

❁ VOLUME ONE ❁

# REFORMED ETHICS

CREATED, FALLEN,  
AND CONVERTED HUMANITY

EDITED BY JOHN BOLT

# HERMAN BAVINCK

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AND CONVERTED HUMANITY**

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HERMAN BAVINCK  
EDITED BY JOHN BOLT

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For Rimmer and †Ruth De Vries  
in gratitude for your kingdom-minded generosity

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❁ Book I ❁

HUMANITY  
BEFORE CONVERSION

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## Essential Human Nature

*How we must live is determined by our answers to the fundamental questions of our origin, purpose, and destiny.<sup>1</sup> Scripture teaches us that the image of God belongs to the very essence of our humanity, created good, fallen, and redeemable in Christ. For Christians the moral good is not a purpose or ideal to be achieved through striving and exertion; it is a gift, a condition of being, a state. We must be good in order to do good. Adam was created good, and, after his fall, the Second Adam provides the gift of new righteousness and holiness.*

*This confession directly contradicts the contemporary dogma that we become good through the conflict between our ego, which strives for autonomy, and the external world of nature and matter, which restricts us; the end goal is to overcome nature by reason and spirit. This is part of a pantheistic worldview in which God himself becomes a person only after a process of overcoming. This movement from below to above, from the material to the spiritual, from the earthly to the heavenly, from humanity to God, from the visible to the invisible, from the temporal to the eternal, directly contradicts Christian belief in revelation. It is a system from the abyss.*

*We believe that the image of God belongs to the essence of our humanity; humanity apart from God, therefore, is unimaginable; all human beings always and everywhere stand in some relation to God. To be fully and truly human we must image God. As*

1. Ed. note: Bavinck's title for this chapter was "Human Nature Considered on Its Own" (*De menselijke natuur op zichzelf beschouwd*). He inserted as an interlinear new title "The Essence of Humanity" (*Het wezen van de mensch*). Our title, "Essential Human Nature," is intended to capture both ideas.

*image-bearers of God, we consist of body and soul, which exist together in a reciprocal interaction of spirit and matter that is complex and mysterious. This must not be understood dualistically, although while the body cannot live without the soul, the soul can exist apart from the body. Persons are unities of body and soul; we are persons because we can say “I.” Our consciousness of this “I” develops gradually and is a wonder, inexplicable and simply to be accepted. Its two movements are theoretical (thinking and knowing) and practical (willing and doing), and both are mediated by feeling. These three abilities are distinct, have their own laws, and are free acts of the one person.*

*Human beings find themselves in three relations to what is external to them: to God (religion), to other persons (morality), and to nature. People cannot be viewed atomistically as mere individuals: we are members of a human race in a relationship to God that is an office or post of obedience and service to him. This is true religion and rests upon and arises from knowledge of God; its essence is piety. The word “religion” is derived from a Latin root that means “regathered” and reminds us that repetition of God’s commands and ordinances is necessary for their observance. This is objective religion—walking in the ways of the Lord—which must be matched by subjective religion—that is, faith or believing. The objective is not the product of the subjective but a gift of the Holy Spirit. Religion should not be defined as “communion with God” because it makes subjective religion all-important and devalues objective religion. Instead, it is the distinctive relationship or position of human beings to God, expressing itself in all of life and based on the distinctive relation of God to human beings.*

*Our relation to other persons begins before birth and starts in the family, which is the type of all other relations in society and the state. Our life in all these relationships constitutes our moral life and must be guided by a standard that is external to us. For Christians that standard is the Word of God. Our moral lives have always been connected to our religious lives, but they are properly distinct, with the latter governing the former. Though the two tables of the law come from one Lawgiver and constitute a single law, it is important to distinguish religion (our love toward God) from morality (our love toward our neighbor). The Bible itself keeps them close and connected but still distinct. The two sinful misconstruals of the relation between religion and morality—absolute separation and identification—both lead to false religion and poor morality. Either morality is divorced from God and true virtue becomes impossible, or God is identified with the world and religion is completely absorbed by ethics and eventually disappears. The Sabbath can and should penetrate the other days of the week, but the fullness of this Sabbath penetration will not be realized in this dispensation and awaits the next.*

