof points out, the three basic elements discovered in the Old Testament — *the faithfulness of God, the unfaithfulness of man, and the expectation that some day the former will triumph over the latter* — are not corrected or augmented with new additions, but are confirmed and deepened. The two Testaments display one continuous way of God with man. Apparently God's revelation in the Old Testament had been unable to overcome this unfaithfulness which is so deeply rooted in human nature itself. For that the entirely new beginning of Christ's sacrifice to effect reconciliation and forgiveness was necessary. Israel's way in the Old Testament thus served to prepare for this new beginning by showing that without this radical new divine act man is unable to respond to and live in harmony with the saving covenantal relationship. It is not due to a contradiction in God that law and gospel come to stand over against each other as *ministry of judgement* and *ministry of reconciliation*, but it is our rebellion which forces Him in His way with us through history to expect less and less from us and to descend progressively deeper. Only when the Old and the New Testament are viewed ideologically separate, does the former become an illustration of the doctrine of man's inability and the latter an announcement of cheap grace. The way of the Old and the New Testament is one and indivisible. Radical grace is understood only in the way of a covenantal association with God, a way in which our radical guilt is constantly disclosed. Revelation is not primarily a written document (Scripture), but a history in which we, through the Spirit, must learn to participate (257-260).

The appearance of Jesus, contrary to its intention, has led to two forms and to two ways of the people of God. Israel, Berkhof states, continues the old covenant dialectic and waits for its solution, as if Jesus Christ had made no change in this respect. The church, which has never lacked a *remnant* out of Israel as a sign of hope, lives from the new covenant, the accomplished work of salvation, and experiences the working of the Spirit everywhere among the nations of the world. Both forms cannot get away from each other. As long as Israel does not accept her messiah, the church is reminded that her faith is and can be contradicted and that she does not yet live in the consummated new age. Since the new age is still incomplete and this incompleteness persists in spite of the faithfulness of her Lord, then in the church, too, the dialectic of faithfulness and unfaithfulness continues. Therefore the church must keep on believing *for* Israel that the people and its messiah will find each other, and keep believing

in Israel that within the way of this people the signs of God's covenant will always and afresh be and become visible. The church cannot force that future by trying to convert Israel or get rid of her some other way. Through her faithful obedience and its fruits, the church must convince Israel that in Christ and the Spirit radically liberating and renewing powers, as an anticipation of the consummation, have poured from God into the world. If this convincing does not happen on a large scale, it is an indication that the church also fails and resists the Spirit given to her. If in spite of that we do not despair, it is only because we know of the faithfulness of Christ and the power of His Spirit (260-264).

6.3 In search of the historical Jesus

With this significant title Berkhof begins his chapter on Christology. It rings of the *Leben-Jesu-Forschung*, the notably 19th Century attempt to reconstruct the historical Jesus on the basis of documents preserved from New Testament times. Berkhof distinguishes several possible approaches to the 'historical Jesus'. The first, the approach *from behind*, where from the perspective of redemptive history Jesus is seen as He arises out of the Old Testament problematic and gives and is the answer to it, has already been dealt with above. Secondly, there is the approach *from above*, an approach that starts from the Word, the second Person of the Trinity, i.e. the creative and saving speech of God which became 'flesh', a historical human life in Jesus. He is the fulfilment of Israel's way precisely because He is more than a segment of that way, namely a new beginning and turning point made by God. Classical dogmatics through the ages knew only this approach from above. Since the Enlightenment and the inauguration of the historical-criticism (cf. Hermann Samuel Reimarus 1694-1768) reaction set in with strong emphasis on a third approach, namely *from below*. In this approach the methodology of all historical investigation is applied to the appearance of Jesus as a dated life within human history, in order to ascertain what He looks like in the light of a careful investigation of the sources and within the framework of His own time. A fourth approach, *from ahead*, i.e. from the perspective of what Jesus accomplishes through the centuries in human hearts and in the peoples of the world, Berkhof states, is usually dealt with under other headings, e.g. the work of the Spirit, the church, justification, etc. (Berkhof 1985⁵: 265-266).

For Berkhof the first three approaches are complementary, since they all relate to the manner in which eternity unites itself to time in Jesus the Christ. His main concern, however, is the approach *from above* and *from below*. But he opts for a sequence in which the approach *from below* comes first. Indeed, he emphasizes: “In our world (after the Enlightenment) this could hardly be otherwise” (266). In a previous article, *Christo-logie en Christus-prediking in verband met de huidige beleving der werkelijkheid*,⁷ Berkhof stated categorically that a confession of Christ, which cannot in one way or another be justified in the light of the method and results of a historical critical investigation concerning Jesus of Nazareth, is quite unthinkable (Berkhof 1967a: 374).

Berkhof finds the fierce opposition in ecclesiastical thinking to this line of approach understandable, but not altogether justifiable. He admits that the supposed purely historical-scientific and unbiased approach was often motivated by the desire to prove that Jesus was not the Son of God, but only a uniquely gifted and inspiring man among men. He is also aware of the fact that the Biblical sources were, and sometimes still are read with a scepticism and suspicion concerning their historical reliability such as is not applied by historians in parallel situations. Nevertheless, he is convinced that the historical-critical search for the historical Jesus was a necessary and beneficial correction to the one-sided approach *from above* that had led to a minimization of Jesus as a man living in a particular historical context. Indeed, owing to a greater unanimity in and refinement of the methods to be used in such a search, the study of the faith is obliged to incorporate this historical research into its own work, thus serving faith and protecting the study of the faith against abstractions much better than before. It is therefore Berkhof’s firm belief that precisely from the point of view of faith the historical-critical investigation should be left free. Due to its methodological limitations this investigation cannot uncover the divine secret of Jesus. But if this secret is there, he states, the investigation will sooner or later in one way or another come upon it. Thus, in his opinion, by approaching Jesus with our own historical awareness first of all as an historical figure, the way can be prepared for the other more deeply penetrating approach. The people from Jesus’ own time, he points out, also began by interpreting Him with concepts derived from their own world and ex-

⁷ Translated: *Christology and the preaching of Christ in the present-day experience of reality.*

perience, and as a consequence of that interpretation some of them discovered that they had to interpret Him differently in order to do justice to Him (266, 267).

Berkhof mentions, however, that the historical investigation concerning Jesus faces four specific problems, mainly as a result of modern Biblical research in the field of form-criticism (*Formgeschichte*), redaction-history (*Redaktionsgeschichte*), and of the views of the school of Rudolf Bultmann. Regarding the first of these problems — the *nature of the sources* — Berkhof rejects the view that the Gospels, being primarily evangelistic material, do not aim at providing objective information, and must therefore be considered unreliable as historical sources about the real Jesus. Such a conclusion is invalid, he states, because for the evangelists the *kerygma* of Christ meant two things in one: passing on to others the story of a decisive and liberating event, *and* doing so in such a manner that those whom they addressed would themselves discover that it was indeed a decisive and liberating event. While the Gospel writers tell the story of Jesus with a great measure of freedom and variation to make clear to their readers the relevance of these events, they are nevertheless very careful to pass on as accurately as possible what really happened through and with Jesus in accordance with the historical tradition which they possessed. For man's salvation depends precisely on the historicity of these events. By simply comparing the Gospels with each other, the dangers of distortion and mutilation which threaten historical research, can be traced fairly accurately and overcome (267, 268).

As to the second problem, whether the collections of small units of sayings, disputes, and miracles, previously handed down orally and put together with a more or less coherent passion narrative in the synoptic Gospels (the *Formgeschichte* view), give a reliable picture of Jesus and His ministry, Berkhof points out that scholars are divided into a more conservative and a more sceptical group. The difference between them lies in the adherence to a different view concerning the tradition process. In Berkhof's opinion, this process must have been more complicated than has been suggested. The picture of a community which immediately after Jesus' departure began to produce words and stories as if it were devoid of recollection, conflicts with what is humanly and historically likely. No doubt the tradition process did result in a certain loss of depth, a measure of obscurity as well as embellishment, and in general exerted an altering influence, but, he emphasizes, that can never be the determining starting-

point of the investigation. The burden of proof ought to be on those who deny the historicity of a part of the tradition, not on those who acknowledge it. This is the normal rule for the historical investigation of a tradition only a few decades removed from the event (269, 270).

A third unique and intriguing problem facing the research concerning Jesus lies in the fact that the New Testament offers a twofold image of Christ: the historical Jesus portrayed in the Gospels; and the kerygmatic exalted Christ proclaimed in the Epistles and Revelation, where Jesus' life occurs only in much abbreviated perspective, as the introduction to His death and exaltation. Due to this twofold image, Berkhof points out, the history of the research concerning Jesus reveals a pendulum movement in which historical investigation and systematic reflection continually interact. Men either attempted to explain the second image from the first, arguing that the impression made by the man Jesus was so overwhelming that eventually He was elevated into a mythological being; or on the back swing, they regarded the first image as margin or even as historicizing projection of the second, maintaining that the experiential knowledge of Jesus which the community gained through her belief in the proclamation, coloured and enriched her recollection of His earthly life. Both views have their drawbacks and shortcomings. The former is flawed, because precisely the earliest writings proceed from the 'deified' picture of Christ and refer to still earlier confessional statements which breathe the same spirit, while the image of the historical Jesus in the Gospels was, as a whole, only committed to writing several decades later. Indeed, at no time, however brief, did the image of the historical Jesus function without the image of the exalted Christ, and the image of the earthly Jesus was never more than an aspect beside or in the preaching of the exalted Christ. In the latter, the earthly Jesus is only the nebulous cause of a mythological, Gnostic, philosophic-religious system of a community gathered around a 'cult hero' — a conception which does little justice to the historical Palestinian dimension of the Gospels. It is Berkhof's conviction that the total influence of the kerygmatic picture on the synoptic historical narrative cannot be determined with the means at our disposal, and that the appellation *Gemeindetheologie* (community theology) used for this influence (Bultmann *cum suis*) is an unfortunate term, since it suggests an autonomous intellectual activity. For Berkhof the importance of the twofold image lies in the light which it sheds on the freedom which the traditionists exhibited alongside their faithfulness. A confluence of

the two images or phases is no more the case than that of keeping them watertight apart. The pendulum movement will not stop, however, if the New Testament explanation itself, namely the resurrection of Jesus, which divides the two phases and joins them into one historical transcendent way, is rejected (271, 272).

Berkhof discerns a *convergence* and *divergence* regarding the three problem areas mentioned above. The *convergence* lies in the fact that, although there are two more or less opposite scientific traditions, the differences in result with respect to the words and deeds of the historical Jesus are surprisingly smaller than one would expect. In contrast, there is wide *divergence* of opinion concerning Jesus' *self-consciousness* and His *suffering and death*. In both instances, Berkhof points out, apart from the historical questions, hermeneutical, dogmatic, and philosophical arguments enter into the discussion. In his view, these are not decisive in the first instance, but certainly in the second. Did Jesus give special names ('son of God', 'son of man', etc.) to Himself to express His unique relationship to God, or did the community only afterwards put these titles into His mouth and into that of His contemporaries? Berkhof contends that hardly any scholars doubt that there must have been an *implicit Christology* in Jesus. He simply could not express the uniqueness of his relationship to God in traditional concepts. Did Jesus foresee His own suffering and death and did He incorporate it in His expectation and preaching, or did the community only afterwards, in the light of the resurrection, ascribe redemptive significance to His death? Typically mediatory, Berkhof maintains that it is most likely that the community continued to build interpretively on convictions that it had already discovered in Jesus' preaching (274, 275).

Regarding the *resurrection*, the fourth and most difficult problem facing the research concerning the historical Jesus, there is a not insignificant unanimity. It is generally assumed, Berkhof states, that the image of the exalted Christ and the courage to profess it amidst the suffering which accompanied it would be unthinkable if the resurrection narratives did not contain a measure of truth. The fact is that there were witnesses of appearances of Jesus after His death. These convinced Jesus' followers that He lives and that His violent death was not a failure, but a passing through to His exaltation and a new phase in the breakthrough of the Kingdom of God. However, about the historicity of the narratives concerning the *empty grave*, Berkhof

points out, there is little unanimity. There are those who deny it, and there are counter-arguments which support it. The latter are the stronger, according to Berkhof, although they do not provide an explanation for the variety and contradictory elements in the narratives. That however, Berkhof states, is also true of the hypothesis that explains the empty grave as a legend. Berkhof acknowledges that with purely historical means one cannot proceed any further. Considerations pertaining to worldview and / or faith, decide the matter one way or another (275, 276).

The claim that the Christian faith stands or falls with Jesus' resurrection is true in this sense, according to Berkhof, that without a clear, liberating event, analogous to the Old Testament redemptive acts, Jesus' way could be seen only as a mistake or a failure. Essential for faith is that God manifests in history that He stands behind the way of Jesus and that this man is therefore for us the way to salvation, and that this life and death are our decisive hope for the future. Regarding the *how* of the resurrection, Berkhof states, the historical research may and must have a voice, but it is precisely here that the researcher is soon compelled to make a personal choice which need not be unscientific, but which will always carry one beyond the boundaries of the investigation (276).

Reviewing the significance and value of the historical investigation for the faith, Berkhof emphasizes that, far from undermining the faith, genuine investigation can only promote the truth. The faith is more than this truth, yet it presupposes and implies it. Historical investigation cannot lay the ground for faith; it cannot with its limited means and empirical orientation ascertain that *God* is actively present in Jesus. It can, however, correct, refine, and elucidate faith's presuppositions. The quest for the historical Jesus aims to find and reconstruct the historical situation from which the testimonies arose — ideally the re-enactment of the original situation. Yet, as finite human endeavour it never gets beyond provisional probabilities which are always susceptible to correction, partly on account of the limitation of its means, partly because of the inspiring and at the same time disturbing factor of the subjectivity of the investigator. This does not eliminate the value of the historical research, for the more penetrating and persistent the questions the closer the quest approaches the actual situation of the contemporaries and eyewitnesses. Surprisingly, in this process, Berkhof points out, the secret of Jesus is not unravelled. Its mysteriousness becomes even more

sharply visible. Thus, far from absolving us from the need to make a most personal choice with respect to Jesus, the historical investigation irresistibly forces us to it. Then once again we stand where the crowds, the disciples, the scribes, the poor stood, and we hear again the two questions: “Who do men say that I am?” and “Who do you say that I am?” In the light of the information gained by the results of the historical investigation, Berkhof in his *own way* aims to concur with Peter’s answer. From the perspective of the one continuous covenantal way of God with His people, on which Christ turns out to be God’s great and definitive step towards His future and towards us, Berkhof examines the person, life, death, and glorification of Jesus (277, 278).

