



The Bavinck Review

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The Bavinck Review

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Editorial

The 2010 Edinburgh Bavinck Conference

John Bolt

Calvin Theological Seminary

The essays in this volume of TBR were presented at the Edinburgh Bavinck Conference held at New College, University of Edinburgh, September 1–2, 2011. Sponsored by New College and the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, the two-day conference explored issues related to Bavinck’s theology and wider cultural and ethical applications of this theology. The essays were presented in the graduate student sessions, and their authors represent a wide diversity of schools and degrees. They provide us with new insights into Bavinck as a believer, as a thinker, and as an advocate of Christian praxis.

Willem de Wit portrays Bavinck as “a tragic hero of faith” who sought to remain standing in the faith of his ancestors as he wrestled with the challenges of the modern world. By taking us into Bavinck’s personal notes, diary entries, letters, and lesser-known publications, de Wit opens up for us dimensions of Bavinck as a modern man and a devout believer that have until now been closed to those who do not have access to the Dutch language. It thus joins Pastor Ronald Gleason’s recent biography of Bavinck as a valuable resource for understanding him better.¹

Theological aesthetics has been placed on the front burner of our theological stove in recent years, inspired, among other things, by the magisterial work of the great Swiss Roman Catholic, Hans Urs von Balthasar and the renaissance of scholarship on Jonathan

1. See Ron Gleason, *Herman Bavinck: Pastor, Churchman, Statesman, and Theologian* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010).

Edwards. Thanks to writers such as Patrick Sherry and Jeremy Begbie, Abraham Kuyper's pneumatological aesthetics has become a part of the discussion.² However, the work of his neo-Calvinist contemporary, Herman Bavinck, remained out of sight for English-only students until his essay, "Of beauty and aesthetic," was recently published in *Essays on Religion, Science and Society*.³ Robert Covolo's efforts to locate Bavinck's aesthetics in the larger frame of his theology and, secondarily, within the trajectory of Christian theological aesthetics is an original and welcome addition to Bavinck scholarship.

Much the same can be said about Bavinck's views on education. It is noteworthy that within sixteen years of his death in 1921, no less than five book-length studies of Bavinck's pedagogy and educational philosophy came into print. Two of these were in English: Cornelius Jaarsma's *The Educational Philosophy of Herman Bavinck* and a translation by unnamed Calvin College professors of a work by Jakob Brederveld, *Christian Education: A Summary and Critical Discussion of Bavinck's Pedagogical Principles*.⁴ Though Bavinck, especially in the last decade of his life, wrote and spoke more about educational matters than Abraham Kuyper ever did, Kuyper today receives all the attention because of his political accomplishments for the emancipation and maturation of Christian education in the Netherlands. Timothy Shaun Price compares the two giants of neo-Calvinism, not by delving into the large corpus of

2. See Patrick Sherry, *Spirit and Beauty* (London: SCM, 2002); and Jeremy S. Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise: Towards a Theology of the Arts* (London: T. & T. Clark, 1991).

3. Ed., John Bolt, trans. Harry Boonstra and Gerrit Sheeres (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008).

4. See Cornelius Richard Jaarsma, *The Educational Philosophy of Herman Bavinck: A Textbook in Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1935); and Jakob Brederveld, *Christian Education: A Summary and Critical Discussion of Bavinck's Pedagogical Principles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Smitten, 1928); an anonymous translation of *idem*, *Hoofdlijnen der paedagogiek van Dr. Herman Bavinck: met critische beschouwing*, Voor onderwijs en opvoeding 25 (Amsterdam: De Standaard, 1927).

Bavinck's books, articles, and speeches on education and pedagogy, but by comparing Kuyper's 1880 *Vrije Universiteit* inaugural, "Souvereiniteit in eigen kring" ("Sphere Sovereignty") with Bavinck's 1908 Stone Lectures, *The Philosophy of Revelation*.⁵ The advantage of this creative comparison is that it directs our attention to what both men considered to be the truly important issues in education.

Laurence O'Donnell's essay explores the theological sources of Cornelius Van Til's theology in Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*. While Van Til scholars and devotees have often noted "Uncle Kees's" fondness for Bavinck, O'Donnell's study is the first to actually trace the lineage in some detail. Most Van Til students were unable to do this before the full body of Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* was available in English translation. The evidence is clear; the conclusion unmistakable: Cornelius Van Til's theology, the foundation of his apologetics, is the Reformed system of truth set forth in Herman Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*. In that respect it is neither novel nor Copernican. O'Donnell's essay points the way forward for a significant reassessment of Van Til's thought that appreciates him in a newfound way.

The final two essays by Michael Chen and Travis Pickell explore the Augustinian character of Bavinck's theology. In the foreword to his *Reformed Dogmatics*, Bavinck had insisted that "Irenaeus, Augustine, and Thomas do not belong exclusively to Rome; they are Fathers and Doctors to whom the whole Christian church has obligations."⁶ These two essays make it clear that Bavinck remained true to his professed intentions. Bavinck's epistemology, understanding

5. Abraham Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty (1880)" in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt, (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998), 461–90; Herman Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation: The Stone Lectures for 1908–1909*, Princeton Theological Seminary (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1908).

6. Herman Bavinck, "Herman Bavinck, 'Forward' to the First Edition (Volume I) of the *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*," trans. John Bolt, *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (2010): 9.

of sin and evil, and his ecclesiology, all bear the unmistakable imprint of Augustine.

The two brief research updates by Wolter Huttinga and Aart Goedvree show us how Bavinck remains fruitful as the inspiration and impetus for research into theological topics that are “hot” today: the *ordo salutis*, regeneration, and participation. With both, as with the authors of the longer essays, we look forward to the completion of their projects and anticipate being enriched by their work.

This issue includes Nelson Kloosterman’s translation of Bavinck’s 1881 lecture, “The Kingdom of God, The Highest Good,” a “Pearls and Leaven” segment featuring Herman Bavinck and Islam, and our annual bibliographies. The issue as a whole signals a world of Bavinck scholarship that is healthy and productive. May it continue to be so.

“Will I Remain Standing?”: A Cathartic Reading of Herman Bavinck

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A TRAGIC HERO OF FAITH

“Will I remain standing? God grant it!” writes the nineteen year old Herman Bavinck in his diary on September 23, 1874, the day he arrived at Leiden University to study theology.¹ In the next decades he will see many of his contemporaries drift away from the Cross in the current of the modern worldview and bow down to the idol of evolution.² He himself will seek to stand firm as a Christian, not by

1. Herman Bavinck, “Ex animo et corpore” [diary 1874–1879], September 23, 1874, H. Bavinck Archives, Historical Documentation Center for Dutch Protestantism (1800 to the present day), University Library, VU University Amsterdam, collection 346, folder 1 or 16. Subsequent references to this archive follow the following format: H. Bavinck Archives, HDC, folder number. When two folder numbers are given, there is a difference in the numeration between J. F. Seijlhouwer, “(Voorlopige) Inventaris van het archief van H. Bavinck” (Amsterdam: HDC, October 2004), http://www.hdc.vu.nl/nl/Images/346%20Herman%20Bavink_tcm99-137241.pdf and J. F. Seijlhouwer, “Inventaris van het archief van H. Bavinck, 1870–1954” (Amsterdam: HDC, October 2004), respectively.

2. Cf. Herman Bavinck, *De wetenschap der heilige godgeleerdheid: Rede ter aanvaarding van het leeraarsambt aan de Theologische School te Kampen, uitgesproken den 10 jan. 1883* (Kampen: Zalsman), 6, and *idem*, *The Philosophy of Revelation: The Stone Lectures for 1908–1909; Princeton Theological Seminary* (New York: Longmans Green, 1909), 291: “Just as the pagan treats his idol, so modern man acts with the idea of evolution.” The question, “Will I remain standing?” may allude to the Old Testament story of the three men who refused to bow down for Nebuchadnezzar’s golden image and therefore were thrown in

isolating himself from the world, but in an existential struggle with the intellectual climate of his day.

In this article we will follow Bavinck in his struggle. Our focus will not be on his major works such as the *Reformed Dogmatics* and *The Philosophy of Revelation*,³ but rather we will examine his personal notes, letters, lesser known publications, and his contemporaries' memories of him. The image that appears after a wide reading of his writings is that of a “tragic hero of faith.”

Bavinck is a hero of faith. He sought to remain standing, and he stood firm. We have no indications to the contrary. In his confrontation with the modern worldview, he kept the faith.

However, we may wonder whether his attempts to overcome the modern worldview intellectually were also successful. His *Reformed Dogmatics* is impressive, if only for its sheer size, and *The Philosophy of Revelation* displays a depth and breadth of thought that is rarely found. Still, these works can leave one with the feeling that they are not sufficient as an answer to the modern worldview, that is, the way of thinking that breaks away from Christianity, explains the world without God, and understands human life and culture from an evolutionary perspective.⁴ As

the fiery furnace (Daniel 3).

3. In this article, references are to the English edition of the dogmatics: Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols., ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003–2008; Logos4 electronic edition). References follow the format “volume:page #section.” The same section numbers are found in the second and subsequent Dutch editions of the *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*. A searchable Dutch version (similar to the second edition, but in revised spelling) is available in *Online Bijbel DeLuxe: Studie-editie 2002* (Dordrecht: Importantia, 2001; CD-ROM) or its successor the *Online Bijbel Studie DVD* (various editions).

4. The following quotations illustrate how Bavinck understood what was going on in his days: “Man has undertaken the gigantic effort of interpreting the whole world, and all things that are therein, in their origin, essence and end, what is called purely and strictly scientifically, that is, without God, without any invisible, supernatural, spiritual element, and simply and alone from the pure data of matter and force.” “Thus presently over against the old world-view there will be placed the new world-view thought out to its latest instance and

Henrikus Berkhof remarks: “After 1900 Bavinck increasingly felt that his theological direction was leading to a dead end. . . . He felt increasingly that the modern period needed a much more vigorous renewal of theology than he himself had produced or was able to produce.”⁵ Also, some texts that we will discuss later in this article show that Bavinck, far from being always victorious, was rather a tragic hero of faith.

My invitation in this article is to read Bavinck in a cathartic way. Just as Aristotle said about Greek drama that following the hero in a tragedy brings about *catharsis* (cleansing, purification), so also following Bavinck in his existential-intellectual attempts to remain standing, including his failures, can purify our minds and hearts from problematic patterns of thought and piety and enable

consequently applied to every department of life, namely, the irreligious over against the Christian, the atheistic over against the theistic, the mechanical over against the organic, or as it has been named, the world-view of development over against that of creation.” Herman Bavinck, “Creation or Development,” trans. J. H. de Vries, *Methodist Review* 17 (1901): 849, 852; Dutch original: *idem*, *Schepping of ontwikkeling* (Kampen: Kok, 1901), 8, 12. Although Bavinck can speak about “creation and development [evolution]” (see e.g. *Schepping of ontwikkeling*, 2nd ed. [Kampen: Kok, 1919], 5), he explicitly rejects the idea that human beings descend from (other) animals. For an early example of this rejection, see the text edited in Willem J. de Wit, “Beeld van gorilla en chimpansee of beeld van God? De eerste pagina’s van Herman Bavincks manuscript ‘De Mensch, Gods Evenbeeld’ (1884); Inleiding, tekst, commentaar,” in *Ontmoetingen met Herman Bavinck*, ed. George Harinck and Gerrit Neven, AD Chartas-reeks 9, 165–82 (Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 2006). A popular overview of Bavinck’s views on evolution can be found in Willem J. de Wit, “Herman Bavinck over de evolutieleer,” *Nederlands Dagblad* (October 29, 2004): 2K.

5. Hendrikus Berkhof, *Two Hundred Years of Theology: A Report of a Journey*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 113. Jan Veenhof agrees with Berkhof, but nevertheless shows appreciation for Bavinck’s dogmatics as it is. See Jan Veenhof, “Bavinck and Guardini: Theologie en cultuur; Over de continuïteit in het levenswerk van Herman Bavinck,” in *Ontmoetingen met Herman Bavinck*, 20–21; cf. 24n23. For Andrea Ferrarri it was a discovery that Bavinck himself is more interesting than that he had understood from these few lines of Berkhof. See Andrea Ferrari, “Bavinck in Italiaanse context,” in *Ontmoetingen met Herman Bavinck*, 121–22.

us to live and theologize with a new openness and freedom amid the questions that face Christianity and the Church today.

“FOR THE SAKE OF CONSCIENCE”

Shortly after the young Bavinck prayed to remain standing, his commitment to faithfulness is tested. He decides to follow his conscience, but even doing that is not so easy, as a short study of two passages in his diary will show. This study will also give some insight into the spiritual climate in which Bavinck grew up and into his personal character.

In his diary notes on September 23, 1874, the words, “Will I remain standing? God grant it!” are immediately preceded by the remark: “Leaving my parents was difficult for me, especially because I went to L[eiden].”⁶ Bavinck’s problem is probably not the physical distance from Kampen to Leiden or the fact that he is no longer to see his parents daily. When he was at grammar school in Zwolle, he also lived far away from his parents, and, while he had been rather reserved with his parents, he reportedly opened up in Zwolle.⁷ The point of his remark must be then that at Leiden University he will be outside the Reformed circle and within the atmosphere of the modern worldview.

