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ON THE CHRISTIANITY OF THEOLOGY



Franz Overbeck

FRANZ OVERBECK

*ON THE
CHRISTIANITY
OF
THEOLOGY*

Translated with an Introduction
and Notes

By

JOHN ELBERT WILSON

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PREFACE

Franz Camille Overbeck (1837-1905) was professor of New Testament and early church history at the University of Basel, Switzerland, from 1870 until his retirement in 1897. His parents belonged to the German middle class, the father being involved in banking. At the time of Franz Overbeck's birth the family lived in St. Petersburg, Russia. His mother was French and Roman Catholic; he was reared Lutheran. He took his university degree from the University of Leipzig in 1860 and habilitated in 1864 at the University of Jena.¹ In 1876 he married Ida Rothpletz, who died in 1933; the marriage remained childless. Overbeck is known in two contexts: among historians of theology as a church historian and sharp critic of theology, and among historians of philosophy as the loyal friend of the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche.

The work that is here translated is the second edition of *Über die Christlichkeit unserer heutigen Theologie (On the Christianity of Our Today's Theology)* (Leipzig: C.G. Naumann, 1903). The first edition was published in 1873 (Leipzig: E.W. Fritsch). I shall refer to the work as the *Christianity of Theology*. Its significance lies first of all in its critical assessment of the theology of its period and in its hermeneutical statements on the relationship of historical criticism and Christian faith. It reflects a period of great ferment, when theology was intensely involved in trying to comprehend the meaning of recent progress in the historical criticism of the Bible. In the forty years prior to the publication of the *Christianity of Theology*, criticism had shaken the Christian tradition about the authorship, dates and purpose of several New Testament writings, including the Gospels, especially John, and the Acts of the Apostles, and it had also given serious attention to assessment of the difference between Paul and the synoptic Gospels. The book was written at the time of the consolidation of Germany, when laws regulating the study of theology in the universities were being formulated. The Afterword of the second edition of 1903 discusses the reception of the work and the development of theology since the first edition, a development that came to be known as "modern theology," the age of Adolf Harnack.

Together with the posthumous publication of late notes by Overbeck under the title, *Christentum und Kultur*, edited by C.A. Bernoulli (Basel, Benno Schwabe, 1919), the *Christianity of Theology* was a major source of inspiration for the "dialectical theology" of the 1920's, especially that of Karl Barth. The English-speaking world has known

about this influence since Barth's works were first published; wherever Barth's origins have been discussed, Overbeck has been mentioned. Yet not only has Overbeck not been translated, but also, especially since the 1960's, a growing body of German literature has supported the view that Barth was seriously mistaken about Overbeck. The problem was not just that Barth wrongly thought Overbeck was a Christian in the guise of a critic of Christianity, but more importantly that he had made such emphatic use of Overbeck in what he and his comrades "between the times"—Rudolf Bultmann, Friedrich Gogarten, and Eduard Thurneysen—understood as a radical new beginning in theology. In the 1920's Barth had had a "witness" for his interpretation, namely Franz Overbeck's wife, Ida; I give the evidence for their conversation in my introduction. As is well known, Barth's theology took a decisive new turn in the 1930's, namely to the *Church Dogmatics*, which were to occupy him for the rest of his life. For whatever reason, Overbeck belonged to an increasingly distant past.

Intermittently Overbeck has occupied my attention for over thirty years, beginning with my Ph.D. dissertation (Claremont, 1975)—in which I too thought Barth was mistaken—and I have worked from time to time on the translation of the *Christianity of Theology* for almost as long. In the 1970's I was able to work for a considerable period of time in the Overbeck manuscripts in Basel, from which a large part of the material in my introduction is drawn. With time I became convinced that in the 1920's Barth was essentially right about Overbeck. The key, as I came to think, was Overbeck's method, which he developed through his extensive interaction with the patristic writer, Clement of Alexandria.² Contemporary interpreters of Overbeck generally support the view that Barth was mistaken. In my introduction I present arguments for my position, but the main argument is the work here translated. Originally published in 1873 and published again in 1903, two years before Overbeck's death, it both represents the continuity of his thought and is the most definitive public statement of his "theology."

