

Bavinck Society Discussion #1: The VanDrunen-Kloosterman Debate on ‘Natural Law’ and ‘Two Kingdoms’ in the Theology of Herman Bavinck

By John Bolt

The Spring 2010 issue of the *Calvin Theological Journal* featured most of the plenary and breakout session papers given at the conference, “[A Pearl and a Leaven: Herman Bavinck for the 21st Century](#),” held in Grand Rapids, September 18–20, 2008. Included are Westminster Seminary (California) Professor David VanDrunen’s paper, “Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms in the Thought of Herman Bavinck,” and a response by Professor Nelson D. Kloosterman of Mid-America Reformed Seminary.¹ The issues raised in these two papers are of such significance, not only to Bavinck scholarship but to our understanding of Christian discipleship in the world that it is a natural topic for the first discussion thread for members of the [Bavinck Society](#). I find my self in the “interesting” circumstance of agreeing *in part* with two friends who disagree with each other at a pretty basic level, and my purpose here is to summarize the issues and to offer some preliminary suggestions for getting the discussion going.²

¹ David VanDrunen, “‘The Kingship of Christ is Twofold’: Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms in the Thought of Herman Bavinck,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (April 2010): 147-164; Nelson D. Kloosterman, “A Response to ‘The Kingship of Christ is Twofold’: Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms in the Thought of Herman Bavinck by David VanDrunen,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (April 2010): 165-176. [Listen to the VanDrunen-Kloosterman exchange](#) (in [Real Audio](#) format).

² The quotations that follow are from VanDrunen’s paper and follow in sequence. I will not burden the text with further pagination. Readers can consult

VANDRUNEN'S PROPOSAL

VanDrunen's concern in a number of recent publications has been to rehabilitate the importance of natural law and the two kingdoms doctrine for Reformed ethics.³ He acknowledges that this is not the first thing that comes to mind when considering Bavinck because the scholarly consensus points to "grace restoring nature" as the preeminent theme in his theology. Even the conference theme—"a pearl and a leaven"—points to the transformative power of the kingdom of God, all of which "seem[s] to cohere with the promoting a Christian world and life view and with seeing redemption as the renewal and development of the natural, created order, the effects of which will carry over into the age to come." In this climate natural law and the two kingdoms "appear to intrude like uninvited guests, archaic remnants of a dualistic past." Yet, VanDrunen argues that "Bavinck, adopting categories of historic Reformed orthodoxy, indeed taught doctrines of natural law and the two kingdoms." Furthermore, "Bavinck's defense of these doctrines was neither incidental nor a mindless repetition of his theological inheritance. Grace-restoring-nature and the kingdom-as-a-leaven are certainly themes in his theology, but expounding these themes in his thought without accounting for the natural law and two kingdoms categories will produce a distorted picture of Bavinck."

VanDrunen begins by "providing an overview of the natural

the printed article for the full references. The same is true for footnote references which will be kept to a bare minimum in this summary.

³ David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010); idem, "The Two Kingdoms and the Ordo Salutis: Life Beyond Judgment and the Question of a Dual Ethic," *Westminster Theological Journal* 70, no. 2 (2008): 207-224; idem, "The Two Kingdoms Doctrine and the Relationship of Church and State in the Early Reformed Tradition," *Journal of Church and State* 49, no. 4 (2007): 743-763; idem, "Abraham Kuyper and the Reformed Natural Law and Two Kingdoms Traditions," *Calvin Theological Journal* 42, no. 2 (2007): 283-307; idem, "The Two Kingdoms: A Reassessment of the Transformationist Calvin," *Calvin Theological Journal* 40, no. 2 (2005): 248-266; idem, "The Context of Natural Law: John Calvin's Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms," *Journal of Church and State* 46, no. 3 (2004): 503-525.

law and two kingdoms categories as found in the older Reformed tradition and then describes Bavinck's utilization of these doctrines." This is followed by reflection "on how these categories relate to Bavinck's broader theology," along with suggestions for "a way forward that is biblically and theologically satisfying."

Two Kingdoms

The first point is that natural law and the two kingdoms are not simply "Roman Catholic and Lutheran [notions], respectively," but common categories of Reformed theology from its earliest days. "In a nutshell, the traditional Reformed doctrine of the two kingdoms teaches that God rules all things in his Son, yet does so in two fundamentally different ways. As the creator and sustainer, through his Son as the eternal Logos, he rules over all human beings in the *civil* kingdom. This civil kingdom consists of a range of non-ecclesiastical cultural endeavors and institutions, among which the state has particular prominence. As redeemer, through his Son as the incarnate God-Man, God rules the other kingdom, sometimes referred to as the *spiritual* kingdom. This spiritual kingdom is essentially heavenly and eschatological, but has broken into history and is now expressed institutionally in the church. Both kingdoms are good, God-ordained, and regulated by divine law, and believers participate in both kingdoms during the present age. From this distinction between a twofold kingship of the Son of God and the consequent distinction between two kingdoms by which he rules the world, Reformed orthodox theology derived a series of distinctions between political and ecclesiastical authority. The civil kingdom is provisional, temporary, and of this world. The spiritual kingdom is everlasting, eschatological, and not of this world."

This two kingdoms doctrine had natural law as its "natural" correlate. Natural law is of no saving value but does play an important regulatory role in *civil* life as well as providing "an explanation for the cultural achievements that fallen human beings still produce and as the norm and source of civil law. By the natural law they referred to the moral law of God as it is written upon the heart and witnessed to by every person's conscience, as described in Romans

2:14–15, a favorite proof-text for the doctrine.”

VanDrunen acknowledges that “Bavinck did not ordinarily speak explicitly of the doctrine of the two kingdoms. But his utilization of the traditional categories is evident first in his defense of the doctrine that the Son of God has a twofold mediatorship and consequently a twofold kingship. Following his Reformed predecessors, Bavinck asserted that the Son is mediator of both creation and recreation (or redemption). To be sure, he often made this claim in order to defend the overarching unity of all of God’s work, but within this unity he posited two distinct works of the Son. He often assigned the title “Logos” to the eternal Son who created the world and the title “Christ” to the Son who became incarnate to accomplish redemption (though he also used “Christ” as a generic name for the Son in either capacity). The Son as Logos is the “firstborn of every creature” and the Son as incarnate redeemer is the “first born of the dead.” On many occasions Bavinck pointed to the Son as Logos as the source and explanation for humanity’s ongoing cultural life, which includes the good things that remain among peoples whom the gospel has not reached. For example, primarily through natural revelation, Christ *as Logos* issues to all human beings the call of the law, which compels them to organize as families, societies, and states (in distinction from the call of the gospel that comes not from the Logos but from Christ, through special revelation). The order of creation is thus the basis for culture. At one point Bavinck wrote that the one source of truth and wisdom found among the heathen comes from the continuing illumination of the Logos. The Logos, the creator and maintainer of all things, enlightens all people who come into the world.