6.4 Who is Jesus?

In his exposition concerning Jesus’ *person*, Berkhof first of all qualifies his statement that he aims *in his own way* to concur with Peter’s answer (“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God”, Matt.16:16). The concurrence, he states, involves a *leap*, a decision, which is neither implied in nor in conflict with the historical research. It is not a leap in the dark either, but rests on and is justified by the totality of the image which the person and way of Jesus evoke. Berkhof states that his main concern is not the faith testimony of the writers of the New Testament, nor the manner in which the picture of Jesus is being sifted and corrected by the historical research, but with the picture in its totality. No one, he points out, is equally motivated by all the parts of the picture, and in the course of time the question regarding the basis of faith in Christ has been variously answered. But when one is gripped by one aspect and compelled to faith and obedience, it leads to the recognition of the other aspects. While this psychological process lies outside the scope of the study of the faith, it is necessary to point it out, because dogmatics must guard the totality of the picture as well as the combination of its parts. Reviewing the wide diversity of grounds for faith in Jesus which theology and church have suggested over the ages, Berkhof maintains that there are three central elements which presuppose each other, and which in combination are decisive for who Jesus is and for the faith that directs itself to Him. These are: (a) His *ministry with authority*; (b) His *resurrection as legitimization of His life* (Phil.2: 9); and (c) His *continuation and fulfilment of God’s way with Israel by which He turns out to be God’s liberating answer to the covenant problematic of the Old Testament*. Where one of these elements is missing, Berkhof emphasizes, it is then no

longer clear why we should allow this person from long ago to have a radical re-orientating influence on our lives (278, 279).

6.4.1 “Son of God” — “Firstborn among many”

The main question is: ‘What does faith see in Jesus? We know Him only in and from His way, but that way, Berkhof points out, derives its significance for us from the person whose way it is. Thus: “Who do you say I am?” In the New Testament, he states, the secret of Jesus’ person is indicated with many names (occasionally briefly and daringly: God). From shortly after the resurrection until today, however, the Christian community senses that the title *Son of God* is the most adequate. Yet, it must be kept in mind, Berkhof states, that *sonship* in the Bible is a redemptive-historical concept. Jesus, as the Son of God, is not a purely vertical “in-cident” or intrusion on the way of Israel and in the history of mankind. In the Old Testament this title is used in the case of heavenly beings around God’s throne, of Israel, and of its king. In none of these cases, Berkhof points out, is there any thought of a physical relationship of origin. As regards Israel and its king, sonship is a matter of a covenantal relationship of mutual love and (in the case of man) of obedience. In the same sense, in the New Testament believers are called children and sons of God: “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God” (Rom.8:14). So, too, the sonship of Jesus stands in this covenant tradition. He is *pre-eminently the obedient and therefore beloved covenant partner*. His relationship with God meets the requirements of the representative purpose with the king and other types of mediators in Israel as is evident from the narrative of His baptism (Mark 1:11). Through this representation, He becomes as Son “the *firstborn* among many brethren” (Rom.8:29), the one who in the centuries-long procession of God’s children leads the way and bears the brunt (Heb.12:1-3). In John 10:33-38 Jesus’ Sonship is even defended with an appeal to the Old Testament sonship of all believers (Ps.82:6), because sonship is the same as “doing the works of the Father” (279, 280).

6.4.2 A new creation — “the Only-begotten Son”

In this context which, according to Berkhof, has largely been neglected in the study of the faith, it must be remembered that Jesus’ sonship is also *entirely unique*. This Son of God stands and is one with all the other covenant partners before and after Him, but He does that precisely by standing at the same time and from the beginning especially opposite them. Only in this way is He the liberating sequel and answer to the preceding history of the covenant. In that history sonship had come to a dead end. The sons are lost sons (cf. Malachi 1:6). A new beginning is necessary. The prophets know this cannot be expected from below. God Himself must supply the true man, the faithful covenant partner. The new beginning from above is called “Jesus”. He finally fulfils the sonship. He is the Son *par excellence*; and He is that not as the fruit and climax of human religious and moral purity, but in virtue of *a unique and new creative act of God*. Therefore, according to Berkhof, there is between Father and Son not only a covenantal relationship, but also *a relationship of origin*, a new covenantal relationship based on a unique relationship of origin. Jesus is therefore *the* Son, the *only-begotten* Son. Though with “son” the Old Testament never thought of such a relationship, the prophets certainly did expect a new beginning from God in the form of a man or men. Now, Berkhof states, the new beginning comes to us in someone for whom God is uniquely the Father and who is therefore the Son in a pre-eminent sense, in whose God-created relationship with God the covenant is renewed and forever established: Immanu-El, God with us (280, 281).

In the context of the covenant, Berkhof continues, this unique sonship comprises a number of elements: Jesus’ authoritative representation of God’s loving faithfulness in that He lives from and responds to the faithfulness of the Father with total obedience; His complete directedness toward the neighbour, constantly denying Himself so that He may be the channel of the grace of God to men who are prey to guilt and perdition; His freedom in relation to the established powers and traditions which are intended to make human life possible as a life of freedom and love, yet so often are opposed to it; His freedom toward and control of the forces of nature, particularly the destructive forces of sickness and demon-possession which threaten man’s existence (281).

To this man who is pre-eminently the Son belongs also an altogether unique way of life. Person and way are inseparable. In a world of shrewd calculation and self-interest, this becomes a way of being a stranger, of growing conflict and suffering, but from Jesus' side also of a constant and growing self-denial and the readiness to make the final sacrifice. Holding on, with all the power of His love and on God's behalf, to those who cast Him out, and at the same time holding on to God, the Son then, far ahead of us, enters a new way of human existence in which the covenant and sonship intended by God finally reach their full development. Thus, the truth becomes manifest that only he who is willing to lose his life to the ultimate purposes of God keeps it, even in the face of death (281). Regarding the centuries-long controversy in dogmatics regarding the priority of the person or the work of Christ, Berkhof emphasizes that a separation of the two is theologically and philosophically impossible — theologically, because person and work derive their significance for faith from each other; and philosophically, because the function abolishes itself without the substance, and the substance becomes known to us only in the function. Berkhof is convinced that in our cultural situation it is impossible to go back to the one-sided ontological mode of thought of years ago. Yet, a purely functionalistic way of thinking, he states, leads nowhere either (282).

Yet, Berkhof emphasizes, this unique person and way of life would have no relevance for us, can at best only discourage us, unless this Sonship has more than individual significance. In Israel the king represents the people, and Israel itself has a representative role in the midst of the nations. For such a representative role, however, one has to be called by God. Those who were called regularly failed in their redemptive role. In Jesus, however, there comes one who does not fail, because His calling is based on a new creative act. He, who is the true Son, penetrates with His radical covenantal obedience to the final, ultimate salvation. Thus, as our substitute, He breaks open for all of us the way to the future of full salvation (281, 282).

Naturally, this raises the question concerning the *relation between the Son and the sons* (i.e. believers). According to Berkhof, Jesus' sonship is unique as regards its origin and its representative power. But as regards its content, it is that to which all of mankind is called *via* the covenant way of Israel. In other words, in Jesus' sonship we see what we, what Israel, and what Israel's representatives should have done and

been, but in which we all have obviously failed. Thus, according to Berkhof, Jesus' sonship concerns us because it is that in which He, precisely in virtue of His uniqueness, wants to involve us. The exclusiveness is here the condition for the inclusiveness. We must become like Him, but in virtue of His taking the lead and in abiding dependence upon it. That is why in the New Testament Jesus is called *the first-fruits*, and it is said that we are *not natural*, but *adopted sons*, destined as *fellow heirs with Christ*, to be *conformed to the image of the Son* (282).

In the study of the faith, Berkhof points out, there has been a great deal of controversy between orthodoxy and heresy about the time when Jesus' sonship began. Did Jesus become Son at His exaltation (Acts 2:36); or through the resurrection (Rom. 1:3f); or at His baptism (Mark 1:11); or with His conception and birth (Luke 1:35); or before (the rest of) creation (Col.1:16); or was He already son from eternity (John 1:1-17; Rom. 8:3; Phil. 2:6; Heb. 1:2f)? Berkhof's view is that this variety in time designation in the New Testament is due to the fact that all the writers want to maintain two things simultaneously: (a) that this sonship has its origin in eternity; and (b) that it realizes itself in a history of struggle and obedience (283).

6.4.3 Reinterpreting Chalcedon

Berkhof is aware that his statement: *Jesus is the Son by virtue of a new creative act of God*, unavoidably brings him up against the extremely difficult questions with which the church and theology have wrestled since the Christological controversy (4th to 7th Century) up to the present day. Because these questions are decisive for the ground, the nature, and the perspective of the Christian faith, Berkhof feels compelled to give account of his view concerning Jesus against the background of this controversy (284, 285). In his view, the reason for the unabated struggle is to be found in the fact that in the history of the church *biblical encounter-thinking* was changed into *substantialistic thinking* (287). Theology, he states, has been thrown back and forth between what is broadly labelled Adoptianism (a Christology *from below* starting with Jesus' true humanity) and Monophysitism (a Christology *from above* starting with Jesus' deity). Both views were rejected by the church as inadequate and in error, because the former left the supra-human in Jesus underexposed and the latter His genuine humanity. The formulation of Chalcedon (AD 451), however, though ac-

cepted (even to this day by the majority of Christian churches) as the decisive expression of belief in Christ, proved to be more of a hindrance than a help (285, 288). For when it speaks of *two natures* (divine and human) which come together and constitute *one person* in Christ, it leaves open the question whether this person is to be regarded as standing on the side of the divine or the human nature, and which attributes belong to the one person and which to the divine or the human nature. Through the ages the church generally answered this open question with the doctrine of the *anhypostasia* and the *enhypostasia* which renders Jesus' humanity passive, so that (negatively) it possesses no human "I", or (positively) its "I" is the divine "I". In other words, the second Person of the Trinity assumed the impersonal human nature. With that answer, Berkhof maintains, contrary to the intention of Chalcedon, not only has the genuine and full humanity of Christ been misconstrued, but in addition the duality of the two natures has obscured the unity of the person and obstructed the way to the Jesus of the Gospels (285, 286). In the first edition of his *Christelijk geloof* (1973a: 303) he expressed it even stronger: that within the framework of substancialistic thinking the divine and the human in Christ are each other's rivals (Dutch: *elkaars concurrenten*), the one thus necessarily detracting from the other (Dutch: *op elkaar in mindering moeten worden gebracht*).

Berkhof is convinced that the Chalcedonian formula becomes more intelligible when it is removed from this framework of a static nature mode of thinking, typical of the Greek church fathers and later centuries, and placed within the framework of the Old Testament covenant and encounter thinking (Berkhof 1985⁵: 286; 1973a:303). Within this framework, under the precedence of the divine initiative, the divine and the human *I* evoke each other. The human *I* of Jesus is not displaced by the divine, but finds its fulfilment in surrender to God. In this sense there is simultaneously a *duality* (of God and Jesus, not of two natures in Jesus) and *unity* (between God and Jesus, not between two natures in Jesus) (Berkhof 1973a:303). He points out, that the New Testament, when speaking of the structural duality of being in the person of Jesus, does not portray the two structures as being located *statically on top* of each other, but as *historically following* each other (*vide* Acts 2:22-36; Rom.1:3f; Phil.2:8-11; 1Tim.3:16; Heb.5:7-9). This last statement has a history in Berkhof's thinking. In his reply to the criticism of G. de Ru and A. Geense (*Weerwoord op De Ru en Geense*), which he felt made light of the vertical aspect of his Christology, he points out that

Christ is and remains *one*. But this unity has many levels (Dutch: *verdiepingen*). What is disregarded, he states, is that what we encounter in Jesus is a way which this new Man goes from out of our estranged existence to the very throne of God. This way cannot be described without a certain duality (Berkhof 1975c: 324, 325). In the preface to the 4th edition of *Christelijk geloof* he falls back on this idea when he states that his criticism of the dogma-historical course of Chalcedon was now somewhat differently situated, and that he was now less critical of the ‘two natures’ than of their being *statically next to each other* instead of *dynamically and historically after each other*. He emphasizes, however, that with this his Christology has not changed essentially, but rather is brought in closer connection with the tradition (Berkhof 1979⁴: xx). The New Testament shows us a history in which the man Jesus, because of His total obedience even unto death, may share in the life and rule of God. In this history Jesus transcends the boundaries of what we understand by the word *human*. However, He does not lay aside the *human*, but on the way of a progressive obedience and glorification He exhibits more and more new and to us unknown dimensions of the humanity which God intended. It is understandable therefore, Berkhof points out, that in attempting to express all this, one comes dangerously close to dualistic-sounding formulations like *God and man*, and *two natures*. One also understands why the controversy between a Christology from above and one from below has never come to an end. At the same time it makes us aware of the *relatively good elements in Adoptianism and in Monophysitism*. The first, he states, looks at Jesus’ way from its beginning, the second from its end. Both want to construct a picture that is valid for all the stages at the expense of the recognition of the unique and surprisingly wonderful way which the Son must go: through the depths on high to glory (Berkhof 1985⁵:286).

Concerning the numerous Christological designs that emerged since 1960 ⁸, Berkhof maintains that the great difference between them lies in the line of approach, whether it is *trinitarian-chalcedonian* or *biblical redemptive-historical*. Many of the first group, he points out, regard the designs of the second as purely *functional Christologies*, while the great majority of the latter group are convinced that there exists a *tertium* between a *substantialistic Christology* (Christ one in being with the Father — *homo-ousios*) and a purely *functional Christology* (Jesus as the human mirror of

⁸ Berkhof mentions those of W. Pannenberg, J. Moltmann, K. Rahner, W.Kasper, E. Schillebeeckx, J. Sobrino, P.Schoonenberg, E. Flesseman-Van Leer, W. Thüsing, J.A.T Robinson, H. Küng, G.C. van de Kamp, H.J. Kraus, and A. van de Beek.

God's love), namely: *a new covenant relationship created by God, which has its own ontological significance* (289).

6.4.4 Jesus is man — perfected covenant man, the new man, the eschatological man

What does Berkhof mean when he says *Jesus is the Son by virtue of a new creative act of God*? Apparently, he aims to emphasize two aspects: (a) that Jesus is more than a man among men, called by God like Moses and the prophets, and adopted as son because of his obedience, for in that case the covenant would still not have received a lasting or permanent basis. That basis is acquired only because Jesus rests on a new creative act of God. That newness implies that (b) Jesus does not restore an imaginary, perfect covenant relationship from pre-historic times. History is not turned back, Berkhof states, but makes its most decisive leap forward. The “last Adam” is infinitely more than the first. What is effected here as a covenant relationship is an entirely new beginning, something totally unique, but at the same time it is a pointer to and a promise for a future which is now still unrealized (Berkhof 1985⁵: 284).

Does this mean that Jesus the Son (*by virtue of a new creative act of God*) is thus not really a man, but God? To this Berkhof's reply is that if Jesus were not a man, His way within humanity would be an isolated spectacle of no concern to us. Indeed, in the New Testament, he points out, nothing non-human or extra-human, and very little that is simply empirically human is proclaimed about Jesus. On the contrary, there everything is related to human existence as it was intended and promised by God in the covenant. *Jesus is man, the perfected covenant man, the new man, the eschatological man* (284).