My work in the Overbeck manuscripts was made possible by a publication that catalogued the manuscripts: *Overbeckiana. Übersicht über den Franz-Overbeck-Nachlass der Universitätsbibliothek Basel. II. Teil. Der wissenschaftliche Nachlass Franz Overbecks*, described by Martin Tetz (Basel: Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 1962). The first volume of this two-volume series, published in the same year and edited by Ernst Staehelin, *Die Korrespondenz Franz Overbeck*, was also a significant help. Almost all of Overbeck's works published during his lifetime were reprinted by offset process in the 1950's and 1960's by the Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft in Darmstadt, and these publications received wide distribution in libraries in the United States as well as Europe. I have used them for this work, including the Darmstadt reprint (1963) for my translation of the second edition of the *Christianity of Theology*.³

In 1994 an editorial commission in Basel began the publication of several volumes of Overbeck's published and unpublished works: *Franz Overbeck Werke und Nachlass* (Stuttgart: Verlag J.B. Metzler). Volume One contains the first edition of *Über die Christlichkeit unserer heutigen Theologie*. It also contains an important work not reprinted by the Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, namely Overbeck's inaugural lecture at Basel in 1870, *Über Entstehung und Recht einer rein historischen Betrachtung der Neutestamentlichen Schriften*, which was published in a limited edition in Basel in 1871. In this case my references are to the publication of the work in the *Werke und Nachlass*. This edition of Overbeck's works, Volume 6/1-2, also contains an important critical edition of Overbeck's *Christentum und Kultur*, a work based on excerpts from a part of his manuscripts he called the "Kirchenlexikon" (Church Lexicon, also called the "Collectaneen") and published in 1919. The critical edition, edited by Barbara von Reibnitz, is a highly valuable demonstration of the procedure followed by the editor of the work and includes many corrections of the 1919 text in favor of Overbeck's original words. My limited references however are to the 1919 edition, for the reason that they do not have to do with problematic wordings in this edition, and that this edition has been a very widely used text since its publication and has its own important history.

Volumes 4 and 5 of the *Franz Overbeck Werke und Nachlass* publish largely unpublished material from the Kirchenlexikon that I had read earlier and from which I had made handwritten copies of my own. The German titles from the Kirchenlexikon in my text and footnotes correspond to the titles in these published volumes, so that the original German of many if not all notes can be found there. Giving the original German in every case where I have translated from what are, in some instances, still unpublished manuscripts, would have encumbered and lengthened the work to a very great degree. The same is true of untranslated German books I have used.

The Kirchenlexikon is an alphabetically arranged compilation of notes on historical and theological subjects. Overbeck began it as a collection of references to and quotations from different sources, but very soon it served for personal comments, which are in some cases rather lengthy. The individual pages have a uniform size, approximately 7 1/4 inches by 4 1/2 inches. In Martin Tetz's catalogue, all the manuscripts, including those in the Kirchenlexikon, are identified by a number beginning with the letter "A." Where I have quoted from the Kirchenlexikon, I omit the catalogue number but give the title of the note in the Kirchenlexikon. In the case of other manuscripts I give the catalogue number. Where a date is not given in a note, Overbeck's handwriting usually makes it possible to differentiate between earlier and later notes. It is notable that research in the manuscripts, which has concentrated on the Kirchenlexikon and other personal notes on theology, has left Overbeck's lectures virtually untouched. I have read several of the

lectures, but not all.