In classic Reformed theology this twofold mediatorship—over creation as Logos and over redemption as Christ—corresponded to a twofold kingship. Bavinck followed this lead. In his own words, “The kingship of Christ is twofold.” On the one hand Christ holds the “kingship of power” by which he has authority over all things in heaven and on earth. On the other hand Christ exercises his “kingship of grace” by which he acts “to gather, protect, and lead his church to eternal salvation.” In this latter role, “Christ is not the

head of all human beings, not the prophet, priest, and king of everyone, for he is the head of the church and has been anointed king over Zion.” Christ’s kingship of grace, according to Bavinck, “is totally different from that of the kings of the earth” It operates without violence through the ministry of word and sacrament. Again reiterating the tradition, Bavinck explained that the kingship of grace has a certain priority over the kingship of power. Christ does not “concretely govern all things,” but if he is to gather his church then all must be “under his control, subject to him, and will one day, be it unwillingly, recognize and honor him as Lord.” In this sense the kingship of power is “subordinate to, and a means for, his kingship of grace.” Based upon Christ’s perfect obedience, his Father exalted him and granted him the right to protect his people and to subdue their enemies. Thus the obedient, exalted God-Man now exercises both the kingships of power and of grace. At the end of history Christ’s mediatorial work will be finished and he will hand over the kingship to his Father, who “himself will then be king forever.” Through all eternity Christ will remain the “head of the church,” but his “mediatorship of reconciliation, and to that extent also the prophetic, priestly, and royal office..., will end.”

There is thus a universal kingdom of God which Christ administers through his kingship of power and a redemptive kingdom, the kingdom of heaven, which he administers through his kingship of grace, and Christians participate in both kingdoms. While the kingship of grace has particular reference here and now to the *church*,” it is important to remember that “the kingdom of heaven and the church are not identical, in that the kingdom is eschatological and pure while the church is this-worldly and a mixed society.” It is also important to remember that “the Reformed and Lutheran versions of the two kingdoms doctrine are not identical.” The Lutherans tended to constrict the “kingdom of the right hand” to the church’s spiritual ministry of word and sacraments and to view external church government as a matter for the “kingdom of the left hand,” and thus the Lutherans often handed over church government to the civil magistrate. The Reformed, conversely, insisted that Christ’s kingship over his church includes an interest in its government, and thus they defended the church’s right to exercise discipline and

to administer its own affairs. On this matter Bavinck again followed his Reformed forebears, stating that Christ himself instituted church offices and that ecclesiastical government is a gift from God that must remain distinct from civil government. Thereby Christ alone remains king in his church.

Bavinck followed the earlier Reformed tradition in deriving a series of distinctions between political and ecclesiastical power from the doctrine of the twofold kingship of Christ. The *origin* of political (and other social) power “comes from God as the creator of heaven and earth (Rom. 13:1), but ecclesiastical power comes directly from God as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. . . .” Second, political power is “legislative” and ecclesiastical power is “ministerial.” Third, political and ecclesiastical power differ in *nature*. While ecclesiastical government is “spiritual,” political government is “natural, earthly, secular. It extends to all subjects for no other reason than the fact that they are subjects and only regulates their earthly interests.” Fourth, the *purpose* of ecclesiastical power is to edify the body of Christ, whereas political power “strives for the natural and common good.” Finally, the *means* the church employs are “spiritual weapons,” but the civil government “bears the sword, has power over life and death, and may exact obedience by coercion and violence.” The church’s authority is spiritual because Christ is its king and “his kingdom is not of this world.” The church operates “not with coercion and penalties in money, goods, or life,” but “only with spiritual weapons.” This spiritual authority is essentially distinct from every other authority that God has bestowed in the various cultural relationships and institutions. In regard to the state, Bavinck warned that civil government should not usurp jurisdiction that God has not entrusted to it. He faulted Calvin for the execution of Michael Servetus and believed that early Reformed theologians erred in seeing unbelief and heresy as crimes against the state. With Abraham Kuyper, Bavinck supported revision of Belgic Confession 36 and endured opposition from his contemporaries for breaking with the ideal of a state church.

Bavinck’s view of common grace is also relevant here since “evidence suggests that his understanding of the issue reflected the

earlier two kingdoms doctrine. For Bavinck, common grace is common in the sense that God bestows it upon all people, the good and the evil together. Grounded in the covenant with Noah, which Bavinck termed the “covenant of nature” in distinction from the covenant of grace, common grace restrains sin and evil in a fallen world. (Special grace, in contrast, renews and redeems the world and conquers sin.) Bavinck explained common grace in connection with the various two kingdoms themes. He specifically associated the distinction between common and special grace with the twofold kingship of Christ, and he connected the Noahic covenant of nature with the work of the Logos in distinction from the work of Christ as mediator of the covenant of grace. Bavinck ascribed a crucial role to common grace in the ongoing preservation of culture. According to Bavinck, *everything* good after the fall in *all* areas of life is the fruit of common grace, and all the arts and science have their *principium* in common grace, *not* in the special grace of regeneration and conversion. The civil state in particular was established by God in the Noahic covenant of nature in Genesis 9:6. In summary, then, the ongoing development of culture finds its ultimate explanation in the blessings of common grace by the work of God the Son as Logos, the mediator of creation, not in the special grace brought by Christ as mediator of re-creation.

Natural Law

Older Reformed theologians viewed the doctrines of natural law and the two kingdoms as closely connected. While they emphasized that Scripture is the only conscience-binding standard in the church, they ascribed a broad importance to natural law in the state and in other cultural arenas. Bavinck again reflected his Reformed tradition at this point. He believed that the source of natural revelation generally and of the natural, moral revelation of God’s law in particular is the Son of God *as Logos*, who now bestows this revelation through common grace. Thus the topic of natural law follows appropriately from that of the two kingdoms. There is a “general revelation” (in the sense of being accessible and known to all people) that is given primarily by natural revelation, that is, God’s

revealing himself “in nature all around us” and “in the heart and conscience of every individual.” Since Bavinck viewed general revelation as the gift of the Son as Logos rather than as Christ, he predictably distinguished general revelation from special revelation chiefly in that only the latter reveals special grace and salvation. General revelation is insufficient in various respects, yet it remains extraordinarily useful, providing a point of contact with non-Christians as well as knowledge to support all sorts of cultural activities. He explained: “It is not the study of Scripture but careful investigation of what God teaches us in his creation and providence that equips us for these tasks.”

Bavinck, it is clear, held a traditional Reformed view of natural law, including natural moral revelation (Romans 2:14–15) because “all human beings have the requirements of God’s law written on their hearts, and also possess a “sense of divinity” and “seed of religion,” precisely because they all bear God’s image. In terms of *content*, Bavinck believed that the natural law is simply *law*; it is not *gospel*. Nature impresses upon people what God requires them to do, but Bavinck emphasized that nature knows nothing about forgiveness and hence that natural law is insufficient for salvation. Bavinck also, it must be noted, affirmed the traditional support of all sorts of cultural activities. He further affirmed the Reformed doctrine of the covenant of works as a crucial aspect of theology and argued that “the foundation on which the covenant rested, that is, the moral law, was known to man by nature. . . .” In other words, the natural law was part of original human endowment in that Adam understood by nature the requirements of God’s law. For that reason, the *content* of the natural law, even after the fall into sin, was to be identified with the moral law revealed in a different form in Scripture, specifically as summarized in the Decalogue. This too was a standard feature of historic Reformed natural law doctrine.

The purpose of this natural moral law remaining in effect even after the fall into sin is twofold: (1) It renders all people accountable in the final judgement, and (2) it provides the key foundation for civil justice and civil law. “Justice,” he wrote, “is not derived from the outside, but rests in and flows from nature.” Civil right has hu-

man right as its background: it points back to a law of nature, it is rooted in natural law, and it is revelation of the eternal law that originated simultaneously with the divine spirit.” Thus “international justice” is founded on a moral order that is “rooted in natural law.”

Conclusions and Reflections

VanDrunen concludes that the two kingdoms and natural law doctrines both found a home in Bavinck’s theology. He also draws four important inferences from this observation.

