

J. H. Bavinck on "Elenctics" - our direct attack upon non-Christian religiosity in order to call men to repentance. (John 16:8)

"What have you done with God? That is the question that here burns our lips. Does there lurk behind this staggering piety a secret flight from God? Has man here assaulted God and gradually but certainly transformed him into a formless "It"? And is perhaps the deepest motive in all his seeking and thought the shuddering before the responsibility of life, the being afraid of going through life with God? Has man here in a refined manner pushed God away from himself by letting himself be swallowed up in God?

"If these questions must be asked. We can never be satisfied with a simple acquaintance with what is given us in historical data. We must always try to understand the hidden motives. Such will sound merciless, and frequently men will attack this convicting witness. And yet, we must speak the decisive word, though we can never cease being tactful and long-suffering. And we must speak this word in the trust that finally it is not us, but the Holy Spirit who can convince the world of sin, of judgment and righteousness.

"This work receives the greatest support from its repeated awareness that the sharpest weapons must in the first place be turned against ourselves. We have frequently pointed out that the various tendencies in the history of religion repeatedly occurred and still occur. To make it more concrete; the four tendencies we have discussed are to be found within ourselves each day. It is not easy to have real fellowship with God. We can much more easily bury him under a concept, shove him away to an endless distance, dissolve him in all sorts of secular realities, and make him into a nice fairy tale of boundless beauty. Anyone who knows himself to any extent knows the finesse with which a man can escape from God, and wrestle free from his grasp. To be really able to convict anyone else of sin, a person must know himself, and the hidden corners of his heart very well.

"There is no more humbling work in the world than to engage in this aspect of reaching the lost. For at each moment the person knows that the weapons which he turns against another have wounded himself. The Holy Spirit first convicts us, and then through us he convicts the world. Anyone who in humility lets the Holy Spirit convince him of his sins may be the means by which the Holy Spirit discloses to others the hidden sources of their unwillingness to really take God seriously. And anyone who does not take God seriously can not take himself seriously. In one way or the other, he will always seek to abandon his sin, his responsibility, his need of grace, and the meaning of his life. He will seek to escape from this as from an obstinate illusion. Whoever finds God, discovers life."