

# The Outline of Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*

What follows is Herman Bavinck's original outline for his magnum opus, *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*.<sup>1</sup> Presenting it in English serves a practical purpose for readers of the *Reformed Dogmatics: Abridged in One Volume*: to provide a convenient way to correlate the subparagraph numbers with their place in the unabridged translation.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, making the outline available to be read along with the abridged or unabridged *Reformed Dogmatics* serves a speculative end, which, despite its apparent banality (i.e., a table of contents), is no small boon to reading the *Dogmatics* well: elucidating the author's arrangement of the synthetic whole.

At first glance the four volumes are dauntingly long, and upon cracking one open it might seem inevitable to lose one's way through the forest due to the many trees. Nevertheless, a deeper look at the structure reveals Bavinck's keen sense of direction. The author does not waste the traveler's time with meanderings. Every part serves a purpose in the whole, and topics are treated in their proper places. That which goes before prepares the way for that which lies ahead. Thus like the traveler who departs on a long journey with the assistance of a GPS system, which tracks one's present location in relation to the destination, the one who peruses the *Dogmatics* with the aid of the original outline will have the advantage of knowing where one's present passage is located on Bavinck's map. Such a self-aware traveler will be able to appreciate the author's sharp eye for the organic relation between the various loci of dogmatics themselves

1. 4 vols., 7th ed. (Kampen: Kok, 1998). The outline is translated by Laurence O'Donnell.

2. Ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011). The unabridged translation is Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004–2008). The latter is arranged differently than the Dutch original in order to enhance readability for modern anglophones: each volume receives its own title and trinitarian order, the structural components of the original outline are reduced to two levels (i.e., chapters headings and subheadings), and additional subheadings are added to help the reader navigate long sections. Bavinck organized *Gereformeerde dogmatiek* into a simple three-point outline: introduction, *principia*, and dogma. The structure of the work consists of parts (i.e., volumes), chapters, paragraphs (i.e., large sections), and subparagraphs. The numbers in square brackets preceded by a number sign found in the text of both the abridged and unabridged translations (e.g., [#101]) are *subparagraph numbers* that correlate with the same in the *Dogmatiek*.

Bavinck wrote his own non-academic abridgment of the *Dogmatiek* for use by churches, families, and individuals: *Magnalia Dei: Onderwijzing in de Christelijke Religie Naar Gereformeerde Belijdenis* [The wonderful works of God: instruction in the Christian religion for Reformed believers] (Kampen: Kok, 1909). This work was translated as *Our Reasonable Faith: A Survey of Christian Doctrine*, trans. Henry Zylstra (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956). Note that this work, a gem in its own right, is distinct from the editor's abridgment of the four-volume *Dogmatics* mentioned above.

and for the balance of biblical, historical, philosophical, and theological materials within each locus.<sup>3</sup> The one who patiently treks through the tome with map in hand will find that the *Dogmatics*, notwithstanding its length, imbibes in its own way the *brevitas et dilucidatio* of Aquinas and the *brevitas et facilitas* of Calvin.<sup>4</sup>

## Volume 1

### I. Introduction

- A. The name and idea of dogmatics [##1–8]
- B. The place of dogmatics within theological encyclopedia [##9–12]
- C. The method of dogmatics [##13–26]
- D. The arrangement of dogmatics [##27–35]
- E. The history and literature of dogmatics [##36–60]
  - i. The period of dogmatic formation, second to fourth centuries [##36–39]
  - ii. Dogma and dogmatics in the East [##40–41]
  - iii. Dogma and dogmatics in the West [##42–46]
  - iv. Roman Catholic dogmatics [##47–49]
  - v. Lutheran dogmatics [##50–53]
  - vi. Reformed dogmatics [##54–60]

### II. *Principia* of Dogmatics

- A. *Principia* in general (ch. 1)
  - i. The meaning of *principia* [##61–63]
  - ii. *Principia* in science
    - a. Rationalism [##64–65]
    - b. Empiricism [##66]

3. Bavinck covers these topics in vol. 1 of the *Dogmatics*; see also Bavinck, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman, “The Pros and Cons of a Dogmatic System,” *Bavinck Review* 5 (2014): 90–103, <https://goo.gl/GvDfkm>. On the meaning and significance of the organic motif in Bavinck’s thought, see James Eglinton, “Bavinck’s Organic Motif: Questions Seeking Answers,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (2010): 51–71; Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism: Towards a New Reading of Herman Bavinck’s Organic Motif*, T&T Clark Studies in Systematic Theology 17 (London: T&T Clark, 2012).