1. Bavinck’s appropriation of the two kingdoms and natural law doctrines from classical Reformed theology dispels the misconception that these two doctrines exalt human autonomous reason, underestimate the effects of sin, and dualistically turn the cultural realm into something neutral that leads to Christian disengagement and social conservatism. If Herman Bavinck saw no conflict between these classic doctrines on the one hand and active Christian engagement in cultural endeavors on the other hand, then we should be wary about assuming that there is such a conflict.

2. While active Christian engagement in cultural endeavors are placed in a positive light, they also portray nature as we know it and natural institutions as temporary and provisional. Culture is a good gift from God. Nevertheless, we ought to have sober expectations about what can be accomplished in this life, and we ought to set our hearts not upon the things of earth but upon the things of heaven.

It is here that we are given a check on the implications that are sometimes evoked by Bavinck’s grace-restoring-nature and kingdom-as-a-leaven themes. Taken together, they lend credence to a Christian optimism about what can be accomplished now through cultural endeavors, the effects of which carry over even into the age to come. VanDrunen concludes that “Bavinck’s embrace of historic natural law and two kingdoms categories” properly cautions us against reading too much of an eschatologically-charged cultural optimism into many of his familiar themes.” Though he spoke “of the kingdom as a leaven such that the preaching of the gospel and

the Christian's cultural work has a reforming effect in every area of life, he also reminded his readers that the kingdom is a leaven only *secondarily*. The kingdom is first and foremost a pearl that demands readiness to sacrifice everything in this life for its sake."

3. VanDrunen "is not convinced that Bavinck has left us with an entirely coherent portrait of Christians' basic relationship to this world and of the fundamental nature of their cultural endeavors."⁴ He finds both a world-denying emphasis on suffering and an occasional world-affirming cultural optimism in Bavinck. Noting that Bavinck himself even acknowledged that some tensions between world-denial and world-affirmation are inevitable in this life, VanDrunen writes that "some statements and discussions in Bavinck's corpus defy easy reconciliation with a two kingdoms doc-

⁴ The natural law and two kingdoms issue perhaps immerses us directly in the common question whether there were "two Bavincks." The two-Bavincks story goes something like this: On the one hand is the pious Herman Bavinck, a child of the *Afscheiding*, seminary professor at Kampen, and stout defender of historic Reformed orthodoxy. On the other hand is the modern Herman Bavinck, who finished his theological training at the liberal Leiden, left Kampen to take a post at the Free University of Amsterdam, and embraced the highest standards of scholarship as he critically yet appreciatively engaged human culture. According to this story, Bavinck lived his life with a foot in each of two worlds, both of which he found attractive yet flawed. The Reformed church of his youth was pious and doctrinally orthodox but overly separatist and withdrawn from the world. Modern culture had produced great scientific and scholarly achievements but tended to exhibit anti-religious biases. Bavinck thus strove throughout his life to embrace the best of both worlds and to point the way toward a synthesis of Christianity and culture that refused to choose one over against the other. Though a complete account is more complex, a good general argument can be made, I believe, that his defense of the natural law and two kingdoms categories belongs to the "orthodox" Bavinck and his advocacy of themes such as grace restoring nature and the kingdom as leaven belongs to the "modern" Bavinck. For discussions of the two-Bavincks hypothesis, see George Harrinck, "Something That Must Remain, If the Truth Is to Be Sweet and Precious to Us': The Reformed Spirituality of Herman Bavinck," *Calvin Theological Journal* 38 (2003): 248-262; John Bolt, "Grand Rapids Between Kampen and Amsterdam: Herman Bavinck's Reception and Influence in North America," *Calvin Theological Journal* 38 (2003): 264-268; and idem, "Editor's Introduction," in Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1.13-15. For relevant discussion of Bavinck's separatist upbringing, see also Henry Elias Dosker, "Herman Bavinck: A Eulogy by Henry Elias Dosker," in Bavinck, *Essays*, 17.

trine and a conception of the Christian life as nothing but a suffering pilgrimage under the cross.”

4. “The next generation of Reformed thinkers should reappropriate the two kingdoms and natural law doctrines. These doctrines not only ground us in our rich heritage but also promise to help us to capture many of Bavinck’s chief concerns without falling prey to certain temptations that we ought to avoid. They require us to honor the created goodness of family, science, art, and state. They place all of life under the moral reign of the one true God. They encourage Christians to participate in cultural activities and to engage them both critically and appreciatively. Yet they also teach us that these cultural activities do not belong to the redemptive kingdom of Christ and thus they remind us that these activities are not only good but also temporary, provisional, and destined to pass away. They check our this-worldly dreams, focus our attention upon the church, remind us that we participate in cultural endeavors as pilgrims rather than as conquerors, and draw our eyes toward the things that are above, where Christ is seated at his Father’s right hand and from where he is coming again to bring the end of the world as we know it.”

VanDrunen concludes: “This, I believe, is a biblically faithful perspective on the Christian life that Reformed Christians would do well to recover and to cultivate.”

RESPONSE BY NELSON D. KLOOSTERMAN

And now to Professor Kloosterman’s response. He begins with indicating significant points of agreement with VanDrunen and then proceeds to denote his reservations and a to sketch an “alternative unified approach to natural law and the kingdom of God.” He shares “VanDrunen’s concerns regarding the apparent triumphalism among some neo-Calvinist heirs of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck,” though he wonders “whether in this case the error of the disciples can properly be attributed to the masters.” He rightly, in my judgment, calls attention to the way in which “in the

1960s and later, the neo-Calvinist project became misdirected to the extent that it embraced the transformational Calvinism of H. Richard Niebuhr.” Where he wishes “modestly to demur” is with “the thesis that forms a thread, if not the backbone, of Dr. VanDrunen’s presentation,” namely the “alleged existence of ‘two Bavincks’ that has left us with a theology that is inconsistent and incoherent. In its place he proposes that “Bavinck’s life-work in general, and his treatment of natural law and the kingdom of God in particular, supply us with a helpful model for integrating the dualities present in theological truth and the dualities operative within his, and our, religious experience. That there were tensions, even polarities, in Bavinck’s life and thought is incontrovertible, but in my judgment these need not be elevated to the level of incoherent inconsistencies or irreconcilable themes.”

Natural Law in Herman Bavinck

Kloosterman agrees with VanDrunen regarding the presence, in Bavinck’s writings, of “a” doctrine of natural law. He takes pains to note that “the Reformers’ doctrine of natural law needs to be coordinated with their robust acknowledgement of the radical seriousness of the fall, of the pervasive depravity of human reason, and of the necessity of Holy Scripture as the spectacles for correctly interpreting all of general revelation.” [T]he Reformers never used their doctrine of natural law as the basis for a twofold ethics, one derived from nature, the other from grace, the one governed by human reason, the other by the Christian faith. From this follow several corollaries that are essential to interpreting Bavinck’s understanding and use of natural law:

1. It is God, not nature, that explains all the external moral righteousness we see around us. By his providence God governs the world and maintains the structures—moral as well as physical—of the creation. God’s general revelation, as Calvin has taught us, is dynamic, personal, and existential throughout history. Bavinck’s emphasis on God’s continual personal interaction with creation prevents natural law from becoming, as it so often has throughout the history of the concept, a handmaiden to secularization.

2. This active, personal divine providence accounts for the continuation, and recognition, of creational ordinances like marriage, authority, labor, and leisure. In God’s daily government of the universe we may recognize constants that serve to restrain human beings who would otherwise live out their rebellion unto total destruction. For example, propagating anarchy presupposes some kind of authority; even denying the creational boundaries of marriage presupposes at some point the acknowledgement of “the way things work.” So there is a providential correspondence between the content of the Decalogue and the law embedded within the give and take of human living in God’s universe.