With these far-reaching words, Berkhof is immediately confronted with more and closely related questions: how does the above mentioned view fit in with the emphasis with which the New Testament places Jesus, the Son, on the side of God over against men? Are there then two subjects in Jesus. In reply, Berkhof emphasizes that Jesus is no dual being, “For there is...one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim.2:5). It is Berkhof's contention that Jesus is able to be the mediator in our alienation from God, because He is *a new input from God — conceived of*

the Holy Spirit. For that reason God's purpose can land in this world *via* Jesus. There are thus not two subjects in Jesus, but, as Berkhof puts it, "*His human I is out of free will fully and exhaustively permeated by the I of God and by virtue of this permeation He becomes the representative of the Father*" (284).

This fulfilled covenant relationship, Berkhof states, signifies a new union of God and man, far beyond our experience and imagination. This union is not something static. It passes through a history. Jesus begins His covenantal way as the carpenter's son from Nazareth and finally, after much assailment and struggle, fully participates in the life of the Father and in His works in the world — *sitting at the right hand of God*. The exclusive sphere of God, the 'glory' (קְבוֹד / δόξα), passes in Jesus to one man. God does not push the human person of Jesus aside, but permeates it entirely with His Spirit, i.e. with Himself. Thus, according to Berkhof, in the obedient and therefore resurrected and glorified Jesus our humanity far surpasses what we can imagine and even consider covenantally possible. In that surpassing, humanity in its covenantal relationship to God is not obliterated, but brought to its highest fulfilment (285).

6.4.5 Ideal pre-existence

Berkhof concedes that there are Christological statements in the New Testament in which God sometimes seems to be the subject who acts in Jesus, then again the man Jesus seems to stand opposite God. Such statements which are contradictory in terms of substantialistic thinking are often found in the same author (e.g. Rom.1:3f and Phil.2:6f; Heb.1:1-4 and 5:1-10; Joh.10:30 and 14:28). These, according to Berkhof, have caused classical systematic theologians great difficulty, and it may equally be asked whether in view of his own view the statements about Jesus' pre-existence do not cause him great difficulty too. Berkhof is convinced, however, that these texts know nothing of a separate, pre-existent life apart and different from the earthly and glorified life of Jesus. Even in a text such as Phil. 2:5f, he states, the pre-existent one is not God the Son, but the man Jesus. The fact is, Berkhof argues, that the Jewish and Hellenistic way of thinking in terms of images often applied the category of pre-existence to for instance the Torah, to wisdom, and to the Son of man, to express the *divine initiative behind and the meta-historical validity of these phenomena*. The pre-

existence statements in the New Testament also aim to extol the divine initiative and the divine condescension in the creation of Christ (286, 287). Furthermore, Berkhof points out, in those places in the New Testament which express the cosmic significance of Jesus, the concept of pre-existence does not refer to a Trinitarian residing of the Son with the Father, but to a co-operating of the historical Jesus with God in the work of creation. That is why Col.1:15 can speak of “the first-born of all creation”. In this mythical form, current according to Berkhof in rabbinic and Hellenistic Judaism of the time, was expressed what we with our Western way of thinking would call an *ideal pre-existence*, in other words: *God’s first and dominant thought in His plan of creation was Jesus, the Son*. Berkhof emphasizes that the contrast between *personal* and *ideal* pre-existence must not be over-accentuated. If God had the man Jesus in mind from eternity, then as the covenant partner He also stands from eternity over against the Father (290).

Berkhof also mentions that apart from the statements about the pre-existence which aim to express the divine initiative in the sending of the Son, the New Testament has many other statements which place Jesus above and outside our empirical human existence. He maintains, however, that what is *exclusively ascribed to Jesus* in these statements *is at the same time a pneumatological-eschatological promise to us*. In his view, this holds true for the sonship, the resurrection, the exaltation and session at the right hand of God, Christ’s priesthood and kingship, and even His *παρουσία*. Thus, Berkhof points out, Jesus forgives sin on behalf of God, in order that we may learn to forgive; He performs signs on behalf of God, in order that we may learn to do the same. Jesus exists as the *είκων* of God, in order that we might come to share His *είκων*. Jesus exists in the *μορφή* of God, in order that we might become *συμμορφος* to Him, *μεταμορφωσθαι* after His *είκων*. Jesus shares in the *δόξα* of God, in the sphere which is most uniquely God’s, so that we also might share in it. Indeed, in the light of the daring statement in 2 Pet.1:4 (“...that you may become sharers of the divine nature”), the purpose of redemption may be regarded as *deification* (*θεοποίησις, θεωσίς*). Even as by a new act of God in Jesus as the true covenant partner the climax of the union of God and man is brought about, so likewise on that ground and in dependence on it our humanity is destined for a union with the life of our divine covenant partner which we cannot now imagine (287).

Berkhof is aware that here the crucial question can be raised, whether all this does not detract from the exclusiveness of Jesus' being God. In this regard he points out, however, that it must be kept in mind that that which relative to us is entirely unique in Jesus, is as a rule not expressed with the word "God", but with names like "lord", "saviour", "firstling" or "first-fruits". Closely connected to this is question whether we can still speak of God becoming man. It is Berkhof's contention that this expression is not derived from the New Testament. There the terminology is that of the sending of His Son, and of the Word (God's creative speaking) which became flesh. The few times (Joh.20:28; Tit. 2:13; 1 Joh.5:20) where Jesus is called "God", this is done, Berkhof states, solely on account of His intimate union with God. Here too, according to Berkhof, it is a matter of a covenantal functionality which does not contradict the numerous statements where Jesus distinguishes Himself from God or is distinguished from God by the writers, but presupposes them (287).

6.4.6 Cosmic significance and virgin birth

Berkhof feels necessitated to mention two further issues regarding the person of Christ: His *cosmic significance* and the *virgin birth*. With regard to the former, it is Berkhof's contention that if Jesus the Son is God's new creative beginning, the real man after God's image, then He answers to the final intentions God has with His creation of mankind. This means that Jesus' historical appearance can no less be separated from the creation (the beginning) than from the consummation (the end). As regards the creation, this means that with the creation of 'Adam' God had in mind 'the Last Adam', who is therefore in God's council 'the first-born of all creation' (1 Cor.15:45; Col.1:15). As regards the consummation, this means that it will be the consequence of the new humanity which began in Jesus, when the world of men around Him will be renewed after the likeness of His image. Thus, according to Berkhof, Jesus stands at the beginning and at the end of the history of mankind. Only within this *cosmic framework* can the scope of Jesus' appearance be fully recognized (290).

Here it should be noted that in his paper before the Theological Faculty of Helsinki, *Christ and cosmos*, Berkhof gave the resurrection of Christ as ground for extending the significance of Christ to creation and to the whole created order. It was not the exclusive ground, for also the cross, Jesus' life (especially His miracles), the

Old Testament expectation of the coming of a new age, and the spectacular expansion of the church over the whole world of that time contributed to underline the cosmic significance of Christ which had been revealed in His resurrection. The reasoning behind linking together God's redemptive act with His creative act is to be found in both Old and New Testament, where the God of redemption and the God of creation are deemed one and the same, for both acts have the same style. The known act of redemption is the key to the understanding of the unknown act of creation. With a term borrowed from the sciences, Berkhof calls this an *extrapolation*. It belongs to the very essence of faith which meets God on the level of history, to make such extrapolations both backward and forward. The God of history is the God of creation and therefore also of the future of the cosmos (Berkhof 1968b: 427-429).

Concerning the *virgin birth*, Berkhof states that many religious-historical, bible-theological, and systematic studies have been devoted to this theme. Especially the historians of religions have put forth much effort to trace the story in Luke 1 back to earlier traditions. Berkhof points out, however, that the climate in Luke, in which the child is brought forth in the way of promise and faith, is miles removed from the tales in Egyptian or Greek mythology, and the young girl, Mary, cannot be compared with the barren Sarah or Hannah, and among the Old Testament quotations in Luke 1, Isaiah 7: 14 is significantly not mentioned. A convincing source for Luke 1 in earlier traditions has not been found. As regards the possibility that the story of the virgin birth may be historical, Berkhof emphasizes that apart from Luke and Matthew none of the New Testament writers give an indication of knowing this story, even though such an indication might have been appropriate in some cases (Joh.1:13; Gal.4:4). After the resurrection, Mary's silence on this matter within the circle of the disciples is hardly imaginable (Acts 1:13f). Berkhof is therefore of the opinion that the story of the virgin birth is most probably a later enrichment of the tradition in order to give concrete expression to the confession that Jesus, the Son by pre-eminence, cannot be brought forth by man. He can only be received. In his view the purpose of the "born of the virgin Mary" is to provide the earthly obverse of the "conceived of the Holy Spirit". Also the often drawn parallel with the resurrection or with the empty tomb (Barth), does not hold, because the resurrection is central in the very earliest kerygma and in all traditions, while here we have only one, at most two obviously late traditions. For Berkhof it is therefore regrettable that in many later summaries of the

kerygma, among others in the Apostles' Creed, the virgin birth did receive a central place, thereby making its acceptance until today a touchstone of orthodoxy. In his view, decisive for the study of the faith can and must only be that in the New Testament the virgin birth did not belong to the kerygma and its *paradosis*. Faith in Jesus as the unique Son, he states, does not depend on the virgin birth, but the converse seems to be the case (Berkhof 1985⁵: 291).

Some eight years after the first publication of his *Christelijk geloof*, Berkhof's view regarding the *virgin birth* caused quite a stir in ecclesiastical circles in the Netherlands — not so much due to what he wrote in his *opus magnum*, but in consequence of his remarks on this topic in an interview with Niek Scheps in the fortnightly paper *Kerknieuws*. There Berkhof disputed that the virgin birth should be seen on a par with for instance the salvific fact of the resurrection. "Nowhere in the New Testament can I find that the birth of Christ from the virgin is mentioned as a salvific fact" (Scheps 1981:2). According to Berkhof, the negative reaction was sparked off by the *Reformatorisch Dagblad* which informed its readers of the "shocking news" under a somewhat misleading headline: "Berkhof doubts the virgin birth. Nowhere to be found in the Bible".⁹ Although in his view he had said nothing new in comparison with what he had written in his *Christelijk geloof*, he was inundated with an icy avalanche of oral reactions and letters of concern, admonishment, disappointment, anger, and even a few of abuse. While Berkhof found consolation in the fact that more than a hundred years previously Gunning had a similar experience for disputing (albeit in veiled terms) the historicity of the virgin birth, Berkhof voiced his disappointment at the apparent taboo on any open-hearted discussion of this matter since then. In his article, *Het 'soortgelijk gewicht' van de verhalen over Jezus' maagdelijke geboorte*¹⁰, Berkhof explains that all he attempted to do in the interview with Scheps was to convey as briefly as possible with the borrowed term 'specific gravity'¹¹ something of the difference in historical quality or value of the three narratives in the New Testament: the virgin birth, the resurrection, and the ascension. While the cross and the resurrection are central to the *kerygma*, the virgin birth has only a marginal place in the narrative material. In his view, the narratives of Jesus' birth are an 'erratic block' in the New

⁹ Dutch: "*Berkhof twijfelt aan de maagdelijke geboorte. Nergens in de Bijbel te vinden.*" (Quoted in the column: 'Visies in Discussie' in: *Centraal Weekblad*, 4 Maart, 1981, .3).

¹⁰ English: The 'specific gravity' of the narratives about Jesus' virgin birth.

¹¹ From a lecture of Prof. Koole: *Het soortelijk gewicht van de historische stoffen van het Oude Testament* in: *Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift*, mei 1965, pp.81-104).

Testament. But is this erratic block based on history? Did it actually happen? Berkhof does not see his way clear to either confirm or refute it. Scientifically, he states, one can only speak in terms of probabilities. In his opinion, if it was historical, and if it was communicated to the apostles by Mary, the whole New Testament would have abounded with it. Since this is not the case, his preliminary opinion is that it is a narrative which emerged later, probably because the second and third generation Christians, with their knowledge of Jesus' resurrection and exaltation, and of the mighty workings of His Spirit, wanted to set their confession of Jesus Christ as the only true Son of God, *the one born from Above, 'Conceived of the Holy Spirit'*, off against all the pagan myths. Gunning spoke of 'holy poetry' and 'holy legends'. Berkhof emphasizes that it is not necessary to shy away from a word such as 'legend', if what is meant is: a narrating underscoring and illustration of Gods acts and purposes. Dogmatists, Berkhof states, could never really come to terms with the virgin birth as a separate salvific fact. For the Roman Catholic Church it provides too little to serve as the basis for the incarnation of the Son of God. Through Mary Jesus would still have partaken of hereditary sin. That is why in 1854 the Roman Catholic Church promulgated a separate dogma that from the time of her conception Mary was free of the blemish of hereditary sin. On the other hand, the protestant theologians could hardly accept the elimination of marriage and sexuality at Jesus' birth as the basis and explanation of the incarnation. For the most part they do not deem the elimination necessary. God could just as well have become man with Joseph's co-operation too, as with the cooperation of Mary only. Apart from those dogmatists who push the virgin birth aside (Brunner), there are many who with Barth see the virgin birth as a 'sign'. A sign, however, is itself no salvific fact. No one would think of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus merely as 'signs'. All this, Berkhof states, underlines his view that Scripture itself teaches us to take note of the difference in specific gravity in its narrative witnesses. In Bible study, in preaching, and in catechesis we try to take this into account. Therefore, he implores, "let us also do so in ecclesiastical confessions and in dogmatics. At least: let us grant our fellow believers this freedom" (Berkhof 1981e 3).

6.4.7 A preliminary conclusion

At this stage and in the light of all that has been said above (especially under the last six headings), the question necessarily presents itself: who is Jesus for Berk-

hof? Is a simple and succinct answer available? Fortunately, Berkhof himself has provided such an answer. In September 1973 Berkhof presented the opening lecture at the European Area Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in Amsterdam on the theme: *Who do you say that I am?* In it he states: “My personal answer to this question would be: You are the true Man, as God intended you to be from the beginning: the true obedient Son, the man of love, the one who was willing, taking the full consequences, not to maintain his life, but to lose it for others, and who by that exceptional life of love and obedience started in our world the counter-movement of resurrection. And as the true Man you are the Man of the Future. You are not only a strange exception, which would mean merely an accusation directed at us. God has given you as the Pioneer and Forerunner, as the Guarantee that by your sacrifice, your resurrection, and your spirit, the future is opened to our rebellious and enslaved race... You are God’s eschatological Man!” (Berkhof 1973c: 303-304). Does this mean that Jesus is only man and not also God? Significantly, in the same lecture Berkhof says: “He may, because of his complete unity with the Father, sometimes be called ‘God’” (303).