Works in English on Overbeck are very limited.⁴ Recently Martin Henry, who has also worked in the Overbeck archives, published his book on Overbeck, *Franz Overbeck, Theologian?* (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 1995), which in spite of an occasional harsh judgment gives a good introduction to the interpretation and reception of Overbeck while leaving its wealth of quotations untranslated.⁵ Henry has also recently published a translation of the first chapter of the work I translate here, in the *Irish Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 66/1, 2001. Recent works in German on Overbeck have been written mainly by young scholars who have done at least some manuscript research, above all in the *Kirchenlexikon*.⁶

As has already been said, the dominant view in today's theological scholarship is that Barth misunderstood Overbeck, that Overbeck was an unbelieving theologian who lost his faith (at some undetermined point) but continued to serve on the theological faculty at Basel. This view is represented, for example, by both Martin Henry and a recently published dissertation on the history and interpretation of the *Christianity of Theology*: Nikalus Peter, *Im Schatten der Modernität, Franz Overbecks Weg zur Christlichkeit der heutigen Theologie* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 1992). The book contains valuable unpublished material and well represents its point of view. But it omits important information promised in the second line of the title—"Overbeck's way to the *Christianity of Theology*," and it illustrates that Overbeck interpretation is strongly influenced by how the interpreter responds to Nietzsche, whose shadow still falls on the understanding of modernity.

As Overbeck states in his introduction to the second, 1903 edition of the *Christianity of Theology*, his relationship to Nietzsche was quite important for him personally.⁷ But Nietzsche was not Overbeck's teacher in religion, nor was Overbeck ever anti-Semitic. The relationship is well documented by their exchange of letters: *Friedrich Nietzsches Briefwechsel mit Franz Overbeck*, edited by Richard Oehler and C.A. Bernoulli (Leipzig, 1916). Among these [p. 134] one finds Nietzsche writing to his friend in the year 1880, "I have read your 'Christianity' [of *Theology*] once more and rejoiced a great deal in its astonishingly rich content and excellent disposition ... As I now to my shame realize, when you wrote it I only believed I understood nine tenths of it."⁸ This is an important commentary on the book, for it contains many twists and turns to be recognized and to be reflected on.

While it would be a mistake to interpret Overbeck without knowing Nietzsche's works, any attempt here to enter into an interpretation of the enigmatic Nietzsche, about whom there is significant disagreement among his interpreters, would burst the limits of both this preface and the introduction, although I do speak of him briefly in the fourth part of my introduction. I can say that I am well acquainted with Nietzsche's works and have published an interpretation of them, and I

am comfortable with omitting consideration of him here.⁹

My introduction focuses on the central interest of Overbeck's book, the nature of theology. Many aspects of the book not mentioned in the introduction receive comment in the endnotes; others remain unmentioned and are left to the reader's own reflection.

Finally, I express my thanks to the Basel University Library, especially Dr. Martin Steinmann and the manuscript division for their gracious assistance. Thanks are also due to my colleagues at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, Professors Dale Allison and John Burgess, for their reading of the manuscript, corrections and suggestions, and to Dikran Hadidian for the acceptance of this work in the Princeton Theological Monograph Series.

On the Translation of the "Christianity of Theology"

Among the most frequently occurring terms in the book are "Wissen" and "Wissenschaft." "Wissen" is a verbal noun based on the verb "wissen," to know. "Wissenschaft" means science in the broad sense of both natural sciences and the humanities. "Wissen" and "Wissenschaft" mean all knowledge developed by autonomous human thought. Overbeck can substitute for "Wissen" the word "Denken," thinking or thought. Insofar as Overbeck makes a definite point in consistently using these words as inclusive of philosophy and history, and insofar as English has no equivalent other than "science" to the broad German meaning of "Wissenschaft," both in Overbeck's text and in my introduction I have adopted his usage and normally translated "Wissenschaft" as "science." Only where the word specifically means philosophy or history have I used these words instead.

The closely related words "Kultur," culture and "Bildung," formation or education, define the integrated ideas and institutions that characterize an historical period, above all its science (in the broad sense). In Overbeck's usage "Kultur" is very nearly synonymous with "Welt," world.