3. In this context it may be helpful to recommend the superb analysis provided by Al Wolters regarding the relationship between structure and direction. No one would deny that the normative structures of creation continue after the Fall, providing the bedding and boundaries of human existence. What distinguishes believers from unbelievers is the directionality, the motivation and purposiveness in their respective uses of creation. In terms of this distinction, moreover, Wolters insists that creational norms can be properly discerned *only in the light of Scripture*.⁵

4. God has inscribed “the work of the law” in the hearts of Gentiles. If we study carefully the context of Romans 2.14-15, two exegetical notes are relevant to this discussion. First, the law being referred to here in the context of Paul’s argument is the Mosaic law, the Decalogue—not “the natural law.” Second, God (not nature, not reason) has written this in their hearts. That which we know from the law of God, written once upon two tablets of stone, set forth in the law and the prophets, we find among unbelievers because they show that they have received the law’s work, the law’s activity, written by God in their hearts. Thus, we need not deny or ignore such moral activity if we are directed from the activity to the law—not the natural law, but the law revealed in the Bible. There we find the her-

⁵ Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1985), especially 49-52, 72-95; for the point of the ability to discern creational norms only in the light of Scripture, see 91.

meneutical key for interpreting the moral uprightness we see in the world. The universal is clarified by the particular, the human is explained by the Christian. Not the other way around, such that the *lex naturae* becomes the hermeneutical key for the *lex scripturae*.

Two Kingdoms in Herman Bavinck

Kloosterman sketches out his demurrals by taking a close look at two of Bavinck's essays on the kingdom of God.⁶ "The kingdom of God is broader than the organized institutional church, Bavinck argued, because Christianity is more than worship, since it constitutes an entirely new life-power that can penetrate and enliven all spheres and forms of life."

Thus it is that we speak of a Christian society, a Christian school; There is nothing human that cannot be called Christian. Everything within and beyond the church that is enlivened and governed by Christ, who exercises sovereignty over all things, contributes to and belongs to the kingdom of God.⁷

"The goal of the church's ministry," Kloosterman notes regarding Bavinck's view, "is that its members live out their personal consecration to God in their natural, moral, civic, and political life. With a clarity that astonishes twenty-first century ears, Bavinck insisted that even the state finds its goal and destiny in the kingdom of heaven."

Just as the individual must seek the kingdom of God not beyond but within his earthly calling, so too the kingdom of God requires of the state not that it surrender its earthly

⁶ The first is "Het Koninkrijk Gods," in *Handboekje ten dienste der Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland voor het jaar 1894*, ed. J. H. Feringa and A. Littooi (Le Cointre, 1893), 243-252. The second is "Het rijk Gods, het hoogste goed," in *Kennis en leven. Opstellen en artikelen uit vroegere jaren* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1922), 28-56; This essay was a lecture given to the theological students at Kampen on February 3, 1881. References to these two articles will be provided within the text and identified by year and page (e.g., 1881/1922, 38; 1893, 250).

⁷ 1881/1922, 46-7.

calling or its unique national particularity, but simply that it allow the kingdom of God to penetrate and saturate its people and nation. In this way alone can the kingdom of God come into existence. For this kingdom is not an effort of one nation or another, not even of one people and of one government, but of all peoples and all governments, it is the *Gesamtaufgabe* of the human race.⁸

While the state, “of course, . . . is an agent not of grace, but of the law, . . . [it] can become a *paidagogus* or tutor (Bavinck uses the Dutch word *tuchtmeester*; he is alluding to Gal. 3:24) unto Christ. In that sense the state has the ability and the calling to work in service to the kingdom of God.” Using a family analogy, Bavinck describes it thus: “cultus and culture ought to be sisters, independent to be sure, but still sisters bound together in love.”⁹ Kloosterman’s point is as follows: “[T]hough Bavinck recognized the twofold kingship of Christ, this never functioned in his theology as the warrant either for a dual ethic or for a duality-of-independence between religion and cultural life in the world, including politics.”

A Christological Framework

What Kloosterman wants to suggest a theological (Christological) framework for the two kingdoms doctrine that provides greater integration and unity. For Bavinck, he proposes as the first principle “regulating the relationship between the church and the world . . . the principle that the church cannot resist stating the demand that all creatures, arts, sciences, family, society, state, and so forth must submit to the Word of the Lord.”¹⁰ “This unity and integration are rooted particularly in the person and work of Christ Jesus. In contrast to positing a continuing duality between the Logos and the Incarnate One, Bavinck saw Jesus Christ as revealing himself progressively in human history through his unitary and

⁸ 1881/1922, 49.

⁹ 1881/1922, 50.

¹⁰ *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:439-40.

unitive mediatorial activity. Although, before his incarnation, the Second Person of the Trinity was indeed the *Logos Asarkos*, after his incarnation he remains the *Logos Ensarkos*. The profound significance of the incarnation is precisely that Christ's work in the creation is taken up within and made serviceable to his work of redemption. This has implications for the relationship between the church and the world. In a very significant passage in volume 4 of his *Reformed Dogmatics*, Bavinck applies this Christological unity to the relationship between the church and the world:

Accordingly, the relationship that has to exist between the church and the world is in the first place organic, moral, and spiritual in character. Christ—even now—is prophet, priest, and king; and by his Word and Spirit he persuasively impacts the entire world. Because of him there radiates from everyone who believes in him a renewing and sanctifying influence upon the family, society, state, occupation, business, art, science, and so forth. The spiritual life is meant to refashion the natural and moral life in its full depth and scope according to the laws of God. Along this organic path Christian truth and the Christian life are introduced into all the circles of the natural life, so that life in the household and the extended family is restored to honor, the wife (woman) is again viewed as the equal of the husband (man), the sciences and arts are Christianized, the level of the moral life is elevated, society and state are reformed, laws and institutions, morals and customs are made Christian.¹¹

In summary, according to Kloosterman: “The importance of this paragraph as a digest of Bavinck’s understanding of the relationship between Christ and culture is difficult to exaggerate. For Bavinck, church and world, grace and nature, faith and reason, though *distinguishable*, are best understood as *integrated* in Christ Jesus.

Kloosterman then goes on to underscore the importance of the theme of unity in Bavinck’s thought, “especially the unity found in

¹¹ *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:437

God himself.” “The entire Scripture proclaims the unity of God,” Bavinck declared in 1911, “which means, the unity of the God of nature and of the God of grace, and for that reason Scripture cannot dualistically separate creation and redemption, but always binds them together organically and harmoniously.”¹² Bavinck thus opposed Roman Catholic anthropology (natural/supernatural) and spirituality. “Observing that Bavinck refused to choose between faith and science, George Harinck claims that

All his theological work can be regarded as a refutation of the duality of faith and culture, which was, given his secessionist background, so familiar to him and for which a meeting with modern theology offered such an opportunity. This rejection of duality, which he knew from the Secession and from Leiden, was a decisive step in Bavinck’s spiritual development and became characteristic of his Reformed spirituality.¹³

Harinck describes Bavinck’s emphasis on the unity between faith and scholarship as “the *Leitmotiv* of Bavinck’s life.” Such unity between Christianity and culture was rooted in the Christian confession of the one God, one Creator of all things and the one Redeemer. “This Redeemer not only shed his blood for people’s sins, but also for all creation.”¹⁴

What Kloosterman finds missing in VanDrunen’s portrait of Bavinck is the latter’s strong emphasis on the cosmic scope of God’s work in Jesus Christ and the consequent catholicity and integration of the Christian faith and life. Catholicity for Bavinck is not just geographical nor even only ecclesiastical, it is, in Bavinck’s own words, “a joyful proclamation, not only for the individual person but also for humanity in general, for family, and society, and state, for art

¹² H. Bavinck, *Modernisme en orthodoxie* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1911), 37.

