

SCHOLARSHIP

TWO CONVOCATION ADDRESSES
ON UNIVERSITY LIFE

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SCOLASTICA II



THE GOAL OF GENUINE STUDY: TO SEEK OR TO FIND?

Aestumattissimi, Ornatissimi Commilitones,

Latin may be dying out but allow me to address you according to academic tradition as *Distinguished Students, Esteemed Comrades-in-arms*, and to bid you once more, on behalf of the senate, a warm welcome in the army camp of our studies. Welcome first of all to you upperclassmen as you rejoin the colors for a new campaign, but just as warm a welcome to you first-year students, fresh recruits from the gymnasia, presenting yourselves for the first time under the university banner. "Going home" at the end of the academic year may elicit rich sensations of relaxation, especially if you've earned your leave after passing your courses. Nevertheless, come autumn, a longing for our academic army tent rekindles your fighting spirit. And that our novices yearned to join our ranks is all the more understandable at a university where no dread of malicious initiation rites comes to deflate high expectations and where proper modesty ensures a safe-conduct against any molestation at the periphery.

Thus the start of a new school year always makes for a positive mood in our circles. Also among us, your professors. We

have dedicated our lives to the struggle for a sacred principle. It is our passion to hunt down the lie in the world of academic scholarship and to dislodge error from its hiding place. After a period of rest, the parole to press onward burns on our lips. It is like a brook that swells and wants to flood the fields. And what scene can be more desirable, what sight more striking, than to see you all lined up again in front of us, eager to listen to our words if well-founded.

Students, we are supposed to form you; but you in turn form us. As the child makes a woman into a mother, so the student makes the professor. Time and again your curiosity elicits from us what might otherwise never have passed our lips, and for all our delight in inspiring you, you also inspire us. As well, our hearts are still somewhat heavy when we contemplate our small numbers, and although the sexagenarians among us are not yet ready to retire, still we feel we need assistance, soon replacement.¹ Without new recruits an elite corps dies out. And where else but from your midst are they to come who will before long take our place? That is why you are *spes nostra*—our hope. Today you are our listeners, tomorrow the mouthpieces of our word, and someday—this is our quiet prayer—more than just our epigones.²

Spes nostra, but no less *spes patriae*, the hope of our country. For the spirit of our forefathers that has taken hold of us continues to meet with hostile resistance among the leading circles of our nation. And although our faithful God still spared a remnant, that remnant cannot strive for victory, can barely hold its own, and will be defenseless if it does not acquire, *also outside the church*, heroic men who can bear arms in every domain: the one the sling and the bow, the other the sword and the lance. Our Christian folk are crying out for such men; they hope to see such men come forth from among you in ever larger numbers. And if our people

give generously to our school and have given our Free University the love of their hearts, then it is because they expect us to teach you the indispensable skills, and for the brightest among you the fundamentals of military science, for waging our sacred struggle.

All the more do we trust that this high-minded expectation will not be disappointed because your passing up other universities and choosing to come here in itself already betrays your willingness to make a considerable sacrifice for your principle. Our young institution lacks so much of what is offered in abundance at other schools. Our departments are few, our faculty is pitifully small, we are without academic institutes worthy of the name, and the degrees we confer still lack any *effectus civilis*.³ To have studied here has never yet been a recommendation for public office; to *dare* to have studied here still bears a mark of obloquy. But that is precisely why your coming here is a *moral* act that compares so favorably with other people's love of ease and abject betrayal of principle. It is the *moral* character of your choice that automatically creates a bond of spiritual kinship between you and your professors and gives real meaning to the title *comrades in arms*. And so long as the flame of that holy principle continues to burn in our breast, our paucity of numbers cannot discourage us and the heat of day does not daunt us.

Nevertheless, students, studying at an Opposition School need not be made more onerous than necessary. It borders on cruelty to strew your difficult path with stumbling block after stumbling block, and in this opening address I am therefore going to try and remove at least one of those nasty obstacles. Or is it not offensive, and is it not calculated to dampen all your courage, when you put up with sacrifices and then to hear them yell at you from the opposite side: "You won't find scholarship at the Free

1 The Free University at this time (1900) had 6 professors, 126 students, and 3 departments (theology, law, and letters).

2 I.e., more than just our followers or imitators.

3 To lack "civil effect" meant that a degree in law or letters earned at the Free University did not qualify its holders to serve in public offices such as notaries, registered attorneys and justices, or to serve as teachers of the classical languages in the public gymnasia. This disadvantage would be removed by the Higher Education Act piloted through parliament by the Kuyper Ministry in 1905.

University anyway, just indoctrination in time-worn propositions. Filling station is perhaps too banal a name, but your would-be university will never be more than a drill school, a cramming school for regurgitating ancestral lore." This evil accusation, which is even echoed in the major liberal papers, might easily become too much for you first-year students, too much in any case for you to be able to respond to it with a principled refutation. You can stop your ears to it, but that is not how you defeat it. That is why I am going to use this opportunity to put your mind at ease on this point at least. If I spoke eleven years ago about the *secret* of genuine study, let me on this occasion speak to you about the *goal* of genuine study, focusing on the all-important question: What is the point of scientific study? Is it to seek or to find?