Although Leiden’s faculty of theology is not radically atheistic or turned against the church, its predominantly modern theology breathes a different spirit than his Reformed upbringing. His 1902 farewell lecture to his students in Kampen offers some insight into this upbringing:

I am a child of the Secession,⁸ and I hope to remain so. . . .

6. “’t Afscheid van mijn Ouders viel me zwaar, vooral hierom, dat ik naar L. ging. Zal ’k staande blijven? God geve het!” Herman Bavinck, “Ex animo et corpore” [diary 1874–1879], September 23, 1874, H. Bavinck Archives, HDC, folder 1 or 16.

7. See V. Hepp, *Dr. Herman Bavinck* (Amsterdam: Ten Have, 1921), 20, 27.

The best I have I am indebted to the Secession. My father and mother were both from Secession circles. And I do not owe the Reformed confession to Dr. Kuyper, but to my father and mother. . . .

My father . . . is a simple man, but he has been foreign to all separatism, and that was even more the case with my most simple and nevertheless perfectly healthy mother.⁹

The autobiographical sketch that Herman's father, Jan Bavinck, wrote at the age of almost eighty offers further insight. Herman was the second of seven children, four of whom died at an early age. In a telling passage, father Jan looks back on the death of his two daughters:

Although we mourned our dear dead, we did not do so without hope that they rest in the Lord and had been taken up into heaven. Already in Bunschoten, our oldest daughter Dina gave clear signs that, as we already attested, she loved Jesus, so that a pious neighbor, whom she often visited, once said about her to us: "In that child lies something good for the Lord." Also in Almkerk, she revealed her choice to serve the Lord at several occasions, and this especially became clear at her deathbed. She liked nothing more than when someone prayed with her, that one chapter or another

8. Bavinck refers to the 1834 secession from the Dutch Reformed Church. Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) led a second secession from the Dutch Reformed Church in 1886. In Dutch, the first secession is usually called "Afscheiding" and the second one is called "Doleantie."

9. "Ik ben een kind der scheiding en dat hoop ik te blijven. . . . Het beste wat ik heb, heb ik aan de scheiding te danken. Mijn vader en moeder waren beiden uit de afgescheidene kringen afkomstig. En de Geref. Belijdenis heb ik niet te danken aan Dr Kuyper, maar wel aan mijn vader en moeder. . . . Mijn vader . . . is een eenvoudig man, maar toch van alle enghartigheid, van alle separatisme is hij vreemd geweest en dat was nog meer het geval met mijne allereenvoudigste, en toch door en door gezonde moeder." C. Veenhof, "Uit het leven van de Theologische Hogeschool 6," *De Reformatie* 30 (1955): 123–24 (Veenhof quotes a report of Bavinck's speech). According to R. H. Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck en zijn tijdgenoten* (Kampen: Kok, 1966), 13, Bavinck's mother is not from the circles of the Secession but from a Dutch Reformed family in Vriezenveen.

from the Word was read for her, or that one spoke with her about God and his service. In our other daughter we did not notice such clear signs of grace, but she too was asking and longing, and we hope that the Lord our God will have heard her sighs and our prayers. Nevertheless, these signs are not the foundation of our hope that our children died in the Lord; no, our hope is founded on the covenant of grace with his promises that are yes and amen in Christ Jesus. Also to our children the Lord has made his promises, promises that have also been signified and sealed to them in Holy Baptism.¹⁰

In this passage father Bavinck not only expresses his hope that his children rest in the Lord, but also he alludes to questions that were vehemently discussed in Reformed circles in those days, questions concerning the relationship between (infant) baptism and salvation, the foundation and meaning of baptism, and the way one can be certain of one's salvation. Meanwhile, outside Reformed circles, a way of thinking was developing in which the very premises of the discussions were becoming obsolete: a modern, evolutionary worldview was gaining prominence, and the “the covenant of grace”

10. “Doch betreuden wij onze lieve dooden, wij deden dit niet zonder hope, dat zij in de Heere ontslapen en in den hemel opgenomen waren. Onze oudste dochter Dina heeft reeds in Bunschoten duidelijke blijken gegeven, dat zij, gelijk wij reeds van haar getuigden, Jezus liefhad, zoodat eene vrome buurvrouw, bij wie zij veel kwam, eens, van haar sprekende, tot ons zeide: ‘In dat kind ligt iets goeds voor den Heere.’ Ook in Almkerk openbaarde zij bij verschillende gelegenheden hare keuze om den Heere te dienen, en vooral op haar sterfbed kwam dit duidelijk uit. Niets had zij liever, dan dat met haar werd gebeden, dat een of ander hoofdstuk uit het Woord haar werd voorgelezen, of met haar over God en Zijn dienst werd gesproken. Van onze andere dochter, Femia, merkten wij zulke duidelijke blijken van genade wel niet, maar ook zij was vragende, uitziende, en wij hopen dat de Heere onze God hare verzuchtingen en onze gebeden zal verhoord hebben. Doch niet op deze blijken rust als grond onze hope, dat onze kinderen in den Heere gestorven zijn, maar onze hope is gegrond op het verbond der genade met Zijne belofte[n], die in Christus Jezus ja en amen zijn. In dit verband heeft de Heere ook aan onze kinderen Zijne beloften toegezegd; beloften welke in den H. Doop hun ook beteekend en verzegeld zijn.” Jan Bavinck, “Korte schets van mijn leven” (typoscript) [1906], 62, H. Bavinck Archives, HDC, folder 14 or 29.

was fading into meaningless, old-fashioned terminology. The hope of dying in the Lord was being replaced by the claim that there is no Lord.

Given the gap between his Reformed upbringing and the theology at the university, why does Bavinck go to Leiden? Later, he will explain that he wanted “a more academic education than the Theological School [in Kampen] could offer in those days” and that he had “a strong desire to become acquainted with modern theology first hand.”¹¹ It is certainly not his intention to break away from the Reformed faith and to become a modern theologian. The words, “Will I remain standing? God grant it!” in his dairy prove the contrary. But why then does Bavinck feel attracted by modern theology if he already knows that he fundamentally disagrees with it? Why will he later feel so attracted by the theory of evolution that he does not reject it once and for all but comes back to it again and again? Probably he already had doubts—existential-intellectual doubts—before he went to Leiden,¹² and maybe he hopes that in Leiden he will find words to make them manageable: unless the power that tries to bring him down gets a face, he will not be able to set his face against it.

At the same time, Bavinck goes to Leiden for some space and fresh air. The Reformed world is safe but also small. In his 1902 farewell speech in Kampen, he explains:

In that time it was thought in [our] church that we should abandon the world to its fate, and just because I come from the circle where I come from, I felt impelled to seek my education at a university; for, because of its concern for holiness of life, that church ran the high risk of losing sight

11. Herman Bavinck, “Ter gedachtenis,” in *Beschouwingen van een christen-denker*, by A. Steketee, ed. A. Gislinga and C. J. Goslinga, v–ix (Kampen: Kok, 1914), v. See also Hepp, *Dr. Herman Bavinck*, 29, and Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck en zijn tijdgenoten*, 20.

12. A letter that A. Brummelkamp wrote to Bavinck on March 2, 1878 makes clear that Bavinck already experienced an inner struggle when he went to Leiden. See Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck en zijn tijdgenoten*, 21.

of the catholicity of the church.¹³

For Bavinck, catholicity means not only that the church of all times and places is essentially one, but also that the Christian faith is essentially related to all areas of life. For him, it is the opposite of narrow-mindedness and pettiness, both of which he observed in his own circles.¹⁴

Bavinck also goes to Leiden for a more down-to-earth reason. As a nineteen year old he goes not only to study but also to enjoy student life. His diary contains the following expenses estimate:

Costs in Leiden¹⁵

Tuition fees	270 guilders
Student Corporation membership	14
Subtotal	284
Glass of beer	15
Freshmen Society membership	50

13. “In der tijd leefde in die kerk [de Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk] de gedachte, we moeten de wereld maar overlaten aan haar eigen lot, en juist omdat ik gekomen ben uit den kring, waaruit ik gekomen ben, gevoelde ik mij genoopt om aan eene Universiteit mijne opleiding te zoeken. Want die kerk liep groot gevaar om terwille der heiligheid des levens de catholiciteit der kerk uit het oog te verliezen.” Veenhof, “Uit het leven van de Theologische Hogeschool 6,” 24 (quote from the report of Bavinck’s speech).

14. See, e.g., Bavinck’s letter to Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, dated December 22, 1888, that is discussed later on in this article.

15. “Kosten te Leiden

Collegegeld	f 270
Lid Corps	+ 14

	284
Glas bier	15
Lid Groen Societeit	50”

Herman Bavinck, diary 1871–1875, undated note, H. Bavinck Archives, HDC, folder 1 or 16.

Bavinck obviously reserves quite a lot of money for student life, and a day after his arrival he goes as a freshman to the Leiden Student Corporation. However, very soon he begins to question whether as a Christian he really belongs there. After a conversation with Rev. J. H. Donner, the Leiden colleague of his father, he concludes that he does not. Thus he writes in his 1871–1875 diary on September 24, 1874: “Decided not to become a member of the Corporation, for my conscience’s sake.”¹⁶ That sounds honest and principled: yesterday he prayed that he would remain standing, and today he does not give in to the temptation to throw himself into a world of which he knows by now that it is at odds with his Christian convictions.

But is his decision not to become a member of the Corporation really an act of faith and principle? Or is it an act of cowardice, of giving in to Rev. Donner’s pressure? Bavinck is doubly honest with himself. Thus when he copies his notes on September 24, 1874, from his 1871–1875 diary to his 1874–1879 diary, he makes a remarkable change in the final sentence:

Can I as a Christian become a member of the Leiden Student Corporation? I was in doubt: Rev. Donner came to me at half past ten in the evening, advised me against it, and—I will not become a member, so I decided. Oftentimes I wonder whether it was *only* and *purely* for the sake of conscience that I did not become a member.¹⁷

The bird sits gloomy in his cage. Finally, the door is open and he can fly away, but he hesitates and lets the door slam again.

16. “Besloten geen lid te worden van ’t Corps om mijns gewetens wille.” Bavinck, diary 1871–1875, September 24, 1874. For the role of Donner, see also Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck en zijn tijdgenoten*, 20, 31–32.

17. “Mag ik lid worden als Christen van ’t Leidsche Stud.-Corps. ’K twijfelde: D^s. Donner kwam ’s avonds te half elf bij me, ried ’t me af en—ik word geen lid, zoo besloot ik. Dikwerf vraag ’k me af, of ’t wel *alleen* en *zuiver* gewetenshalve was, dat ik geen lid werd.” Bavinck, “Ex animo et corpore” [diary 1874–1879], September 23, 1874 (italics replace original underlining).

Bavinck has been brought up in piety and is a pious man himself. When he goes to Leiden to study theology, he prays that God will grant that he remains standing. However, his piety entails a tremendous tension: he cannot go and delight in Leiden’s modern theology with fresh openness but must compare everything against the Reformed confession of his upbringing. Just like almost every other student in his days, he was to become a member of the Student Corporation. But for him, he is haunted by his conscience because of it. And once he has followed his conscience and has made a decision on principle, it is not yet his final word. “I decided not to become a member . . . for the sake of conscience” is typically Bavinck, but “Oftentimes I wonder whether it was *only* and *purely* for the sake of conscience that I did not become a member” is probably even more characteristic of him.

“TRYING TO UNDERSTAND THE OPPONENT”

In 1922 Coenraad Bernardus Bavinck (1866–1941) edits a florilegium from the work of his brother Herman that contains articles mostly from the eighties. In the preface he speaks about the “twinkling of youthful ardor and animation that was so characteristic of him [Herman] in those days and that still shines in these articles.”¹⁸ If one reads the articles along with his inaugural lecture, *De wetenschap der heilige godgeleerdheid* (*The Science of Sacred Theology*) (1883), and his rectorial lecture, *De katholiciteit van christendom en kerk* (*The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church*) (1888),¹⁹ one soon notices that brother Coenraad has not

18. “De tinteling van jeugdigen gloed en bezieling, die hem in die dagen zoo eigen was en ook in deze artikelen nog doorstraalt.” Coenraad Bernardus Bavinck, “Voorwoord,” in *Kennis en leven: Opstellen en artikelen uit vroegere jaren*, by Herman Bavinck (Kampen: Kok, 1922), v.

19. See Bavinck, *De wetenschap der heilige godgeleerdheid*; *idem*, *De katholiciteit van christendom en kerk: Rede bij de overdracht van het rectoraat aan de Theol. School te Kampen, op 18 dec. 1888* (Kampen: Zalsman, 1888); *idem*, “The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church,” trans. John Bolt, *Calvin Theological Journal* 27 (1992): 220–51.

said too much. At the same time, the eighties are also years of searching and struggle for Bavinck. This much is especially clear from his letters to Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857–1936) with whom he became close friends during his studies in Leiden.²⁰ We will examine several of these letters below.