I have translated Overbeck's word "Urchristentum," meaning the New Testament period, as "original Christianity," and "die alte Kirche" (the post-New Testament period) as "the ancient church."

In important contexts Overbeck uses words of viewing and vision that usually have to do with a certain view of the world of life: "Betrachtung," "Ansicht," "Anschauung," and also "Ideal." They are related to the common 19th century expression, "Weltanschauung," worldview. Another frequent word is "Empfinden," a verbal form meaning a perception in which the emphasis lies in the sensing or feeling of what is perceived, something religious for example. Overbeck only rarely uses the word "Gefühl," a word meaning "feeling" that is entirely subjective.

The book is marked by an unusual and difficult style, especially in the Afterword. Perhaps this was intentional and an aspect of his method. Other publications, especially *Über die Anfänge der patristischen Literatur*, are written in a lucid style. I have tried to make the work as clear as possible. Unusually long sentences have been made into more than one sentence, and in the Afterword repetitive words and phrases have been omitted. Paragraph breaks have been added that are not in the original text. In some instances a new thought is introduced at the end of a paragraph rather than at the beginning of a new paragraph; in these instances I let the paragraph begin with the new thought.

In the text and footnotes of the *Christianity of Theology* my additions are in [brackets]. Overbeck's few additions to the text in the second edition of 1903 are in {curved brackets}.

NOTES

1. The history of the family and Overbeck's early years is given in an autobiographical essay by the late Overbeck and published by Eberhard Vischer under the title, *Selbstbekenntnisse* (Basel: Benno Schwabe, 1941). The main part of the book was later reprinted with an introductory essay by Jacob Taubes (Frankfurt a.M.: Insel Verlag, 1966).

2. I am indebted to Martin Tetz's article, "Über Formengeschichte in der Kirchengeschichte," *Theologische Zeitschrift*, 1961, 413-431, especially the discussion of Overbeck's interpretation of Clement.

3. *Studien zur Geschichte der alten Kirche* (Schloss-Chemnitz, 1875); *Über die Auffassung des Streits des Paulus mit Petrus in Antiochien (Gal. 2, 11 ff) bei den Kirchenvätern* (Basel, 1877); *Zur Geschichte des Kanons* (Chemnitz, 1880); *Über die Anfänge der patristischen Literatur*, separate reprint from: *Historische Zeitschrift*, 1882; *Über die Anfänge der Kirchengeschichtsschreibung* (Basel, 1892). Not published in later Darmstadt editions: "Aus dem Briefwechsel des Augustin mit Hieronymus," *Historische Zeitschrift*, 1879; *Die Bischofslisten und die apostolische Nachfolge in der Kirchengeschichte des Eusebius* (Basel, 1898); and *Christentum und Kultur* (Basel, 1919). Besides this last book, Bernoulli edited and published three other books from the Overbeck manuscripts, one of which was reprinted by the Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft: *Vorgeschichte und Jugend der mittelalterlichen Scholastik* (Basel, 1917). The other two are: *Das Johannesevangelium. Studien zur Kritik seiner Erforschung* (Tübingen, 1911), and *Titus Flavius Klemens von Alexandria, Die Tepiche (Stromateis)*. Deutscher Text nach der Übersetzung von Franz Overbeck. Im Auftrage der Franz-Overbeck Stiftung in Basel herausgegeben und eingeleitet von C.A. Bernoulli und L. Früchtel (Basel: Benno Schwabe & Co. Verlag, 1936). An article written by Overbeck that was not reprinted is: "Aus dem Briefwechsel des Augustin mit Hieronymus," *Historische Zeitschrift*, Vol. 42, 1879, 222-259. Overbeck's numerous reviews and short dictionary articles are listed in *Overbeckiana*, Vol. 1.