At the end of a later article (1975b) about Edward Schillebeeckx’ Jesus-book (*Jezus het verhaal van een levende* (1974), Berkhof wrote: “I am more selective and conservative in my dealings with the recent New Testament hypotheses (than Schillebeeckx —JPG). But I am more radical in the dogmatic conclusions that I draw: I cannot understand the risen Jesus as the second person of the Trinity in the classical sense; only as *mán*, as the new Man given by God to us” (Berkhof 1975b: 331).¹² Berkhof explains his position further in his reply to the criticism of De Ru and Geense. There he points out that he did indeed strive to understand Jesus Christ entirely as man, as a ‘Christ without duality’ (*à la* Piet Schoonenberg’s ‘*Christus zonder tweehed*’), as the one who, according to the synoptic witness, came as man to represent God among the people. He points out, however, that he often recalled what J.M. de Jong once said: ‘Yes, Jesus is man, but...if you understand what I mean!’ With His love and self-sacrifice, with His anguish and, none the less, confidence, and then even different entirely with His resurrection and exaltation, Jesus walks so infinitely far

¹² Dutch: “Ik ben veel *eclectischer en conservatiever* in mijn omgang met de recente *nieuwtestamentische hypothesen*. Maar ik ben veel *radicaler* in de *dogmatische consequenties* die ik trek: de *verrezen Jezus* kan ik niet verstaan als de *tweede persoon van de drieëenheid* in de *klassieke zin*; *alleen als mēns, als de door God aan ons gegeven nieuwe Mens*.”

ahead of us that our human-monophysitism succumbs. Indeed, He is and remains one. He does not become a double being. But, Berkhof asks: “How am I to express this unity even more? The word ‘man’ is much too vague and ambiguous. We may go on and write it with a capital letter: Man. But what do I gain by that? I therefore say: eschatological Man. But what is that? And why is only He that? And I say: conceived of the holy Spirit, a new creation of God, etc. But then I also discover that my growing embarrassment is the reflection of an objective event: of the way the carpenter’s son from Nazareth went, of the way upon which He constantly gave his life further away, even unto the deepest despair, in order thus to gain it, and be seated at the right hand of God. Closer to the Father it cannot be. He shares in the privilege of God’s glory. He partakes of the divine nature. And thus He is our pledge, our guarantee, the firstling, who prays for his far lagging brothers and sisters, and draws them with his spirit to where He is...But all my words of unity succumb. The unity is eschatological; I am still on the way and cannot express it in words. I begin to stammer about a unique relationship of origin and about a way of increasing *deificatio*...The way cannot be described without a certain duality...Apparently I have only made a very clumsy start. Otherwise people would not be so concerned over my ‘true covenant partner’ as purely man” (Berkhof 1975c:324, 325).¹³

6.5 Humanity instead of sinlessness

Through the ages, Berkhof points out, it has been the evangelists’ picture of the earthly Jesus which foremostly fascinated and gripped people. Strangely enough, for centuries the study of the faith showed hardly any interest in the life of Jesus. As a rule dogmatics was based on the proclamation structure of the New Testament epistles and not on the narrative structure of the gospels. Thus, the life of Jesus always stood

¹³ Dutch: *Maar hoe kan ik die eenheid nog uitdrukken? Het woord ‘mens’ is veel te vaag en te ambigu. We gaan het met een hoofdletter schrijven: Mens. Maar wat win ik daarmee? Ik zeg dus: eschatologische Mens. Maar wat is dat? En waarom is net hij dat? En ik zeg: ontvangen van de heilige Geest, een nieuwe schepping Gods, enz. Maar dan ontdek ik ook, dat mijn groeiende verlegenheid de weerspiegeling is van een objectief gebeuren: van de gang die de timmermanszoon uit Nazareth ging, van de weg waarop hij zijn leven steeds verder weg gaf, tot in de diepste wanhoop, om het zo te winnen, en gezet te worden aan de rechterhand van God. Dichter bij de Vader kan niet. Hij deelt in het privilege van Gods heerlijkheid. Hij is de goddelijke natuur deelachtig. En zo is hij ons onderpand, de eersteling die voor zijn ver achtergebleven broeders en zusters bidt, en hen met zijn Geest trekt naar waar hij al is...Maar al mijn eenheidswoorden bezwijken...De eenheid is eschatologisch; ik ben nog onderweg en kan haar niet onder woorden brengen. Ik ga stamelen van een unieke oorsprongsverhouding en van een weg van toenemende deificatio...Die weg is niet te beschrijven zonder een zekere dualiteit...Ik heb blijkbaar ook maar een stuntelig begin gemaakt. Anders zou men niet zo bezorgd zijn over mijn ‘ware verbondspartner’ als een puur mens.*

in the shadow of either the doctrine of the two natures or of reconciliation, with the detrimental effect of giving the impression that Jesus came to earth only to suffer and to die — an impression unfortunately largely fostered by the Apostles' Creed, since it has no article about Jesus' life, but moves directly from 'born' to 'suffered'. According to Berkhof, however, without the life of Jesus, which is indeed presupposed and included in the proclamation of the crucified and exalted Christ, cross and exaltation come to hang in the air as a sterile abstraction. Fortunately, in recent times there have been signs of fruitful beginnings to do justice to the life of Jesus in the works of various theologians (Berkhof 1985⁵:291, 293).

Berkhof's aim is not to give a survey of the entire life of Jesus, but to investigate how his sonship evolves and realizes itself on the way he goes. His concern is not Biblical history, nor the results of historical-critical investigation, nor the theology of the New Testament, but a concretization of Jesus' sonship on the basis of the more permanent features in his words and deeds (292). In this concretization, however, the eschatological perspective and framework in which he had placed the life of Jesus up to this point recedes into the background, because in Jesus actual ministry all the emphasis falls on the fact that the Kingdom of God (the term for the future consummated covenant relationship) has now "come near" (Mark 1: 15), "come upon you" (Mark 12:28), in fact is "among you" (Luke 17:21) (296).

For Berkhof the foremost and central element in the earthly life of Jesus as Son is *His love for the Father*. Based on a very special calling, election, mission, and even creation, this intimate mutual relationship completely filled Jesus' whole life, was proof against all temptations (the wilderness) and all threats (Gethsemane), found the source of its power in his constant and intense prayer-life, and made him, who dared to call God 'abba' (Father), aware that God intended him to make as many as possible participate in the secret of this intimacy (cf. Matt. 11:27). The consequence and the reverse side of this radical love is his no less radical *obedience to the Father*. Jesus, Berkhof states, is not will-less with respect to God. His passionate will is to set his own will aside before the will of God and to will nothing else than what God wills (John 4:34). This element, Berkhof points out, includes the fact that *Jesus represents God before men*. His actions in complete solidarity with the Father are an analogy and an instrument of God's purposes and deeds (cf. Luke 7: 16). In this representation Je-

sus not only established the covenant order in the spirit of the law and the prophets, but He was first of all himself the embodiment of that order — the man who completely answers to the purposes of God and translates, reflects, and pursues them in his words and deeds (e.g. the Sermon on the Mount, Luke 6: 35). In line with God's condescension to a helpless and estranged world, Jesus came to the *guilty* with the message of radical forgiveness (Luke 9:10), and to the *wretched* with deeds of compassion (Matt. 9:36) and healing, aiming in all this to elevate man to the true humanity of being a free and happy child of God (Luke 4:18-19; cf. Is.61:1-2). Directly connected to this action is the *freedom* to which He called men and which first of all formed the climate in which He himself lived. It was not a freedom over people and circumstances which He had to acquire. He possessed it from the outset by virtue of his fellowship with the Father. It was the fruit of a strong carefreeness born from the absolute priority of the Father and his gracious lordship (Matt. 6:33). Though this freedom, regarding temple and cult, synagogue and commandment, priests and scribes, Sabbath and government, mother and brothers, food and clothing, possessions and money, popularity and the power of the state, expressed itself in the form of a *calm conservatism* (*gelassener Konservatismus* — Barth), those around Him experienced it as an extreme threat to the established order. It even extended to the non-human part of creation, i.e. nature, which for Jesus included chaotic and demonic elements behind which He saw the work of Satan. As the Son of the Creator of this threatening world, He moved through it as lord and master, using His freedom to make the love of the Father triumph even in the dark shafts of reality as a sign of the coming kingdom of peace (Mark 1:13) (293-295).

All these aspects of Jesus' humanity are often summed up in dogmatics as his *sinlessness* — an unfortunate term, according to Berkhof, being too negative, static, and limited. This is due to the use in classical theology of the static-ontological substantive *impeccabilitas* (without sin) which leaves no room for temptation or struggle, so that Jesus becomes remote and seems no longer genuinely human. Thus, Berkhof prefers to speak of a functional *impeccantia* (without sinning). For the study of the faith the problem here is largely philosophical in character, having to do with the relation between 'being' and what he terms *Geschichtlichkeit* (historicalness), between essence and existence. Human existence, according to Berkhof, realizes and discloses itself only in a series of choices of which the outcome is uncertain for the chooser in

advance, but which in retrospect yields a coherent life-pattern (297). The static traditional view changes, he states, when one considers that *sin* is *refusing relationship*, and that *sinlessness* means *absolute surrender to God and absolute association* (Dutch: *solidariseren*) *with sinful mankind*. Berkhof emphasizes that nowhere in the New Testament is Jesus' sinlessness explained in virtue of the *virgin birth* as was done later on. On the contrary, the gospel writers speak of His temptations, anguish, and struggle. They make no mention of failure or guilt on Jesus' part, or of His letting go of the Father, or of His giving up of the people. In that case He would have been no more than a man among all the others, the covenant of God and man would then not have been definitely established in humanity and would remain as problematic as ever. Through the resurrection, however, Jesus was 'designated Son of God in power' and His life was shown to have been ruled by 'the Spirit of holiness' (Rom.1:4). In this sense, Berkhof states, the Christian faith stands and falls with the belief in Jesus' sinlessness. But like us all, Jesus had to become what He was. Could He have succumbed to the pull away from His calling which a whole world exerted on Him? In retrospect, in the light of the resurrection, Berkhof states, the answer is 'no'. Jesus, however, feeling the full impact of the opposing forces, did not know this in advance. He had no idea of His sinlessness as something which He could fall back on as a means of encouragement and consolation. He was 'tempted in every respect as we are, yet without sinning' (Hebr.4:15) (295).

Instead of the negative *sinlessness*, Berkhof uses the word *humanity* to indicate the core of Jesus' life. Though deemed a worn-out and misused word, he applies it to the unique life of Jesus to highlight the depth and the breadth of God's purpose for man. In Jesus, he states, we find the complete structure of what it means to be man in relation to God, to the neighbour, and to nature; also the highest quality of being man — love and freedom. Here human existence has reached its full maturity and therefore has fully become God's partner and instrument. Though this humanity is foreign to us — an example which we do not follow and a constant accusation of our failures — it is nevertheless foremost an invitation to us to become involved in this new form of being man, and a promise that God has something infinitely better in mind for us than what we seek in our own self-chosen ways. *That* and *how* this humanity spells a liberating and renewing salvation for us, can only become clear if this

earthly life of Jesus is viewed not as an isolated occurrence, but as the beginning of a history (295-296).

6.6 God-glorifying instead of God-forsaken

Jesus' earthly life led to suffering, a death sentence, and death. That event and the circumstances leading up to it occupy about half of the gospel narratives — an indication of the very close connection between the two. This connection, Berkhof emphasizes, must not be misconstrued by making an orthodox caricature of it as though Jesus came to earth only to die, or even less, by regarding Jesus' suffering and death as a lamentable combination of circumstances. Jesus, Berkhof states, came to live, but to live in such a way that in this world He could not but perish. In His suffering and death Jesus necessarily and voluntarily took the consequences of the life He had chosen. Only in that sacrifice did his life take on that final seriousness of which the evangelists were and we become aware in his words and deeds, and only then was the new humanity, which He came to bring, completed and fully revealed (297).

In his person and ministry Jesus came to fulfil the covenant, ('fulfil all righteousness', Matt.3:15), and bring near the Kingdom of God. But precisely now that God gives the new man around whom mankind may renew itself, it becomes clearer than ever before, through invited Israel's refusal *via* her spokesmen to participate in the royal banquet of the union between God and man which had come, that there is no place for God's kingly rule in this world. Men cannot tolerate this nearness. Though he never doubted that some day God's will would be done on earth too, Jesus had to discover that His way did not lead directly to the completion of the Kingdom; that between Kingdom and world there is a gaping abyss through which He himself had to go. Jesus, Berkhof states, assimilated this discovery step by step in fellowship with the Father, integrating it into his invitation to men to enter into the Kingdom. Apparently, God wanted more than that invitation, and men needed more than that as well. So Jesus agreed to drink the cup to the dregs. For 'unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit' (John 12:24) (298).

According to Berkhof, it is the evangelist John who has fathomed most deeply what transpires here between God, and the Son, and man by relating Jesus' suffering and death to the *glorification* of the Son and through Him to that of God, while precisely the opposite seems to happen (John 12:23; 13:31). The glory of God, what He is like in the very depth of his being, is his condescension, his love that stops at nothing, appearing the more clearly as there is less in man to which it can join itself, and as the loneliness and darkness around it grow deeper. So, too, the true humanity of the Son stands out the more clearly as He puts himself at the disposal of this glory and with his self-denial goes to the very limit. In this way the Father and the Son hold mutually on to each other, determined to make the glory, the love, the covenant faithfulness victorious against all human resistance. The greater the outward defeat and the inner struggle, the greater becomes the revelation of love and the more the Son is 'lifted up' (John 3:14). With the death of Jesus the covenant seems to collapse for good, but the Son holds on to the Father and the people up to the very end, and so the covenant did not perish, but was fulfilled. In Berkhof's view, the significance of Jesus' suffering and death is his sustained and fulfilled being-with men for the sake of God and being-with God for the sake of men (298, 299).

Berkhof is aware that his view, expressed above, necessitates comment on the gospel proclamation of Jesus' *God-forsakenness*. Jesus knew, Berkhof states, or rather believed against all appearances, that his path of suffering was a necessary part of God's redemptive way. But apart from the 'that', did He also know the reason, the 'why' and the 'what for' of his suffering and death? Berkhof is convinced that the traditional orthodox view that Jesus knew precisely what his suffering was for conflicts with his agonizing Gethsemane-prayer (Mark 14:32-42) and his anguished cry from the cross: '*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani*' (Mark 15: 34), in both of which He is depicted as a tormented man who shrinks back from the way before Him. In both instances, Berkhof points out, Jesus' anguish of soul ends in a new obedience (in Gethsemane with His stronger desire that God's redemptive will be carried out) and a new confidence (on the cross, where His 'It is finished' (John 19:30) may have been an intended quotation of the final words of Ps. 22). Berkhof therefore emphasizes that one should rather avoid speaking of Jesus' *God-forsakenness*, for precisely in his words of anguish of soul, of obedience, and of confidence the Son (as John puts it) was glorified and the Father was glorified in Him. This does not mean, Berkhof states,

that there was an absolutely blind obedience and surrender in Jesus. Guided by the Old Testament, He tried to feel his path of faith. There He repeatedly found mention about the suffering of the righteous, but even more pointers for his road of suffering which are reflected in the gospels. Yet, even in the gospels it is difficult, Berkhof points out, to distinguish between how Jesus before and in His passion read the Old Testament, and how after His resurrection the Old Testament began to function for the Christian community (299).