When Bavinck completes his studies in 1880, he attempts to bid farewell to Leiden and to become a good Reformed theologian. The pressure to bid farewell comes partly from his church. After the

20. Whereas Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, *Amicissime: Brieven van Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje aan Herman Bavinck, 1878–1921*, ed. J. de Bruijn (Amsterdam: HDC, 1992) contains letters from Snouck Hurgronje to Bavinck only, Herman Bavinck and Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, *Een Leidse vriendschap: De briefwisseling tussen Herman Bavinck en Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, 1875–1821*, ed. J. de Bruijn and G. Harinck, Passage Reeks 11 (Baarn: Ten Have, 1999), contains 76 letters from Bavinck to Snouck Hurgronje (not 66, as said in the introduction, page 12). Additionally, this latter work is not so much “a biographical study [that] explores the correspondence” as an annotated edition of the correspondence itself, pace Eric D. Bristley, *Guide to the Writings of Herman Bavinck (1854–1921)* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 128; cf. Bristley’s confusion of the two editions on page 139n91. Furthermore, *Een Leidse vriendschap* contains only 29 letters by Snouck Hurgronje, and Bavinck often answers to letters on postcards that have not been preserved (or whose location is at least unknown). However, three letters from Snouck Hurgronje to Bavinck that are not included have been quoted in earlier publications. For the sake of completeness, I give the quotations here.

When Snouck Hurgronje had received Bavinck’s *Christelijke wereldbeschouwing: Rede bij de overdracht van het rectoraat aan de Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam op 20 oktober 1904* (Kampen: Bos, 1904), he writes on January 29, 1905: “. . . komt mij steeds meer de schriftbeschouwing voor, het zwakke punt uwer leer te zijn. Met de bezwaren, waartoe eene ernstige studie der bijbelboeken aanleiding geeft—geheel afgezien van den dogmatischen grondslag des vorschers—wordt daarin m.i. niet ernstig rekening gehouden, een groot gebrek, dat slechts kan blijven voortbestaan zoolang de gemeente, de schrift slechts door vele intermediären kennend, te dien aanzien geene eischen stelt.” C. Augustijn, “Bavinck ter vergadering van moderne theologen, 1912,” in *In rapport met de tijd: 100 jaar theologie aan de Vrije Universiteit*, by C. Augustijn et al., 88–110 (Kampen: Kok, 1980), 109–10 n98. June 1, 1905, Bavinck answers with a letter that is published in *Een Leidse vriendschap*, 157–58. October 23, 1905, Snouck Hurgronje replies from Weltevreden (Jakarta): “Wat ge mij nader omtrent uwe beschouwing der Schrift schrijft, heb ik meer dan eens, in min of meer gewijzigden vorm van u gehoord, en ik kan mij erin verplaatsen, dat ge u

defense of his thesis in Leiden, he has to pass an ecclesiastical exam in Kampen in order to be eligible to become a pastor. During the examination pastor F. J. Bulens asks him to deliver a sermon about Matthew 15:14a: “Leave them; they are blind leaders. . . .” Who Bulens means by “blind leaders” is fully clear to Bavinck, but he cannot say goodbye to his Leiden professors so cheaply. He preaches on this verse only under protest.²¹ For many years he will keep in his study a picture of the Leiden professor Abraham Kuenen (1828–1891), one of the leaders of modern, liberal theology who was especially famous as a historical-critical Old Testament scholar. He also does not end his friendship with Snouck Hurgronje, but rather describes his own inner change to him.

If Bavinck briefly but powerfully expresses in his dairy on September 23–24, 1874, how he experienced his move from the

daarbij nederlegt, maar het is en blijft in mijn oog een uiterst zwak punt uwer wereldbeschouwing. Of men al zegt: anders is de natuur, is de geschiedenis mij een raadsel, daarmee rechtvaardigt men niet eene oplossing van het raadsel, die eene onderstelling in zich sluit, waartegen zoo gewichtige en onweerlegde bedenkingen ingebracht zijn als tegen het supranatureele karakter der Schrift. . . . Met het aprioristische van denk- en zedewet laat zich dit niet vergelijken, want wat wij voor denk- en zedewet houden, kan blijken iets anders te zijn en dan zijn wij bereid, onze voorstelling dienaangaande te herzien, maar de Schrift is eene bepaalde verzameling van gewijde documenten, over welker oorsprong, samenhang en karakter in de laatste eeuw veel licht is opgegaan, dat men niet met eene algemeene phrase kan negeeren. . . . Mij dunkt, dat het Calvinisme zijne schriftbeschouwing zal moeten herzien om in volle oprechtheid jegens zichzelf voort te kunnen bestaan.” Augustijn, “Bavinck ter vergadering van moderne theologen,” 109–10 (first and third fragment in the main text, second fragment at n98). Exactly six years later, October 23, 1911, Snouck Hurgronje writes to Bavinck about his *Modernisme en orthodoxie: Rede gehouden bij de overdracht van het rectoraat aan de Vrije Universiteit op 20 oktober 1911* (Kampen: Kok, 1911): “Zooals al hetgeen gij mij uit uwe pen te lezen gaaft, heeft ook dit stuk mij gesticht, in dezen zin, dat het mij noopte over allerlei vraagstukken, die het leven ons opgeeft, ernstig na te denken. Gij hebt in hooge mate de gave vanuit den streng begrensden kring, waarin gij leeft, te spreken niet alleen tot geestverwanten in den engeren zin van het woord.” Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck als dogmaticus* (Kampen: Kok, 1961), 135.

21. See Hepp, *Dr. Herman Bavinck*, 81 and Bremmer, *Een Leidse vriendschap*, 35. In Dutch, the difference between “leidslieden” (leaders) and “Leidsche lieden” (Leiden men) is very small.

Reformed world to Leiden, then in his letter dated November 24, 1880, he describes the opposite. He writes on the occasion of Snouck Hurgronje taking his doctoral degree (his own graduation was a few months earlier, and since then he has lived with his parents in Kampen):

And so both of us have reached the end of the academic curriculum. I can only regret that we differ so much, so very much in principle and in view of life. Nevertheless, my cordial friendship and warm interest will accompany you in spite of great difference in insight and conviction. I hope that that difference will become smaller, but I do not yet see it. Now that I have left Leiden and look upon the modern theology and the modern worldview somewhat differently than when I was so strongly under the influence of Scholten and Kuenen, many things seem me to be rather different than they appeared to me during that time. I learned a great deal in Leiden, but I also unlearned much. The latter could in part have harmed me, but I begin to see more and more what is harmful in it. The period in which the convictions that we brought with us [to Leiden] were thrown in the melting pot of criticism is over. Now it is our task to be faithful to the convictions that we hold now and to defend them with the weapons that we have at our disposal.²²

22. “En zoo hebben wij beiden dan het einde van de academische loopbaan bereikt. ’t Kan me alleen maar spijten, dat we zoo ver, zoo ontzachlijk ver in beginsel en in levensbeschouwing uiteengaan. Toch blijft mijne hartelijke vriendschap en warme belangstelling u vergezellen ondanks nog zoo groot verschil van inzicht en overtuiging. Dat dat verschil kleiner zal worden hoop ik, maar zie ik nog niet. Nu ik uit Leiden weg ben, en de moderne theologie en de moderne wereldbeschouwing wat anders in de oogen zie, dan toen ik zoo sterk onder den invloed van Scholten en Kuenen stond, nu lijkt mij veel weer heel anders toe dan waarin het mij toen voorkwam. Ik heb in Leiden veel geleerd, maar ook veel verlerd. Dit laatste kan ten deele schadelijk voor mij gewerkt hebben, maar meer en meer begin ik dat schadelijke ervan in te zien. Het tijdperk, waarin onze van vroeger meegebrachte overtuigingen in den smeltkroes der kritiek geworpen zijn, is voorbij. ’t Komt er nu op aan, de overtuigingen, die wij thans hebben, trouw te zijn en ze te verdedigen met de wapenen die ons ten

The duck fully plunged into the pond of modern theology and the modern worldview, but now that it has come back on the bank it soon lets the water slide down its back.

When Snouck Hurgronje objects that in the days of their daily companionship he never noticed such a strong influence from Scholten and Kuenen on him (just like Kuenen, J. H. Scholten (1811–1885) was a leader of modern theology), Bavinck answers that indeed their influence did not lead to “loss of truths of faith and acceptance of other ones, of theirs.” So, for Bavinck, “the convictions that we hold now” do not essentially differ from the Reformed confession with which he was brought up.²³

It is worthwhile to go so somewhat deeper into the letter dated November 24, 1880. This will not only provide us a background for understanding the letters to Snouck Hurgronje that will be discussed later on, but also it will show us how Bavinck values and interprets somebody who thinks differently. Snouck Hurgronje and he are good friends, but they differ “in principle and in view of life,” in “insight and conviction.” He does not see this difference as a mutual enrichment; no, he regrets it and hopes that the difference will become smaller even though he does not yet see this happening. Therefore he concludes that each of them has to be faithful to the convictions that he has now and should defend them. This is Bavinck’s analysis of the difference between Snouck

dienste staan.” Bavinck aan Snouck Hurgronje, November 24, 1880, *Een Leidse vriendschap*, 75–76. My English translation is partly a revision of Harinck’s; cf. 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 (2003): 253.

23. Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck en zijn tijdgenoten*, 22–26, says that Scholten imparted a thorough knowledge of older Reformed theology to Bavinck, but A. Vos, “Gespleten wortels van Samen-op-Weg: Bavinck en La Saussaye,” *Kerk en Theologie* 52 (2001): 226, points out that Scholten no longer taught dogmatics during Bavinck’s student days but rather New Testament studies. For Snouck Hurgronje’s reaction see Snouck Hurgronje to Bavinck, December 22, 1880, *Een Leidse vriendschap*, 79. And for Bavinck’s response—“het verliezen van geloofswaarheden en het aannemen van andere, van de hunne”—see Bavinck to Snouck Hurgronje, January 13, 1881, *Een Leidse vriendschap*, 81.

Hurgronje and himself: just as he has a Reformed view of life and wants to defend it, he ascribes to Snouck Hurgronje a modern view of life that he should defend with the weapons that are at his disposal.

However, Snouck Hurgronje actually does not have such outspoken convictions. He does not say that he regrets that his friend is still Reformed. In his answer he emphasizes that he “continually” has “due respect and unconstrained sympathy.” He finds that Bavinck should not neglect “the critical objections against the old view of Scripture,” but should work towards a solution of the problem. He explains: “Although I did not share your dogmatic opinions, I have never despaired of the possibility of such a solution, as usually happens in modern circles—my more or less uncertain, if you like it, sceptic point of view allowed me to deviate from the common opinion on this issue.” So, Snouck Hurgronje counts himself among the moderns, but he does not feel obliged to think after the typical modern fashion. Already a year earlier he had written: “All kinds of things bring about that my sympathies are anything but at the side of one persuasion or party and that I, since my conscience as yet forbids me to ally anywhere, preferably find my spiritual food there where I am at least certain to find seriousness.” Later on he will call himself a “skeptic, be it without making a system of skepticism or agnosticism.”²⁴

24. “. . . steeds den noodigen eerbied en ongedwongen sympathie . . .”; “. . . de kritische bezwaren tegen de oude Schriftbeschouwing . . .”; “Ofschoon ik uwe dogmatische meeningen niet deelde, heb ik aan de mogelijkheid dier oplossing toch nooit gewanhoopt, zooals dat in moderne kringen gewoonlijk geschiedt—mijn meer of min onzeker, als ge wilt sceptisch standpunt veroorloofde mij die afwijking van de gewone meening in dezen.” Snouck Hurgronje to Bavinck, December 22, 1880, *Een Leidse vriendschap*, 79–80. “Allerlei zaken brengen mée dat mijne sympathieën alles behalve aan de zijde van ééne richting of partij zijn en dat ik, daar mijn geweten mij vooralsnog verbiedt, mij ergens aan te sluiten, het liefst mijn geestelijk voedsel zoek daar waar ik zeker ben altháns ernst te vinden.” Snouck Hurgronje to Bavinck, August 4, 1879, *Een Leidse vriendschap*, 55. “. . . sceptisch, zonder van scepsis of agnosticisme een systeem te willen maken.” Snouck Hurgronje to Bavinck, December 30, 1908, *Een Leidse vriendschap*, 163.

For Bavinck, Snouck Hurgronje represents “modern man” over against whom he wants to justify himself as a Christian.²⁵ But actually Snouck Hurgronje is not such a typical modern man. In today’s terms one would rather call him postmodern: he cannot agree with grand narratives, systems, worldviews, at least he does not adopt one. In this respect Bavinck is much more modern: grand narratives do draw him.

The difference between the two friends also becomes strikingly clear in the following. On August 19, 1879, Bavinck writes: “If I owe something to Leiden, it is this: trying to understand the *opponent*. You also said that in your letter.” However, Snouck Hurgronje actually wrote: “You will be willing to believe that I appreciate and strive to understand also *the serious opinion of somebody else* and to sharpen the ‘organs of my own mind’ with it.” He does not use the word “opponent.”²⁶ For Snouck Hurgronje, Leiden is an environment in which he meets people who think differently, like Bavinck; for Bavinck, it is a place of confrontation with “the opponent.”

Whom or what he means exactly by “the opponent” is not fully clear. One might suppose it is Snouck Hurgronje, since Bavinck

25. See H. F. von Meyenfeldt, “Prof. dr Herman Bavinck, 1854–1954: ‘Christus en de cultuur,’” *Polemios* 9 (1954): 109–12, cited in Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck als dogmaticus*, 142.