¹³ George Harinck, “‘Something That Must Remain, If the Truth Is to Be Sweet and Precious to Us’: The Reformed Spirituality of Herman Bavinck,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 38, no. 2 (2003): 252.

¹⁴ Harinck, “Something That Must Remain,” 254-55.

and science, for the entire cosmos, for the whole groaning creation.”¹⁵ It is this catholicity, according to Bavinck, that sets Calvin apart from Luther.

Luther’s mistake here is that he restricts the Gospel and limits the grace of God. The Gospel only changes the inward man, the conscience, the heart; the remainder stays the same until the final judgment. As a result, dualism is not completely overcome; a true and full catholicity is not achieved. Re-creation (*herscheping*) continues to stand alongside creation (*schepping*).¹⁶

In this way, Bavinck points to the social and political implications of the Calvinist/Reformed understanding of catholicity:

There is nothing that cannot or ought not to be evangelized. Not only the church but also home, school, society, and state are placed under the dominion of the principle of Christianity. Calvin established this dominism in Geneva with an iron will and implacable rigor. The German reformation, therefore, was a reformation of worship and preaching while the Swiss reformation included a renewal of state and society. The former was exclusively ecclesiastical (*godsdiensstig*) in character, the latter also displayed a social and political character. All of this results from the fact that the Bible is, for Luther, only a source of salvation truth, whereas for Calvin it is the norm for all of life.¹⁷

Kloosterman concludes with some reflections on how to integrate the themes of a Christian’s spiritual pilgrimage with that of cultural participation. “The biblical-theological grounding of our living as Christians in the world should be the cultural mandate as fulfilled in the finished work of Christ as the Last Adam.” In this connection, Kloosterman agrees with VanDrunen that it is important to “warn us of the toxin of triumphalism arising from an over-realized

¹⁵ Herman Bavinck, “The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church,” trans. John Bolt, *Calvin Theological Journal* 27, no. 2 (1992): 224.

¹⁶ Bavinck, “The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church,” 237.

¹⁷ Bavinck, “The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church,” 238.

eschatology that sees our efforts as establishing and ushering in the kingdom of God.” He, however, also wishes to alert us to another, “equally toxic danger, namely, ingratitude arising from an *under-realized eschatology that refuses to extend the Third Use of the Law beyond personal ethics into social-cultural relationships*, an ingratitude that quarantines the active rule of King Jesus, and communal principled response to it, to the church parking lot.” Thus, the status of pilgrim should not be viewed as an *alternative* to Christian cultural participation, but rather as the *mode* of Christian cultural engagement. It is precisely as pilgrims that we seek and pray for the coming of God’s kingdom already here and now. Our seeking the kingdom of God, Jesus taught, is already here and now accompanied by the gifts of eating, drinking, and clothing. If we may—indeed, must—seek God’s kingdom as we enjoy food, why not as we plant the seed and farm the ground that supplies our food? Why would we not seek God’s kingdom as we market and package and ship our food? Everything we do—all our eating, drinking, buying, selling, marrying, childrearing, educating, entertaining, burying—must be directed to the glory of God. Our orientation toward the future need not paralyze our responsible cultivating of creation in the present. The church fills the time between Christ’s ascension and Christ’s return with preaching and teaching the gospel *together with all of its consequences for living in this world*. Such gospel preaching and teaching necessarily, and thankfully, bears fruit also for Christian cultural activity.”

To place this all in a proper, Scriptural, eschatological perspective, Kloosterman notes that “Bavinck takes a position between the two extremes of the permanent continuation of the world in its present form, and of the annihilation of this world’s substance and its replacement with a brand new world (Origen, the Lutherans, Socinians, Remonstrants, and some Reformed). Redemption, writes Bavinck, ‘is never a second, brand-new creation but a re-creation of the existing world.’ ‘All that is true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, and commendable in the whole of creation, in heaven and on earth, is gathered up in the future city of God—renewed, re-created, boos-

ted to its highest glory.”¹⁸

Kloosterman’s Summary

As we encounter Bavinck’s constant emphasis on the present and future integration and restoration of all of created reality in Christ Jesus, and as we review his own application of theology to life in the areas of women’s suffrage, statecraft, pedagogy, and psychology, we may not fail to honor both his struggle and his achievement. But more than that, as together we reflect on whatever weaknesses and strengths that Bavinck’s thought and life exhibited, we may not refuse to give thanks to Bavinck’s Savior and Lord, even Jesus Christ.

Addenda

Kloosterman helps us out considerably with two “addenda” to his essay: (1) A question about “The Two Bavincks?” and (2) on the possibility of “*Christian Education*” if the two kingdoms approach is over emphasized.

Addendum #1: Were there really “two Bavincks”?

Here Kloosterman takes on the “annoying acknowledgment” that I suggested in a previously published essay on Bavinck,¹⁹ ‘that there is not just one but rather *two* Bavincks.’²⁰ Presumably, Bavinck #1 was a son of the Secession, loyal to the piety and orthodoxy of the church of his youth, yet critical of its cultural asceticism, whereas Bavinck #2 was a restless student of modernity, enamored of the problematics that had surfaced in contemporary philosophy and theology, yet critical of their answers. Bolt’s conclusion at this point rests on the analysis of Dutch writers like A. Anema, G. C. Berkouwer, and J. Veenhof—all of whom identify the ‘tensions’ and

¹⁸ *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:717 and 4:720, respectively.

¹⁹ John Bolt, “Grand Rapids Between Kampen and Amsterdam: Herman Bavinck’s Reception and Influence in North America,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 38 (2003): 263-280.

²⁰ Bolt, “Grand Rapids Between Kampen and Amsterdam,” 264-65.

the ‘polarities’ in Bavinck’s theology and experience, but none of whom (including Bolt) elevates these, as VanDrunen does, to the level of two inconsistent and incoherent Bavincks.” Kloosterman then does the cause of Bavinck scholarship a great service (though at the cost of some embarrassment to yours truly) by correcting my translation of G.C. Berkouwer’s claim that “Bavinck’s theology contains so many *onweersprekelijke* motieven” which I erroneously translated as “*irreconcilable* themes” rather than as “*undeniable* themes.” Kloosterman is quite correct in observing that Berkouwer is not speaking of people “*with opposing views* appealing to Bavinck, but rather about the danger that *Berkouwer himself* faced” in appealing to Bavinck for one’s own agenda. Berkouwer continues by saying that it was possible to overcome any such danger because there are *undeniable* (not *irreconcilable*) themes in Bavinck that are clearly visible. It is worth citing Kloosterman’s corrected translation here in full: “The danger present in describing and evaluating Bavinck’s life-work is that one might annex him for one’s own insights. *It is, however, not impossible to escape that annexation-danger, since various undeniable themes become manifest in Bavinck’s work* (italics and underline added).”

What Kloosterman does in this addendum is to call for a more nuanced rendering of any “tension” in Bavinck’s thought. Using Bavinck in a one-sided manner to advance one’s own thought can be avoided “if we both acknowledge and respect the presence in Bavinck of *various* undeniable themes. In other words, respecting the *coherence* of Bavinck’s own thought will prevent us from succumbing to the danger embedded in the popular approach of isolating and identifying one’s own point of view with one or another “strand” in Bavinck.” Kloosterman adds: “a danger that was not altogether avoided, regrettably, in VanDrunen’s conference paper.” In summary, although one can identify various “tensions” within the thought of Herman Bavinck (as one can for every theologian, including John Calvin!), this is inadequate warrant for the claim that there existed “two Bavincks,” i.e., two irreconcilable strands of thought within Bavinck’s theology.