6.7 Reconciliation as representation

According to Berkhof, for those who were initiated into the way of Israel and the experiences gained on that way with God, i.e. for Jesus and after the resurrection for His followers, it was self-evident that Jesus' suffering and death had to be read in the light of the promises of God in the Old Testament concerning the sacrifice of the life of a suffering servant of God, who as the representative bears the sin of many (Isaiah 53:12). As the covenant with Moses was established with blood (Ex.24:8), so too the new covenant (Jer.31:31) could not be established without the surrender of life. Thus, in one of the earliest Christian confessions it is stated that 'Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures' (1 Cor.15:3), and the tradition of the last meal which Jesus had with His disciples contains references to a '(new) covenant', 'my blood', and 'for many' (300).

With the often used words *representative* and *representation*, Berkhof states, the final, solid core of our salvation is reached and it remains a question whether it can be further split or elucidated. The great witnesses of revelation in the Old Testament realized more and more, Berkhof points out, that Israel in her estrangement from God needed someone who could *reconcile* and bring the parties together by *representing* the people with God and God with the people. Since our human world proved incapable of bringing forth this man, in Jesus the Son God created this man as a *new and irreducible act of grace and redemption* in His struggle to save man. Jesus' whole life appearance is motivated by the fact of covenant estrangement ('because of our sins'), an estrangement so terrible that the representative could bring about reconciliation only at the cost of his life. Jesus is thus God's forgiving and reconciling gesture (2 Cor.5:19). Every part of Jesus' life bore this stamp (300).

From this representative, this mediator, the forces must now issue which join us to Him and so to the Father (2 Cor.5:17). That this life is representative and reconciling only becomes clear, or stronger still, becomes genuinely true in its climax and nadir: death, i.e. when the representative has gone the limit in His obedience to the Father and in His solidarity with resisting and hostile men, holding on to both and keeping them together though neither seem to offer Him any reason for doing so. Without this final consequence, by reason of which salvation may be summed up in words such as: suffering, cross, death, blood (i.e. surrender of life), reconciliation would not have been a settled matter. However, in this representation the Son stands blamelessly correct and justified over against the Father, and therein we are justified before God (2 Cor.5:21). On the cross, Berkhof points out, the definitive encounter between *the old man*, the *new man*, and *God* takes place. While man is here irrevocably disclosed as the enemy of God's ultimate and renewing purposes for his life, the price of the radical surrender of our life to God and the neighbour which we refuse to pay for our redemption and renewal is *substitutionarily* paid by the new man. In this way the secret of the new and true humanity is revealed: *preservation of life through the loss of it; bearing fruit through dying*. Here too, Berkhof points out, God is definitively revealed once and for all as the *Holy Love*, who loves the sinner, but hates sin; who has sin carried away in order to break open the way to the sinner (300, 301).

The event of reconciliation is incomplete, Berkhof states, unless it is realized within a reconciled community and in reconciled people who in turn institute reconciliation mutually and toward the outside world. It is in this vein that 2 Cor.5:19 is directly followed by verse 20. Just as the cross may not be isolated from Jesus' foregoing life, so too it may not be isolated from the history of reconciliation, which was initiated by it and set forth under the guidance of the Spirit. Such isolation has not only taken place frequently, but it has also cast a dark shadow over the effective power of Jesus' work of salvation (301).

Berkhof points out that his interpretation is but one way to put into words the redemptive necessity of Jesus' suffering and death. There are several others in the New Testament (Paul, John, and the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews) and countless more in the history of the church. Within the Western way of thinking concerning the doctrine of atonement or reconciliation the most important and exhaustive designs

in Berkhof's view are those of Anselm, Abelard, Calvin, A. Ritschl, Karl Barth, and J. Moltmann. Fresh attempts are continuously being made to verbalize it, yet it has never led to a theological consensus. There remains an impenetrable haze, making it impossible to express in words the decisive connection between death and salvation; and he who thinks that he is able often makes the connection superficial, rational, and all too human. Where Jesus' suffering is separated from his life and also from its Old Testament background, the result is often a rationalistic or one-sided construction which lacks both the mysterious depth and the metaphorical breadth of the New Testament witness. That Jesus died for our sins as our substitute to remove the barrier between God and us has always and everywhere belonged to the essence of the faith. Why this had to be precisely so, and wherein the exact nature of the connection between death and salvation, the cross and reconciliation lies — whatever the theory put forward — intuitively the Christian community has always found it to be inadequate. The differences, Berkhof points out, are the result of questions such as whether Jesus' sacrifice is directed to God to appease his wrath, or whether through this sacrifice of love God seeks to move man to respond with love; whether in his sacrifice Jesus is God's representative with man or *vice versa*; and in what way wrath and grace, justice and love are related in God. For Berkhof it is clear that the Western distinctions between God and man, justice and love, and especially subject and object dominate the discussion without rationally clarifying the mystery of reconciliation. He is convinced, however, that when one starts from the inter-subjectivity in the history of the covenant and the idea of representation as a functioning aspect of it, many of the concepts and alternatives lose their significance. Even the question whether God is the subject or the object of reconciliation can no longer be put like that, for in Jesus God gives the man in whom He himself also receives reconciliation and peace with men. Yet, even when stated in this way, the essence (Dutch: *zijn*) and specific character (Dutch: *zo-zijn*) of the representative and of His way are not explained. It is therefore Berkhof's firm conviction that the rich imagery of the New Testament invites us to express this mystery time and again in contemporary symbols (301-304).

The concept *substitution*, which is frequently connected to the cross, can also mean *representation*. According to Berkhof, this representation must not be connected exclusively to the cross, for then the cross is no longer seen as the seal which is put on a substitutionary life. The fear that in the Christian faith the substitution has often be-

come the replacement (*Ersatz*) which renders us and our actions superfluous (Dorothee Sölle) has no ground in the New Testament, because the other side of substitution, Berkhof states, is our participation through the Spirit (302-303). Closely linked to substitution is the concept of the *transfer of guilt*. Although this is a closer approximation of substitution, it is questionable, according to Berkhof, whether it is correct, for it implies that only the consequences of sin are transferable. Such a distinction, he points out, is foreign to the New Testament and would rob words such as Joh.1:29; 2 Cor.5:21; Gal.3:13; 1 Pet.2: 24, etc. of their power. The substitution is total. Guilt, Berkhof states, is a *relational* concept. We are deep in debt before God and representation signifies that in Christ the relationship is restored, i.e. that that which from our side obstructed the relationship simply does not count anymore in the light of His perfect love and obedience (2 Cor.5:19). Indeed, no one has the power to transfer his guilt, but as the covenant representative Jesus is apparently able to assume our guilt. Why representation is possible, and why it requires the total sacrifice of life, and how this sacrifice is related to the assumption of guilt, the New Testament gives no answer. It merely proclaims the fact. Apparently, it is the secret of God (Heb.2:10). The only explanation that can be suggested, according to Berkhof, is that the way of the Old Testament went from judgement to grace, from death to life, and in accordance with the will of God the representative of Israel will have to walk this way to the very end. Only then does true substitution in our stead take place (Matt.26:54; Luke 22:37; 24:25f, 44-47; Mark 8:31; John 20:9). In this regard a further question arises: did Jesus bear the *punishment for our sins*? Apart from the incidental use of this word in Is.53:5, in the New Testament only Rom.8:3 and Gal.3:13 approximate it. Though Jesus identifies Himself with the estrangement from God and all its consequences, the juridical interpretation and extrapolation of the concept of punishment as it is found in Western orthodoxy since Anselm, Berkhof states, is foreign to the New Testament. In his view this has put such a burden on the word that it is better to avoid it. In our time, he maintains, it is preferable not to interpret Jesus' death primarily and exclusively with the juridical and cultic concepts of Paul (as has happened and happens one-sidedly in Western theology), but with the Johannine concepts of love, obedience, and glorification as he has attempted to do above (303).

As regards the *descent into the realm of the dead*, Berkhof is of the opinion that due to its inclusion as article of faith in many confessions (especially in the Apos-

bles' Creed) it has received more theological attention than is justified by the structure of the New Testament kerygma. In his view, what it seems to express as such is: (1) Jesus' continued substitutionary solidarity with us to the very end, unto death, becoming one of the dead, descending into the abyss where the dead are gathered together; (2) Jesus' victory over the realm of the dead, because He entered this state as the one who never forsook God, thus depriving it of its frightening terror; and (3) the universality of Christ's work, due to the early origin of the ideas of a preaching of Christ in the realm of the dead and a deliverance from it of the Old Testament saints, to which was added by way of the obscure passage in 1 Pet.3:19 (cf. 4:6) the opportunity for repentance after Christ's atoning death for those who had died in unbelief. In Berkhof's view, all three these elements are already implied in what is professed about Christ's person, His representation, His cross and resurrection. Whatever goes beyond that is in his words "pious fantasy". On the other hand, Calvin's profound and influential demythologizing reinterpretation of this article, making it refer to Jesus' God-forsakenness on the cross, goes counter to the order of the Apostles' Creed and is thus, in Berkhof's view, historically and systematically untenable (304-305).

6.8 Resurrection and Glorification

The resurrection of Jesus, Berkhof states, may be called the decisive redemptive event with which the Christian faith stands and falls. Without the resurrection the belief in Jesus as the saviour of the covenant and the bringer of the Kingdom of God would have perished at the cross, the entire New Testament would have remained unwritten; and nothing would have changed in our situation of alienation (1 Cor.15:17). All we would have left is the *late* Jesus of Nazareth, one of the many martyrs who died for a conviction, one who could not even be a teacher and an example to us because He failed in both respects. Even his own interpretation of Jesus' path of suffering, Berkhof points out, would hang in the air completely. At the same time, however, he emphasizes that the belief in the resurrection cannot be separated from the preceding way of Jesus, or from God's way with Israel, or for that matter from the active presence of this risen person in subsequent history. Though we commonly speak of resurrection (Dutch: *opstanding*), the New Testament as a rule speaks of 'raising' (Dutch: *opwekking*). While abiding by the current usage, Berkhof stresses the need to remember that Jesus' resurrection was first of all *a creative act from*

God's side. Resurrection did not happen accidentally to a random individual, but to this particular man, whose life called for it in view of the purposes and promises of God. If ever something like resurrection would happen to a man, then it would happen to Him. If anywhere, then here, Berkhof states, we may speak of *synergism* (305-306).

In Berkhof's view, the resurrection first of all has *retroactive significance as the divine legitimization of the way of Jesus' life and death.* Without this exceptional sign from God we would have no certainty about the exceptional nature of his life and his surrender of it. Only through the resurrection do we know: God was in Jesus. Berkhof emphasizes, however, that the resurrection should not be regarded exclusively as noetic, so that (in neo-Bultmannian tradition) it is no longer a separate fact but merely a fresh elucidation of preceding facts. Nor should its significance be narrowed down so drastically (*à la* J. Moltmann and W. Pannenberg) as to misconstrue the fact that in the resurrection Jesus' entire existence and course of life are validated. The legitimization through the resurrection concerns not only our knowing, but first of all Jesus' own being. In raising Jesus from the dead, God legitimizes this life, declares precisely and only this life as a life in agreement with His purpose. This declaration takes place in the form of a crowning, an elevation of this life to a higher state ('Therefore God has highly exalted Him...' Phil. 2:9). This legitimization is so much a new act of God, Berkhof states, that occasionally it can be said that only through the resurrection was Jesus made what He is for us — Lord, Messiah (Acts 2:36, cf. verse 24) — and declared, defined, designated and appointed as Son of God, but by virtue of the 'Spirit of holiness' (Rom.1:4) who precisely before His raising had governed His life. The legitimization thus expresses continuity. That is the significance also of the appearances after the resurrection insofar as they stress the fact that the wounds of the cross were still visible in the resurrected Christ. Precisely as the crucified one, i.e. because He let himself be crucified, Jesus is the resurrected one (306-308).

What does this mean for us? God was in the man Jesus. One, and only one man received from Him the legitimization which all our humanity needs. Apparently, our present life is meant to be only provisional and intended for resurrection. Yet, we do not reach that goal, because we do not consistently and truly follow and want the way that leads to it. Since Jesus' resurrection we know that whoever is willing to lose his life will retain it. We, however, struggle, individually and together, with and

against each other to preserve and retain our life, if necessary at great cost preferably to others, yet in the process lose it. Jesus let it cost Him His life not thinking primarily of Himself but of others. Yet, even those who believe in His resurrection do not, as a rule, dare to entrust themselves to the law of life which it disclosed. In our world there remain only vague analogies. Jesus is an only, a one-ling (306-307).

According to Berkhof, the resurrection is no miraculous return to earthly life as in the case of Lazarus and a few others of whom the gospels relate. Nor, however, is it a continued existence of the soul in a higher world. Here something entirely different happens which, in his view, can only be described as *a borderline event*. In a period of forty days (Acts 1:3), which for Berkhof signifies *a transition period*, Jesus appears as someone who walks *on the borderline of two worlds*. It is a short period of appearing and disappearing, of absence and presence simultaneously. He is no longer present as before, yet repeatedly present for a few moments in some sort of continuity with the past. He is still near, but as one departing. In Berkhof's view, in the New Testament this period of appearances serves the purpose of indicating that with His resurrection Jesus entered into a new and higher form of existence which is unknown to us. Occasionally, the resurrection is referred to as the *opening act of the exaltation*. According to Berkhof, a better term to express the nature of this event is *glorification*. Therefore he speaks of *resurrection as glorification*. For him this means that by way of obedience and self-surrender Jesus' humanity is taken up into the sphere of God, the sphere of glory, which thus far had been the exclusive sphere of God Himself. Berkhof emphasizes, however, that this does not mean that Jesus thereby changes from man to God. It means, he states, that *as man Jesus receives the most intimate union with God as the crowning of his whole preceding way*. The expressions that Jesus is *in heaven*, or *ascended into heaven*, or *was taken up into heaven* are, in his view, not so much specifications of place, but rather of a form of existence (Dutch: *zijnsbepaling*). Similarly, Jesus' *sitting at the right hand of God* — the place of the viceroy or the rightful representative — implies, according to Berkhof, that *from now on God is essentially united with man and His divine existence (Dutch: God-zijn) can never more be thought of as separate from man*. It further implies that because God's right hand expresses His exercise of power, Jesus' glorification guarantees that *God will rule in the spirit and after the will of this man*. God and Jesus in one place, on one throne — such bold expressions, Berkhof contends, indicate that *the covenant be-*

tween God and man, which had failed for so long, has now in one man eternally succeeded (308, 309).

As regards the *significance of the empty tomb*, Berkhof points out that Jesus' body which was laid in the tomb could not possibly serve as the *somatic instrument* of His glorified existence. Therefore, Berkhof is convinced that the empty tomb cannot be regarded as a redemptive or intellectual necessity. On the other hand, Jesus' glorified human existence cannot be thought of as consisting only of spirit or soul, and thus only as half-human. The new humanity is indeed the glorification of this concrete earthly existence which was laid in the grave. It holds good for Jesus, too, that *this mortality must put on immortality*. Therein lies the promise, according to Berkhof, that God will redeem this world in the totality in which He created it. That is the message of the empty tomb. All that we perceive of Jesus' transition is a negative sign: emptiness. Yet, it tells us how comprehensive and radical the transfiguration is. Though no more than a sign, without it Jesus' appearances would not have brought to our minds the idea of resurrection, and thus of a future hope for the earth (309, 310).