## §5. HUMAN BEINGS, CREATED IN GOD'S IMAGE

Questions about what human beings are, where they are headed, and the end and purpose of their existence depend on the answer to a prior question: Where did human beings come from? Origin determines direction and purpose. There is a big difference between saying that human beings are the image and offspring of the chimpanzee and orangutan and saying they are the image and offspring of God, between saying human beings are from below and saying they are from above. That governs the entire discipline of ethics. Without the Bible, it is impossible to answer the question of where human beings are from, and thus no answer can be given to the questions of what they are or where they are headed: one can only surmise, suspect, presuppose, and philosophize. The Greeks regarded human beings as autochthonous, as having originated from the earth, by chance, of their own accord. And contemporary thought, under the influence of materialistic pantheism,<sup>2</sup> which erases all boundaries, levels all things and makes all things uniform, sees human beings as originating from a primate ancestry through a series of missing links and extinct mediating forms (species) influenced by natural selection and the struggle for survival over the course of many millennia. No one has furnished proof of this; it is not a conclusion reached by science or even a hypothesis that is occasionally borne out. No, it is simply a philosophical idea which people assume because they will not recognize a Creator God. This was openly stated by Professor du Bois-Reymond in Berlin.<sup>3</sup>

By proceeding from a wholly different presupposition we reach a different ethic. Ethics in the true sense of the word does not exist within a Darwinian framework.<sup>4</sup> Every view of human beings starts from an axiom, a point of departure, a proposition of faith or hypothesis. This is the case with Darwin as well: his proposition of faith is that a human being is an evolved animal. For us, on the other hand, by faith, we understand that human beings are created in the image of God and are God's offspring (Acts 17:28). This has to be a

2. Ed. note: Bavinck regarded pantheism as one of the great threats of his day to a Christian worldview. See, inter alia, *RD*, 1:80; 2:408–15, 426–38; 3:42, 236, 299, 529; 4:60, 75, 92, 108, 161, 250, 576, 691, 699, 711.

3. Ed. note: Bavinck refers here to an essay by Emil du Bois-Reymond, "Naturwissenschaft und Philosophie von Nathusius," in *Zeitfragen des christlichen Volkslebens*; it was not possible to verify this reference. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emil\\_du\\_Bois-Reymond](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emil_du_Bois-Reymond). The reference to Nathusius is most likely to Martin Friedrich von Nathusius (1843–1906), author of *Naturwissenschaft und Philosophie: Zur beleuchtung der neuesten materialistischen Kundgebungen du Bois-Reymond u.a.* (Heilbronn: Henninger, 1883). Bavinck deals with du Bois-Reymond's views at greater length in his essay "Christianity and Natural Science," 85–87, 101–2.

4. Ed. note: Bavinck's note here reads "See last year's lecture" ("Zie dictaat vorig jaar"), an indication that he used these notes over and over again.

fixed and controlling principle when we examine humankind, a presupposition that governs all further reflection. To call human beings God's image is to say that the human person is God's likeness, his portrait in miniature, his imprint, effigy, or ectype.<sup>5</sup> The image of God is the human similarity to God whereby we display, in our own creaturely way, the highest perfection of God.<sup>6</sup> We are God's image with respect to all of our existence, in the soul with all its capabilities (thinking, feeling, willing) and also in the body.<sup>7</sup>

The image of God, therefore, exists

1. in the essence of our humanity: with soul and body as substrate;
2. in the capacities and abilities of that essence: knowing, feeling, willing, and acting;
3. in the properties and gifts of that essence and their capabilities: holiness, knowledge, righteousness.<sup>8</sup>