4. Notable is Karl Löwith's brief treatment in: *From Hegel to Nietzsche. The Revolution in 19th Century Thought*. Translated from the German by David Greene (NY: Holt, Reinhart & Winston, 1964), pp. 377-388.

5. See also Robert Luehrs, "F. Overbeck and the Theologian as Antichrist," *Katallagete*, 1973, IV, 16-20; "Christianity against History: F. Over-

beck's Concept of the Finis Christianismi," *Katallagete*, 1975, V, 16-20. Luers wrote his Stanford University Ph.D. dissertation on Overbeck: *Franz Overbeck* (1968). Another dissertation, by James Overbeck, *History against Theology, an Analysis of the Life and Thought of Franz Overbeck*, was accepted at the University of Chicago Divinity School in 1975.

6. The most important general introduction in German and the work most cited in recent scholarship is Arnold Pfeiffer, *Franz Overbecks Kritik des Christentums* (Göttingen: 1975). The following are some of the most recent works: Rudolf Brändle and Ekkhard Stegemann, eds., *Franz Overbecks unerledigte Anfragen an das Christentum* (Munich: Kaiser, 1988); Hermann-Peter Eberlein, *Theologie als Scheitern? Franz Overbecks Geschichte mit der Geschichte* (Essen: Blaue Eule, 1989); Eberlein, *Flamme bin ich sicherlich! F. Nietzsche, F. Overbeck und ihre Freunde* (Cologne: Schmidt von Schwind, 1999); Johann-Christoph Emmelius, *Tendenzkritik und Formengeschichte. F. Overbecks Beitrag zur Auslegung der Apostelgeschichte im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: 1975); Ulrich Körtnner, *Theologie in dürftiger Zeit* (Munich: Kaiser, 1990); Andreas Urs Sommer, *Der Geist der Historie und das Ende des Christentums* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997); Rudolf Wehrli, *Alter und Tod des Christentums bei F. Overbeck* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1977).

7. The major work is still C.A. Bernoulli's two-volume *Franz Overbeck und Friedrich Nietzsche. Eine Freundschaft* (Jena: E. Diedrichs, 1908), which contains many quotations from Overbeck's manuscripts. It also tells the story of Overbeck's struggles with Nietzsche's sister concerning her manipulation of information after Nietzsche became insane and after his death in 1900.

8. These letters have recently been newly edited by Katrin Meyer and Barbara von Reibniz, *Briefwechsel F. Nietzsche, Franz and Ida Overbeck* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2000). Other important letters of Overbeck have been published: *Franz Overbeck, Erwin Rhode, Briefwechsel*, edited by Andreas Patzer (Berlin, NY: W. de Gruyter, 1990). *Briefwechsel Franz Overbeck, Heinrich Köselitz [Peter Gast]*, edited by David Marc Hoffmann, Niklaus Peter and Theo Salfinger (Berlin, NY: W. de Gruyter, 1998). Another, much earlier publication of letters is also notable, namely Nietzsche's mother's letters to Overbeck during the period of Nietzsche's insanity: *Der kranke Nietzsche, Briefe seiner Mutter an Franz Overbeck*, edited by Erich Podach (Vienna, 1937).

9. J. E. Wilson, *Schelling und Nietzsche. Zur Auslegung der frühen Werke Friedrich Nietzsches*. Manuskripte und Texte zur Nietzsche-Forschung, Bd. 33 (Berlin and NY: Walter de Gruyter, 1995). I agree with the view that at the time of the writing of the *Christianity of Theology* there is no evident hostility in Nietzsche toward Christianity.