The difference between seeking and finding as the goal of scientific study is best illustrated by pointing to analogies taken from daily life. You have heard of the recreational activity of the hunt. What is it that drives all those gentlemen who normally live a life of ease (a few not even all that steady on their feet owing to rheumatism) to spend hours upon hours chasing across the fields and crawling through the woods? Is it to catch a hare for dinner or a partridge for supper? Apparently not, because any poultry shop can supply the most pampered palate with a wide assortment of game; and to have game on the menu for a whole week no doubt costs far less than a whole day of hunting with dogs and loaders. No, what matters for the true lover of the chase is not to taste or eat game, but to hunt. His passion is for the activity of hunting as such. Eating game is a bonus, but the thrill he is looking for is the actual chase.

That's how it is with the huntsman, and it is no different with the angler. Stepping out when it is still half dark, baiting the hook, lowering the float, and waiting for a nibble, striking at just the right moment and then landing a pike or a bass, that is the

real pleasure of the recreational fisherman. The sport is the search and the search is the angler's bliss. Buy a fish in the store or receive one as a present, marinated in the finest sauce—that too is a treat; but for a real sportsman nothing can compare with personally angling for a fish in a stream or canal. Our Frisians know how wealthy Englishmen cross over to Frisia just for the pleasure of fishing in the well-stocked Frisian lakes. That is how it is with hunting and fishing, and that is how things stand, though to a lesser degree, for all those who find joy in their daily occupation. Money lightens toil, but money does not inspire. Rembrandt and Frans Hals created marvelous paintings that today are worth their weight in gold, but they were fobbed off with a hundred shillings, if that much. Vondel, our "prince of poets" as he came to be called, worked as a clerk in a hosier's shop and as a teller in a savings and loan bank.⁴ Painters who today paint for a living see their talent visibly drying up. But poets and painters who are *artists by the grace of God* are those who write verse because they can't stop themselves and who create paintings because it is their passion. And although this holds especially for artists, it is no less true of our artisans. A mason, a carpenter, a house painter, an upholsterer, if they think only of their weekly pay and derive no pleasure from making things beautiful, from building and upholstering, are not held in high regard by their bosses or their co-workers. Even the farmhand that plows and sows, disks or harrows, should find his enjoyment and passion in the work itself, or his boss will not take him seriously. Small wonder, then, that a real student does not make any progress until the study itself gives him pleasure. The joy of academic life is no longer to have to finish assignments on time, as formerly at school, but to be free to study for the sheer pleasure of it. And the person who graduates and is allowed to assist in the search for truth at a more advanced level, to grope for light in much that is dark and to hunt and dig where no one has

⁴ Kuyper refers in this section to the Dutch painters Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn (1606–69) and Frans Hals (ca. 1581–1666) as well as to Dutch poet and playwright Joost van den Vondel (1587–1679).

gone before, that person relishes his good fortune: he tastes the pleasure of study, indulges his passion with rejoicing, and feels great delight as he engages in *research*.

Accordingly, I have no intention of disputing the delights of seeking after truth. I welcome it with gratitude as a token of God's common grace. When we lost the luxuriance of paradise and were burdened with eating bread by the sweat of our brow, it was a blessing that along with that burden we were given pleasure in work as a spur for that work. A thoroughbred finds pleasure in the race and a pedigree hound takes delight in the chase. A purebred huskie can scarcely be held back from dashing forward. You need a whip only for those animals that lack nobility. To have to till the ground in order to have bread and to plough and sow not slavishly but with joy—that is *grace*. Without passion for work, all that work would debase us. And that the flames of enthusiasm leap even higher when not the hand but the head has to perform the work—that is an even richer gift of grace from God, something which even the pagan poets acknowledged when they explained their irresistible urge from divine inspiration: "Est Deus in nobis, agitant calescimus Illo."⁵ It is that wondrous urge to which our generation owes its richest benefits, its greatest treasures. And without doubt it is also true of the pursuit of science that the urge to *seek* truth is from God and that even if you make no discoveries the search itself elevates your person, and that here too *laudanda voluntas*⁶ remains a patent of nobility.

With one proviso! Provided science aims to *serve*, never to *rule*. Seeking should be in the service of finding. The ultimate purpose of seeking is finding. Only from this lofty goal does seeking derive its reason for existence. The shepherd who had

5 This Latin phrase translates a line from the Roman poet Ovid (ca. 43 BC–ca. AD 17): "There is a god within us, and we glow when stirred by him." Ovid, *Fasti*, bk. 6, line 5.