26. “Heb ik iets aan Leiden te danken dan is het dit: *den tegenstander* trachten te begrijpen. Dat zegt ge nog in uw brief.” Bavinck aan Snouck Hurgronje, August 19, 1879, *Een Leidse vriendschap*, 57 (italics added). “Gij zult wel willen gelooven, dat ik er prijs op stel en dat het mijn streven is, ook *anderer ernstige overtuiging* te begrijpen en daarmêe mijne eigen geestesorganen te scherpen.” Snouck Hurgronje aan Bavinck, August 4, 1879, *Een Leidse vriendschap*, 55 (italics added). In their introduction the editors of the correspondence remark that “this understanding for each other as opponent . . . may especially be called remarkable for a polemicist par excellence like Snouck Hurgronje.” (“Dit begrip voor elkaar als tegenstander, dat vooral voor een polemicus pur sang als Snouck Hurgronje opmerkelijk mag heten . . .” J. de Bruijn and G. Harinck, “Inleiding,” in *Een Leidse vriendschap*, 9.) This remark overlooks the fact that Snouck Hurgronje does not use the word “opponent” for Bavinck at all.

subsequently expresses the wish that nothing will take away “the tone of true friendship” from their relationship. But in the preceding sentences he speaks about Leiden in general:

Leiden has been useful to me in numerous ways; I hope always to acknowledge it with gratitude. But often it has also made me very poor. It has not only deprived me of a lot of excess baggage (of which I am glad), but also of much that I later on learned to value as indispensable for my own spiritual life, especially when I had to prepare sermons.²⁷

In the light of this passage, the opponent may be (the representatives of) modern theology and the modern worldview. In the discussion of his dairy notice of September 23, 1874, we suggested that Bavinck went to Leiden because the power that tried to bring him down had to get a face before he would be able to set his face against it. On this point Leiden has not disappointed him; for, he has begun to understand the opponent. If this interpretation is right, Snouck Hurgronje in person is not his real opponent.²⁸

Nevertheless, in the letter dated November 24, 1880, he ascribes to Snouck Hurgronje a set of convictions that he must defend with the weapons that are at his disposal just as he himself must defend his Reformed convictions. Also in his letter of August 19, 1879, he tries to include his friend in his struggle: “My honest

27. “. . . de toon der ware vriendschap . . .”; “Leiden is me van veelzijdig nut geweest; ik hoop het altijd dankend te erkennen. Maar het heeft me ook dikwerf zeer arm gemaakt, me ontnomen, niet alleen veel ballast (daar ben ik blij om) maar ook veel dat ik thans in den lateren tijd, vooral als ik preeken maken moest, als onmisbaar voor eigen geestelijk leven leerde beschouwen.” Herman Bavinck to Snouck Hurgronje, August 19, 1879, *Een Leidse vriendschap*, 56–57. My English translation is partly a revision of Harinck’s. See Harinck, “Something That Must Remain, If the Truth Is to Be Sweet and Precious to Us,” 252.

28. In a later letter, however, Bavinck clearly refers to Snouck Hurgronje when he writes: “Exactly because by now I always live among kindred spirits, the control of opponents who are also friends is sometimes even more indispensable.” “Juist wijl ik thans altijd onder geestverwanten leef, is mij de controle van tegenstanders die tevens vrienden zijn soms te onmisbaarder.” Bavinck to Snouck Hurgronje, December 23, 1884, *Een Leidse vriendschap*, 122.

prayer is that, through struggle and doubt and suffering, both of us will always come closer to what is really true and good. Then would also be fulfilled what I wish with all of my heart: that we always come closer to each other in conviction and confession.”²⁹

However, Snouck Hugronje does not follow a similar path of struggle and doubt and suffering. Certainly, in his letter dated December 22, 1880, he writes that Bavinck’s questions also “are and remain *the* questions” for him, but that is first of all meant empathetically, to underline the wish that he just uttered: “Let us continue to sympathize with each other’s spiritual development as cordially as before.” Later on in Bavinck’s life struggle, Snouck Hugronje appears not so much as someone who is also wrestling with the same questions, but as a friend who gives honest criticism from the sideline. That was his ideal in his friendship with Bavinck: “An exchange of thoughts in which one does not hesitate at all to tell each other the truth.”³⁰

If one compares him with pastor Bulens, for example, Bavinck’s openness for those who think differently attracts attention. However, when one reads his letters to Snouck Hurgronje carefully, one gets the impression that he can appreciate others more *despite* than *in* their otherness and that he seems to understand the mental world and experience of others as a kind of mirror image of his own. “Trying to understand the opponent” is a strength, but it becomes a weakness if the other is immediately understood as an opponent.

29. “Mijne oprechte bede is het, dat we beiden door strijd en twijfel en lijden heen altijd nader komen aan wat wezenlijk waar is en goed. Dan zou tegelijk vervuld worden wat ik met mijn gansche hart wensch, dat wij altijd nader tot elkaar komen in overtuiging en belijdenis.” Bavinck to Snouck Hurgronje, August 19, 1879, *Een Leidse vriendschap*, 57.

30. “. . . de vragen zijn en blijven . . .”; “blijven wij steeds even hartelijk als vroeger in elkaars geestelijke ontwikkeling deelnemen.” Snouck Hurgronje to Bavinck, December 22, 1880, *Een Leidse vriendschap*, 80 (italics original). “. . . eene gedachtenwisseling, waarbij men niet in het minst schroomt, elkaar de waarheid te zeggen.” Snouck Hurgronje to Bavinck, August 4, 1879, *Een Leidse vriendschap*, 55.

“AN UNSPOKEN DESIRE THAT SCRIPTURE MIGHT NOT BE TRUE”

On December 22, 1888, Bavinck writes a letter to Snouck Hurgronje that gives deep insight into his inner struggle.

Sometimes I perceive in my own *soul* an unspoken desire that Scripture might not be true, that the newer criticism might be right, and in this I see something of that secret enmity that the sinful *heart* feels against the Holy One and that can only be overcome by faith and prayer. . . . Exactly this experience of the soul, in connection with others, ties me to Scripture and confession, although I feel in my *mind* the objections that can be brought against Christianity as deeply as you do. As for me, primarily *heart* and *conscience* prevent me from being modern and liberal. . . .

You will certainly have received my oration [*The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church*]. Remember when you read it that it is especially meant as some medicine against the separatist and sectarian tendencies that sometimes show up in our church. There is so much narrow-mindedness and so much pettiness among us, and, worst of all, this is counted as piety. I know, the ideal which I strive after is unattainable here, but to be human in the full, natural sense of that word and then as a human to be a child of God in every respect—that seems me to be the most beautiful of all. That is what I strive after.³¹

31. “Soms bespeur ik in mijn eigen *ziel* een onuitgesproken wensch, dat de Schrift niet waar mocht zijn, dat de nieuwere kritiek gelijk hebben mocht, en daarin zie ik iets van die geheime vijandschap, die het zondig *hart* tegen den Heilige gevoelt, en die alleen door het geloof en het gebed overwonnen kan worden. . . . Juist deze zielservaring in verband met andere bindt mij aan Schrift en belijdenis vast, ofschoon ik in mijn *verstand* even diep de bezwaren gevoel die er tegen het christendom kunnen ingebracht worden als gij. Het is voor mij in de eerste plaats het *hart* en het *geweten*, dat mij belet modern en liberaal te zijn. . . . Mijne oratie hebt ge zeker ontvangen. Bedenk bij de lezing dat ze vooral bestemd is als eenige medicijn voor de separatistische en seclarische neigingen, die soms in onze kerk zich vertoonen. Er is zooveel enghartigheid, zooveel bekrompenheid onder ons, en ’t ergste is dat dat nog voor vroomheid geldt. Ik weet wel, het ideaal

Bavinck perceives a *desire* in his soul that Scripture might not be true. This is quite astonishing. He does not say that he *fears* that Scripture might not be true, but that he *desires* so. Apparently, Scripture is not a book (maybe we should say: a power) that makes him feel at ease. Fortunately, one might say, Bavinck also knows the objections against Christianity with his *mind*—if only he distances himself from Scripture and Christianity, both his soul and his mind will be satisfied. A narrow-minded person may not dare to distance himself, but Bavinck does not like narrow-mindedness and certainly not when it is counted as piety. In short, he is not far from being a human in the full, natural sense of that word!

The bird is sitting in the opening of the cage. It knows about the problems inside. It knows that it wants to go. And still, it remains sitting.

When Bavinck feels uncomfortable with Scripture, he does not blame Scripture but his own desire that Scripture might not be true. That desire is not good but sinful. It is enmity against the Holy One. Neither does he give in to what his mind says, namely, that there are many objections against Christianity. Using the means of faith and prayer, Bavinck struggles to dissociate himself from his sinful heart and his mind and to associate himself with his conscience and with that other heart that is tied to Scripture and confession, that bows before the Holy One, and that lives as a child of God. Remarkably, Bavinck does not speak about a second mind or about arguments in favor of Christianity that are also “felt” by his mind.

For Bavinck, this struggle has little to do with narrow-mindedness. Rather, he who knows this struggle will no longer worry about all those issues that do not really matter. Being human in the full, natural sense of the word is not a category that he uses to describe the mainstream of his life so far. On the contrary, real life,

waar ik naar streef is hier onbereikbaar, maar mensch te zijn in den vollen natuurlijken zin van dat woord en dan als mensch in alles een kind van God – dat lijkt mij 't schoonst van alles. Daar streef ik naar.” Bavinck to Snouck Hurgronje, December 22, 1888, *Een Leidse vriendschap*, 136–37 (italics of “*heart* and *conscience*” [het *hart* en het *geweten*] are original; other italics added).

true humanity is an ideal for him: it will be attained when both the sinful heart and petty piety have been overcome, but that will not be in this sublunary existence. One feels the oppression that dominates his life: just being human—for Bavinck this is an ideal, not reality. Out in the countryside the bird could sing a much more glorious song for its Creator, but it feels it cannot reach the countryside.

How shall we evaluate this letter? Does it reveal that Bavinck was a person with a well-nigh tragic religious development that made him unhappy and insincere toward sound arguments? Was that Holy One from whom Bavinck wanted to escape but could not really the living God, or was it an oppressing idol? And when we read Bavinck's books, should we think that they spring from a disturbed mind?

Or is Bavinck one of those heroes of faith who remains standing amidst all conflicting desires and intellectual pressures? Is this letter a precious example of the true struggle of faith, the struggle between "the flesh" and "the Spirit"?³² Are his works therefore so important because he was such an experienced Christian?

Can it be both? Can we take Bavinck's oeuvre seriously and not discard it as the work of a sufferer from religious mania? And at the same time can we acknowledge that his tense self-understanding sometimes led him to "self-demonization" and hindered him from developing a level-headed view, for example, on the gains and weaknesses of critical Biblical studies?³³

32. Cf. Galatians 5:17.

33. See also the discussion of Bavinck's letter to Snouck Hurgronje dated June 1, 1905, later on in this article. In his *Reformed Dogmatics* Bavinck offers a more matter-of-fact discussion about objections against the inspiration of Scripture. Yet even here, right at the beginning, he puts the issue at the level of an "ethical battle, which at all times has been carried on against Scripture": "If Scripture is the word of God, that battle is not accidental but necessary and completely understandable. . . . Christ bore a cross, and the servant [Scripture] is not greater than its master. Scripture is the handmaiden of Christ. It shares in his defamation and arouses the hostility of sinful humanity." This is not only a battle fought by outsiders, but a battle within the believers themselves: "In Scripture too there is much that raises doubt. All believers know from experience that this is

“IN PRAYER HE DOES NOT SEEK HIMSELF
BUT THE HONOR OF HIS FATHER”

In the letter that we have just discussed, Bavinck mentions two means to overcome the secret enmity of the sinful heart: faith and prayer. In this section and the next we will seek to catch some glimpses of how Bavinck uses prayer and faith to remain standing. However, before we proceed we must note that we are approaching a private area that requires an attitude of reverence and to which our sources provide only limited access.

Indeed, to be clear from the beginning, we do not know much about Bavinck’s prayers or his views on prayer. An occasional remark in *Het christelijk huisgezin* (*The Christian Family*) suggests that he is used to a regular pattern of prayer: “Everything in the family has an educative function: . . . prayer and thanksgiving at the meal and the reading of God’s word, and the morning and evening prayers.”³⁴ Sometimes he writes short prayers in his diary, especially during his years in Leiden. Most of them can be categorized under the heading of loyalty such as prayers to be a worthy follower of Jesus, prayers of thanksgiving that God enabled

true. . . [Also] simple Christians . . . know the hard struggle fought both in head and heart against Scripture. . . . It is one and the same battle, an ever-continuing battle, which has to be waged by all Christians, learned or unlearned, to ‘take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ’ (2 Cor. 10:5). Here on earth no one ever rises above that battle. . . . There is no faith without struggle. To believe is to struggle, to struggle against the appearance of things.” Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* 1:439–41 [#116]. What one misses in Bavinck’s argument is a criterion to decide what belongs to the true struggle of faith and what is rather a misguided attempt to believe that something is true that is actually not true.