But the question now arises: What is the relation between the human essence and those properties of the image of God? In other words, is the image of God the essence, the nature of a human being, or something added to its nature? The Flacians say the image of God (thus also its properties, including original righteousness)<sup>9</sup> belongs to the *essence*, the nature of human beings.<sup>10</sup> This cannot be correct, because then humanity, on losing its original righteousness, would have lost and changed its essence. The Roman Catholics say that human beings were created with an unblemished nature<sup>11</sup>—hence neither righteous nor unrighteous by nature—and that original righteousness was added as a “superadded gift” to curb the naturally existing disharmony between flesh and spirit.<sup>12</sup> But

5. Ed. note: See *RD*, 2:531–33.

6. Van Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, I.iii.9, §30 [2:99]. Ed. note: For an explanation of the format we are using to cite this work, see the extended note in the introduction, §1, in the section “Reformed Churches” (pp. 8–9n48). The volume and page numbers come from the 1749–53 Dutch edition used by Bavinck.

7. Van Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, I.iii.9, §31 [2:99].

8. Van Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, I.iii.9, §30–33 [2:99].

9. LO: *justitia originalis*.

10. Ed. note: Matthias Flacius Illyricus (1520–75) was a Lutheran reformer from present-day Croatia who held the view that the human fall into sin substantially transformed human nature into something evil.

11. LO: *in puris naturalibus*.

12. LO: *donum superadditum*. Ed. note: Bavinck's critique of Roman Catholic thought on this point can be found in *RD*, 2:539–48. However, Bavinck's treatment of Roman Catholic thought needs to be nuanced and corrected in places, particularly through a closer examination of Thomas Aquinas; see Bolt, *Theological Analysis*, 172n24, 180n29, 189n50. Cf. Vos, *Aquinas, Calvin, and Contemporary Protestant Thought*. An affinity between Bavinck and Thomas has

this also cannot be correct because then the struggle between flesh and spirit would be natural and good, coming directly from God, who would then be the cause of sin. The Reformed say that the image of God is neither the sum and total of human essence nor a “superadded gift.” Rather, Reformed theology understands the image of God in a broad sense to include the essence and capabilities of a human being, while a narrower sense of the image involves true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness.<sup>13</sup> As original righteousness it belongs *naturally* to a human being, so that human essence or nature can no longer be complete and right without it. The image of God, therefore, belongs to the essence of human beings, although not in the Flacian sense.<sup>14</sup>

This statement is of paramount importance for ethics. *First*, because it implies that humans were good by nature, that the image of God by nature properly belonged to them, that they did not need to *become* good, holy, and righteous but *were* so already. Human beings by nature possessed goodness. This directly contradicts contemporary teachings. J. G. Fichte (1762–1814) taught with impressive intellectual power that morality only comes into existence out of conflict. The intelligent *ego* strives after freedom, self-sufficiency, and independence and wants to be absolutely autonomous but finds itself restricted by the *non-ego*. The *non-ego* has to be conquered and pushed back; the *ego* has to dominate the *non-ego*; reason has to rule over nature, and spirit over matter. Morality, thus, is the result of conflict, struggle, and wrestling; it lies at the end of the road, it is not a point of departure but an end goal. The *ego* is born as restricted by the *non-ego* (which is sinful, because for Fichte sin is restriction).

Similarly, for Hegel, humanity is at first only natural and evil by nature; it needs to free itself from the power of nature and, as spirit, needs to break free from nature and oppose it. For Schleiermacher, too, the goal of ethos is that nature becomes reason and spirit. The position of Rothe in his *Theologische Ethik* is similar; for him the personhood of God is itself the result of a process because the Spirit cannot be made but must bring himself forth, be his own effect and cause.<sup>15</sup> This is also the case with human beings.<sup>16</sup> God can create spirits only mediately; that is, he creates material creatures, which then raise themselves up out of materiality toward spirituality.<sup>17</sup> The *ego* is its own act and action only; the human being thus destines itself to be *ego*, a person. And

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been clearly demonstrated recently by two younger scholars: Sytsma, “Bavinck’s Thomistic Epistemology”; and Van Raalte, “Unleavened Morality.”