6 This Latin phrase translates a phrase from a letter written by Ovid to Rufinus, "[Though the power may be lacking,] the will is to be praised," which in the original reads "ut desint vires, tamen est laudanda voluntas." Ovid, *Epistulae ex Ponto*, bk. 3, *Epistle 4: To Rufinus*, line 79.

lost his sheep did not rejoice in searching for it but in finding it; it was then that he called together his friends and neighbors and exclaimed: "Rejoice with me, for I have *found* my sheep."⁷ Jesus expressed the same thought about the woman who had lost a piece of silver. And when the prodigal son finally returned home the emphasis was so exclusively on having found him that the father did not mention a word about seeking; he could only shout for joy: "This my son was lost, and is *found*."⁸ Delight in searching is priceless, and without it you won't get there; but *finding* must be the goal and motive and therefore the main thing, above all for science that seeks *truth*. When you are really thirsty you do not seek a spring for the sake of seeking but for the water that can slake your thirst; and once you find water, seeking is furthest from your mind. When a traveler through the desert locates a well with bubbling water, he does not withdraw at dusk to forget about its whereabouts, to look for it again the next morning; instead he lies down next to it and falls asleep, to refresh himself with the water at dawn before moving on. Thus when people say that in the field of academic scholarship not the possession of truth, not the finding of truth, but the search for truth is the principal motive, then evidently the thirst for truth has flagged in their hearts and not the desire to possess truth but the pleasure of seeking it is paramount with them. They do not seek in order to find; in fact, too much finding would spoil it for them. The angler who has a bite every minute grows tired of landing fish after fish and no longer finds pleasure in the sport.

And yet, that is all too often how modern scholars approach their studies. They quote the bold words of Lessing: "If God were to hold all Truth concealed in his right hand and in his left only the steady drive to seek Truth but with the proviso that I would forever go astray in the search, and He would bid me choose, I would humbly take the left hand and say: Father, give me this

7 Cf. Luke 15:6.

8 Cf. Luke 15:24.

one—the pure Truth is for you alone.”⁹ Thus for Lessing, the search for truth is more glorious than the possession of truth. But let no one be misled by this pithy saying. For if you say that even Lessing after all did ultimately hope to be in possession of truth provided it were the result of his own searching, that objection does not stand up for one minute. Call truth one hundred, what Lessing’s contemporaries knew of it nine, and one-hundredth what he himself along with his adherents could add to it in a life-long search (which is of course far too high an estimate), then it still is true that he would rather die without ever having known nine-tenths of the truth than to have found the truth as a result of his searching for it. Lessing’s statement runs perfectly parallel in the intellectual domain to work-righteousness in the moral domain. To want to earn one’s own salvation and not receive it by grace is perfectly on a par with the desire to seek all truth by oneself and spurn any revelation of higher light. To prefer to dispense with nine-tenths of the truth rather than to receive the light of truth humbly and gratefully from God’s hand is to want to pick from the tree of knowledge in order to be like God and to owe one’s knowledge to no one but oneself and to own it thanks solely to one’s own effort.

You all know the fundamental contrast between knowledge in this life and in the life to come. In this life it is a question of finding by seeking, gradually knowing more and more, but always a knowing *in part* and never otherwise than through a glass, darkly.¹⁰ In eternity, on the other hand, it will always be knowing the essence of things, knowing face to face, knowing God even as we are known by him, a knowing that is immediate, exhaustive, perfect, and for that reason without any *seeking*.¹¹ And the knowledge which is our possession without seeking

and which the prophets and apostles say is the most exalted and the most glorious of knowledge—that knowledge is rejected by Lessing and all who follow him, rejected as unworthy of the human spirit. However, those who with us rank the *possession* of truth above all else, and who honor immediate knowledge as the highest knowledge, feel deeply how humbling it would be if we in our sinful state could not gain even the bread of knowledge except “by the sweat of our brow,” by dint of our own efforts. We therefore thank our God that all our exertion in seeking after knowledge is attended by delight in studying and that the search itself has its own attraction.

This contrast in standpoint has three direct consequences. If for you the pleasure of seeking truth surpasses the possession of it, then you cause to be lost what is not lost; then you will seek again what others have found long ago; and then you will rather grope in darkness than open your eyes to the light of the revelation that has been given us. If on the other hand you seek only in order to find, you will take care not to lose what you already have; you will no longer seek what was found long ago; and you will gratefully accept what is thrown into your lap without ever having to search for it.

Let us examine each of these three contrasts more closely.

The first contrast is that you must not lose, or cause to be lost, what was not lost to begin with. You know how a cat plays with a mouse: when it has caught the mouse it deliberately lets it go again purely for the pleasure of catching it again. That is how a cat plays, but it does not behoove the man of science to play like that with the truth. All knowledge proceeds from fixed presuppositions, not as artificial hypotheses that fell from the sky but as simple expressions of our existence, of our consciousness, of our perceiving and thinking *I*, including *axioms*, including *perception* as perception and *being* in ourselves, in the cosmos and in that which transcends the senses and is experienced immediately by our soul. This is the common belief that is foundational to all knowledge.

9 G. E. Lessing, *Anti-Goetze* (1778), in *Werke*, ed. H. Göpfert (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1979), 8:32–33.

10 Cf. 1 Cor. 13:12.

11 By this Kuyper means knowing in a qualitative, not quantitative sense.

For example, it is by means of discrete numbers and adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing them, or taking their square root, that we acquire the sums that we make ourselves by *induction*. But you have to *start* with these discrete numbers; if you commence your computation with zeroes you will always end up with zero. Any lessening of the certainty that is rooted in this fundamental belief can only lead to doubt, to skepticism, and at last to insanity. I do not deny that afterward it is humanity's duty to analyze, plumb, even x-ray the thinking subject. In that respect all of us are in debt to Kant. But analyzing the fact presupposes that the fact is there to begin with. And what is never legitimate is that we imagine that we ourselves have to prove *being itself* and that we willfully discard what we know immediately in order to regain it as the product of our own thinking. The absurd notion of our mind as a *tabula rasa* began with Descartes, who thought he could make not just knowledge but also being hang by the flimsy threads of an intellectual formula. And ever since Descartes that process of doubt in one form or another has carried on its destructive work without letup. We are no longer sure whether we even have a soul. And if it were not the case that these thinkers, these destroyers of what is immediately given, once outside their ivory towers, time after time deny their own intellectual constructs, then these gentlemen would be of no earthly use in the practical world.