34. “Alles voedt in het huisgezin zin op, . . . de bede en de dankzegging aan den disch en de lezing van Gods woord, het morgen- en het avondgebed.” Herman Bavinck, *Het christelijk huisgezin* (Kampen: Kok, 1908), 140 (2nd ed., 1912: 148). Bavinck refers to a habit among Reformed Christians in the Netherlands both to pray before the meal and to read the Bible and say a prayer of thanksgiving after the meal. At the celebration of his hundredth birthday, his daughter told that every morning at half past eight he read Scripture with the family and prayed for all family members and also the servants. See Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck en zijn tijdgenoten*, 272.

him to pass exams with good results, a prayer for humility and gratitude, and so forth.³⁵

When Bavinck was a pastor in Franeker (1881–1882), the chairman of the school board came to his house to take him to a meeting that he was to address. Forty years later, the chairman relates how he overheard Bavinck in prayer:

The housekeeper of the pastor took me into the front room. The pastor would be ready in a minute, I just had to wait. I sat down, but immediately heard somebody speaking in the next room. . . . I heard Bavinck praying. Praying, begging, wrestling for wisdom, for a blessing on the work that he was about to do. I stood as if pinned to the ground and was surprised . . . that he felt so little and incapable to fulfill this work that he had to put pressure on the throne of grace. But that evening I was surprised for a second time: now about the mighty, awesome word that the pastor laid on the consciences of the hearers. It was the witness of all: we have never heard Bavinck like this!³⁶

If this rather hagiographic story is true, then such intensive preparation in prayer seems to have been an exception rather than a rule for Bavinck.

35. See Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck en zijn tijdgenoten*, 32.

36. “De hospita van den dominee liet mij in de voorkamer. De dominee was zóó klaar, ik moest maar even wachten. Ik zette mij, maar hoorde meteen spreken in de kamer naast me. . . . [Ik] hoorde Bavinck bidden. Bidden, smeeken, worstelen om wijsheid, om een zegen over den arbeid, dien hij stond te verrichten. Ik stond als aan den grond genageld, en was verbaasd . . . dat hij zich tot het volbrengen van dezen arbeid zoo klein en onmachtig gevoelde, dat daarom als het ware de troon der genade geweld moest worden aangedaan. Maar ik heb mij dien avond nogmaals verbaasd; en toen over het machtige, ontzaglijke woord door den dominee op de consciëntie der hoorders gelegd. Het was het getuigenis van allen: Nog nooit hebben we Bavinck zóó gehoord!” See J. H. Landwehr, *In memoriam Prof. Dr H. Bavinck* (Kampen: Kok, 1921), 22, who quotes this story from *Friesch Kerkblad* (August 19, 1921).

Later on, when he lived in Amsterdam and lead a church service, he was asked to pray for a child who was ill. His prayer is still remembered many years later:

The words in which this prayer was lifted up to God were very simple, but did not a deep emotion spread through the whole church? That was praying. A father prayed, who was used to praying for his own child and now loved these parents as himself, these unknown parents who had a child that was ill and who had asked for his intercession. That was true charity. We experienced it.³⁷

As for Bavinck’s theological views on prayer, neither the *Reformed Dogmatics* nor *Our Reasonable Faith* contain a chapter or section on prayer. Although the title might suggest otherwise, *The Sacrifice of Praise* (a popular gift for young adults on the occasion of their public profession of faith) can only be called a treatise on prayer if one takes that in a much broadened sense; it does not even contain a chapter on personal prayer, for example.³⁸

A small but more relevant source for understanding Bavinck’s view on prayer is his three-page foreword to a practical work on prayer. Herein he first discusses Kant’s criticism of prayer (i.e., in essence prayer is an act of superstition, although public prayer can

37. “Het waren zeer eenvoudige woorden, waarin dit gebed voor God werd opgedragen, maar ging er niet een diepe ontroering door de gansche kerk heen? Dát was bidden. Daar bad een vader, die zelf voor zijn eigen kind bad en nu dat onbekende ourderpaar dat een ziek kind had en zijn voorbede vroeg, daar liefhad als zichzelf. Dat was waarachtige naastenliefde. We beleefden het.” H. W. van der Vaart Smit, “De Dogmatische beteekenis van Dr H. Bavinck,” *Vox theologica* 8 (1936): 43.

38. See Herman Bavinck, *Magnalia Dei: Onderwijzing in de christelijke religie naar gereformeerde belijdenis* (Kampen: Kok, 1909); English translation: *idem*, *Our Reasonable Faith*, trans. H. Zylstra (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956); and *idem*, *De offerande des lofs: Overdenkingen vóór en na de toelating tot het heilige avondmaal* (The Hague: Verschoor, 1901); English translation: *idem*, *The Sacrifice of Praise: Meditations before and after Receiving Access to the Table of the Lord*, trans. John Dolfen (Englewood, NJ: John V. Bogert, 1908) and *The Sacrifice of Praise*, trans. Gilbert Zekveld, SpindleWorks, <http://spindleworks.com/library/bavinck/sacopraise>.

be allowed because of the impact it has on the people who listen to it) and the total rejection of prayer by others. Next, he complains about the growing abuse of prayer: people pray for physical needs only and hardly for spiritual needs. “Disconnected from the rules to which God has bound it,” writes Bavinck, “it serves as a means to get a sudden cure, to find lost goods again, to ascertain oneself of the success of a dubious enterprise, to gain without effort whatever the sinful heart desires.” Then, he emphasizes that prayer is a commandment that God has prescribed us, that the Lord himself has said in his Word what prayer is and which are the rules for serving and honoring him. There is no space for human self-will in prayer. True piety is first of all expressed in obedience. Next, he explains that prayer is also a need and privilege of humanity: “An animal does not pray, but a human cannot live without prayer.” (Should we sense here an implicit rejection of the idea that human beings descend from animals?) Finally, he mentions the higher meaning of prayer for a Christian:

For him, it is not just an expedient from distress but a fruit of gratitude; not a burden but a pleasure; not a commandment but a privilege. Prayer is the breath of his life, the pulse of his spiritual existence, the most intimate act of communion with God. His life becomes praying without ceasing. Also, in prayer he does not seek himself but the honor of his Father.³⁹

39. “Losgemaakt van de regelen, waaraan God het gebonden heeft, dient het als een middel, om plotselingen genezing aan te brengen, om verloren goederen terug te vinden, om zich van het welslagen eener bedenkelijke onderneming te verzekeren, om zonder inspanning deelachtig te worden hetgeen het zondig hart begeert.” “Een dier bidt niet, maar een mensch kan niet leven zonder gebed.” “Voor hem is het niet maar een redmiddel uit den nood, doch eene vrucht der dankbaarheid; geen last maar een lust; geen gebod maar een voorrecht. Het gebed is de ademtucht van zijn leven, de polsslag van zijn geestelijk bestaan, de innigste gemeenschapsoefening met God; zijn leven wordt een bidden zonder ophouden. Ook in het gebed zoekt hij zichzelf niet, maar de eere zijns Vaders.” Herman Bavinck, “Voorrede,” in *Het gebed*, by F. Kramer, 1–3 (Kampen: Kok, 1905), 2–3.

This foreword confirms the impression that we gained from his dairy notes—Bavinck’s piety is characterized by deep loyalty more than by confidential conversation. Prayer is a commandment that loses its character as a command for the Christian who prays out of gratitude. The traditional phrases, “prayer is the breath of his life,” and so forth, as such leave open a different conclusion, but the next sentence confirms again that he basically thinks in terms of loyalty: the Christian “does not seek himself but the honor of his Father.” Prayer as the free expression of one’s doubts and needs, without worrying whether this is according to the rules, does not seem to have been very important to him.

Although Bavinck calls prayer “the most intimate act of communion with God,” and although the mystical union between Christ and believers is an important theme in his thinking, by this union he means that Christ indwells believers (through the Holy Spirit and signified and sealed in the Lord’s Supper) rather than that believers speak in words to or with Christ.⁴⁰ Certainly, his personal prayers are not always wordless, as the chairman of the school board testifies, but maybe prayer as communion with God is for him more that one seeks the presence of the Lord than that one says so much to him.

If so, one may tentatively say that Bavinck’s understanding and practice of prayer might have helped him to remain standing, to remain loyal to his Father and not to give in to the modern worldview, but that they were probably not so useful for actually freeing him from the burden of the challenge of that worldview.

40. For the mystical union with Christ, see, e.g., Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* 4:250–51 [#480], 4:567–68 [#544], 4:576–79 [#546]. See also Ronald N. Gleason, “The Centrality of the *unio mystica* in the Theology of Herman Bavinck” (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2001) and Hans Burger, “Een eeuwigdurende verbondenheid: Bavincks concept van de *unio mystica*,” in *Ontmoetingen met Herman Bavinck*, 265–86.

“THIS IS THE VICTORY THAT OVERCOMES THE WORLD,
EVEN OUR FAITH”

Bavinck uses not only prayer but also faith in order to remain standing—to overcome both the secret enmity of his own sinful heart and the world. One of the most important Bible verses in his life is 1 John 5:4b: “This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith.”⁴¹ His first sermon was about this verse. In a letter to Snouck Hurgronje dated August 3, 1878, Bavinck relates that, although the fact that he had preached his first sermon felt as a victory, he was not completely satisfied: “It inspired me less than I had thought. I did not speak with that feeling for myself as I had hoped that I would do, while the thought was continuously with me that I would always stand so far below the ideal.”⁴² May we infer from this that he had hoped to speak from the experience of the victory of faith over the world, whereas in fact this experience of having overcome still stood as an unattainable ideal before him?

Bavinck’s only published sermon is about the same passage. He preached it when Paul Kruger was with him in the church in Kampen on June 30, 1901. Also, quotations and allusions throughout his writings show that this verse has a special meaning for him.⁴³

41. My translation of the Dutch Statenvertaling (the Bible version that Bavinck used): “Dit is de overwinning, die de wereld overwint, *namelijk* ons geloof” (italics original, indicating that a word is not found in the Greek original). Whereas several English versions translate the Greek aorist participle νικήσασα with “that has overcome” (e.g., NIV, NASB, and ESV), the Statenvertaling uses the present tense (“overwint”), which can be understood as a futuristic present: now, the battle with the world is going on, but faith will overcome and have the victory.

42. “Toch was ik in zooverre onvoldaan, dat het mij minder inspireerde dan ik gedacht had. Ik sprak niet met dat gevoel voor mijzelf, als ik gehoopt had dat ik doen zou; terwijl de gedachte, altijd zoo ver beneden ’t ideaal te blijven staan, me onophoudelijk bijbleef.” Bavinck to Snouck Hurgronje, August 3, 1878, *Een Leidse vriendschap*, 45.

43. Herman Bavinck, *De wereldverwinnende kracht des geloofs: Leerrede over 1 Joh. 5:4b; uitgesproken in de Burgwalkerk te Kampen den 30sten juni*

At the eighth congress of Dutch philologists in 1916, he speaks about the victory of the soul. He notices that the materialistic worldview has had its heyday and that there is renewed attention upon the soul. He himself sees in science and technology a proof of the superiority of the human mind over nature and in art the victory of the ideal over reality. The highest victory, however, is the victory in the soul itself. Art can prophecy the victory over the struggles in the world and in oneself, it can make us see the promised land from far away, but it cannot take us there.⁴⁴ Bavinck speaks for a general scholarly audience and does not elaborate on specific Christian beliefs. However, at the end of his lecture he quotes Dante to make clear that the real victory of the soul can only be reached by faith. Art has a prophetic function, but “the happy end goes far beyond the earthly horizon. Therefore: ‘What reason sees, I can explain to you, but otherwise you will have to wait for Beatrice in matters of faith.’”⁴⁵

According to Bavinck’s students, he could already see beyond the horizon in his preaching and teaching:

When Bavinck lectured . . . it could happen that he was so much filled by God’s glory that he forgot us, and, while speaking, gazed out of the window into endless distances;

1901 (Kampen: Zalsman, 1901). For allusions, see, e.g., *idem*, “Het christelijk geloof,” *De Vrije Kerk* 9 (1883): 187–88, reprinted as “Het christelijk geloof,” in *Kennis en leven: Opstellen en artikelen uit vroegere jaren*, by Herman Bavinck, 86–97 (Kampen: Kok, 1922), 93–94; *idem*, *De katholiciteit van christendom en kerk*, 45, 49; English translation: “The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church,” 247, 249; *idem*, *Reformed Dogmatics* 1:600 [#155]; *idem*, *De zekerheid des geloofs* (Kampen: Kok, 1901), 78, English translation: *The Certainty of Faith*, trans. H. der Nederlanden, 2nd ed., IRS Study Pamphlets 364 (Potchefstroom: Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir Christelike Hoër Onderwys, 1998), 45.

44. Herman Bavinck, *De overwinning der ziel: Rede uitgesproken in de algem. vergadering van het achtste Nederlandsche philologencongres te Utrecht, 26 april 1916* (Kampen: Kok, 1916), 27, 29, 30, 33.