As regards the question *where Jesus is now according to His human nature*, Berkhof points out that in the resurrected Jesus we see only a glimpse and a beginning of what glorification is. Rejecting the classic Lutheran theory that Jesus was made to share in God's omnipresence, Berkhof contends that in His glorification Jesus remains man, one of us. He is God's covenant partner and counter-player, but He is *not absorbed by God*. More, Berkhof states, we do not know. When Paul speaks of the 'soma' of the glorified Christ, it is with reference to Christ's church on earth. There the materialization of His glorified existence which concerns us takes place. Is there no other materialization? To this Berkhof replies that as the first-fruit and the head Christ is more than what assumes bodily form in His church, but that more we know only as Spirit, and that, in his view, is enough (310).

As the representative, Jesus is everything He is in our stead and for our benefit. Therefore Berkhof states, His glorification is the ground of our own coming glorification. The *One-ling* is simultaneously the *Firstling* (Dutch: *De eenling is tegelijk de eersteling*). This means that to people who had alienated themselves from God and thus also from the future which He intended for them, that future is granted as a gift of

grace. The big difference, however, is that the Firstling has entered the future ahead of us, while we still live from a promise on this side of the border to the future. Any idea that through the resurrection of Christ the reunion of God and man, heaven and earth has become a universal reality is an illusion which is contradicted by the hard facts. Nevertheless, we live from a new fact and from a real promise based upon it. Apparently our reality of sin, suffering, and death is not what we have thought it to be: dependent on itself, tragic, definitive. It turns out to be provisional, stamped as passing away through the resurrection of the Firstling (310).

As to the kind of world which will sooner or later replace our reality, one can say no more, Berkhof states, than what can be derived from the humanity and resurrection of Jesus — ‘... that when He comes, we shall be like Him’ (1 Joh.3:2); ‘... we shall bear the likeness of the heavenly man’ (1 Cor.15:49); ‘...who will transform our humiliated body to the likeness of His glorified body’ (Phil.3:21). This minimum of knowledge, Berkhof states, points to a maximum of existence, which despite its soberness creates room for a wealth of imagery about a *banquet to come* and a *city of gold* (310, 311).

Why this future did not dawn immediately as a direct consequence of Jesus’ glorification, and why the resurrection has not concluded history but on the contrary has introduced and placed its stamp on a new phase in history, is something we do not know. One possible answer, Berkhof states, is that otherwise the world might have been taken by surprise which is out of keeping with God’s entire method of preservation and redemption. Berkhof is of the opinion that in the wake of A. Schweitzer far too much has been made of the problem of the delay of the *παρουσία* as if it would have burdened the first community with a deep and lasting trauma. In contrast, Berkhof points out that for Jesus himself this question was likely dislodged from centre stage through the presence of the Kingdom in His own ministry. The same, he states, must have happened in the community under the pressure of the presence of the Spirit and the challenge it entailed (cf. 1 Thess.4 & 5) (311, 312). Over against Barth’s primarily christological and Pannenberg’s anthropological answer as to the meaning of proceeding history, Berkhof mentions his own *christological-pneumatological* solution which he put forward in his *Christ the meaning of history* (1979a:78, 100). There he states that the history after the resurrection is the period when the analogy of

Christ's cross and resurrection is being realized over the whole earth. Berkhof argues that if God's way with Israel and in Christ is intended to bring about the redemption of all mankind, then it is unnecessary to ask what the meaning of the continuation of history is, because the meaning of Christ's work requires this continuation and becomes effective in it (Berkhof 1985⁵: 312). As there has been an ages-long way to the Christ-event, so possibly, he concludes, there must be an ages-long way in which this event can penetrate history and in which the world grows toward a new 'fullness of time' which becomes the threshold of its glorification. Meanwhile we are not yet that far. We live *between the times*. Our Representative is here no more and not yet. What is now present for Him, is still future for us, and what is past for Him, is still present for us. We live under the cross, but with the prospect of resurrection. That also implies, Berkhof states, that while we may already live from reconciliation, redemption still lies ahead of us. Moreover, Berkhof adds, it means that in Jesus way of life we have the disclosure of the meaning of our humanity (Dutch: *de zin-onthulling van ons mens-zijn*) behind us, but we are still en route to the fulfilment of the meaning of our own life (Dutch: *onze eigen zin-vervulling*) (311).

This interim situation, Berkhof remarks, gives a *double ex-centric direction* to our life. Vertically, our centre of orientation and inspiration does not lie in this world but above it in Him who has reached the goal and represents us with God. Horizontally, the life we expect is not yet here, we are still in pilgrimage, awaiting the moment when God will make all things new. This dual ex-centricity of the Christian life is also reflected in the believer's attitude toward the present. On the one hand, Berkhof states, it is an attitude of security and rest, because the future is guaranteed through the sitting of Jesus at the right hand of God. On the other hand, it is an attitude of anxiety over and rebellion against the *status quo* which is still out of keeping with the new fact. The raising of Jesus rouses us, His resurrection stirs us to insurrection (311).

Contrasting a *theologia crucis* and a *theologia resurrectionis* as has happened in Germany, Berkhof points out, can lead to an intolerable paradox, unless one realizes that it concerns elements on a way which we have not gone to the end, but which now already through the Spirit makes its liberating power felt. Berkhof emphasizes that when cross and resurrection are no longer related to or defined by each other they

are made to be something other than what they are in the fellowship with Christ. He who sits at God's right hand can also be portrayed as the lamb, standing 'as though it had been slain' in the midst of the throne (Rev.5:6). The practical and concrete importance of cross and resurrection is clearly indicated in 2 Cor.4:7-11 and 6:3-10 (312).

In the realistic West, especially in comparison with the Eastern Church, the resurrection as a central redemptive event has always stood very much in the shadow of the cross. According to Berkhof, however, a wholesome reaction began with the work of J. Moltmann and W. Pannenberg, both of whom understand the resurrection as *anticipatory*, as *Vorschein* (appearance) of a new world for which God has destined mankind. While both these theologians maintain that the relation between Jesus' resurrection and our future went by way of Jewish apocalyptic thinking, in Berkhof's view this relation should much rather be sought in the belief in Jesus as the representative (312, 313).

If Jesus has reached the goal for Himself and in that is our representative, it is hard to imagine that the fruit of His representation would only be future. His sitting at the right hand of God, this man's covenant bond with God would then have no effect on the present. The opposite is the case, Berkhof states. Indeed, the greater part of the New Testament is predominantly about the work of the exalted Jesus in the present in the church community and in the world, through the renewing work of the Spirit in the hearts and lives of men, by which they are involved in the covenant and prepared for the future. But, Berkhof emphasizes, the work of the exalted Christ does not coincide with the work of the Spirit in us. Aside from that, He is present Himself, and He is there for us and for the world. His influence on God and on history is more than the direct influence of the Spirit on us. According to Berkhof, the first community gave expression to this belief by calling the exalted Jesus *Lord* (Κυριος). For Berkhof this means that Jesus, as God's covenant partner, has a *managing and ruling function*. Precisely He who in His earthly life was willing to be the δουλος, the servant, the slave in the fullest sense of the term, is therefore now active as the Κυριος, the Lord.

As the exalted Lord, Jesus' activity is directed

(a) *toward God*. He represents us, wandering and failing, suffering and guilty people, before God as the guarantee that our covenant bond with God is not broken.

This active and saving representation, Berkhof states, can only be expressed with the analogical imagery of the New Testament: He is our *advocate with the Father*; with the sacrifice of His life He enters for our sake into the presence of God; He *intercedes* on our behalf.

(b) *toward the world*. Berkhof emphasizes that this is not as if He would possess a separate ruling power or province beside God. His sitting at the right hand of God means that God's activity in the world is bound by this covenant; that He rules in the Spirit of Jesus; that He directs everything to the revelation and victory of this covenant. Jesus, who gave His life for us, has the final say over the course of world history.

(c) *toward His community*. Here, Berkhof states, he does not indicate Jesus' work in the community through the Spirit, but that as our representative He is the guarantee that the movement He established through His resurrection will not stop, but will always continue in whatever form against all the forces that aim to undermine or destroy it; that those who have allowed themselves to be taken up in this movement will not be disillusioned in their faith, but will experience that they are being protected and will keep the upper hand over temptations and setbacks (cf. Belgic Confession art. 27 and Heidelberg Catechism q. and a. 49-51) (313, 314).

According to Berkhof, what is here ascribed to the exalted Lord, must by virtue of the covenant relationship within which it happens, also be ascribed to God and to the Spirit. In keeping with the character of this active covenant partnership, it is possible to speak of a *triune activity*. If we start from Christ, it means that we believe that *one* man has overcome for us and that the blessings of that fact must forever remain a part of God's plans and deeds with respect to the world (Heidelberg Catechism, ans. 49) (314). In religious experience, Berkhof states, with the exception of the so-called Pietistic circles (Zinzendorf and the Blumhardts), the living Lord has often become secondary to God and the Spirit. Of late, according to Berkhof, the theological interest is concerned not with Jesus' relation to the present, but rather to the past and especially to the future (315).

Regarding the ascension, it is Berkhof's opinion that the statement that Jesus was taken up into heaven is the biblical way of saying that He was glorified — fully permeated with the presence of God. Once again Berkhof points out that this is a des-

ignation of being (Dutch: *zijnsbepaling*) and not a designation of place (Dutch: *plaatsbepaling*). While much is said in the New Testament about the fact of the exaltation and about Christ's *being-in-heaven* as the fruit of the resurrection, nowhere, according to Berkhof, do we detect any interest for questions such as: *where is that presence of God? How and when did Jesus get there? How is His exaltation related to His appearances on earth?* In this regard the Hellenistic historian, Luke, is an exception to the rule. He is interested in periods, breaks, and transitions. In Acts 1 he clearly delineates the period of the Church from that of his gospel narrative when he speaks of the appearances as a *transition period of forty days* to which he gives a definite conclusion with the *ascension*. In Berkhof's view, this report in only one sentence — 'as they were looking on, He was lifted up, and a cloud took Him from their sight' (Acts 1:9) — hardly deserves the name of an ascension story. The cloud which took Jesus from their sight, Berkhof maintains, not only served to indicate Luke's ignorance concerning the sequel, but also as a reminder to the other occasion when he had connected Jesus with a cloud at the *transfiguration* on the mountain (Luke 9:34f). Now it concerns the *glorification*, the entrance into the sphere of God, of which the high and mysterious clouds are the sign. A period is now concluded and angels elucidate it (Acts 1:10) (315).

In Berkhof's view, Luke stands alone regarding the story of the ascension, and also as regards the tendency to render the exaltation historically graphic. Berkhof therefore concludes that, in contrast to the cross and the resurrection, the ascension is no separate redemptive fact within the framework of the New Testament kerygma. That does not mean, he states, that Luke did not wrestle with the important problem of the relationship between the brief appearances and the abiding exaltation. Berkhof rejects the idea of some theologians that the appearances took place from the sphere of glorification, because then all the appearances would have to be analogous to that of Paul and the glorification on the mountain. But this, Berkhof states, is not the case in any of them. Rather, Jesus appears as an ordinary human being, even as an unknown and therefore unrecognized man (Luke 24:16; Joh.20:15, 21:4, 12), and Luke sees the appearance to Paul as something distinct and separate in time and nature from the forty days, differing in this even from Paul himself (1 Cor.15:8). Berkhof also rejects the idea that Luke and perhaps John also, had in mind a progressive advance from resurrection to glorification as an attractive but speculative view. The appear-

ances, he points out, do not exhibit an inner connection, let alone planned progress. Jesus as *one-ling* is far ahead of us, lifted up into the new world. We who remain behind lack the categories with which to make the transition transparent, and even if we had them, the answer to the question concerning the *how* would still not belong in a confession of the faith. Therefore it is regrettable, Berkhof states, that the Apostles' Creed, with the trio virgin birth, descent into the realm of the dead, and ascension into heaven, includes precisely three of these *how* answers which did not belong to the kerygma and which only have marginal significance in the New Testament, and presents them as redemptive facts that have to be believed (315, 316).

Finally, Berkhof mentions that according to the Apostolic Constitution of Nov. 1, 1950, the Roman Catholic Church has felt the need for yet a second ascension: that of Mary, better called the *assumption of Mary to heaven*. This need Berkhof attributes to the fact that Jesus' glorification functioned insufficiently as the guarantee of our glorification because He was too little regarded as a man with and for men. Further development in Roman Catholic theology, where greater emphasis has been placed on Christ's humanity, the need for this newest dogma, he states, appears to have virtually disappeared (316).

6.9 Pneuma-Christology

Significantly and unconventionally, Berkhof does not treat the theme of the Spirit separately, but as the conclusion of Christology. His aim in doing it like this, he states, is to indicate that, despite all the turning-points encountered along the way, there is *one uninterrupted working of God in history* (316). After Jesus' resurrection there was indeed a turning-point, but not toward the consummation to which the resurrection points. Far less is it a break indicative of a vacuum in God's activity. It is rather a turning-point which ensues from what preceded and prepares for the consummation. Berkhof calls it a *transition to mission* (Dutch: *wending tot zending*). From the outset it is impossible that the *Firstling*, who will soon become the centre of a renewed humanity, can remain a *one-ling*, a single individual. It has to become evident that from now on, in virtue of His representing us, a process toward the renewal of the human race is under way. The concentration of the representation is thus fol-

lowed by the *centrifugal movement* of conversion, expansion, and renewal among the people (317).

Although this movement, this *complementary verso* of His work, already began during the earthly life of Jesus — the gathering around Him of a community of people who would repent from their sins to celebrate the presence of God’s Kingdom; the calling of a small group to literally follow after Him so that later as eyewitnesses of the way He had to go they could win others for that way — it never got beyond beginnings, which can hardly be said to have succeeded. When the real suffering began, all deserted Him; when He died, there was absolutely no evidence that even one was still with Him. Only after and through the resurrection did the complementary counter-movement, the work of mission, forcefully and definitively begin. Significantly, Berkhof states, all the appearances of the risen Jesus, except those on Easter morning itself, contain mandates for the work of mission, while (*nota bene*) the edification of the church is only of subsidiary importance in these passages (317, 318).