To inspect a precious seal ring that is not lost but that you clasp in your fingers—to assay the karats of its gold and appraise the value of its diamond—is something altogether different from throwing it deliberately into the vortex for the sheer pleasure of retrieving it again. The art of every age mirrors the aspiration and the self-awareness of the age; so it is not an inaccurate characterization when a man of letters, himself a modern of moderns, wondered only recently what the art of the nineteenth century betrays other than an age of feebleness, flabbiness, inconstancy, and insipidity. "Future historians," he exclaims, "will not see anything else in our art but the somber index of the spiritual

state of our self-abasing century, the mark of our moral impotence, the melancholy testimony of the bankruptcy of our energies, however much we may boast of our energy."¹² That is the just punishment for people who cause to be lost what they already possessed by casting it into the vortex and who then dive into that vortex in vain hopes of recovering it. As real children of Pilate, they are left with not one fixed starting point for their thinking, not a single pillar in their temple of justice, not one firm rule for their moral code.

For this reason it is not an unscientific standpoint, but a *sine qua non* for any science which is to enrich humanity, that we in our University resist tooth and nail that wanton rejection of certainty and, honoring religious belief as a foundation also for science and scholarship, use our common sense and hold fast to man's immediate knowing of the basic elements of all being and all thought.



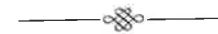
The case is no different with the second contrast that I pointed out: no longer seeking what was long found, or if you will, keeping to our *historical* standpoint over against hypercriticism and its penchant for always starting afresh. The edifice of scholarship is so enormous in design that if the pursuit and practice of science had no order, no collaboration, and no recognition of the historically prepared foundations, the building would never be put under one roof. Then everything that was ever discovered would be lost again and the search each time had to start all over again. Every scholar now living would have to begin afresh, on his own account, and cover the whole field. And every published result would only arouse your suspicion. You would want to look for possible mistakes by former scholars and to show them up for those mistakes. You would claim to be a free, independent

¹² Leo Claretie in *Le Monde moderne*, no. 68 (August 1900), p. 241.

thinker, and even as a professor you would need to take no notice of anything or anyone. If after ten years you were to topple like a house of cards the results you once dished up with great show of learning, even then, both what you first assembled and what you later discarded would still have to be lauded as "great feats of scholarship."

We refuse to go along with this critical individualism. It is contrary to the very nature and purpose of science. It speaks of the play enjoyed by people who delight in the search, but not of the earnest desire for humanity to advance to ever clearer light of knowledge. If science were concerned with the material world only, with things that can be weighed and measured, there would be no danger in that mania for criticism and that atomistic self-conceit. After all, an experiment can be repeated at the drop of a hat and a mathematical result can be checked at once. But however important the discovery and the manipulation of the forces of nature may be, all disciplines devoted to their study can never yield more than the lower levels of science. You do not ascend to the higher levels of knowledge until you delve into the spiritual sciences of invisible human life and in the relation of that life to the law which it obeys and so to the single mysterious force which causes it to come into being and to pass away again and which directs it to its goal or end. That higher, nobler science is so intricate and complex, and so surpasses what a single century, let alone a single thinker, can encompass, that there can be no question of progress in science unless the next century is prepared to continue spinning the thread as it slips from the failing hands of the dying century. The result of that historical labor has been that this higher science has produced fundamentally different positions which history itself has worked out in blood and tears. Here, subjective differences rule out unity of vision and, depending on a person's mind, one of these historic positions matches that person and that person matches that position. Given that scholars cannot work together unless they share a common starting point, we at this University collaborate

exclusively with those who take the position of our Reformed forebears. The way they viewed things strikes us too as the truth—matches the way we too view life. That is why we refuse to take to the streets and put the torch of criticism to everything that has been built up, to start building all over again. We inhabit the Reformed house bequeathed to us by our forebears and that is where we carry on our lives. If that is called *unscientific*, then notice how those who label us with that stigma factually do the same thing, only on less solid grounds. Among them, too, there is not one who has devised his own world of ideas and has investigated every foundation of knowledge. They too float on corks that others have launched in the water. They adjust to the dominant pattern of thinking and simply repeat its slogans. They are Kantians, or Hegelians, or Darwinians, et cetera. They spawn school after school, each with its own catechism, and they swear by the creed of their favorite mentor. Our alphabet has never numbered more than five vowels, and among the critical atomists, too, the consonants, which have never given a sound of their own, account for the bulk of their speech. In other words, they too inhabit a house with others and proceed from a position that others have found. With this difference only, that the position on which we take our stand bears the stamp of centuries, whereas they adjust their kaleidoscope almost every decade. Plus this difference as well: we for our part *openly acknowledge* that we proceed from what others have found, whereas they deceive themselves by claiming that they never come out with anything other than fresh produce from their own greenhouse.