Addendum #2: What about “Christian” schools and “Christian” art?

Kloosterman's second addendum raises questions about whether the adjective "Christian" should ever be used with respect to "creational" disciplines by Christian believers. E.g., should Christian novelists ever speak of writing a "Christian novel"?

Turning to a concrete and practical example (based on a claim found in VanDrunen's footnotes!) Kloosterman challenges VanDrunen's assertion that Bavinck "confuses categories" in the way he talks about civil authority. In his 10th footnote VanDrunen cites Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4.370, where Bavinck speaks of "Christian government" and "Christian Society." Concerning this usage, VanDrunen writes the following:

In my judgment, Bavinck's use of language here about a "Christian government" and similar terms is confusing. If [civil government proceeds from] the Son as Logos, through the work of common, preserving grace, rather than from the Son as Christ, through the work of special, redemptive grace, then *ascribing the language of "Christian" to the state, even when civil authority is exercised by Christians in a just manner, is a confusion of categories. A similar dynamic and confusion, again in my judgment, occurs in the work of Abraham Kuyper; . . . [italics added, ndk].*

Asks Kloosterman:

If Bavinck's language about "Christian government" involves a confusion of categories for the reasons given by VanDrunen (a claim with which we disagree), one may validly infer from VanDrunen's argument that the same confusion attends the language of Bavinck and Kuyper with respect to "Christian education" and "Christian art" and "Christian science."

Kloosterman is concerned that this conclusion might be the "pay off" for the the contemporary advocacy of "this recent version of the two kingdoms doctrine," a development that involves "the rejection of the century-long neo-Calvinist heritage among Reformed and Presbyterian believers." "Given VanDrunen's analysis, are not these

phrases also a confusion of categories?”

Kloosterman concludes with a challenge to “those advocating this recent version of the two kingdoms doctrine” to clarify “their disagreement with *the worldview undergirding the establishment and support of Christian schools around the world—a Reformed Christian world-and-life-view that for more than a century has been nourished precisely by this allegedly confusing language of Kuyper and Bavinck.*”²¹

RESPONSE AND EVALUATION BY JOHN BOLT

This is a very important discussion, not only for Bavinck interpretation, but more importantly for the life of Christian discipleship. How we talk about the Christian life outside the “official” church (i.e., as instituted by its “offices”) is properly basic to the Reformed, Catholic, Christian faith. There is no disagreement about the divine character of the vocation of Christians in the world of culture and society, including education, business, journalism, art, politics, and the like. Nor is there disagreement that there must be a basic unity in our lives as Christians: that Christ is Lord is the regulative conviction for our worship on Sunday and our vocation during the rest of the week. Finally, I believe that I can safely say that all three of us agree with a strong accent on the pilgrim character of the Christian life. The key question we face is how to describe that which is common to both our life as believers in the community of faith and our life in the world and distinguish without separating that which is different. To mention just one important question: Where do we go for direction and wisdom in our daily vocations? What is the source of the knowledge we need to be farmers, butchers, auto-mechanics, plumbers, professors, sculptors, newspaper editors, governors, and judges?

Issue# 1: Unity of thought and “tensions” in Bavinck

Reviewing these two essays once again, the first comment I

²¹ Emphasis added.

need to make is the most formal one having to do with Bavinck scholarship. It may have been partly my translation error that led VanDrunen to cite me as evidence that Bavinck might not have an entirely coherent position of the place of the Christian in the world. At the very least, I judge Kloosterman to be quite correct in his claim that while there may be tensions in Bavinck, there is an underlying unity, and I want to express my thanks here for his insistence on it publicly. In addition to finding that unity in Christ who is both the eternal *Logos* by whom all things are created and the *Logos* who became flesh for our salvation, Bavinck repeatedly finds the unity of God's works in the very unity of the triune being itself. Noting that all creation is a work of the triune God, Bavinck comments: "Certainly, all God's works *ad extra* are undivided and common to all three persons. Prominent in these works, therefore, is the oneness of God rather than the distinction of persons."²² The divine unity in diversity comes to expression in the creation itself. "Just as God is one in essence and distinct in persons, so also the work of creation is one and undivided, while in its unity it is still rich in diversity."²³ That means that the Christian worldview must be a trinitarian worldview:

The Divine Being is one: there is but one Being that is God and that may be called God. In creation and redemption, in nature and grace, in church and world, in state and society, everywhere and always we are concerned with one, same, living and true God. The unity of the world, of mankind, of virtue, of justice, and of beauty depends upon the unity of God. The moment that unity of God is denied or understressed, the door is open to polytheism.²⁴

From the fundamental unity-in-diversity that exists in God and his works, Bavinck deduces three important "unities" for Christians: unity of (1) the human race, (2) truth, and (3) morality. For our pur-

²² *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2.329-30.

²³ *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2.422.

²⁴ Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith: A Survey of Christian Doctrine*, trans. Henry Zylstra (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), 158.

poses, the last two are significant.

Bavinck laments the growing gulf between academic theology and the pew, a divide that characterizes much of modern life in general as science forgets that its own knowledge is always preceded by and flows out of the ordinary experience of life. Intellectual gnostic elites must not elevate and exalt themselves over the “common horde.” “There is no esoteric and exoteric science; there is no double truth.”²⁵ Faith and science must be brought into a unity. “There is indeed no double truth. . . . Because the human spirit is one, it must strive for an *einheitliche* world-and-life-view that satisfies the heart and mind.”²⁶ The same is true for morality. Any division into two kinds of morality (e.g., the Roman Catholic notion of “counsels of perfection”) must be rejected:

. . . [T]he Christian life cannot be atomistically split up, neither can the works be separated from the person, nor one work from another. It is one organism, arising from one principle, regulated by one norm, and reaching out to one goal. . . . [T]he final goal of moral conduct can be found only in God, who is the origin and hence also the final goal of all things, the supreme good that encompasses all goods, the Eternal One to whom all finite things return.²⁷

God’s will is one and his moral law is one. Scripture “knows only one idea of humanness, one moral law, one final destiny, and one priesthood, which is the portion of all believers.”²⁸ God makes the same demands of all people:

God claims all of man—mind, heart, soul, body, and all his or her energies—for his service and his love. The moral law is one for all humans in all times, and the moral ideal is the same for all people. There is no “lower” or “higher” righteousness, no double morality, no two fold set of duties.²⁹

²⁵ *Christelijke Wetenschap*, 117.

²⁶ *Christelijke Wetenschap*, 91.

²⁷ *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4.264.

²⁸ *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2.546.

So, to make the point clear, while making no claims that Bavinck himself mastered the “unity in diversity” principle, he did strive for it. Whatever tensions, therefore, are discerned in Bavinck’s theology, they must not be used to invalidate his own clearly stated commitment to unity of thought.

There is more, however, that needs to be said, things that are directly relevant to our discussion. Yes, Bavinck is opposed to all notions of “double truth,” but his repudiation is subtle and nuanced. He is also, we must add, equally opposed to monistic efforts to develop a single scientific method universally applicable to all the sciences. Thus, biology and psychology, for example, must not be reduced to chemistry and physics; attempts to obtain mathematical-physical certainty in other disciplines of study by application of the positive scientific method were doomed to failure. The attempt to explain all reality from the perspective of one of its diverse aspects is not an exact scientific question but a philosophic one rooted in a religious (monistic) conception of reality.