45. “Maar het blijde einde gaat ver boven den aardschen gezichtseinder uit. Daarom, ‘Wat de rede ziet, kan ’k U verklaren; / Maar verder moet gij wachten / Op Beatrice in zaken des geloofs.’” Bavinck, *De overwinning der ziel*, 34 (quoting Dante, *Divina Comedia*, Purgatorio 18.46–48).

for God's glory is endless, and we were listening speechlessly and were introduced—for our whole life—into the mystery of salvation of the Eternal and Almighty One, who is our merciful Father in Jesus Christ.⁴⁶

When he was teaching, there was something visionary or prophetic about him as if he witnessed a higher world.⁴⁷

He did much more than mere teaching. As a Christian he was able to make one feel the width and glory of God's revelation in Christ, to make one realize the limits of the temporary over against the eternal, to make one look forward from knowing in part to the day of the full solution of the mystery. He carried one away to kneel before the throne of the Lamb.⁴⁸

When Bavinck began to speak at a mission conference after other speakers had finished, the room became silent, "ecumenically and universally silent": "majesty had come into the meeting, the majesty of the greatness of God's revelation."⁴⁹

46. "Als Bavinck . . . college gaf, kon het gebeuren dat hij zelf zo vervuld werd van de heerlijkheid Gods, dat hij ons vergat en al sprekende door het raam naar buiten staarde in eindeloze verten, want Gods heerlijkheid is eindeloos, en wij zaten sprakeloos te luisteren en werden ingeleid—voor ons gehele leven—in het heilgeheim van de Eeuwige en Almachtige, die in Jezus Christus onze genadige Vader is." J. J. Buskes, *Hoera voor het leven* (Amsterdam: De Brug-Djambatan, 1959), 33; also available at Digitale bibliotheek voor de Nederlandse letteren (dbnl), http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/busk005hoer01_01/busk005hoer01_01_0011.php; quoted in A. Th. van Deursen, "Bavinck en de Vrije Universiteit," in *Ontmoetingen met Herman Bavinck*, 29–30.

47. According to E. D. Kraan, "Prof.dr. H. Bavinck," *Fraternitas: Groot-gereformeerd studentenblad* 8 (1921–1922): 34; cited in Van Deursen, "Bavinck en de Vrije Universiteit," 30.

48. "Hij deed veel meer dan doceeren. Hij wist als Christen de wijdte en de heerlijkheid der openbaring Gods in Christus te doen gevoelen, de grenzen van het tijdelijke tegenover het eeuwige te doen beseffen, uit het kennen ten deele te doen uitzien naar den dag der volle oplossing van het mysterie. Hij sleepte mede om te knielen voor den troon des Lams." Van der Vaart Smit, "De dogmatische betekenis van Dr H. Bavinck," 43.

Do these testimonies demonstrate that Bavinck lived from the victory of faith? From his letters we have already learned that he was not unfamiliar with struggle and doubt. Remarkably, in *De overwinning der ziel* (*The Victory of the Soul*), he does not connect the prophetic-visionary experience with faith but with art. He continues: “The esthetic human, says Kierkegaard, lives from moment to moment; if he could maintain himself in the moment, he would be like a god. But his danger is . . . in the emptiness between the moments; again and again, he has to go through his own emptiness.”⁵⁰ Does Bavinck here also describe his own experience, at least in part?

Still, Bavinck was not the kind of person whose life of faith concentrated on special immediate experiences. His foreword to a biography about Rev. L. G. C. Ledeboer (1808–1863) is instructive in this regard. This pastor was respected in circles that stood somewhat apart from the mainstream of the Secession tradition. According to Bavinck, Ledeboer was “a speaking example of the piety that is regarded as the highest and purest” in these circles: “He possesses all its characteristics, its originality, its freshness, its immediacy, but also all the peculiarities, caprices, and extravagances by which it is often accompanied.” From this biography Bavinck learns “what is the one-sidedness of this kind of godliness and what we lack ourselves.” He continues: “And when we have taken all this in and have passed it through our souls, then we willingly return to the language of *faith* of the Christian of Heidelberg [i.e., the Heidelberg Catechism] or even better to the testimonies of *faith* of the apostles and the prophets. We breathe

49. “Wat werd het stil, muisstil, oecumenisch en universeel stil in die groote kerk. Daar was majesteit in de vergadering gekomen, de majesteit der grootheid van de openbaring Gods.” Van der Vaart Smit, “De dogmatische betekenis van Dr H. Bavinck,” 43.

50. “De aesthetische mensch, zegt Kierkegaard, leeft van oogenblik tot oogenblik; als hij zich in het oogenblik handhaven kon, zou hij een god gelijk zijn. Maar zijn gevaar ligt . . . in de leegte tusschen de oogenblikken; altijd weer moet hij door zijne eigene leegte heen.” Bavinck, *De overwinning der ziel*, 33–34.

again and revive.”⁵¹ Living from faith rather than from experience seems to have given Bavinck the power to live.

In his theological works Bavinck has written much about faith, most of which we will not try to include in the discussion here. However, his very first article deserves attention. In this article, entitled, “Geloofswetenschap” (“Science of Faith”), and published in 1880, he reflects upon the relationship between science and faith and upon the scientific character of theology. The article gives the impression that Bavinck himself is still searching.⁵² At the end of

51. “[Ledeboer is] een sprekend type van de vroomheid, welke daar als hoogste en zuiverste geldt.” “Hij bezit er al de eigenaardigheden van, de oorspronkelijkheid, de frischheid, de onmiddellijkheid, maar ook al de zonderlingheden, grilligheden, buitensporigheden, die er dikwijls mee gepaard gaan.” “[Men kan leren] wat eenzijdigheid aan dezen vorm van godsvrucht kleeft, en wat onszelfen ontbreekt.” “En als wij dit alles in ons hebben opgenomen en door onze ziel hebben laten gaan, dan keeren wij gaarne tot de *geloofstaal* van den Heidelberger Christen en nog liever tot de *geloofsgetuigenissen* van de apostelen en de profeten terug. Wij herademen en leven weer op.” Herman Bavinck, “Een woord vooraf,” in *L. G. C. Ledeboer in zijn leven en arbeid geschetst*, by J. H. Landwehr, 2nd ed., v–vii (Rotterdam: Bolle, 1910), vii (italics added).

52. Herman Bavinck, “Geloofswetenschap,” *De Vrije Kerk* 6 (1880): 510–27; reprinted as: “Geloofswetenschap,” in *in Kennis en leven: Opstellen en artikelen uit vroegere jaren*, by Herman Bavinck, 1–12 (Kampen: Kok, 1922). The Dutch title, “Geloofswetenschap,” is ambiguous in several respects: “geloof” can be translated both as faith and as belief and can also mean the attitude of faith (*fides qua*) or the content of faith (*fides quae*). “Wetenschap” can be translated as science or as knowledge, but it is also the general term for all scientific and scholarly disciplines together, and the title does not make clear whether the article will speak about an approach of science that is based on faith or about the scientific study of faith. To complicate matters further the combination “geloof en wetenschap” (literally: faith and science) is the usual Dutch term for the problem area that is commonly called “science and religion” in English. So, “geloof” in “geloofswetenschap” may even be translation as “religion.” Bavinck is partly aware of these ambiguities and uses them in his article, but at the same time they seem to make it difficult for him to get a full grip on his topic. By contrast he begins his 1918 essay, “Philosophie des geloofs,” in a much clearer way, immediately discussing what he does and does not mean by his title. See *idem*, “Philosophie des geloofs,” in *Annuaire der Societas Studiosorum Reformatorum*, 1918, 62–72 (Rotterdam: Donner, 1918); republished as “Philosophie des geloofs,” in *Verzamelde opstellen op het gebied van godsdienst*

the article he says remarkably that God is the ultimate hypothesis, of which one already knows by faith that it is true, while one may still exhort others to search deeper and deeper to discover that God truly exists.⁵³ To my best knowledge Bavinck does not call God a hypothesis in any of his other works. However, the implicit tension will remain: Is it possible to say in the same breath that by faith I am certain of something and that it is open for scientific research? By declaring the same statement both a matter of faith and a hypothesis for scientific scholarly research, does one not either compromise one's academic open-mindedness or give way to doubts in matters of faith, or both? If a matter is truly open to research, is faith not simply too early if it already claims its victory and states beforehand what the outcome of research will be?

The 25th anniversary of Bavinck's professorship was celebrated in 1908. In his thanksgiving speech at the end of the celebration, he looks back at the past twenty-five years and recalls what he has lost, what he has gained, and what he has kept. All are touched when they hear him speak about the third point: although it seems a miracle to himself, he has kept the faith.⁵⁴

CONCLUSION

This article has certainly not offered an exhaustive treatment of the sources that give insight into Bavinck's inner life, but hopefully it has examined enough of his writings in order to read Bavinck in a cathartic way, to reconsider our own piety in the mirror of his even when it appears to be problematic.

en wetenschap, by Herman Bavinck, 9–16 (Kampen: Kok, 1921); English translation: “Philosophy of Religion (Faith),” in *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, by Herman Bavinck, ed. John Bolt, trans. Harry Boonstra and Gerrit Sheeres, 25–31 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008); cf. the editorial note on page 25 that explains why the Dutch word “geloof” in the title has been translated as “religion (faith).”

53. Bavinck, “Geloofswetenschap,” 526; cf. *Kennis en leven*, 12.

54. See Hepp, *Dr. Herman Bavinck*, 299–300.

Henrikus Berkhof describes the main problem of Bavinck's theology as follows: "For him faith was not in the first place a yielding up of one's life to a Person [Christ] but intellectual assent and submission to Scripture."⁵⁵ Berkhof's observation is confirmed by a letter to Snouck Hurgronje dated June 1, 1905, in which Bavinck writes:

I agree that the supposition on which my view of life rests, namely, the truth of Holy Scripture, includes a difficult problem. I can only say this about it: the longer and deeper I live, the more I perceive that I cannot free myself from the authority of Scripture. . . . Sometimes I am inclined to break with it, but when I examine myself carefully, it is related to the evil in my human nature. . . . And conversely, the more I am, to put it this way, in a pious mood and experience better moments, I feel totally willing and inclined to accept Scripture and to submit myself to it, and then I have peace for my heart.⁵⁶

Bavinck does not piously and cheerfully revel in Scripture, but experiences it as an authority from which he cannot free himself; at moments that he calls his best he is "totally willing and inclined to accept Scripture and to submit" himself to it. When he feels the inclination to break with it, he relates this to the evil in his human nature. Just as in his letter of December 22, 1888, so here we see a tendency to self-demonization. Does Bavinck use the Word of God as part of his spiritual armor in his struggle to remain standing, or

55. Berkhof, *Two Hundred Years of Theology*, 114.

56. "Mijnerzijds stem ik toe, dat de onderstelling, waarop mijne levensbeschouwing rust, namelijk de waarheid der Heilige Schrift, een moeilijk probleem insluit. Ik kan er eigenlijk dit alleen van zeggen: naarmate ik langer en dieper leef, bemerk ik, dat ik van het gezag der Schrift niet los kan komen. . . . Soms heb ik er wel eens de neiging toe, om er mede te breken, maar als ik mij zelf dan goed onderzoek, dan hangt dat saam met het booze in mijne menschelijke natuur. . . . En omgekeerd, naarmate ik, laat ik het zoo maar zeggen, vromer gestemd ben en betere oogenblikken doorleef, *voel ik mij tot aannemen van en onderwerping aan de Schrift volkomen bereid en geneigd*, en heb vrede voor mijn hart." Bavinck to Snouck Hurgronje, June 1, 1905, *Een Leidse vriendschap*, 158 (italics added).

does he feel compelled to use his own arms to defend the authority of Scripture and to submit himself to it?

Even though Berkhof has a point when he says that, for Bavinck, faith means submission to Scripture, another passage shows that he has also clearly misunderstood Bavinck.⁵⁷ This passage is from an article that is included neither in Veenhof's nor in Bristley's bibliography of Bavinck's works.⁵⁸ However, Bavinck himself mentions it in his own (incomplete) bibliography.⁵⁹ The article, entitled, “Geloof en liefde” (“Faith and Love”), contains the following lines with which I conclude this article and which make clear that the deepest reason why Bavinck remained standing was not intellectual argument or blind submission but union with Christ:

True faith has a person as its object, namely, Christ. . . . True faith does not stop at the witness of Scripture but pushes forward through it to Christ himself, joins with him, enters into communion with him.⁶⁰

57. Also Dirk van Keulen is of the opinion that Berkhof has represented Bavinck's concept of faith one-sidedly. See Dirk van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek: Schriftbeschouwing en schriftgebruik in het dogmatisch werk van A. Kuyper, H. Bavinck en G. C. Berkouwer* (Kampen: Kok, 2003), 126 n261.

58. Veenhof's bibliography has been published in Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck als dogmaticus*, 425–46, with additions in Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck en zijn tijdgenoten*, 299–301.

59. Herman Bavinck, “Lijst mijner geschriften,” H. Bavinck Archives, HDC, folder 60.

60. “Het ware geloof heeft dus een persoon tot voorwerp, nl. Christus. . . . Het echte geloof blijft echter toch niet bij het getuigenis dier Schrift staan, maar dringt door haar heen tot Christus zelve door, sluit zich bij Hem aan, treedt met Hem in gemeenschap.” Herman Bavinck, “Geloof en liefde,” *Maandblad van de Jongelingsvereniging ter bevordering van Christelijk leven “Excelsior”* (August 1909). In his “angelology” Bavinck says that angels are not object of our trust or worship—“the object of true faith is the grace of God in Christ.” Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* 2:450 [#261].

Herman Bavinck's Theological Aesthetics: A Synchronic and Diachronic Analysis

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In 1914 Herman Bavinck wrote an article for the *Almanak of the Vrije Universiteit* entitled, “Of Beauty and Aesthetics,” which has recently been translated and republished for the English-speaking world in *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*.¹ While this is not the only place where Bavinck treats the subject of beauty, this article stands out as a unique, extended glimpse into Bavinck's theological aesthetics.² In it we see that Bavinck was conversant with philosophical aesthetics and aware of the tensions of doing theological aesthetics from both a small “c” catholic and a distinctly Reformed perspective.