The third point I indicated is even more important. The first was, not to cause to be lost what is not lost to begin with and therefore to maintain the elementary things that are sensed through immediate knowledge. The second was our historical standpoint: not to seek again what others already found long ago.

Now to add the third point: stop seeking if God graciously reveals to you what you were seeking.

This too is a reasonable demand. The opposite is the way of the schoolboy who has to practice his arithmetic. Even though the answers to the problems he is assigned are in the back of the book, still he has to find them for himself. And that makes perfectly good sense in his case, since the problems themselves are never taken seriously by him. His goal is to *learn* arithmetic. But if you could cable Lord Roberts the current whereabouts of De Wet,¹³ the fox would not for a moment consider tearing up your telegram without first reading it simply for the pleasure of continuing the search. And that is how it is in every domain. When someone is roaming the mountains and just cannot find the right path, he is delighted when he meets a guide who can show him the way; and he would make himself ridiculous if he were nevertheless to say to the guide, "I won't listen to you because I want to go on looking for the path myself." No captain of a ship that is driven off course will, when hailed by a pilot's boat, hoist all sails and steer clear of the pilot in order to look for the course himself. To continue searching when someone else brings you what you are looking for is contrary to everything that is reasonable, and what is unreasonable should not be called scientific.

So here. Science, too, encounters questions in life that scientists never give up trying to solve but without ever solving them. Whence the origin of things? Who rules this world and gave the world its law for life? What differentiates organic life from mechanics? Whence sin? Is there life after death? How can right triumph over might? How is reconciliation possible? Where is the unity of history in the multiplicity of events? And so on and so forth. All of them are questions that continue to exercise the human mind, and the answers to these questions determine our

¹³ Frederick Roberts, 1st Earl Roberts (1832–1914), and Christiaan de Wet (1854–1922) were opposing generals in the Second Boer War (1899–1902), which was in progress at the time this address was given.

energy, our courage to face life, the motive of our supreme devotion, the peace of our heart, and our heroism in the face of death. Nevertheless, all that questioning, all that searching is useless. Results have remained as scanty as thirty centuries ago in India, Greece, or China. But now God has revealed himself. He has spoken in a variety of ways to the fathers through his prophets and apostles.¹⁴ He sent us the One who said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life."¹⁵ He has sealed his faithfulness to us in his Word. And He continues to call out to all who seek but never find: "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."¹⁶ Or to speak with the learned scholar from Tarsus: "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save [i.e., to enrich, also in knowledge] those who believe."¹⁷ Thanks to this revelation a generation arose that no longer wavered in fear nor sought in vain, but that dared to say: "*We know.*"¹⁸ It was a generation that possessed certainty and whose firmness of conviction enabled them to show forth invincible power. Earlier, Jesus had said of these heroes of firm conviction: "I thank you, Father, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children"¹⁹—i.e., unto those who are willing to be children in matters of the spirit.

Where do we see here, I do not say erudition, but true science that aims at genuine knowledge? Is it found in the vain groping and guessing of those who mock this revelation and keep on searching without ever getting beyond agnosticism? Or is it found

¹⁴ Cf. Heb. 1:1.

¹⁵ John 14:6.

¹⁶ Isa. 55:1.

¹⁷ 1 Cor. 1:21; bracketed insertion by the author.

¹⁸ 1 John 3:14.

¹⁹ Cf. Luke 10:21.

in our standpoint, whereby we gratefully accept the God-given solution to those profound questions and through our studies continue to build with boldness and inspiration on the foundation laid by the prophets and the apostles.

Now, all this is governed by the fundamental question I raised at the outset: *What is the goal of genuine study?* Is the goal of science to open up a hunting ground for a few scholars to indulge in their critical investigations, or is it to endow people with certainty, firmness of conviction, *knowledge*? And if it follows from this, assuming you opt for the latter, that to cause to be lost what was not lost, to search anew for what our forebears already found, and to keep on seeking what God has revealed cannot possibly be reconciled with a reasonable understanding of science's goal, why then, from the point of view of science, is the standpoint of the Free University objected to when it favors thirst for truth above the pleasure of study, finding above seeking, and when it thus upholds both immediate knowledge, results once obtained, and the solution given in God's Word to otherwise insoluble questions?



But we are not there yet. Our threefold starting point may be vindicated, but it is not yet clear what scientific studies are meant to do. The immediate pronouncements of one's consciousness come naturally; the guiding principles of the Calvinist worldview are more or less known; the answers that God's Word offers for the great questions of life are summed up in the Apostles' Creed. So what is left for science to do?

My answer is that science is to fulfill the threefold task that constitutes the calling of every university: first, to establish; second, to deduce; and third, to systematize. Science is to establish the wealth of truth that we acquire either immediately or by induction. Next, it is to deduce from these firm data the implications for our present life and our current state of consciousness.