13. Ed. note: These three terms that summarize the original image of God in Reformed orthodoxy are conflated from Eph. 4:24 and Col. 3:10.

14. Van Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, I.iii.9, §44 [2:110–11].

15. LO: *sui ipsius effectus, causa sui*; Rothe, *Theologische Ethik*, §§31, 34.

16. Rothe, *Theologische Ethik*, §47.

17. Rothe, *Theologische Ethik*, §73.

morality exists in the fact that personhood becomes spirit.<sup>18</sup> The personal creature has to treat itself as an end in itself<sup>19</sup> and has to create itself. Rothe writes, “Morality is what is caused, what becomes by means of creaturely self-determination, more specifically through the personal creature’s own self-determination in the human’s earthly created sphere.”<sup>20</sup> Rothe sketches the moral process<sup>21</sup> as one in which human beings determine themselves absolutely to become persons, and this task is twofold: (a) it is *moral* with respect to our material nature, which has to be appropriated and be made our instrument;<sup>22</sup> and (b) it is *religious*, religion being the process by which we become spirits, through our own causality.<sup>23</sup> Thus, we *become* immortal, and so forth, through our own action.<sup>24</sup>

Overall, therefore, morality is a goal, the result of a process, an ideal which human beings finally reach through their own efforts and self-determination. This ethics, constructed on pantheism, a philosophy of process, and the theory of evolution, shares with pantheism an extraordinary number of core ideas. Everywhere in the physical, ethical, religious, civil, social, and political domains, the higher development is seen as having evolved from the lower. From below to above, from the material to the spiritual, from the earthly to the heavenly, from humanity to God, from the visible to the invisible, from the temporal to the eternal. This is directly the opposite of what we confess as Christians because it is directly contrary to God’s revelation. It is a system from the abyss. It has influenced a good deal of the ethics of our day, and yet many believers do not perceive its terrifying nature but unconsciously accept its thoughts and perspectives, which only fit in that anti-biblical system. Thus Harless speaks of a purpose which is given to the Christian in Christ, and Martensen considers morality as an idea, an end goal, a final task for the will.<sup>25</sup> Vilmar, however, understood this better.<sup>26</sup>

Directly opposing these pantheistic theories<sup>27</sup> is the view of human beings as created in God’s image. The moral and the good is not an ideal hovering

18. Rothe, *Theologische Ethik*, §83.

19. GO: *Selbstzweck*.

20. GO: *Selbstbestimmung*; Rothe, *Theologische Ethik*, §87. Ed. note: Bavinck adds two German words after the quotation: *kausirte* = “caused”; *gewordene* = “become.”

21. Rothe, *Theologische Ethik*, §§93–126.

22. Rothe, *Theologische Ethik*, §§97–113.

23. LO: *causa sui*.

24. Rothe, *Theologische Ethik*, §§109–10.

25. Harless, *System of Christian Ethics*, 5 (§2); Martensen, *Christian Ethics*, 1:4, 10–13 (§§1, 4).

26. Vilmar, *Theologische Moral*, 1:23–37.

27. Ed. note: What Bavinck calls “pantheism” here is better described as “panentheism.” On panentheism see Cooper, *Panentheism*; on Schleiermacher, see pp. 80–89, and on Schelling and Hegel, see pp. 90–119.