There are many ways to assess Bavinck's reflections on aesthetics. For example, one could look at the intimations in Bavinck's works of the aesthetics formulations of later Dutch Reformed writers such as Rookmaker, Seerveld, or Wolterstorff.³

1. Herman Bavinck, “Of Beauty and Aesthetic” in *Essays on Religion, Science and Society*, ed. John Bolt, trans. Harry Boonstra and Gerrit Sheeres (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 245–60.

2. See also *Herman Bavinck, Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 252–55.

3. This in itself would prove to be a very interesting study. In one section of the essay Bavinck entertains an idea by a “Mister Berland” who maintains “the characterization of an anarchist situation in the arts.” See Bavinck, “Of Beauty and Aesthetics,” 252. This sentiment adumbrates Rookmaaker's critique of

Yet this paper is concerned with two interrelated theological questions that can be characterized as synchronic and diachronic. First, how does Bavinck's aesthetics fit into his broader theological commitments? Second, where does Bavinck's aesthetics place him in the larger trajectory of Christian theological aesthetics? Before exploring these questions it would serve us well to briefly summarize Bavinck's article.

"OF BEAUTY AND AESTHETICS"

Although Bavinck's article takes many twists and turns along the way, it can be briefly (and therefore somewhat reductively) summarized in two major movements. His first movement sketches the history of aesthetics, including such notable thinkers as Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Clement, Origin, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius, Aquinas, Bonaventure, Schelling, Hegel, Hume, Burke, Darwin, Baumgarten, and Kant. In his sketch Bavinck pays particular attention to three approaches: (1) the influence of Plato's idealism, (2) the modern empiricist movement (i.e., Hume's, Burke's, Darwin's, and Baumgarten's aesthetics), and (3) Kant's *a priori via media* between Plato's idealism and modern empirical approaches.

Through it all Bavinck presents no winners. He sees all three schools as providing both promise and problems for a theological aesthetic. In fact, for Bavinck, the way forward must hold both an

modern art as characterized by "anarchy, nihilism and the gospel of absurdity." See Hans Rookmaaker, *Modern Art and the Death of a Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 130. Additionally, Bavinck states, "some have even proposed that each art has an independent origin and that an archetype has never existed. And thus there remains, in spite of all exact study, the greatest possible difference about the essence of art" ("Of Beauty and Aesthetics," 253). Here Bavinck seems to gloss an idea resembling Wolterstorff's critique of all essentialist attempts to define art as fulfilling a specific purpose, preferring instead to see works of art finding their origin in the uniqueness of each independent action. See Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 4–8.

empirically-based aesthetic from below (an analysis of man's own sense of beauty, the nature of artistic activity, and the objects themselves) combined with a more "spiritual" aesthetics from above (a *via media* that does not err as Kant did by reducing beauty to a function of the human mind). In other words, Bavinck is looking for an aesthetic that can offer a satisfying answer to the complexity of both subjective and objective beauty.

Having provided a brief intellectual sketch of the history of aesthetics, Bavinck's second movement can be organized around the categories of the classical Platonic triad: the true, the good, and the beautiful. In spite of some concern regarding Augustine's use of beauty as a transcendent, Bavinck assures us that Augustine was right to ascribe these categories to God. Yet Bavinck cautions against what he believes is a trace of neo-Platonism in Augustine's thought and emphasizes the limited nature of all earthly manifestations of this triad. Additionally, he recommends referring to God's "glory" rather than to God's "beauty." Such language provides a safeguard to the otherness of God's attributes. According to Bavinck, within the created world the true, the good, and the beautiful are distinct though limited reflections of their divine counterparts, and the triad is associated internally with man's irreducible capacity for seeing the world as containing the true, the good, and the beautiful. Hence they are clearly manifested in society through the developments of science, technology, and art.⁴ Bavinck concludes his second movement by emphasizing that as foundational as beauty is as part of the human condition, it must

4. Bavinck's language of the correspondence between faculties and the external object is central to his thesis of bridging the subjective/objective divide: the intellect corresponding to the true, agency corresponding to the good, and aesthetic awareness corresponding to the beautiful. For Bavinck such an epistemic gap seems to implicitly deny a theological assumption behind the Kantian noumena/phenomena divide. Bavinck states, "Humanity and the world are related because they are both related to God. The same reason, the same spirit, the same order lives in both." See Bavinck, "Of Beauty and Aesthetics," 259. A notable comparison can be seen in Richard Swinburne's principle of credulity. See Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), ch. 13.

never be the initial movement towards the world; for, the beautiful does not have its own content apart from the true and the good.

Having briefly reviewed the two movements in Bavinck's article, we are now in a position to begin exploring the synchronic and diachronic theological implications of Bavinck's aesthetics.

PUTTING BEAUTY IN ITS RIGHTFUL PLACE

One of the most predominant theological concerns for Bavinck is the theological fallout of both a too high and a too low view of beauty. Regarding the latter, Bavinck devotes a large portion of the essay to guarding against the powerful forces of the modern intellectual world that attempt to develop purely immanent explanations of truth, goodness, and beauty. Although he is painstakingly careful to give empirical aesthetics its due, elucidating the strengths and embracing such approaches at a level that is uncommon among theological aesthetics, Bavinck nevertheless rejects all attempts to reduce the dynamic of beauty to its empirical aspects—the eye of the beholder, the skill of the artist, or the form of the work of art. For Bavinck, such reductions can never give a robust account of the question of beauty itself, a question that haunts human perception. Likewise, for Bavinck, to deny man's distinct perception of beauty as an objective, fundamental awareness is to erode one of the elements that makes humans distinct. In other words, Bavinck believes that the perception of beauty—no less than religious, moral, and cognitive awareness—is “peculiar to man.”⁵ Interestingly, in spite of Bavinck's theological problems with a purely evolutionary or empirical explanation of aesthetics, his response is not to dismiss such approaches but rather to show their role as a partial explanation. In other words,

5. “Perception (as we saw above) as the means whereby beauty is observed points back to a sense of beauty that is by nature peculiar to man, just as in religion, morality, cognition, and so forth. Man cannot be understood as a monistic and evolutionary unit; he is and was, as far as we can go back into history, a being that forms a unity, although imbued with different gifts and capabilities.” See Bavinck, “Of Beauty and Aesthetics,” 257.

such answers serve as an invitation to revelation and demonstrate the need for additional sources to explain the depth of “things that arise in the human spirit” due to beauty’s objective and spiritual quality.⁶

It is precisely here that we see most clearly Bavinck’s continuity with contemporary attempts to reclaim beauty over against the subjectivizing of beauty in the secular imagination. For example, in his article, “Beauty and the Soul,” John Milbank speaks of a “simultaneous objectivity and subjectivity of the experience of the beautiful.”⁷ Likewise, David Bentley Hart remarks, “beauty is objective” regardless of “the modern climate which has attempted to sequester beauty within the human subject via phenomenology.”⁸ So Bavinck, long before Milbank and Hart, argued in the face of the modern imagination that beauty required more than the subjective frame (what Bavinck refers to as “empirical aesthetics”).

Going even farther one might say that Bavinck adumbrates much of the language of Milbank and Hart regarding the richness, depth, and charged power involved in the interaction of subjective and objective beauty. Predating both Milbank’s and Hart’s critique of Kant’s placing the “sublime” as merely “subjective” rather than offering a “disclosure of depth” within the objective world,⁹ Bavinck states that “beauty and the sense of beauty respond to each other, as the knowable object and the knowing subject.”¹⁰ This response “discloses us to ourselves,” “deepens, broadens, enriches our inner

6. Bavinck, “Of Beauty and Aesthetics,” 253–254.

7. John Milbank, Graham Ward, and Edith Wyschogrod, *Theological Perspectives on God and Beauty* (New York: Trinity Press International, 2003), 2–3.

8. David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 17.

9. Milbank, Ward, and Wyschogrod, *Theological Perspectives on God and Beauty*, 4.

10. Bavinck, “On Beauty and Aesthetics,” 259.

life,” “brings cleansing, liberation revival,” and creates “a longing deep in every human heart.”¹¹

Bavinck clearly believed that this longing, when matched with truth and goodness, could lead humans to desire the very thing beauty reflected, namely, the glory of God. However, in spite of Bavinck's formulation of an elevated power of beauty within the human soul, his Reformed instincts made him more guarded than modern participation-based elucidations of beauty that view such interactions as sufficient in themselves for providing a window to the infinite.¹² For him, beauty “does not have the same compelling

11. Bavinck, “On Beauty and Aesthetics,” 259.

12. David Bentley Hart describes “the infinite toward which beauty leads reflection, and which lays open the space in which every instance of beauty shines forth.” See Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, 19. Hart's description of beauty is so dynamic, changing, and ineffable that one might be left to wonder how it does not itself come to be an extension or experience of the divine essence. Hart, in his defense, gives a very nuanced and brilliant distinction between his own approach and “Neoplatonism” which has been “left unredeemed by theology” (p. 245ff.). Yet even if we take Hart's own insistence that such language maintains *analogous* participation, some might insist that there is a danger regarding the integrity of materiality when given such an overloaded sense of divine presence. As Jon Mackenzie has noted, sacramental ontologies must navigate an inverse relationship between the degree of divine presence or participation and the actual integrity of materiality. See Jon Mackenzie, “Presence without Absence? A Critique of David Brown's Ontology of Divine Generosity,” unpublished paper presented at the Institute for Theology, Imagination and the Arts, St. Andrews University, Sept 6th, 2010. For a contemporary neo-Calvinist critique of the redemptive aspect of Milbank's participatory aesthetics, see Adrienne Dengerink Chaplin, “The Invisible and the Sublime: From Participation to Reconciliation” in *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition: Creation, Covenant, and Participation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), 89–106. Chaplin states that a “participation ontology. . . remains confined within the traditional dualistic and hierarchical terminology of a ‘lower’ human realm . . . and a ‘higher’ divine or transcendent” by which the “lower realm is construed as rising up toward the higher realm via participation in it.” She continues, “It could be argued that an even more Radically Orthodox Christian understanding of aesthetics would depart from this traditional hierarchical terminology and recognize that the summons to reclaim culture is not adequately stated as a mediation between corporeal and incorporeal or physical and nonphysical but rather as a vindication and healing of an originally and enduringly good but now also broken and

force as the true and the good.”¹³ Though a powerful form of revelation, beauty remains dependent on other elements without which her real magic cannot be fully worked. Even granting an objective status to beauty as part of the world, as well as its ability to enlighten and move the self beyond itself, such aesthetic events can at best leave us longing for something more, some other complement whereby to complete the perception of revelation.¹⁴

Now for Bavinck to speak of the revelation of beauty in a loose way will not do, for beauty is a distinct kind of revelation. This is what is at the heart of Bavinck’s critique of beauty as a transcendental. Bavinck, speaking of the neo-Platonic influences of the church fathers, states that the true, the good and the beautiful were “separated from the theistic foundation and marked as

corrupted creation. . . . [T]he Reformed tradition has understood such reconciliation to be, not a mediation between physical and nonphysical, visible and invisible, material and immaterial realities, but rather both a restoration and transformation . . .” (p. 104).

13. Bavinck, “Of Beauty and Aesthetics,” 259.

14. Here Bavinck’s distillation of the nature of the perception of beauty apart from the propositional and ethical elements of revelation echoes Calvin’s view of the relationship between the witness of creation and scripture. Calvin, recognizing the spiritual and therefore revelatory nature of the natural world, speaks of the Spirit “transfusing into all things his energy, and breathing into them essence, life, and movement. . . .” See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. J. T. McNeill, trans. F. L. Battles (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 1:14. However, in contrast to the revelation of creation, Calvin deems Scripture as a critical source of a true (saving) knowledge of God. For like spectacles that bring the subject into focus, Scripture can gather up the “confused knowledge” in our minds and give us a clear picture of God. See Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.6. William Dyrness, in his discussion on *Institutes* 1.6.1, adds a helpful recognition that Calvin (in a way that parallels Bavinck’s movement) is simultaneously holding forth both more and less of a role for the beauty of creation. He states that for Calvin “the world cannot ‘hold’ God, and therefore no image can be transparent to the Divine, as icons are for the Orthodox. But in another sense Calvin wants to redefine what is religious . . . God’s presence can be glimpsed in a larger sphere of activity.” See William Dyrness, *Reformed Theology and Visual Culture: The Protestant Imagination from Calvin to Edwards* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 75–76.

metaphysical realities; or even elevated to the rank of gods. . . .”¹⁵ He reiterates this concern in his *Reformed Dogmatics* in a passage dealing with God’s majesty:

In the created world there is a faint reflection of the inexpressible glory and majesty that God possess . . . what we have here, however, is . . . not identity. Speaking of creatures, we call them pretty, beautiful, splendid; but for the beauty of God scripture has a special word: glory. For that reason it is not advisable to speak—with the church fathers, scholastics, and Catholic theologians—of God’s beauty. Augustine already spoke in this vain, proceeding from the basic premise that “whatever is, insofar as it has being, is true, good, and beautiful.”¹⁶

Bavinck contends that the discontinuity between divine beauty (along with truth and goodness) and creation’s beauty is not merely a Protestant hang up or the lack of a truly eschatological focus. The patristic tradition, including the likes of Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa, Cyril of Jerusalem, Theodoret, Jerome, Isidore, and so forth, all denied that in the hereafter we would see God “with respect to his essence.” For Bavinck, the communicable attributes maintain both a qualitative and quantitative distinction. He reiterates this truth as part and parcel with the phenomenology of beauty itself; for, finite beings are incapable of perceiving the infinite. God’s incommunicable invisibility—which is more (though not less) than simple immateriality—must always mitigate the nature of the communicability of divine attributes lest in bringing man up to God, we inadvertently bring God down to fit a finite frame. This creaturely limitation is why Bavinck believed Pseudo-Dionysius’ mystical view of participation in the divine beauty is implicitly pantheistic. Such a view duplicates the idealist panentheism of Hegel who saw beauty as the commodity bonding the Geist to the world. This pantheism was also reflected in early Schelling’s elevation of beauty such that art stood above religion and

15. Bavinck, “On Beauty and Aesthetics,” 255.

16. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:254.

philosophy. As Bavinck puts it, for Schelling, art was “the complete revelation of the absolute, the perfect manifestation of the divine idea.”¹⁷ One must ever guard against an idolatrous elevation of beauty to a metaphysical category that transcends the creator-creation divide.