And finally, science is to take this wealth of truth and its implications and bring them into coherence, i.e., raise them into a system. I will not detain you with a discussion of the last two tasks. No one suspects the seriousness with which we at the Free University work at these tasks, nor does it occur to anyone to dispute, given our declared standpoint, our right or our ability to deduce and systematize in keeping with the rules of science. We stand for three principles—certainty of our consciousness, historic Calvinism, and Scriptural revelation—from which implications for every relationship in life can be deduced with logical rigor. Likewise, no man of science can resist the urge through systematization to elucidate the essential coherence of his principles and the organic link of his various deductions to those principles. Thus I have never heard that where our deductions and our systematization are concerned the scientific nature of our work is disqualified.

But I strongly emphasize that first task: establishing the wealth of truth from which we proceed. That is the point where we are attacked. The allegation is that we certify unproven assumptions arbitrarily, hence unscientifically, and that we merely parrot traditional dogmas. Exactly here lies the misunderstanding. On the contrary, establishing the truths we possess demands wide-ranging studies that penetrate to the root of the matter. Not as though we would still want to *prove* the certainty of the axiomatic pronouncements of our consciousness. That would be a contradiction in terms. No school of thought entertains such an absurd argument. Even Descartes took his *cogito* as a *given* starting point and tried from there to ascend to his *ergo sum*. And, inversely, it is no secret for us either how easily a *common opinion* that is accepted for a time in certain circles can be mistaken for the immediate pronouncement of our consciousness. What is real has to be separated from what is imagined, and to be able to do so we have to investigate the nature of this certainty, explain it psychologically, and confine it to the elementary givens. We confess, more than other schools, that false lines have been

drawn across our immediate consciousness by the darkening effect of sin. Thus the allegation is simply ludicrous that we believe having a firm starting point excuses us from examining it more closely.

The case is no different with respect to our historical principle. Or do people think that the Reformed worldview has been slipped into our hands in a secret document, ready to hand and fully worked out? Is Calvinism in its rise and flowering not a historical phenomenon which just like any other configuration in history has to be mined from the sources? And does finding its leading idea not require that we remove its time-bound features, separate the leaven from the flour, and trace the unity behind its multiple forms? And if this is as clear as day, why should establishing the Reformed principle be judged less scientific than establishing the spirit of India or Greece?

And the case is again no different when we come to the principle of revelation from Scripture. Here too it is an altogether false idea that Scripture offers a ready confession and a cut-and-dried catechism for life. What Scripture reveals can only be established after thorough study. And although *belief* in the truth of Scripture is a fruit of the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti*, which is surer than anything else, *knowledge* of Scripture and its contents can only be the fruit of study and research. So much so, in fact, that there is no book in any language that has been subjected to more thoroughgoing, comprehensive, and unremitting study than Holy Scripture.

For us too, therefore, establishing the truth that we possess has nothing in common with drawing up an inventory of known truths without having to do any serious scholarship. On the contrary, only psychological, historical, and biblical studies that go to the root of things can enable us to establish in an informed way just what we possess. Our certainty of consciousness needs psychological study; our Calvinist standpoint needs historical study; the revelation of our God needs biblical study. This is all the more important since by far not all Christian thinkers reach

the same conclusions as we do, either now or in former centuries. On each of the three topics mentioned, divergent schools of thought have arisen leading to friction and controversy. And this controversy, in which we are obliged to demonstrate the soundness of our conclusions over and over again, compels us continually to test and inspect *the way we establish* what we know, an inspection that does not spare a single detail.

But even then the task of establishing is still not complete. Non-Christians and anti-Christians time and again allege that much of what we store in our treasury of truth as gold and diamonds is tinsel and paste. Now nothing is further from our mind than to say that we couldn't care less what others say about us. Our bond with our fellow citizens is felt deeply by us and includes those among them who oppose us. Science and scholarship is a common human endeavor and he who shuts himself up within his own circle without ever "having it out" with those who think otherwise leaves the refreshing stream and ends up in a stagnant bog. We have to engage the objections of those who oppose us on principle and to attack their notions that we deem false—attack them, not in bitter hatred, but from love of those who are misled by them.

Only, we go about this with level heads and a discriminating eye. So long as our strength is so little and so much still needs to be done to build our own house, we shall concentrate our energies first of all on the positive, deductive, and systematic investigation of our principles. How we divide our time and energy is our decision. If you rush to spend all your time as an apologist, you will always lose in influence, you will be mostly disappointed by a poor reception and a poor outcome, and you will have your studies dictated to you by your opponent. Your studies will lose focus, and every morning you will have to be ready to answer what has been brought against you this time. You will be tied down by an unproductive series of ad hoc arguments. That first of all. And then in the second place, we refuse to waste our energy refuting for the umpteenth time what has so often been refuted

already. Many of the objections raised against us are worn-out theses that have been fully answered long ago. Staging a gladiator's match too frequently makes it unpalatable: it is *oleum et operam perdere*.²⁰ And one more thing, in the third place. By far the majority of these objections are inferences from contrary premises that are governed by a philosophical idea. Now it is always fundamentally *unscientific* to wage the battle in the area of inferences so long as the starting premises have not been thrashed out. Why engage in an argument, for example, about Christian doctrine with someone who denies it, so long as you haven't come to agreement on the authority of Scripture? Or again, why argue with that person about the authority of Scripture so long as you haven't agreed on the meaning of the concepts of sin and revelation? But although on that account sound scientific method indeed demands that you settle an argument about the source of a river high up in the mountains and not down by the seashore, nevertheless where the fundamental premises are at issue we too have to join battle, even in the case of a Nietzsche. A scientific school that declines to give account of itself commits suicide.