INTRODUCTION

Criticism and Faith, Theology and Church

"Your theological personality is for me a psychological problem. Its still unfound solution intrigues me, and indeed in the same measure that I have every reason greatly to appreciate so many sides of it, yet find others foreign to me. Each line is in itself intelligible but not the center, where they must come together in the unity of your person and as unity go out again: the positive point where your positive and negative relationship to Christianity are truly inwardly united. ... But where is it?"¹ As Overbeck indicates in the "Afterword" to the *Christianity of Theology*, questions such as this one from the liberal Zürich theologian, A.E. Biedermann (1819-1885), were hardly unusual. Biedermann writes in response to Overbeck's gift to him of another book, *Studien zur Geschichte der alten Kirche* [Studies in the History of the Ancient Church].² As also stated in the "Afterword," the book was published as a continuation of the earlier book, the *Christianity of Theology*, and "with the most definite advocacy of its essential ideas." In a previous letter, dated Oct. 30, 1873, Overbeck had replied to questions from Biedermann about the *Christianity of Theology*, specifically about Overbeck's understanding of faith (Glaube) and science (Wissen). Overbeck's answers basically repeat arguments in the book: "... science, or, if you wish, thought [Denken, autonomous thought] can have only a critical relationship to faith. Faith will call on thought only out of necessity or weakness, but thought will not remain with the task of freeing faith, for example, from a burdensome superstition, but will go on to demonstrate that all the forms of faith it can take in its grasp are themselves essentially superstition.... You ask further, what value I place on instruction about the 'essence of religion,' and I answer: little, if it is a matter of an abstract instruction that goes beyond the limits of experience. I really am of the opinion that every living religion has something incomprehensible for science, and I see no value in an alleged comprehension of religion in purely abstract concepts."³ In Overbeck's understanding, an abstract comprehension or definition in abstract concepts would already be a form of science, and therefore a first step in the process of science's dissolution of faith. Biedermann responded to this letter on Nov. 6, 1873: "I see that in the scientifically [wissenschaftlich] fundamental question about what scientific thought can and cannot do—the answer to which determines the method and

aim of our efforts—you are in agreement with the contemporary return to Kant's determination of 'limit.' " Biedermann, an Hegelian, goes on to say that such a return is understandable, given the excesses of post-Kantian speculation, but he deplors the rejection of speculation he finds implicit in Overbeck's answers.⁴ Yet neither these answers nor Overbeck's *Studien zur Geschichte der alten Kirche* were able to clarify the "psychological problem" of Overbeck's "theological personality" for Biedermann.

That Overbeck sees "no value" in a "comprehension of religion in purely abstract concepts" is highly unusual for 19th century German theology and philosophy. The century begins with Schleiermacher's famous definition of religion as "the feeling of absolute dependence" and ends with Adolt Harnack's definition, derived from the Schleiermacher tradition, of "religion itself" as "God the Father and the human soul so ennobled that it can and does unite with Him."⁵ Biedermann relates Overbeck's statement to a return to the Kantian "limit." Certainly there was such a turn at this time. Along with the strong growth in the empirical sciences and a corresponding emphasis on scientific demonstration in the historical sciences, philosophy and theology had begun to turn away from the predominantly Hegelian speculation of the earlier part of the century to restate in one form or another Kant's theory of the limits of human perception. Kant had said perception is limited to experience and to pure and practical reason; metaphysics that went beyond these was unrealistic. But Kant's own effort in defining and comprehending the practical significance of religion—for example in *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*—is a work in purely abstract concepts. For Kant himself, religion falls within the limits of practical reason.

Looking to Overbeck's own time for expressions of a limit between faith and science, the theology of Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889) should be noted. The first volume of his major work appeared in 1870, the second and (most important) third, in 1874: *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*.⁶ He adopts Kant's understanding of the limit between experience and metaphysical speculation, and Kant's practical reason becomes for him the philosophical ground of his conception of the Kingdom of God. Theology is the Christian science of moral or spiritual value in the service of the Kingdom of God, which is defined as spiritual dominion over the world. Abstract definitions of religion are at the core of Ritschl's work: "Religious knowledge moves in independent value judgments, which relate to man's attitude to the world, and call forth feelings of pleasure or pain, in which man either enjoys the dominion over the world vouchsafed him by God, or feels grievously the lack of God's help to that end" [III, §28, cf. §27]. Christ and Christianity guarantee for Ritschl the dominion over the world, which extends into state and culture [III, §48, §68].