far off in the distance from humanity and which we need to reach. The good is not the end goal of life, a destination for humans, but the foundation on which we stand and the environment within which we stand. The good is not before us but above us and behind us; we stand in it with both feet and are upheld by it. Adam did not have to *become* good, he *was* good and had to ensure that he *remained* good. This is not striving and chasing after something, but remaining and resting in that which he was and had. He came from the hand of God holy, righteous, and wise. It is utterly false to say that holiness could not be inborn and cocreated but must be the result of a process of free self-determination, of one's own action. Holiness is a gift; otherwise we shall never have it. But we receive it now, at once, through justifying faith in Christ. For this reason, moral virtue (holiness, the image of God) is *one*, a seamless garment, which cannot be reached and obtained in piecemeal fashion. Whoever has moral virtue has it wholly; whoever lacks it in part lacks it completely. The Stoics already recognized this. From evil to good is not a walkway or bridge; we reach it only by a leap (a leap of life rather than the proverbial fatal leap, to change the expression). It is precisely the fundamental error of pantheism that it wipes out all boundaries, relativizes all oppositions, and reduces the distinction between sin and holiness, God and devil, to a difference of degree only.<sup>28</sup> For Christians, therefore, Adam *was* holy and had to *remain* such. The fall into sin was not a step forward, but undoubtedly a *fall*, a downfall. The moral good, therefore, is not a purpose or ideal to be obtained through striving and exertion; it is a gift, a condition of being, a state. It remains true forever that a tree has to *be good* if it is to bear good fruit.<sup>29</sup> Pantheism also obliterates the distinction between human beings and animals and views us as developing from an animalistic (unthinking, etc.) state into our humanity.

Now it is true that Reformed Christians, in distinction from Lutherans, can also speak of a goal in the case of Adam: we acknowledge that Adam had not yet reached the end; he did not yet have eternal life; he did not yet have the ability not to sin.<sup>30</sup> In that sense we can also speak of a goal in the case of Adam. But there is also a significant difference. We do not consider this “end” so much a *goal* as a *result*. Adam did not have to strenuously exert himself to obtain it but had merely to do what his own nature recommended—that

28. Ed. note: See Kuyper, “Blurring of the Boundaries.”

29. Ed. note: Matt. 7:17.

30. LO: *non posse peccare*. Ed. note: This phrase comes from Augustine and describes the fourth and final state in outline of redemptive history. In order, the four states of humanity are (1) innocence: able to sin or not to sin (*posse peccare aut non peccare*); (2) fall: not able not to sin (*non posse non peccare*); (3) grace: able to sin or not to sin (*posse peccare aut non peccare*); and (4) glory: not able to sin (*non posse peccare*). See Augustine, *Enchiridion* 118 (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 3:275).

is, to remain what he was. The command not to eat was a *prohibition*.<sup>31</sup> By remaining what he was, he would obtain what he was not.

That we cannot understand or imagine humanity without God and that all human beings always and everywhere stand in some relation to God is the *second* implication of the claim that the image of God belongs to the essence of our humanity. God is the archetype, the exemplar, the original. We are only truly human to the extent that we display God, also in our daily lives. The human person, therefore, has to be viewed theologically, and also in ethics. Morality, too, finds its principle and standard in the relation in which a human being stands to God. This principle is also strongly contested in our time. It is Fichte who dominates our present age: he sees the essence of morality involving the *ego* governing the *non-ego* and reason governing nature; the world is the material content of our moral obligation. This is also the case with Hegel: spirit has to realize its rational content, to mentally permeate nature. According to Schleiermacher the subject matter of ethics is reason acting on nature, and Rothe's position is similar.<sup>32</sup> Humanity stands in relation to nature and to God. The first relation is *moral*, the second *religious*. The moral task of human beings is to condition nature as an organ, an instrument, to make nature our property, a natural organism. Here morality is not only a result but the result of a process, the unity of two (relative) opposites, the product of conflict and struggle. But it is also wrong to think that the good and the moral only become possible by and after struggle, for then good, in order to exist now and to come in the future, needs evil; light needs darkness, and God needs the devil. Evil is then inevitable and actually no longer evil but a necessary intermediate stop, a barrier, a limitation, a transition phase, the condition and *sine qua non* for the good. And this means that the good is no longer good, since it is not free, independent, and eternal.