Thus we do not in any way shirk the strict demand that scientific verification should extend to the most critical level. Not that we close our eyes to subjective differences in fundamental convictions. Aesthetically you will never convince a deaf person of the beauty of Beethoven's symphonies. Ethically a Nero could never be convinced of the sacredness of marriage. Similarly, in the domain of truth Jesus judged that "unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot even *see* the kingdom of God."²¹ But even then that subjective element itself remains open to scientific debate, and we are prepared in that respect to demonstrate the legitimacy of our standpoint.

20 This Latin phrase means a waste of time and trouble. See Plautus, *Poenulus*, act 1, scene 2, line 333.

21 Cf. John 3:3, 5, which Kuyper conflates here as a paraphrase.



Assuming that this is so—that we are obliged and prepared, at least at a time of our own choosing, to give an account of everything, even of our deepest convictions—if you should now ask, finally, in what way we differ from others and why we concentrate our studies in a university of our own (after all, one can debate about certainty of consciousness, Calvinism, and Scripture at any university), then this is my threefold answer. The first is that although the state universities are said to be religiously neutral and admit every opinion to their forum, the fact is that for many years already only one school of thought has set the tone, and even Bilderdijk, Groen van Prinsterer, and Da Costa²² were debarred from their faculties. In the second place, the university also aims to form and mold its students. Now then, pedagogically speaking, an education that calls a lie in Tuesday's lecture what was recommended in Monday's lecture as the truth mocks the primordial demands of a formative education. Moreover—and this I want to note in the last place—there is proof and proof. There is a kind of proof that settles the question once for all. But there is also a kind of proof which, when it fails to convince or even when it fails outright, nevertheless in your eyes leaves unimpaired the truth that was truth for you before the proof was ever undertaken. A judge does not accept the truth of a fact until the evidence submitted is complete; what is not proven adequately he may never accept as truth nor act on it. But that your mother is your mother and that you were begotten by your father is so much part and parcel of your experience of life that the fear of being a baby switched at birth or a child born of adultery *can* never enter your heart. You never searched for a document to prove it. But suppose an inheritance has to be divided

22 Poet Willem Bilderdijk (1756–1831), politician and historian Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (1801–76), and Netherlands-born messianic Jewish poet Isaac da Costa (1798–1860) were early nineteenth-century pioneers of the Calvinist revival (*Réveil*) in the Netherlands.

and an evil person fastens suspicion on your family connection, then you won't sit still; then you hunt down whatever proof you can find. But even if you did not succeed in that, the truth of the matter would never be shaken in your mind. And this difference holds also here. Every rationalist wants to put you in the dock, and in the absence of proof that in *his* eyes is complete he will contest your right to hold your conviction. Now when you face such a denial you too will collect all the evidence available to you and argue your case as thoroughly and powerfully as you can, but also in such a way that you firmly believe the truth of your own basic conviction not *after* but *before* the debate takes place. In fact, even if the debate is called off, that basic conviction is still not weakened in your soul by a millionth of a milligram. This is not just so among us, but among all men of principle. Everyone's basic conviction is the axiom of one's self-consciousness that will defy every wave of attack: *saevis tranquillum in undis*.²³



So long as your own consciousness, therefore, is not a mirror that by turns reflects every color, but has a center that sends out its own strong searchlight, two things will stand out: first, your basic conviction has nothing to fear from the most thorough investigation; and second, our basic conviction actually demands that all scientific research should go down to the root of the matter. And therefore, as resolutely as we reject the scholarly pride of a Lessing, who organized the pursuit for truth merely for the pleasure of the pursuit, so strongly do we urge you to pursue your studies with scientific rigor, but only on condition that *thirst for truth* be your incentive.

Am I reassured about that? Allow me to share an observation with you. At other universities I have sometimes noticed, especially among theology students, a measure of enthusiasm for

²³ This Latin phrase is translated, "Calm amid the fierce waves."

study that I have often missed among you. But what was it that accounted for that impulse at those other schools? The impulse arose from the passion to *negate*, to contribute personally, if possible, toward prying loose a stone from the walls of God's holy Zion that was still held in place. It arose from the critical spirit to outstrip others in unraveling the Christian confession. What accounted for this drive and incentive was the impulse of a spiritual vandalism that will not rest until the last pillar is pulled down. That is how those students joined the ranks of the intellectual iconoclasts, how they became a little Strauss, a miniature Bauer, and how they dreamt of being a disciple of Renan.²⁴ For this they reaped approval and praise. Their professors gratefully drafted them into the light cavalry of the elite army of critics. Their name sometimes became known in other countries. Such *promising* young men! And that goad did wonders, for in our younger years—why deny it?—we have a lot of untamed energy; moreover, a revolutionary trait runs through every scholar's soul, and joining in something brand-new can cast a dangerous spell. Oh, those innovators of yesterday! Such laurels will not be reaped by you. We do not train you in demolishing what is standing, nor are we set up for that. As well, our respect for the holy is too powerful not to label these attacks on God's truth as sacrilege and so appeal to the conscience of those who perpetrate them. No, if the spirit of study is to awaken more strongly *among you*, then your motive must not be self-exaltation but the exaltation of the glory of God, and your focus is to be on shoring up whatever is tottering. Then your critical exactness must be balanced by your historical sense. Then in your estimation Augustine must rise high above Strauss, and Aquinas far above Renan, and not Wellhausen's creeping tendrils but the laurel sprays of Voetius