Ritschl and Overbeck could hardly be further apart on the theological spectrum. As we shall see in the *Christianity of Theology*, for

Overbeck all science and all autonomous thought, from which science originates, is “worldly.” He would agree with Ritschl that science is practically directed to serve humanity’s dominion over its environment, but religion is something else entirely. In fact one may say that for Overbeck it is based on the failure of humanity’s dominion over the world. Reflecting the failure, instead of teaching how to succeed in dominating the world, it teaches “world denial,” as expressed in original Christian eschatology. Ritschl addresses Overbeck’s *Christianity of Theology* in Vol. III, §62, where he calls Overbeck’s understanding of Christianity “Buddhist.” He reiterates that in his view early Christianity’s expectation of the end of the world is “the shell and not the kernel” of Christianity.⁷ Here also he expresses his conviction that an understanding such as Overbeck’s is a form of “barbarism”: it contradicts the continuity of civilization, culture and religion. Both Overbeck’s *Christianity of Theology* and Ritschl’s *Justification and Reconciliation* appeared at a decisive moment for the church in Germany, namely at the time when the newly unified nation was consciously attempting to clarify its religious identity. The most influential answer was to be given by Ritschl and his school, and for the rest of Overbeck’s life Ritschlianism was the dominant theology in the universities.

Two other prominent figures in the Kantian revival of the time were the philosophers Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) and Frederick Albert Lange (1828-1875). In Overbeck’s *Kirchenlexikon* one finds scattered references to Schopenhauer that mainly have to do with the chapter “On Man’s Need for Metaphysics” in *The World as Will and as Representation*. The references to this chapter focus on its concluding words: “For the rest, philosophy is essentially world-wisdom; its problem is the world. With this alone it has to do, and it leaves the gods in peace; but in return for this, it expects them to leave it in peace also.” Overbeck once quotes this passage as support of his own view of the “limits” between philosophy and religion, between “Wissen” and “Glauben.”⁸ But Overbeck is more consistent with this distinction than Schopenhauer, for whom religion is metaphysics in popular allegorical form. The philosopher translates this form, much as in Hegelianism, into philosophical concepts.⁹ Schopenhauer’s work is based on pessimism about life in the world and advocates world denial, and for this reason Overbeck’s work has been associated with it; but the form of denial is philosophical and hence, in terms of Overbeck’s *Christianity of Theology*, a form of science (Wissen).

The “limit” has clearer definition in F.A. Lange’s *History of Materialism*—its first edition was published in 1866—which is generally credited with beginning the neo-Kantian movement in late 19th century German philosophy. Lange distinguishes between the “thing in itself” that is absolute reality and the limited perception of this reality in science. Religion is grounded in ideas innate in the mind and relates in intuitive feeling to the “thing in itself,” but it can express this relationship

only in poetic expression or other forms of art. Because of the limit between scientific perception and absolute reality, scientific metaphysics is impossible. Science can only focus its efforts on empirical reality. Religion can transcend the limit, but only in poetic feeling and vision. Both science and religion have partial aspects of truth, attained by different methods—Lange speaks of a “double sense of the word truth”—and both are needed in human life. Both are also in process of development. Scientific progress usually contradicts the mythical forms of religion, provoking their reaction into rigid dogmatism. While many outmoded expressions retain their poetic power even after falling to criticism, religion undergoes reformulations that correspond to the progress of scientific knowledge. For Lange it retains its value as a psychic or “spiritual” process in human life that responds to the human need for a vision of higher reality.¹⁰