The *motive power* behind this turning to the outside world is everywhere indicated as the (*holy*) *Spirit*, which Berkhof describes as *the third name after and next to that of God and Jesus or Christ* and which, he states, expresses the manner in which God involves Himself with man and denotes God’s active presence always and everywhere in His creation. Our whole life, thinking, and acting we owe to that Spirit in which we are created and by which we are supported. God is depicted as having or being Spirit, that with it He animates His creation, and that He gives that Spirit to man so that he becomes a living dynamic being. While the Old Testament is full of God’s activity in nature and in culture, the work of the Spirit in redemptive history there is experienced only to a limited degree — more in offices and structures than in the hearts and lives of men. Thus the Spirit inspired leaders such as Moses and Joshua, the judges and kings, and in a very special way the prophets. Indeed, Berkhof points out, it was the prophets who hoped, on the basis of God’s faithfulness, that some day the Spirit would permeate Israel and eventually dwell in the hearts of all mankind, so that instead of daily going against His purposes as we are wilfully wont to do, we may become the voluntary servants and co-workers of the Spirit and thus reach our destiny. That expectation, Berkhof states, began to be realized after the resurrection of Jesus. Through the preaching of what God had done in Jesus, people experienced that

God had become *present and active in a new and unparalleled manner*. The Spirit which had been promised for the end-time had now indeed been poured out and was active in crossing the boundaries of Israel and reaching the world. This *new, eschatological mode of being-present* was so overwhelming that, according to Berkhof, God's general presence in creation and culture paled in comparison with it and as a result is hardly spoken of in the New Testament and often wrongly neglected in dogmatics (318, 319).

For a closer delineation of the nature and purpose of the work of the Spirit, i.e. of God's very special presence and activity which followed upon the appearance and resurrection of Jesus, Berkhof states, three preliminary questions, partly Biblical-theological, partly of a dogmatic nature, need to be considered:

(a) From what perspective do we gain access to the essence of the Spirit?

Since the Spirit is God active in the present, it would seem obvious to seek access to his essence from his workings in the present. The difficulty inherent in such an approach, according to Berkhof, is to make the leap from the activities of the Spirit to the Spirit himself. The Spirit is, after all, more than his activities and does not coincide with and is not bound to the church (Roman Catholicism), the converted individual (Orthodox Protestantism), or the human spirit (Liberal Protestant theology). He is the Lord and He blows wherever He wills. We must first know Him from elsewhere, Berkhof states, before we can distinguish in our human phenomena and institutions between what comes from the Spirit and what is human, only too human. Berkhof therefore seeks access to the essence of the Spirit, not from his operations, but from his *origin* which, as it concerns us, lies in Christ. From Jesus, the Son of God, who is the new man, Berkhof states, a *wind* (the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin words for Spirit all indicate originally the movement of the air) begins to blow in our life. Jesus is not the ground and norm of the general working of the Spirit in created life, but indeed of the special accentuation of it, which we experience in the encounter with Christ. For Berkhof, the Spirit is thus *no timeless and static phenomenon, but a power which upholds creation, which arises in history, forms it, and finally in the whole of God's work introduces a new period*. According to Berkhof, only along this mainline Christological approach, characteristic of the New Testament, in which the Spirit is perceived entirely from the perspective of the fulfilled work of Christ, are the operations of the Spirit in the present seen in the proper light (319, 320).

(b) How does the Spirit relate to Christ?

Berkhof points out that in the New Testament the relationship between the Spirit and Christ is not only one of sequence, but indeed also presented in a twofold manner. On the one hand, especially in the synoptic gospels, the Spirit precedes creatively, being greater than Jesus and controlling Him. Here Jesus is the work of the Spirit who begets Him, descends upon Him at his baptism, and drives Him out in the desert. It is the Spirit with whom Jesus is anointed so that He may be called Christ. The Spirit inspires and guides Jesus, is the power through which He brings his sacrifice, and is the ground of his resurrection. On the other hand, especially in John and Paul, though the above mentioned emphasis is not entirely absent from their writings, the Spirit is the work of (the risen) Jesus, interpreting Him and controlled by Him. Significantly, a combination of this twofold relationship is expressed in John 1:33: *Upon Him, whom you shall see the Spirit descend and remain, that One is He who baptizes with the Spirit.* Thus, the twofold picture of the New Testament is that *Jesus is the fruit of the Spirit and the Spirit is the fruit of Jesus.* According to Berkhof, the second aspect has always received due attention in the study of the faith, but not the first. The reason for this, he states, lies in the fact that Christ and the Spirit were not viewed primarily in *redemptive-historical perspective, but rather as the historical counteraction of their place as the second and third person in God's eternal triune being.* It is difficult, Berkhof comments, to let such eternal positions play musical chairs in time. That problem falls away, however, if in our reflection we do not start from eternity and move toward time, but proceed from time toward eternity. A remarkable exception to the neglect of the first aspect of the twofold relationship between the Spirit and Christ in the history of theology, Berkhof states, is to be found in the post-apostolic era. There, he points out, the Spirit is actually the Son of God, through whom Jesus is created; and later, because of His obedience to the Spirit, Jesus was made *a partner of the Holy Spirit.* Apparently, prior to Nicaea, there was still ample room to view Jesus as the incarnation of the Spirit next to or instead of as the incarnation of the Logos. In recent times, Berkhof points out, there has been a new interest among theologians, including himself, in this so-called *pneuma-christology*, which, according to him, has wrongly been regarded as the beginnings of an *adoptianistic Christology* (321, 322).

(c) How are the Spirit and the exalted Christ related to each other?

With this question Berkhof focuses more pointedly on the previous one. If the Spirit creates and inspires Christ so that He becomes the exalted one and as such now sends the Spirit, the question arises whether one can still distinguish between Jesus' actions and those of the Spirit. Is it not so, Berkhof asks, that since the resurrection Christ and the Spirit coincide for us? The Biblical-theological answer to these questions, he states, is not univocal. Often, Berkhof points out, the New Testament speaks about the Spirit as a power which is clearly distinguished from Christ, as *another comforter*, as *the Spirit of Christ*, who leads us to Christ, and in us prays for the coming of Christ. On the other hand, the work of the Spirit is also frequently presented as the work of the exalted Christ himself: 'I am with you always', 'now the Lord is the Spirit', in the resurrection He becomes 'a life-giving Spirit', and therefore He does not leave us as orphans, but will come again to us. The letter to the seven churches in Revelation which are dictated by the exalted Christ for the most part end with a summarizing admonition to listen to what the *Spirit* says to the churches. For Paul, Berkhof states, the expressions *ἐν Χριστοῖς* and *ἐν Πνεύματι* are of similar purport. The Spirit is said to intercede for us and so, too, Christ. The Spirit is called *Παρακλητος* (advocate, helper, or counsellor), so too the exalted Christ. As a rule, Berkhof states, this second aspect has been ignored in the study of the faith, because it could not be made to fit in the classical Trinitarian pattern in which the second and the third person remain clearly distinguished. Of late however, he points out there has been special interest in this second line, although with widely divergent results. Significantly, Berkhof mentions that in his book, *The doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (1964), he initially identified Christ and the Spirit, but could not maintain this identification in the following chapters. According to Berkhof, we shall have to learn to speak about the being and acts of God in such a way that this double relationship of Christ and the Spirit need not be avoided, nor literally repeated, but indeed becomes transparent, interpretable, and fruitful for us (322, 323).

Berkhof therefore attempts to elucidate and articulate the many-sided relationship of the Spirit to Christ in the following way. The Spirit, he states, is the name for God himself in his activity among us. Due to our disobedience and powerlessness there is no more than a loose relation between the Spirit and the world. This is so until as Spirit God takes a new initiative to get a grip on his creation, by creating the new

man and inspiring him with his Spirit. In this man the covenant is confirmed and in him the Spirit makes his abode on earth. From now on the Spirit and Christ coincide. As the totally faithful covenant partner, Jesus is the *form* (Dutch: *gestalte*) of the Spirit, calls the Spirit to earth, and creates passageway for the Spirit. From now on the workings of the Spirit consist in effectuating the absolute covenantal union between God and Jesus and the new life which He has obtained for us in that union. What happens here in this most intimate union of God and man, Berkhof states, can be approached from two angles: (1) *the Spirit creates Jesus and Jesus sends the Spirit*, and (2) *Spirit is the operation of the exalted Christ and a separate operation of God on earth which became possible through Jesus' sonship*. Summing up, Berkhof states: *Christ and the Spirit are the two poles of the new covenant* (323).

Berkhof uses the term *participation* for what the Spirit does to man as He proceeds from Christ. According to him, the basic pattern of this work of participation must be derived from the Son's relationship to us the lost sons. He is the *one-ling* and simultaneously the *firstling*. From Him as the source, our life outside the covenant association with God must be unsettled, brought to a crisis, our alienation overcome, and we moved to voluntary surrender and participation, so that we may become *conformed to the image of the Son*. To that end the Spirit first of all establishes a renewed community within which His healing and renewing power receives operating space. As the body of Christ (*corpus Christi*), this community is the place of *initiation* or *incorporation* into this field of forces. Cyprian's adage, *extra ecclesiam salus non est*, is acceptable, Berkhof states, as long as it is remembered that since Paul's conversion this rule also has its exceptions, and that under the word *church* a great many incorporating communities are included. This renewed community, however, envisages and presupposes the renewal of the incorporated people — a work having several facets and names, such as faith and repentance, justification and reconciliation, vocation and regeneration. The renewal of man and, in a certain sense, the renewal of the world may thus be described as part of the work of the Spirit, for He is indeed the subject of all these works and their mutual relationship and coherence. To do justice to the various aspects, Berkhof states, requires that each be dealt with separately (323,324).

In view of the above, Berkhof characterizes the work of the Spirit as *an event that participates and intervenes in history in an entirely new way, both in the inner*

and outer history of the individual and that of mankind as a whole. Participation, according to him, means that from the exclusive centre Christ the Spirit constantly draws new circles in time and space. Generally called *missions* (Dutch: *zending*), this work includes everything the Spirit does and effects in His ongoing incorporating activity. The Church, the inner life of the individual, the works of love and liberation, the organized activity of the congregation or a group of Christians — all these have their place and significance as elements or dimensions of the great participation movement in which they are simultaneously *both fruit and seed*. Separated from this movement, either the institutional church or the spiritual life of the individual easily becomes a goal in itself — the unfortunate consequence of the tendency to determine the nature of the Spirit from his work in the church or the individual. According to Berkhof, both the Roman Catholic ecclesiastical and the Protestant individualistic conception of the Spirit misconstrued the context in which both of them have their relative value — *the context of the Spirit as a Christologically determined power in redemptive history, and therefore a historical power*. Indeed, Berkhof states, the Spirit is *a historical power* who touches us, transforms us, and enlists us for service in his ongoing work in this present world which will not be completed, so that whatever he accomplishes here points beyond itself and must always and anew exceed its own boundaries (324, 325).

Berkhof emphasizes that the Spirit's work of participation has its limits. Through the work of Jesus the Spirit acquires a hitherto unheard of passage toward our world, enabling Him to begin a great work among us. Yet, He cannot complete it. He forms no more than Christ the closing horizon of our history. On the contrary, like Christ He opens new horizons. Like the Son, the Spirit is in his turn and in his own manner also an *απαρχή*, a *firstling*. On many fronts He joins battle with the alienation from God and the self-sufficiency by which man is held captive. Yet, a definitive victory is still out of the question. It remains a matter of 'starts' or, as the Heidelberg Catechism puts it, of *a small beginning*. Though the Spirit's work in individuals, in churches, and in cultures is powerful, it is also fragmentary, continually frustrated by human resistance, and defencelessly subjected to belittlement and even denial. Those who share in the participation, experience the working of the Spirit, but are also painfully aware how much the Spirit is still only provisional. Whatever the Spirit does is an *ἀρραβών*, a pledge, a guarantee, but at the same time a postponement of the con-

summation. Even and precisely under the guidance of the Spirit we remain under way, *en route*. On the way we are given enough to keep faith and hope, but at the same time too little to delude ourselves in a type of spiritual fanaticism that we have arrived (326).

6.10 The covenant as tri- (-u)-nity

In Berkhof's view there is no reason to ascribe to God something like *triuneness*. As the creator of the world, as the establisher of the covenant, and as the one who reveals Himself to us, we know Him as the *one* God, as a person. In His singleness He is at the same time infinitely rich. Indeed, His singleness goes infinitely beyond what we call singleness. From this knowledge, however, there is no way leading toward a doctrine of God as triune. Berkhof emphasizes that although he regularly mentions the classical doctrine of God as *three persons in one essence*, he does so mainly in critical vein in order to show how this doctrine has saddled us with problems that are foreign to Scripture and indigestible to the believing mind. Indeed, he states, it has changed what was a self-evident confession into an unfathomable mystery, an intellectual crux, and has been the cause of ages-long conflicts and schisms. In traditional theology the discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity next to and following upon the doctrine of the being and attributes of God creates the impression of being little more than an unrelated appendix (326, 327).

According to Berkhof, where the New Testament mentions God, Christ, and the Spirit in one breath, it does so to signify that their cooperation means our redemption. All these passages, Berkhof points out, with the exception of Matt.28:19 and the interpolated 1 John 5:7 are revelation-Trinitarian or revelation-triadic statements. They do not involve any clear reflection pointing to a trinity. As Berkhof sees it, the New Testament witnesses to God's saving association with us in Christ and the Spirit, and although it traces both forms of association back to an eternal intention, so that the Son and in the same way the Spirit can be presented as pre-existent, it does not translate this insight into a doctrine of an ontological trinity (328, 329).

Berkhof reminds us that the Trinitarian controversy was not an independent theme, but the sequel to and the consequence of the Christological dispute. Everything

revolved around the relationship of Christ to God. The ever increasing identification of Christ and later (after the middle of the 4th Century) of the Spirit with God resulted in a conflict with biblical monotheism (the *μοναρχία* of God) on the one hand, and with the subordination of Christ to God as is clearly portrayed in the Gospels on the other. The ‘solution’, Berkhof states, was eventually found by distinguishing between the so-called *economic or revelational Trinity in history* and the *immanent or ontological Trinity of essence in eternity*, and making the distance between them as great as possible. Which meant, Berkhof explains, that on earth Christ can proceed from the Spirit and be subordinate to the Father, but in eternity the Son is of one substance (*ὁμοουσιος*) with the Father (Nicaea 325 A.D), and does not proceed from the Spirit, but the Spirit proceeds from the Father (the Eastern Church) or from the Father *and* the Son (the so-called *filioque controversy*, the Western Church) (329).

This distinction did no more, Berkhof maintains, than cover up the problem of how one can conceive of God as *one-and-yet-three*. For the Greek *τρεις ὑποστασεις εν μιαι ουσιαι* and the Latin *tres personae in una substantia* are not the same. Indeed, the effect of the doctrinal development that followed was that the Trinity of essence actually had nothing to do anymore with the revelational Trinity which was virtually obliterated in it. A most regrettable example, according to Berkhof, is the so-called *Athanasian Creed* or *Symbolum quicumque* (6th or 7th Century) which totally ignores the revelational Trinity and does not connect the redemption of sinners with salvation history, but hangs it on an abstract eternity (329, 330).