²⁴ German theologian and philosopher David Friedrich Strauss (1808–74), German philosopher and historian Bruno Bauer (1809–82), and French philologist and historian Ernest Renan (1823–92) were pioneers of biblical criticism in the middle of the nineteenth century as well as writers on the life of Jesus from a naturalistic standpoint.

should keep sleep from your eyes. Then the passion of your soul should be for God, for His cause, and what should rouse you to holy jealousy is to wipe away skepticism and negation from the pavement of his holy temple, even if only from a single stone in it. That will not be easy. To declare a psalm to be Maccabean or excise another chapter out of Isaiah is much more clever, and the cheerleaders from the gallery of critics will start applauding even before you have finished. And yet, I know, you will not shirk this holy task. Soon it will become apparent among you that thirst for truth is a more powerful motive for study than the appetite for negation. The love of God's people will compensate you for the applause that will pass you by. And the God of truth, whose honor laid hold of you, will, if you have not forgotten the holy art of prayer, sharpen your mental powers, enhance your talent, and in his holy name will make you succeed.

There are already quite a few who have graduated from your noble circle. May many of you in our audience today follow in their footsteps. Let the academic year begin! May it do its part in contributing toward that lofty goal, and let us take up our studies tomorrow as those who know that only that which is begun with God has meaning for eternity.

I thank you.

ABOUT THE ABRAHAM KUYPER TRANSLATION SOCIETY

In 2011 a group of Abraham Kuyper scholars and experts met to form an association that has come to be known as the Abraham Kuyper Translation Society. Kuyper College and Acton Institute, along with other Abraham Kuyper scholars, have an interest in facilitating the translation of Abraham Kuyper's writings into English. Currently the society is involved in translating Kuyper's seminal three-volume work on common grace (*De gemeene gratie*), his three-volume work on the lordship of Christ (*Pro rege*), and key Kuyper texts on the church. The translated texts on the church will be published by Christian's Library Press as an anthology.

The society recognizes that translations are not ends in themselves. Hence, plans are underway to produce an Abraham Kuyper Islam anthology that will focus on how deeply Kuyper's encounter with Islam toward the end of his life affected him and galvanized *Pro rege*, the last major work Kuyper completed in religion and theology. One anticipated result of translating Kuyper's writings on Islam is to reveal to twenty-first century Christians, particularly Christian students, how Kuyper successfully "engaged" another world religion and another culture. It is also hoped that this anthology, along with the translation of Kuyper's other writings, will enable Christians to draw on their Reformation heritage and develop a sense of vocation as wide as creation itself.

The society also exists to further additional Kuyper scholarly projects that will help promote a holistic vision of God's renewal encompassing all things.

ABOUT ABRAHAM KUYPER

(1837–1920)



Abraham Kuyper's life began in the small Dutch village of Maasluis on October 29, 1837. During his first pastorate, he developed a deep devotion to Jesus Christ, spurring him to a deep commitment to Reformed theology, which profoundly influenced his later careers. He labored tirelessly, publishing two newspapers, leading a reform movement out of the state church, founding the Free University of Amsterdam, and serving as prime minister of the Netherlands. He died on November 8, 1920, after relentlessly endeavoring to integrate his faith and life; truly, his emphasis on worldview formation has had a transforming influence upon evangelicalism, through the diaspora of the Dutch Reformed churches and those they have inspired.

In the mid-nineteenth-century Dutch political arena, the increasing sympathy for the "No God, no master!" dictum of the French Revolution greatly concerned Kuyper. To desire freedom from an oppressive government or a heretical religion was one thing, but to eradicate religion from politics as spheres of mutual influence was, for Kuyper, unthinkable. Because man is sinful, he reasoned, a state that derives its power from men cannot

avoid the vices of fallen human impulses. True limited government flourishes best when people recognize their sinful condition and acknowledge God's divine authority. In Kuyper's words, "The sovereignty of the state as the power that protects the individual and that defines the mutual relationships among the visible spheres, rises high above them by its right to command and compel. But within these spheres . . . another authority rules, an authority that descends directly from God apart from the state. This authority the state does not confer but acknowledges."

ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

Harry Van Dyke was born in Rotterdam, Holland, and at the age of twelve moved with his parents and six siblings to Canada. He earned a BA at Calvin College and a DLitt at the VU University Amsterdam. He has published a score of articles, numerous translations, and a book, *Groen van Prinsterer's Lectures on Unbelief and Revolution* (1989), besides editing anthologies of the writings of S. U. Zuidema and M. C. Smit.

For twelve years he served as research fellow and instructor in theory and philosophy of history at the VU University Amsterdam, and then taught history in Redeemer University College for twenty-three years. Since his retirement he has given direction to the Dooyeweerd Centre for Christian Philosophy and has been involved in several translation projects. He and his wife have two adult daughters and two grandchildren, and they reside in Hamilton, Ontario, where they are members of one of five local Christian Reformed churches