4. See the prologue to Aquinas’s *Summa theologiae*; see also the passages from Calvin’s commentaries surveyed in Richard C. Gamble, “*Brevitas Et Facilitas*: Toward an Understanding of Calvin’s Hermeneutic,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 47, no. 1 (1985): 1–17; Myung Jun Ahn, “The Ideal of *Brevitas et Facilitas*: The Theological Hermeneutics of John Calvin,” *Skrif En Kerk* 20, no. 2 (1999): 270–81.

- c. Realism [##67–69]
  - iii. *Principia* in religion
    - a. The essence of religion [##70–75]
    - b. The seat of religion [##76–79]
    - c. The origin of religion [##80–81]
- B. *Principium externum* (ch. 2)
  - i. The essence and idea of revelation [##82–84]
  - ii. General revelation [##85–90]
  - iii. Special revelation [##91–97]
  - iv. Revelation and nature [##98–102]
  - v. Revelation and Holy Scripture [##103–105]
  - vi. The “God-breathedness” (*Theopneustie*) of Scripture [##106–17]
  - vii. The attributes of Scripture
    - a. In general [##118]
    - b. Authority [##119–21]
    - c. Necessity [##122–24]
    - d. Clarity [##125–26]
    - e. Sufficiency [##127–29]
- C. *Principium internum* (ch. 3)
  - i. The meaning of *principium internum* [##130–32]
  - ii. The historical-apologetic method [##133–34]
  - iii. The speculative method [##135–36]
  - iv. The religious-empirical method [##137–40]
  - v. The ethical-psychological method [##141–46]
  - vi. Faith [##147–49]
  - vii. The ground of faith [##150–55]
  - viii. Faith and theology [##156–60]

## Volume 2

### III. The Dogma

#### A. Concerning God (ch. 4)

- i. The incomprehensibility of God [##161–66]

- ii. The knowability of God (*cognitio Dei insita*) [##167–71]
  - iii. The knowability of God (*cognitio Dei acquisita*) [##172–77]
  - iv. The names of God [##178–80]
  - v. The classification of the names of God [##181–87]
  - vi. The proper names of God [##188–91]
  - vii. The incommunicable attributes [##192–97]
  - viii. The communicable attributes [##198–212]
    - a. God’s spiritual nature [##198–99]
    - b. Intellectual attributes [##200–203]
    - c. Moral attributes [##204–206]
    - d. Attributes of sovereignty [##207–210]
    - e. Perfection, beatitude, and glory [##211–12]
  - ix. The Holy Trinity [##213–31]
  - x. The divine counsel [##232–49]
- B. Concerning the world in its original state (ch. 5)
- i. The creation [##250–59]
  - ii. The spiritual world [##260–67]
  - iii. The material world [##268–78]
  - iv. The origin of humanity [##279–83]
  - v. The nature of humanity [##284–93]
  - vi. The destiny of humanity [##294–300]
  - vii. Providence [##301–306]

### Volume 3

- C. Concerning the world in its fallen state (ch. 6)
- i. The origin of sin [##307–16]
  - ii. The spread of sin [##317–27]
  - iii. The essence and operation of sin [##328–34]
  - iv. The penalty of sin [##335–342]
- D. Concerning the person and work of Christ (ch. 7)
- i. The Covenant of Grace [##343–50]
  - ii. The person of Christ [##351–73]

- iii. The work of Christ in his humiliation [##374–94]
- iv. The work of Christ in his exaltation [##395–409]
- E. Concerning the benefits of the covenant (ch. 8)
  - i. The order of salvation [##410–32]

## **Volume 4**

- ii. Calling and regeneration [##433–48]
- iii. Faith and conversion [##449–66]
- iv. Justification [##467–76]
- v. Sanctification and perseverance [##477–84]
- F. Concerning the church (ch. 9)
  - i. The essence of the church [##485–96]
  - ii. The government of the church [##497–506]
  - iii. The power of the church [##507–18]
- G. Concerning the means of grace (ch. 10)
  - i. The Word as a means of grace [##519–22]
  - ii. The sacraments [##523–29]
  - iii. Baptism [##530–38]
  - iv. The Lord's Supper [##539–47]
- H. Concerning the last things (ch. 11)
  - i. The intermediate state [##548–61]
  - ii. The return of Christ [##562–71]
  - iii. The consummation of the ages [##572–80]