As Christians we believe and teach the contrary. The first human was God's image at once, good and holy; the struggle we now experience only came because of our falling away; it is a struggle with sin, in sin, and after sin. The good, as we see it, is victory, rest, salvation, peace, love; not "storm and stress"<sup>33</sup> but calmness. It is eternal, independent, free, in need of nothing, existing in and through itself and by itself, because God himself is the good

31. DO: *verbod*.

32. Rothe, *Theologische Ethik*, §96–113.

33. GO: *Sturm und Drang*. Ed. note: The term is connected with the early Romantic movement in German music and literature in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It stressed individual subjectivity, action, and intense emotional freedom producing turbulence and turmoil in reaction to the constraints of Enlightenment rationalism. The term was popularized by the title of a work by German dramatist and poet Friedrich von Klinger (from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sturm\\_und\\_Drang](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sturm_und_Drang)).

and no goodness exists apart from him. Martensen also acknowledges the fact that morality cannot presuppose a struggle, etc., but thinks that, among other things, morality is the unity of opposites.<sup>34</sup> This is completely wrong.

Men like Fichte have to search for such binary structures because they view morality as a unity of opposites, as the result of struggle. Various names are used to describe these opposites. Autonomous philosophical ethics looks for them in the empirical and the ideal (reasonable) will; in the individual and in humanity, egoism and altruism (like Darwin and those following his thought); or in personality and in nature.<sup>35</sup> The first opposition, between the empirical and ideal will, does not work. It is an abstraction: human beings have but *one* will, and the (empirical) will is evil, sinful, inclined to hate God and the neighbor.<sup>36</sup> What some call the ideal or reasonable will is not a *will*—that is to say, *power*—but (since human beings are powerless) only an idea, an ideal, given to us by our conscience. In the battle between the empirical will and the idea of the good, the empirical will always triumphs. The second opposition, between the individual and humanity, does not work either. It is completely socialist and sacrifices the individual for the sake of the majority, allowing a majority of one-half plus one to determine what is good and evil.

The third binary opposition, morality as the product of the conflict between personality and nature or reason and nature (Fichte, Schleiermacher, Rothe), is also not a viable option. This was essentially the view of the Greeks, a view that is once again being proposed by some of our anthropological philosophers in a somewhat more profound manner. Spirit and matter, personality and nature, are not inherently opposed (at least not originally; now, thanks to sin, they are); personality is by no means dissolved in its relations with nature.<sup>37</sup> But there is some truth in these oppositions: human beings stand in relation to themselves (with duties toward themselves), to their neighbors, and to nature, but all of this is only part of a whole, and to reduce our entire duty to any one of these would be wrong. Regarding nature, Genesis 1:28 teaches us to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and so forth. There exists, therefore, also a relation between humans and animals. But that is by no means the only

34. Martensen, *Christian Ethics*, 1:10–13 (§4).

35. Ed. note: In the margin Bavinck added, “We cannot do away with God if we want to define the good; neither in the case of Kant nor by the socialists.”

36. Ed. note: Bavinck alludes here to Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 5: “Can you live up to all this [God’s Law] perfectly?” Answer: “No. I have a natural tendency to hate God and my neighbor.”

37. Cf. Martensen, *Christian Ethics*, 1:10–13 (§4), but use with discretion.

calling of humanity; it is only one of the entailments and consequences of being created in God's image (Gen. 1:27). And one must read carefully: to have dominion over the earth was not an end goal for human striving through considerable conflict. It was not a distant ideal, a destination at the end of a path of exertion. No! It was a part but not the sole content and consequence of being made in God's image. Adam did not have to *become* lord and master of the earth, conquer it, and exercise dominion over it. Instead, he *was* the lord and master and sovereign and had to *demonstrate* this fact and continue to exercise lordship.

