

The Church Between Temple and Mosque.
A Study of the Relationship Between the Christian Faith and Other Religions,
J.H. Bevinck, Eerdmans/Oxford, 1982, reprint; pb., 206 pp.

Dr. J.H. Bavinck (1895-1964), the -first Dutch Protestant professor of missions, taught for several years at both the theological school of Kampen and the Free University of Amsterdam. From 1939 until his death In 1964 he occupied the Chair of Missions at the Free University. Bavinck was not only a professor, but he had also served as pastor and missionary In Indonesia. He has made a profound impact not only on Dutch missiology, but also on the worldwide church. His book, *Introduction to the Science of Missions*, is still an important and widely used text In North American Bible colleges and seminaries. Bavinck was an extraordinary man, a remarkable scholar, and, by the grace of God, a devout saint. I recall his lectures with a deep sense of gratitude. They were intellectually stimulating and spiritually uplifting.

He was a very friendly man, who loved people and was loved by them. He was a man of small physical stature, but a spiritual and intellectual giant. He had the ability to write with grace, profundity and simplicity. All these qualities shine forth in this posthumously published work *The Church Between Temple end Mosque*.

The chapters of this book were originally lectures given to a small class of students in an American university. They all struggle with the following questions: What is the relation of Christianity to other religions? What basic presuppositions are at the basis of all religions? How can we be bridge-builders between Christianity and other religions? Bavinck states that we cannot avoid dialogue. The Christian must speak humbly and with dignity with the other religions. And dialogue is possible as human beings are ineradicably religious. Man is always busy with God: he flees from God or finds him, he struggles with God or seeks him. Even secular man is deeply religious. Secularism is just another form of idolatry.

What is the purpose of dialogue?

The goal is not the enriching of each other's insights," but an eager desire for the Holy Spirit to lead us into the full truth. In interacting with primitive religions, Hinduism, Islam and secularism, Bavinck leads the reader into the heart of these faiths as well as into Christianity. He demonstrates from scripture, and in particular from Romans I, what the Christian has in common with other faiths, and also how it stands apart.

Man cannot escape God. The Lord occupies man's conscience. God has his hidden means to appeal to men, which we may call "general revelation."

"When the Bible speaks of general revelation, it means something quite different. There it has a much more personal nature. It is a divine concern for men collectively and individually. God's deity and eternal power are evident; they overwhelm man; they strike him suddenly in moments when he thought they were far away. They creep up on him; they do not let go of him, even though man does his best to escape them. Escaping from them and repressing them is the

human answer to God's revelation, an answer that becomes evident in the history of the religion of man."

Man is a sinner by nature. "Sin has an element of suicide. Man, who deserts his place in God's world and makes himself great, and pretends that he himself is a god throws himself in the gulf of chaos and destruction. Sin punishes itself."

The cross is central in Bevinck's missiology. We need redemption from our guilt. Man is personally responsible to God for his actions. Though man's need for a personal relationship with God is strongly stressed, Dr. Bavinck never loses the kingdom perspective. "In our time we still struggle with the Idea of the kingdom of God. For a long time Christians have overemphasized the fact that the Christian faith is something that concerns man's innermost being and is the way of salvation, without paying enough attention to the fact that faith places man in the perspective of the kingdom. That includes the fact that a believer must strive after a new world. Something of the power of the new life in Jesus Christ must penetrate social and economic life, commerce and industry, science and art."

This book is not only for the professor, pastor or missionary. Every serious student of missions can greatly benefit from it. Its message is up-to-date in view of the various nationalities and beliefs in our own country. What do our Muslims or Hindu neighbours believe? How can we approach them with the gospel? Dr. Bevinck's book will not only help you answer these questions, it will also strengthen your own Christian faith commitment. This book is a treat to read!

Johan D. Tangelder
August, 1982