In Overbeck's *Kirchenlexikon* there are only a few references to Lange, all of which are later than the publication of the *Christianity of Theology*. The most important is under the title “Wahrheit (zweifache)” [Truth (twofold)]: “How one can speak of twofold truth, religious and philosophical, without having to admit to the common reproach of a ‘double entry in the account book,’ see Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus*.” Page citations follow.¹¹ In the first place cited by Overbeck, Lange writes: “In the relations of science we have fragments of truth, which are continually multiplying, but continually remain fragments; in the ideas of [metaphysical] philosophy and religion we have a figure [Bild] of the truth, which presents it to us as a whole, but still always remains a figure, varying in its form with the standpoint of our apprehension.” In the other place cited by Overbeck, Lange faults a theologian, who had criticized his theory of twofold truth, with having fused the two truths into one dogmatic statement, thus producing a hybrid that satisfies neither science nor religion.

The concept of a twofold truth has a certain parallel in Overbeck's division of science and faith, yet there are also significant differences between Lange and Overbeck's *Christianity of Theology*. For Lange, all metaphysics falls with religion in the area of poetic instead of scientific truth. In Overbeck's analysis of theology, philosophical metaphysics is science. Furthermore on the basis of his psychological analytic, Lange is able to give an abstract definition of religion, which Overbeck refuses to do because it would be scientific. It may be asked whether Lange remains with any real religion at all, insofar as his vision of a future religion is essentially philosophical. The “core of religion,” he writes, is found in the “elevation of our souls above the real and in the creation of a home of the spirit,” where the “purest forms may produce essentially the same psychical processes” as the “creed of the uncultured masses.” In another place Lange speaks of helping the common folk of the church religiously advance, through “an art of translating religious forms into philosophical ideas” already prepared by Kant and Hegel.

These ideas must correspond to current culture: "Not any given poetical idea [of religion] can serve our purpose, but only that which is adapted to our time and to the character of our culture."¹² According to the *Christianity of Theology*, such adaptation would in fact be the end of religion, its disappearance into culture.

Lange's concept of religion in relationship to scientific thought was hardly new, as was not the Kantian "limit" in application to religion: they had long since been given classical expression by Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834). In his famous work *On Religion, Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, first published in 1799, Schleiermacher posits that science and religion are two different aspects of mind, the one being objective and analytic, the other, the subjective feeling (Gefühl) of the unity of the All and one's dependence on it. Religious expressions are originally expressions of particular inner feelings. Dogmatic thought focus on the "outward," the concept, and where dogmatics becomes dominant, the original source in inner feeling, above all the feeling of love and dependence on God as exemplified by Christ, must be rediscovered.¹³ While this bears a certain similarity to Overbeck's distinction between science and religion, Schleiermacher's central effort in the *Speeches* is something Overbeck criticizes in the *Christianity of Theology*, namely apologetic theology. It is addressed to non-believers and defines religion—"the sense and taste for the infinite," "the feeling of absolute dependence"—as an experience common to all persons who do not close themselves to it.

In spite of Schleiermacher's attempt to exclude science from the area of religion, Hegelian theologians recognized that his definition of religion was accessible to science, to both psychology and metaphysics. By the mid-19th century it was almost a commonplace in liberal theology that, given an Hegelian scientific comprehension of Schleiermacher's concept of religion as subjective existential experience, science and religion could be reconciled.¹⁴ How this was to happen was more difficult. Science could claim anything in the religious tradition it thought it could explain, but the essential subjective experience would remain. The problem was the definition of the essential experience. In any case Schleiermacher's definition of religion was "graspable" by science, so that it could be explained and categorized in ways Schleiermacher never intended.

Schleiermacher himself was aware of the problematic relationship in his theology between autonomous or scientific thought and religion. In a famous letter from the year 1818, he states: "With the understanding (Verstande) I am a philosopher; for this is the original and autonomous activity of the understanding; and with the feeling (Gefühle) I am completely a person of piety, and indeed as such a Christian..." Trying to maintain an equilibrium of understanding and feeling "is certainly nothing other than an alternate lifting of one and sinking of the other. But, my friend, why should we not accept this? The oscillation is the