Similarly, emphasizing the unity of morality does not mean that applications of the moral law do not vary with circumstance. In fact, he even suggests that “there is a truth” in all notions of double morality with their demands of perfection, “a truth that in Protestantism has not sufficiently come into its own.”³⁰ Furthermore, the one law demands a diversity of moral obligations. The same moral law applies to parents and children, rulers and subjects, but places before each different obligations. Judges act unjustly if they function as parents. Justice and love, while they flow forth from the same moral law, are inseparable but also not to be confused with one another, especially when considering the task of the state. Bavinck writes:

In agreement with the very special task that the government has to fulfill in the world, the law calls the government to duties that no citizen can or may carry out. The state is not the vehicle for love and mercy, but of right-

²⁹ *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2.552.

³⁰ *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4.259.

eousness; it is the sovereign dominion of justice.³¹

And there is one more thing. Though we may *strive* for unity of thought, it will always elude us in the present age. Bavinck was profoundly aware of the mystery at the heart of all human knowing—it was, I believe, the basis of his genuine epistemological humility. “The farther a science penetrates its object, the more it approaches mystery. . . . Where comprehension ceases, however, there remains room for knowledge and wonder.”³²

This is also true for theology; finally, its object remains unfathomable. “In that sense Christian theology always has to do with mysteries that it knows and marvels at but does not comprehend and fathom.”³³ Furthermore, Bavinck acknowledges an *eschatological* dimension to our knowing and our living. When we consider the life of Christian discipleship we know that we are creatures who are called to live in God’s world, enjoying the gifts of the Creator and using them as stewards for his glory. At the same time, the reality of sin and the temptation of worldliness, draws the Christian believer to world-renunciation. The problem, says Bavinck, is “delicate and complicated.” He continues:

. . . [it] remains unresolved and . . . no one in this dispensation achieves a completely harmonious answer. Every person and every movement are guilty of a greater or lesser one-sidedness here. Life swings to and fro, again and again, between worldliness and world-flight. Head and heart painfully wrestle for supremacy. It has been said that in every human heart there dwells a bit of Jew and Greek.³⁴

In other words, some form of “dualism” or tension remains unavoidable. In his words: “Every person and every movement are

³¹ Herman Bavinck, *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, ed. John Bolt, trans. Harry Boonstra and Gerrit Sheeres (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 277.

³² *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1.619.

³³ *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1.619.

³⁴ Herman Bavinck, “Herman Bavinck’s ‘Common Grace,’” trans. R. C. Van Leeuwen, *Calvin Theological Journal* 24, no. 1 (1989): 56.

guilty of a greater or lesser one-sidedness here. Life swings to and fro, again and again, between worldliness and world-flight.”³⁵ Then follows a distinction crucial for understanding Bavinck: “And yet it makes a great difference whether one conceives of this dualism as absolute or relative.”³⁶

What does Bavinck mean here by the oxymoronic-sounding term “relative dualism”? His point here is that some dualism is inevitable in this dispensation *for eschatological reasons*; We live “between the times.” Stated differently, the dualism that is inevitable is *historically* conditioned by the reality of sin; It is not a structural or, if you will, *ontological* dualism. This eschatological and relative dualism is overcome by the triumph of grace and the gift of revelation. A broken creation and corrupt humanity is healed by divine grace. Nonetheless, until the consummation, *some* dualism remains inevitable. When we take note of alleged tensions or inconsistencies in Bavinck’s thought, therefore, we must do so in full awareness of Bavinck’s own qualifications and nuances.

Issue # 2: Agreement and Different Concerns

VanDrunen and Kloosterman agree that the doctrines of natural law and two kingdoms are present in Bavinck’s theology. VanDrunen emphasizes this to challenge a stream of neo-Calvinist thought that appeals to the importance of the “grace restores nature” theme in Bavinck in order to push a transformational vision of socio-cultural activism. Kloosterman shares the distaste for what he calls “the toxin of triumphalism arising from an over-realized eschatology that sees our efforts as establishing and ushering in the kingdom of God.” His counter emphasis, nonetheless, is on Bavinck’s Christology as the key to a unified, integral vision of the Christian life that acknowledges Christ’s kingship in communal, social, cultural, and political ways as well as personal and individual. Otherwise, enterprises such as “Christian” education become a problem. The issue, thus becomes, how do we speak about Christ as

³⁵ Bavinck, “Herman Bavinck’s ‘Common Grace,’” 56.

³⁶ Bavinck, “Herman Bavinck’s ‘Common Grace,’” 56.

King outside the walls of the official (i.e., that which is instituted by its office; “institution” as opposed to “organism”)? Are we at an impasse here, or is there a way forward that honors both concerns?

Part of the apparent conflict between VanDrunen and Kloosterman arises from each man having a different “problem” in Christian discipleship as the focus of their concern. Simply put, VanDrunen’s concern arises from his judgment that much neo-Calvinist rhetoric appealing to “grace restores nature,” or the “gospel as a leaven,” sounds more Anabaptist in its intention (i.e., “Christifying” all of life) than Reformed, whereas Kloosterman fears that those who are reaffirming natural law and two kingdoms are closet Lutherans who fail to honor the lordship of Christ in so-called “natural” realms. Thus Kloosterman responds rather directly to VanDrunen’s appeal to “two Bavincks” because he worries about separating what the Reformed tradition strives to keep together.

I cannot say that I have no dog in this fight.³⁷ I consider both men as friends, respect them as fellow Reformed theologians, and have been supportive of the theological work they have done (reciprocated, I must add). My own view is that there is a greater unity in Bavinck’s thought on this matter than VanDrunen allows. At the same time, I agree with him that there are statements in Bavinck that give ammunition to neo-Calvinist transformationalism, and such statements also make me uncomfortable. VanDrunen gives a number of examples in his essay that I will not rehearse here. Where I believe Bavinck made comments that—when abstracted from their fuller context!—left his readers open to confusion is in the doctrine of revelation.³⁸ In particular, statements about *general* revelation have been taken to suggest that Bavinck regards science

³⁷ My very first book publication, *Christian and Reformed Today* (Paideia, 1984) carried on a running critique of neo-Calvinist triumphalism and called for pilgrimage as an antidote (see especially chapters 3, 6, and 7).

³⁸ Jan Veenhof’s very helpful discussion of nature and grace in Bavinck (*Revelatie en Inspiratie*, 345-65, trans. by Al Wolters, “[Nature and Grace in Herman Bavinck](#),” *Pro Rege* 34/4 [June 2006]:11-31) provides plenty of illustrative material that showcases Bavinck’s elaborate (and perhaps not altogether successful) efforts to tie general and special revelation, particular and common grace, creation and incarnation, all together in a harmonious whole.

to be a revelation from God to the same degree that the Bible is the Word of God. Here is one such statement: “And therefore all things are also a revelation, a word, a work of God.”³⁹ This was taken, among other Bavinck sayings, by the Study Committee on Creation and Science that reported to the Christian Reformed Synod of 1991 as evidence for the Reformed tradition’s affirmation of science as a “revelation.” Appeal was also made to Belgic Confession, article 2, and its reference to the “two books” of Scripture and “the creation, government, and preservation of the universe.” Now, whether or not Bavinck said—as the study committee avers in Observation I—that biological facts are words of God parallel to his words in Scripture (I have not been able to find the exact reference), this is one of those attempts to force a unitarian thought on Bavinck that does not do him full justice. For it is clear that in Bavinck’s view all revelation in creation and history is spoken of *as revelation* because it “reveals God to us.” All things in creation speak of God *to the devout*. The following lengthy citation gives us Bavinck’s position clearly:

In a sense we can say that also all knowledge of nature and history as we acquire and apply it in our occupation and business, in commerce and industry, in the arts and sciences, is due to the revelation of God. For all these elements of culture exist only because God has implanted in his creation thoughts and forces that human beings gradually learn to understand under his guidance But since creation’s existence is distinct from God, and nature and history can also be studied by themselves and for their own sake, knowledge of God and knowledge of his creatures do not coincide, and in the latter case we usually do not speak of revelation as the source of knowledge.”⁴⁰

The immediately preceding commentary on revelation is not a sideline to our discussion but is the heart of it. Yes, we can discern a unity of thought in Bavinck that is Christological and which links the *Logos* by whom all things are created and upheld with the *Lo-*

³⁹ *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2.370.