Martensen also argues against this contrast but replaces it with another: morality is produced by conflict, but not between personality and nature but between two personalities, me and you, will and will, specifically human will and God's will. Thus he says that morality consists of the free unity of the human and the divine wills.<sup>38</sup> These are notes that sound orthodox,<sup>39</sup> embroidered with pantheistic philosophical patterns. But Martensen does not start with correct principles. He should have rejected the root idea that morality (being moral and good) is the result of struggle and a unity of opposites. That is a false notion. For us, the moral good is not something in process of *becoming* but something that *is*. It is not a *product* but a *producer*; it is not a *result* but a *point of departure*. Furthermore, the foundational idea of the moral good is not derived from our relation to ourselves, to our neighbor, or to nature, but from the central, all-governing relation of human beings to God. Martensen gets this right. But one has to understand this properly. It does not mean that somebody who stands in the right relation to God (for example, one who is converted) is by virtue of this already moral and can be described as moral. This would blur the difference between religion and morality; more will be said about relation between them later. But it does mean that the relation to God is the central relation controlling everything. Humans are to be viewed as image-bearers of God in our relations to ourselves, our neighbors, and nature. This reality must be seen in and through everything we do or leave undone and in everything effected with us, in us, or through us.

In other words, that which is considered to be *normally* human cannot truly serve as the standard of ethics. It is not enough to be a person exercising dominion over nature. We can only be truly *good* at home, in the public square, and everywhere else, when we are the image of God. After all, we

38. Cf. Martensen, *Christian Ethics*, 1:10–13 (§4). Ed. note: In the opening sentence of §5 (p. 13) Martensen speaks of “union with God . . . as the final aim of human effort.”

39. Ed. note: Bavinck originally wrote “shining” (*schijnende*) but changed it to “sounding” (*klinkende*).

cannot know proper dominion over nature apart from God and his revelation. In an etymological sense, ethics has its roots in religion. The notion of ethics therefore cannot fully satisfy us; it is too narrow. Etymologically, the word points to humanity as the standard, but our standard is humanity as God's image and thus, in the final analysis, God himself.

*Third*, the notion of humanity as God's image entails the essence of human beings having been corrupted through sin. After all, the image of God is part of the essence of humanness, not a *donum superadditum*, not an added trimming. According to Rome, humankind is not corrupt and corrupted but is still what it was supposed to be; but it lost this accessory, this bridle, and because it is no longer controlled and restrained, concupiscence (which humans had before the fall as well) now reigns.

We would say that by the loss of the image of God people's very essence became corrupted, deteriorated and twisted,<sup>40</sup> deformed, misshaped, and wrong. More about this, however, in chapter 2. Sin did not remove something and leave all the rest the same, as Rome would say. Neither did sin become the substance or essence of human beings. The human being remained a human being, not a machine, not a wooden thing or block, not a devil, but a human being. But the human became abnormal; though still human, its humanity is cankered and rotten.

The ethical meaning of the covenant of works is relevant here.<sup>41</sup> The covenant of works assumes that humanity is the image of God. Humankind *is* good, but still has a task: good works. The covenant therefore involves not carefree idleness or quiet rest, as Rome and Luther described, but work, task, goal, thus exertion, zeal, and development of all powers and gifts. It involves becoming the image of God more and more through procreation, worship, and culture. From humanity's creation in the image of God it follows that humans are moral beings and have to develop as such. In this regard the *moral law* must also be mentioned. The moral law is one of many sorts of law,<sup>42</sup> and its basic principle is love for God and one's neighbor. At this point law must be mentioned because the very notion of sin presupposes *law* (see question 3 of the Heidelberg Catechism).<sup>43</sup>

40. DO: *verwongen*.

41. Ed. note: On the covenant of works, see *RD*, 2:567–79, 585–88. This classic Reformed doctrine is defined in the Westminster Confession of Faith (7.2) as follows: "The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience."

42. Ed. note: Bavinck inserts here a general reference to his *Hedendaagsche moraal*, a translation of which appears as an appendix in the third volume of *Reformed Ethics*.

43. Ed. note: Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 3: "From where do you come to know your sins and misery? The Law of God teaches me."