According to Berkhof, a remarkable result of all this is that the Trinitarian confession does not function in the faith of the Church. In this he echoes the sentiments of K. Rahner and P. Kohnstamm that while the doctrine of the Trinity is regarded as the central dogma of the church, in their actual religious life Christians are almost pure monotheists. Berkhof points out that counter movements towards a revelational Trinity are to be found in Irenaeus, particularly in Marcellus of Ancyra, slightly in Augustine, but stronger within the Reformation. The hair-splitting distinctions about *one-and-yet-three* and *three-and-yet-one*, however, remained characteristic of 16th Century Protestant Scholasticism. Even the remarkable *anti-Trinitarian* or *Unitarian* anti-pole was too rationalistically inspired and limited and therefore too negative to make a contribution toward the renewal of this doctrine (330, 331).

In Berkhof's view, it was not until the 19th Century that one can speak of a turn towards giving priority to the revelational trinity, and even then it was hesitant and partial. Only a few followed Schleiermacher's bold initiative in this regard with the same radicalness. Later, Berkhof points out, the positive and the negative aspects of Schleiermacher were followed alternately, modern theology tending to lean towards the negative aspects, except where in the wake of Hegel it interpreted the Trinity in philosophical-idealistic terms. While Confessional theology maintained traditional Trinitarianism, other schools on the continent, e.g. the *Vermittlungstheologie*, the *Ethicals*, and the *school of Ritschl*, began to search in the direction Schleiermacher had shown so hesitantly. The combination of the biblical witness and German-Idealistic thinking led to all sorts of attempts to develop the ontological Trinity from the perspective of the personality of God, self-consciousness, the idea of love, etc. Anglican Trinitarian thinking of that period and Anglo-Saxon theology in general, Berkhof points out, owing to the tendency towards empiricism, exhibits a firm attachment to the revelational Trinity and an inclination to tri-theistic formulations (331, 332).

Under the influence of dialectical theology, the 20th Century has been characterized by a resurgence of interest in classical thinking regarding the ontological Trinity, although theologians could not and would not go back prior to Schleiermacher's starting-point in the revelational Trinity. Typical, Berkhof states, are the attempts of E. Brunner, K. Rahner, and Karl Barth and his school to restore the unity of the revelational and the ontological Trinity. For E. Jüngel, W. Pannenberg, and J. Moltmann who follow the line of Barth more emphatically and who orient themselves to Hegel and his divine triad, the Trinity is the description of a history within and concerning God Himself, with the cross as central point. Indeed, Berkhof emphasizes, where the doctrine of the Trinity does not arise from the covenantal association between God and His people, there the Trinity will always be understood as a divine *Among-Us* (332, 333).

As for centuries a static ontological Trinity was kept far removed from the revelational Trinity, so that, in the spirit of Aristotle, God might remain the unmoved first mover, so at present there exists the inclination to make the ontological Trinity coincide with the revelational Trinity in such a way that, in the spirit of Hegel, the

process of humiliation and exaltation takes place within God Himself. This, according to Berkhof, is more a speculative way out of the problem handed to us by the Trinitarian tradition than a solution which agrees with the covenantal structure of the Christian faith. For also in the modern conception, the Trinity remains the description of a relationship solely within God, i.e. of a God without people, because Christ does not function as the human covenant Partner, but as the anhypostatic second Person of the divine being. In its New Testament form, however, the structure of the Trinity describes precisely the fellowship with man for which God emerges out of himself. We need to return to that intention, Berkhof states. We may not let ourselves be held back from it by a tradition, imposing though it may be, which is artificial and in its abstractness dangerous to the faith (333).

How does Berkhof aim to overcome this danger? The entire Christian faith, he states, hinges on the coming together of God and man as it takes place in the Spirit who proceeds from the Father to the Son and then in turn proceeds from the Son to the people. In that event we see the being of God in action, creating, acting, suffering and struggling. The name for God-in-action toward the world is: Spirit. His supreme act as Spirit is the creation of the new man, the true Son, who by virtue of His love and obedience prepares for us the way from alienation to fulfilment, and with that opens the way for the Spirit who wants to unite us with Him and conform us to his image. Thus, in Berkhof's view, the combination of the three names Father-Son-Spirit, or equally valid, Father-Spirit-Son, proves to be the *epitomizing description of the covenantal event*, both as to its historical and to its existential aspect. The Father is *the divine partner*, the Son *the human representative*, and the Spirit *the bond between both*, and therefore also *the bond between the Son and the daughters and sons* whom He draws to the Father. What we have here, Berkhof emphasizes, is not *one essence in three persons*, but *one event that takes place from out of God*, that is *performed by the Spirit*, and indeed occurs primarily between two persons, God and Jesus. It is an event, however, in which new persons are constantly being involved. "May we then not call the Spirit a person?" To which Berkhof replies "no", if thereby we place Him separately beside the person of God. "Yes", however, if we understand that this name expresses the personhood of God in His actions toward the outside. The Spirit is precisely *God-as-person, God-in-relation* (327).

According to Berkhof, the problem in the history of the church was that it did not regard the Trinity as descriptive of the structure of the covenant, but of the structure of the one covenant partner: God. Presenting that *One* as a plurality gave rise to the problem: How can God be one and yet three? How can He be a person and at the same time three persons? How can Jesus regard God as greater than Himself, if from eternity He is one in essence with the Father? The effect of this, Berkhof maintains, is that God becomes a mystery from which His covenant partner, man, is excluded — a mystery which he can only worship. For his faith it has no significance. For he prays not to the Trinity, but to God; not to Christ, but to God through Jesus Christ, our Lord; not to the Spirit, but to God for the Spirit. For the believer, Berkhof states, each of the three names thus has its particular function in his covenantal fellowship with God. Together, however, they do not constitute *one being in eternity*, but *one history in time* (327, 328).

For Berkhof the word *Trinity* points to *a continuing and open event directed to man*. Indeed, we are invited to participate in the Trinitarian event, because the Spirit conforms us unto the image of the Son. In the light of John 17 and Matthew 11:27, it can be said that we are made to share in the relationship which there is between the Father and the Son, without the uniqueness of their relationship disappearing. Even the classical theology describes the purpose of salvation as: *consortium trinitatis* — partnership in the Trinity. According to Berkhof, the word *Trinity* is to be preferred above *multi-unity* because even the most intimate relationship with it still presupposes the distance in essence (Dutch: *wezensafstand*) with respect to God and His Spirit, and the distance in origin (Dutch: *oorsprongsafstand*) with respect to the *only begotten Son* (328).

Berkhof emphasizes that stating it in this way does not mean that the Trinity is an event that takes place outside of God. That cannot be, because God's being and His revelation are too closely connected. Indeed, the entire Trinitarian event is grounded in an eternal will of salvation which belongs to the very essence of God. In His sovereign love God has made himself mutable. With us He goes through a process which also does something to Him, because as Father it enriches Him with sons and daughters. The Trinity is essential to God in this sense that the Trinitarian event stems from God's being and leads to it. It describes the manner in which God, according to his

eternal resolution, extends and continues his life in time, so as to give man a share in it. Thus the Trinity is not the description of an *abstract God-in-Himself*, but of *the revealed God-with-us* (328).

6.11 In review

At the beginning of this section we asked whether the formulation *Jesus — man and (also?) God* is correct and does justice to Berkhof's view and intention with regard to Christology. Now its correctness must be determined. The crux of the matter lies in the little word *also*. What does Berkhof mean when he states that he regards Christ *also* as God, but with the emphasis on the *also*? (Scheps 1981:2). It cannot be denied that the *vere homo*, the true humanity of Jesus and its full development to the very limit is of radical and decisive importance in Berkhof's Christology. For Berkhof Jesus is man, the perfected covenant man, *the new man*, the eschatological man, as intended and promised by God in the covenant (Berkhof 1985⁵:284). And yet, as G.C. Berkouwer significantly noted in his series of articles in *Gereformeerd Weekblad* (1976), one is not done with Berkhof by exclaiming that for him Jesus is only a (ordinary) man (Berkouwer 1976a: 185). Indeed, he states, Berkhof sharply opposed all criticism which reproached him of viewing Christ *only as man*, albeit an exceptional man with something incomparable with regard to all other men, yet still *only man* (Berkouwer 1976b:193), and that he tried in every way to unnerve such criticism (Berkouwer 1976a:185). Time and again, Berkouwer points out, despite Berkhof's concentration on Jesus' humanity (the approach *from below*), one comes across the elements of the approach *from above*, where Berkhof mentions the new, the unique, and the exceptional with regard to Jesus (Berkouwer 1976f: 234). Berkhof's untiring efforts to emphasize what he would later call the "vertical" dimension in his Christology (Berkhof 1975c:324) are indeed striking. Thus we hear, that Jesus is more than a man among men; that in the New Testament very little is proclaimed about him that is simply empirically-human; that He is an absolute exception, an entirely new beginning (1985⁵:284), which cannot be expected from below, but is a new input from above; that God himself must provide the true man, the faithful covenant partner (281). Again it is stated, that Jesus' sonship is entirely unique; that He is the Son *par excellence* not as the fruit and climax of human religious and moral purity, but in virtue of a unique and creative act of God (281); that Jesus, the Son by pre-eminence, did

not arise out of the empirical human world, but is a new creation which man cannot bring forth, but only receive (1973a:308); that He is able to be the mediator in our alienation from God because He is a new input from God, ‘conceived of the Holy Spirit’, through which in Him God’s purpose can land in the world (1985⁵:284); that the confession ‘born of the virgin Mary’, a later embellishment of the tradition, is meant as the earthly reverse-side of the ‘conceived of the Holy Spirit’ (291); that Jesus could not come forth from our lost human generation; that he comes from above, “begotten of the Holy Spirit”; that the functionality of the new covenant man is grounded in “an ontological secret” (Berkhof 1975c: 320). Then, too, there is mention that between Father and Son there is not only a covenantal relationship, but also a relationship of origin, a new covenantal relationship based on a unique relationship of origin; that Jesus is therefore *the* son, the ‘only-begotten’ Son (Berkhof 1985⁵: 281); that this sonship has its origin in eternity (283); that God’s first and dominant thought in his plan of creation was Jesus the Son (‘ideal pre-existence’) (290); that Jesus is not a dual being — there are not two subjects in Him — his human ‘I’ is, out of free will, fully and exhaustively permeated by the ‘I’ of God, in virtue of which Jesus becomes *the* representative of the Father, and a new union of God and man comes about, far beyond our experience and imagination; that the exclusive sphere of God, the ‘glory’, passes in Jesus to *one* man; that God does not displace the human person of Jesus, but He permeates him with his Spirit, that is, with himself (284,285); that it is therefore God who comes to us in Jesus (1973a:302); that only through the resurrection (as the divine validation of Jesus’ life and death) do we know that God was in the man Jesus (1985⁵:306). And last but not least, Berkhof calls attention to his replacement of the Johannine logos- / ontological /substantialistic model for a pneuma-(Spirit-) model (in the spirit of the Apostolic Fathers, sc. Marcellus of Ancyra — JPG), in which the Spirit and Christ functionally coincide: the Spirit creates Jesus *and* Jesus sends the Spirit; Jesus is the form of the Spirit and the Spirit is the activity of the exalted Christ *and* a separate activity of God on earth, made possible by Jesus’ sonship. Christ and the Spirit are the two poles of the new covenant (1975c: 317; 1985⁵: 323).

But, as Klaas Runia has stated so incisively and insightfully: Berkhof’s “concept proves that historical investigation, which is characteristic of the approach ‘from below’, is indeed unable to uncover the divine secret of Jesus Christ. Even the addi-

tion of the approach ‘from behind’ is not enough to uncover this secret. For even when we acknowledge Jesus as the fulfilment of God’s covenant with Israel, and therefore as the covenantal representative, he still remains human and no more. Berkhof is aware of this and therefore also adds an approach ‘from above’... But however ‘high’ the language he uses may be, he always stops short of calling Jesus God’s Son in an ontological sense. There is in Jesus a divine secret, but it is not the secret of his own divinity! (Runia 1984: 75, 76). This is strikingly born out where Berkhof actually says in the same breath: “It is only through the resurrection that we know: God was in Jesus” and: “... with his resurrection Jesus entered into a new and higher existence... into the sphere of ‘glory’... the exclusive sphere of God himself. Not that he thereby changed from man into God ...” (1985⁵: 306, 308). Significant, too, is the remark by G.C. van de Kamp, that when Berkhof uses the expression ‘conceived of the Holy Spirit’ in connection with Jesus as the new creative act of God, he does not mean it literally (1983:211).

When Berkhof states in the interview with Scheps that Jesus is *also* God with the emphasis on that *also*, he means no more than that Jesus is so involved in the fellowship with God that he may be called God, at least after his exaltation. To which he adds directly, that that is also our destiny; we will also partake of the divine nature, following in Jesus’ footsteps through the grace which we receive in him (Scheps 1981:2). But being called God and partaking of the divine nature in the sense which Berkhof understands it, is not the same as being God. G.C. Berkouwer has rightly pointed out that the ‘God himself’ remains the fundamental issue in the discussion of Berkhof’s Christology (Berkouwer 1976e: 226).

Berkhof’s criticism of H.M. Kuitert, in my view, applies to a certain extent to himself: “Kuitert starts ‘from below’; can he, from this direction, arrive at the God of the Gospel, the father of Jesus Christ?... (his) anthropological floor seems covered from wall to wall with a Christian carpet... his ascent from an anthropological floor, here reached the anthropological ceiling beyond which he cannot climb” (Berkhof 1989: 224, 226). With his *vere homo eschatologicus* Berkhof has reached his anthropological ceiling beyond which he cannot climb. One might ask Berkhof the same question which he posed in his article *Hedendaagse vragen in de Christologie* in connection with the alternative Christologies of Schoonenberg, Ellen Flesseman-van

Leer, John A.T. Robinson and Wilhelm Thüsing: “Does Jesus along this line not become the ideal man just as along the other line he became the disguised God?” (Berkhof 1973b:12). In any event, it seems that of late many theologians regard the ‘from below’ and the ‘from above’ as a false contradistinction which goes against the course of New Testament Christology (K. Runia 1984: 99, cf. G.C. Berkouwer 1976c:202).

Two nagging questions remain. In view of his statement that Jesus’ “human ‘I’ is, out of free will, fully and exhaustively permeated by the ‘I’ of God...” has Berkhof really safely avoided the Scylla and the Charybdis of the anhypostasia and the enhypostasia? Furthermore, is his view of Jesus as the true man strong enough to bear the weight of everything that Berkhof deems essential with regard to our participation in the way of Jesus, or as De Ru posed it: ‘are we saved by God himself, or by a true man who has appeared as a new creative act of God?’ (G. de Ru 1975: 304; cf. G.C. Berkouwer 1976d: 218).

I wholeheartedly agree with Klaas Runia, however, when he says: “... the confession of Christ as Saviour and the Christology, which a person holds, *are not simply identical*... A man’s Christology may be defective, while nevertheless he puts all his trust, for the present and the future, in Jesus Christ, whom he acknowledges as his Lord and Saviour. I for one believe that people like Berkhof fall within this category however much I may disagree with their Christology” (1984:88).