⁴⁰ *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2.341; emphasis added.

gos who became incarnate, died, and was raised for our salvation. Yes, all knowledge, including the knowledge and wisdom that is taught in Christian schools, celebrated by Christian artists, and worked for by Christian social activists, all of this must be tied to Christ. On this Kloosterman's cautions are appropriate. Nonetheless, Bavinck does not identify scientific knowledge of the universe with general revelation as such because the point of talking about general or creation revelation is to *talk about God* and not first of all to describe or celebrate science.

The relevance of this to the differences between VanDrunen and Kloosterman is that the most robust defense of Christian education, for example, rooted in the conviction that a disciple of Jesus yields *everything*, including our thoughts and concepts, to our Lord, still requires of us the need build up *content of our knowledge about the cosmos* through the fully human and natural means of gaining knowledge. The very thing that VanDrunen insists upon needs to be reinforced against a species of Kuyperian and neo-Calvinist thought that, frankly, sounds gnostic because it takes Kuyper's "two kinds of people, two kinds of science" as an absolute epistemological divide between Christian believers and others. In Christian education circles this has on occasion resulted in an extreme form of "perspectivalism" that insists on distinctly Christian ways of doing penmanship, spelling, and multiplication tables. At a more sophisticated level this yields an Anabaptist understanding of socio-political life as though the life of the state ought to be regulated by the principles of the Sermon on the Mount. When considered from this angle, Bavinck's Reformed and integrally Christological position is clearly in the natural law/two kingdoms camp. (See, e.g., Bavinck's remarkable seventh and eighth chapters in *Essays on Religion, Science, & Society* on social relationships and equality). There are, therefore, limits on what we ought to have in view when we speak, for example, of a "Christian" society or state. Perhaps it is better to refrain from language that could be interpreted in theocratic categories that are (Rushdoony to the contrary!) not truly Reformed or Calvinist. At best, we might conclude that a particular social order and its polity are "consistent with" a Christian anthropology: dignity and worth of each individu-

al image bearer of God; liberty of conscience, of religious expression, and association; a constitutionally-fixed rule of law to which those who govern as well as the governed are equally subject; and so forth.

Let me add one additional point in response to the oft-heard complaint that this emphasis on two-kingdoms is more Lutheran than Reformed. It is true that Lutheran tradition differs significantly from both the Reformed and Roman Catholic traditions by tying philosophy to law and making the notion of a *Christian* philosophy seem like an oxymoron. In this view, philosophy has to do with creation and law which are accessible to and approached by human reason.⁴¹ The Bible is about salvation or gospel which is special, privileged to those to whom the Holy Spirit has been given. These are two realms and it is a matter of great confusion to blur the differences between them as the Anabaptists, for example do, when they try to build a civil order on the basis of the gospel.

We must grant that the Lutheran objection has the merit of warning us against any facile uses of the word “Christian” applied to natural or creational realities. It seems absurd to speak of a Christian bridge (in contrast with a pagan bridge), or a Christian beer, or a Christian pickup truck. The adjective is just inappropriate. However, the matter becomes more complicated when we speak of

⁴¹This is the definite view of Swedish Lutheran theologian Gustav Wingren, who is rightly critical of Karl Barth’s excessively christocentric theology, accusing it of failing to take creation seriously. But at the same time that he has a strong doctrine of creation in his theology, Wingren thinks it is impossible to talk about a Christian philosophy. The term is a contradiction because it confuses Law and Gospel. See his *Theology in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1958); *Creation and Law* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1961); *Flight from Creation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1971); *Creation and Gospel: The New Situation in European Theology Today* (New York and Toronto: Wm Mellen, 1979). A good example of a Christian who does philosophy but not a “Christian” philosophy, according to Wingren, is fellow Scandinavian Knut Løgstrup, *The Ethical Demand*, trans. by Theodor I. Jensen (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971). Løgstrup insists that it is improper to speak of a Christian ethic; the moral reality, the truth about right and wrong is a natural reality. To separate nature and grace, law and gospel, in this manner is a typically Lutheran formulation, one that is challenged by Reformed and Roman Catholic alike, both of whom insist that grace restores or perfects nature, that gospel completes law.

human institutions. Families and schools are creational, natural realities, realities shared by believer and unbeliever alike. Yet, we do not hesitate to speak of a Christian family or marriage nor of a Christian school. Why? Because in the case of institutions, even though they are based on created order givens, the role of human cultural shaping and formation in the actual character of the institution is so important. A “Christian bridge” might be one that is built to cross “troubled waters” but whether it is a good or bad bridge depends on basic engineering and construction facts. All the prayer in the world will not keep a bridge with a major engineering design flaw operational. Christian marriages do need and use prayer as a key ingredient of their wholeness and wellness and pay attention to Scriptural teaching on marriage. Though unbelievers may have good marriages when they obey God’s norms for marriage fidelity, mutual love, caring, etc., what distinguishes a Christian marriage is that it is self-consciously patterned after the relationship between the bridegroom Jesus Christ and his bride the church.

Much the same can be said about systems of thought and ideas. Of course, the truth of any Christian philosophy or sociology or psychology will depend on the correspondence that exists between reality and the account of that reality by the philosopher, sociologist or psychologist. Yet, not only does the Christian thinker have the advantage of special revelation when it comes to, let’s say, human nature, an advantage that helps prevent foolish claims being made in the name of science (e.g., there is no difference between boys and girls; gender is entirely a social construct, a product of nurture) it also provides constructive insights into useful research projects and incentives to honor human dignity as image bearers of God.⁴² The Christian faith thanks to the first commandment—Have no other gods before me—also puts up serious roadblocks against ideologies, against a set of ideas becoming a blueprint for a utopian social order.

⁴² For some of the ways in which the Christian faith affects research and scholarship, see Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984).

Concluding Propositions

Let me summarize, conclude, and open the door for further (I hope lively) discussion. I shall do that by way of 5 propositions:

1. Bavinck fully affirms the natural law/two kingdoms tradition that was an integral part of Reformed theology from John Calvin onward.

2. Christian discipleship requires a robust sense that Christ is Lord and King and a robust sense of responsibility to bring every thought and action captive to Christ.

3. The *content* of our obedience as disciples of Jesus Christ within the structures and relationships that are an integral part of our *created human condition* as God's image bearers must be normed by the laws, ordinances, and wisdom of general revelation and natural law, as the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament shed light on them and equip us to follow them. In other words, we are to be guided here by natural law rather than gospel.

4. Acknowledging the need for Scriptural guidance to understand general revelation should not be used in such a way that it provides *privileged knowledge* for the followers of Christ that can trump public, natural knowledge. Our arguments in the public square include witness to the gospel and reasoned argument from common principles.

5. Assessing the degree to which a people, a culture, a nation, a civilization has been "Christianized" should not be measured in distinctly Christian (or gospel) terms but by how such natural and human markers are realized: protection of life; freedom and human dignity, equitable laws and justice applicable to all people; possibility of peaceful voluntary association and cooperation among groups within a society; etc.

Let the discussion begin.