

Dear Rappard,

On rereading your letters, my dear fellow, I find such lively and funny sallies in them that I feel stimulated, particularly by the latter, to continue our correspondence.

Well, well! So after all I am a fanatic! All right, for your words have gone home, right through my skin! So be it – thanks for your revelation, yes, thank God, at first I dared not believe it, but you have made it clear to me – so I have a will, a conviction, I am going in a definite direction, and what is more, not being contented with this, I want others to go along with me! Thank God, so I am a fanatic! Well, from now on I won't be anything else. And now I should like to have my friend Rappard as a fellow traveller – it is not a matter of indifference to me to lose sight of him – do you think I am wrong in this?

Now I said in my hurry that I wanted to drive people “to the open sea” (see my previous letter). If I did nothing but this, I should be a sorry barbarian. But there is something else which renders the thing more reasonable. In the long run a man cannot stick it out in the open sea – he must have a little cottage on the shore with a bit of fire on the hearth – with a wife and children around that hearth.

Look, Rappard, whither I am trying to drive myself, and whither I am trying to drive others too, is to be fishermen on the sea that we call the Ocean of Reality, but on the other hand I want – for myself and for the fellow creatures whom I importune now and then – that “little cottage,” most decidedly I do! And in that cottage, all those things! So the open sea and that resting place, or that resting place and the open sea. And as regards the doctrine I preach, this doctrine of mine – “My friends, let us love what we love” – is based on an axiom. I thought it superfluous to mention this axiom, but for clarity's sake I will add it. That axiom is: “My friends, we love.”<sup>1</sup> From this I deduce that first thesis.

My friends, let us love what we love, let us be ourselves, “do not let us think we know better than God.” This “do not let us think we know better than God” is not my expression, it belongs to Mauve. And this thesis I prove by negative demonstration, i.e. in the following way to begin with.

Suppose a man did not love what he loves, what a lot of misery he would cause himself and others, and how much turbulence he would create in God's world. In short, if all men were like the person who, as we suppose – at least if this is possible – for the moment, does not love what he loves, how the world (which, I think, our Lord put squarely on its feet, which is kept in that position by Him, and which will stay that way as long as you and I are alive – which will serve our time, you know!)...if, I say, all men were like this imaginary one, willfully turned inside out and upside down – (and how fortunate it is that he can only exist in our imagination as an abstraction, just like our proof by negative demonstration of an unmathematical thesis) – how much the world, correctly created by God, would gradually seem to become a radically wrong world. Methinks, by continuing to work with this abstraction in our imagination – and this only for a short, even a very short while – I mean, with the above actually nonexistent man, willfully turned inside out and upside down – we cannot help feeling it goes so much “against the grain” that we are entitled to think we have proved definitely the correctness and reasonableness of our thesis: “My friends, let us love what we love.” (Besides, if I have not demonstrated clearly enough that the incorrectness of the said thesis would be an enormous absurdity, you, who are much further advanced in mathematics than I, would easily succeed – if you would give your mind to it – in finding more conclusive proofs for my thesis.)

We now come to some remarkable conclusions or “deductions” from our primary thesis, as for instance:

1. The man who damn well refuses to love what he loves dooms himself.
2. He must have quite a lot of o(a)bstinatie, to stick it out in the long run (The o and the a happen both to be appropriate, eh?) [This pun is untranslatable. The Dutch word *obstinatie* means “obstinacy,” and the (incidentally incorrect) word *abstinatie* (correct: *abstinentie*) means “abstinence.”]
3. If he changed, wouldn't his conversion be a great thing!

Yes, and whether I add it or not, I think you will understand that I am suggesting more or less, Rappard, by sticking so close to the academy you are clinging to a reservation as to a rope that has “strangled” many a one – I mean, who could not cut himself loose when he wanted to put to sea.

Are there still other “reservations” besides the academic ones? See the chapter “eye beams” in my previous letter.

There are, if you will allow me to say so, as many kinds of reservations as there are kinds of eye beams.

How many? Legions, I tell you, legions!

This “being strangled” by a reservation is a much slower and more agonizing death than stoutly hanging oneself by means of a halter. Are there also moral reservations? Why shouldn't there be, just as there are moral “eye beams”?

But you and I, have we laboured under them, are we labouring under them, shall we labour under them?

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Goodness gracious – I am far from sure, and if I were speaking for myself instead of for the two of us, I should say, I have laboured, am labouring and shall labour under moral eye beams and moral reservations, but this has not altered, does not alter and will not alter the fact that I have cast, am casting and shall go on casting moral beams out of my eyes, and that I have chucked away, am chucking away and shall go on chucking away moral reservations. Until in the end I shall stand with a clear eye and a free neck.

When?

If I persevere until the end – in the end.

But I feel sure you will see that by continuing our correspondence we get so much profit out of it that gradually this correspondence is getting more serious.

For though, as I said, I give my imagination a free rein, yet I swear that I write in dead earnest, and not the reverse.

Nothing is further from my thoughts than writing you out of a lust for argument, but my intention is “to wake Rappard up,” and I doubt whether I shall drop off myself when “waking Rappard up.” God forbid that this should be the case – far be it from me!

Now I told you on a former occasion that in general, and more especially with artists, I pay as much attention to the man who does the work as to the work itself. If the man is not there, I am now and then forced to draw conclusions from the work only (we cannot know all artists personally), or if the work is not there, to form an opinion of the man by himself. Now I know something of the work of a certain Mr. Van Rappard, and secondly something of the gentleman himself.

His work is always saying to me, Better is to come; his person is saying the same thing to me.

Better and better.

Do you think this a very merciless judgment? And (to jump from one subject to another) as regards my special “bête noire,” today I had little opportunity to occupy myself with hunting it; but for all that I have not been able to refrain from attacking it a little.

And we shall have a bone to pick with it by and by. But it is beginning to be a little on its guard; the fact is that resignation is accustomed to resignation, and I thought it would give up the struggle. But lo! I am not yet in a mood for it. Oh well, later on I shall probably tell you something more about the said bête noire. Damned bête noire! And yet it amuses me.

Meanwhile believe me, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

I am writing you pretty often now, as shortly I shall have a lot of other correspondence to attend to.

1. See letter 161 to Theo of the same date. “Through love... our sense of duty is sharpened and our work becomes clear to us through love; and in loving and fulfilling the duties of love we perform God's will.”