Here Bavinck’s suspicion that an over-elevated understanding of beauty infringes on God’s glory finds resonance from a different voice on the theological spectrum—that of Karl Barth. Barth notes:

If we say that God is beautiful, and make this statement the final explanation of the assertion that God is glorious, do we not jeopardize or even deny the majesty and holiness and righteousness of God’s love? Do we not bring God . . . into the sphere of man’s oversight and control, into proximity to the ideal of all human striving? [. . .] Certainly we have every reason to be cautious here.¹⁸

That Barth drew from Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics* in preparation for his *Church Dogmatics* is well known, being possibly most conspicuous in Barth’s adoption of Bavinck’s idiomatic “Deus dixit.”¹⁹ Yet in reading Barth’s distinction of the relationship between glory and beauty, his concern over Augustine’s development, and his assessment of Pseudo-Dionysius’ approach to divine beauty as “hardly veiled Platonism,”²⁰ it is hard not to hear Barth reframing Bavinck’s concerns as part of his own account of the relationship between God’s glory and beauty.²¹

17. Bavinck, “On Aesthetics and Beauty,” 247.

18. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (New York: T & T Clark, 2004), 2/1:651.

19. John Visser has recently offered an assessment of the positive nature of Barth’s adoption of Bavinck. See John Vissers, “Karl Barth’s Appreciative Use of Herman Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics*,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (2010): 79–86.

20. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2/1:651.

21. Cf. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:252–55 with Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2/1:649–667. Although we know that Barth read Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics* in preparation for his *Church Dogmatics*, there is no evidence to

However, it must be said that the real point of comparison between Bavinck and Barth is not their concern over distinguishing divine and creaturely beauty. If this were the case, it would simply place them both within the dominant trope of such twentieth-century Protestant theologians as Anders Nygren, Jaroslav Pelikan, and Eberhard Jüngel.²² What makes the comparison between Barth and Bavinck all the more fascinating is that while they echo sentiments common to other Protestants, they stand out by doing so within a largely positive and spirited defense of beauty as a category of revelation itself. This is not to say that Barth and Bavinck saw eye to eye on the nature of that revelation. For whereas Bavinck associated beauty with his view of general revelation,²³ Barth saw the divine voice as irreducibly linked to the revelation of beauty. Therefore, for Barth “the statement that God is . . . beautiful . . . cannot claim to have any independent significance” for “we must keep strictly to Jesus Christ. . . . It is indeed only of Him that we can speak when we dare to say such extravagant things about ourselves and the rest of creation.”²⁴

At this point we are in a position to see Bavinck's unique place in twentieth-century theological aesthetics. On the one hand, Bavinck (along with Barth) stands out among twentieth century Protestants for his unusually positive and robust place for a theological understanding of beauty. As we have seen he did this by his articulation of beauty as a distinct kind of general revelation. Moreover, it was precisely because of Bavinck's view of the nature of beauty's role within general revelation that he demonstrated such

suggest that Barth read Bavinck's article, “On Beauty and Aesthetics.”

22. See Edward Farley, *Faith and Beauty: A Theological Aesthetic* (London: Ashgate, 2001), 68–74.

23. While not salvific revelation, “all peoples have to a certain extent recognized this revelation” for “even idolatry presupposes that God's ‘power’ and ‘divinity’ manifest itself in creatures.” See Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:310.

24. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2/1:667–68. The classic exposition of the distinction between these two versions of revelation can be found in the book by Emil Brunner and Karl Barth, *Natural Theology* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2002).

a keen awareness of the denial of objective beauty in the modern imagination. Here, in somewhat bold relief from Barth, Bavinck adumbrates many contemporary scholars (Milbank, Hart, etc.) who desire to defend beauty as an objective quality of the world; for, these scholars ground a theological appraisal of beauty in the objectivity, depth, and longing that the revelation of beauty engenders, and they argue that creation, though fallen, still has an irreducible, objective aesthetic revelation, a revelation pointing towards a higher beauty albeit not identical with that beauty.

THE TRINITY AND BEAUTY

To understand the second theological implication of Bavinck's aesthetics we must return to his concern regarding the fracture of beauty in modern thought. This fracture includes not only separating beauty from creation but also separating beauty from its natural relationship with the true and the good. Bavinck believed that since this triad acts as a created revelation of God's own transcendent truth, goodness and beauty, it was originally intended to work together.²⁵ He is not stating that this is necessarily the case in our fallen world, however. Rather, he asserts only that since the triad reflects the divine qualities, truth, goodness, and beauty were originally intended to subside together in unity despite the fact that they appear in asymmetrical form in the fallen world.

Consequently, Bavinck's description of the relationships among the triad evinces an uncanny resemblance to his formulation of the

25. It is really quite remarkable that, a hundred years before the current debate, Bavinck returns to Plato as the clue to a proper view of beauty. For an excellent review of the contemporary ways to read Plato regarding beauty, see Jamie Smith, "Will the Real Plato Please Stand Up?" in *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition*, eds. James K. A. Smith and James H. Olthuis (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 61–72. Bavinck implies the unnatural nature of separating the triad with the simple question: "is beauty essentially bound to content, as well as to truth and goodness, and even if it were possible, is it really permissible to break this triad? In short, is Satan beautiful if he appears as an angel of light?" Bavinck, "On Beauty and Aesthetics," (p. 257).

relationships among the persons of the Trinity. This is not to say that Bavinck explicitly states a trinitarian structure for aesthetics. However, it is difficult to ignore the striking similarity in Bavinck's description of the relationship of the true, the good and the beautiful with his view of the Trinity. For example, when describing the triad Bavinck states, "the true, the good, and the beautiful are one but also three." Additionally, when reflecting upon the created nature of the three he restates, "their unity, however, does not exclude diversity." These relationships among the members of the triad mirrors his Augustinian trinitarian formulations.²⁶

In describing the power of the intellect (corresponding to the true), intention (corresponding to the good), and aesthetic delight (corresponding to beauty), Bavinck makes clear that the source of the three is conceptualization or the true. Then, emerging both dependently and simultaneously, is our pursuit of the good by which we shape the world "according to our ideas." Bavinck reiterates that these two—the true (which is the source) and the good (which emerges from the source)—are paired in a unique relationship. And then, in addition to this initial relationship "comes a third: the aesthetic" which unlike the unique relationship between the first two "consist in the agreement" between the true and the good. It is marked by "harmony" and "fullness." Although Bavinck sketches the trinitarian structure subtly, and although this structure is spread throughout his essay, a careful reading of his aesthetics reveals an implicit identification of the true with the Father, the good with the Son, and the beautiful with the Spirit.²⁷

26. See Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:316. It is very interesting to compare Bavinck's use of the triad with Plato. For Plato, the Good is the ontological basis for truth and the epistemological basis of the knowledge of the truth. The knowledge of the truth then fills us with beauty. While Bavinck's model reverses the order of the true and the good, it retains the dependent role of beauty upon the true and the good. For a helpful review of Plato's original model see Diogenes Allen, *Philosophy for Understanding Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 28.

27. Bavinck, "On Beauty and Aesthetics," 254.

That Bavinck would adopt a trinitarian structure to the corresponding human capacities for the true, the good and the beautiful should come as little surprise given his affinity for Augustine's psychological analogy of the Trinity, a model which discovers traces of the Trinity "in the faculties of the soul."²⁸ What should draw our attention, given the history of theological aesthetics, is Bavinck's distinct development of the Augustinian model such that the Spirit has a unique relationship to beauty that is characterized by "harmony," "unity," "perfection," and "completeness".²⁹ Thus to rightly appreciate Bavinck's unique theological aesthetic we would do well to place Bavinck's association of the Spirit with Beauty in the context of church history. Here Patrick Sherry's work, *Spirit and Beauty*, proves invaluable.³⁰

According to Sherry, the association of the Spirit with beauty has a long history, finding its inception early in the church. The tradition begins with Irenaeus' association of the Spirit's work in creation with adornment, Clement of Alexander's connection of the Holy Spirit to artistic beauty in the world, and the Cappadocean's eschatological association of the Spirit with perfecting or "beautifying." There are many names that could be added to this early patristic list such as St. Basil, whose treatise, *On The Holy Spirit*, claims that the Spirit's work is to return us to our natural beauty. This patristic trend was conspicuously absent in Augustine, however, who distinctly connected beauty to the Son. Augustine's legacy was very strong in the West and remained the primary association. His view was further embellished by Aquinas and Bonaventure. One has to wait for the work of Calvin before a robust connection between the Holy Spirit and beauty can be reclaimed. Moreover, it is not until the Eighteenth century, with the work of Jonathan Edwards, that an "aesthetic discussion" is keyed into "a

28. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:325.

29. Bavinck, "On Beauty and Aesthetics," 256.

30. Patrick Sherry, *Spirit and Beauty* (London: SCM, 2002).

fully developed Augustinian Trinitarian Theology.”³¹ In his *On the Trinity*, Edwards argues that the Father and Son delight in each other and breathe forth the Holy Spirit in love and joy; thus, “the Holy Ghost, Being the Love and Joy of God, is his beauty.”³² In like manner Hans Urs von Balthasar uses Augustine’s view of the Spirit as the harmony between the triune members as the basis for connecting the Spirit with beauty. Speaking of the Spirit as the bond between the Father and Son, Balthasar states, “In this incomprehensible unity the Spirit is the locus of the beauty of God.”³³

With this brief historical sketch a very fascinating picture of the uniqueness of Bavinck’s trinitarian aesthetic appears. Drawing on Calvin, Bavinck’s robust creation pneumatology echoes the early patristic connection of the Spirit to the common encounter with beauty.³⁴ Yet, like Edwards and Balthasar, Bavinck seems to move beyond Calvin by intimating a connection between the Spirit and beauty in an Augustinian trinitarian fashion. Thus he places his theological aesthetic in the company of such renowned modern aesthetic theologians as Edwards and Balthasar. This should cause one to take pause. For it is striking to see Bavinck’s aesthetic theology in the company of two such celebrated theologians.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to unpack fully the unique aesthetic developments of Edwards and Balthasar. Yet a few things should be noted. First, Edwards’ concept of beauty as a disposition toward being is so distinct that it is unique to any other theologian’s concern. Additionally, Bavinck’s concern regarding the transcendent nature of being shows a contrast with Edwards who, at least on one level, freely associates beauty as a transcendental.

31. Sherry, *Spirit and Beauty*, 12.

32. Sherry, *Spirit and Beauty*, 12–15.

33. Sherry, *Spirit and Beauty*, 16–17.

34. Patrick Sherry places Calvin in the same line as the Cappadocians in connecting the Spirit to beauty. See Sherry, *Spirit and Beauty*, 11–12.

Bavinck's work resonates more naturally with Balthasar's theology than with Edwards' for two reasons. First, Balthasar, like Bavinck, is leery of allowing beauty to control theology. Second, Balthasar's use of Aquinas to speak of the splendor of divine truth and goodness parallels Bavinck's view on the primacy of truth and goodness as the "content" necessary for beauty.³⁵

Since Balthasar postdates Bavinck, and since Edwards only makes a handful of appearances in Bavinck's works, neither of them are directly related to Bavinck's aesthetic formulations. It seems fair to conclude, therefore, that Bavinck, despite clear resonances with a number of theologians, is not merely recycling previous theological aesthetics but formulates his own distinctly trinitarian theological aesthetics, an aesthetic both sensitive to the broader Christian tradition and reflecting his unique neo-Calvinist perspective.

CONCLUSION: AN UNASHAMEDLY THEOLOGICAL AESTHETICS

We have seen that Bavinck, though happy to recount the philosophical history, made use of theological categories—especially Augustinian trinitarian formulations—to frame and analyze aesthetics. Through a careful examination of his work, Bavinck's true intent becomes clear: his desire is to guide his readers through the increasingly reductive empiricism of modern thought and to reclaiming created beauty as a revelation of God designed to direct us toward a transcendent beauty—the beauty that God alone possess in his categorically distinct trinitarian glory. Since the time of Bavinck's publications almost one-hundred years ago, the need for a Christian reframing of aesthetics (and epistemology and ethics) has become all the more pressing. While some headway has been made, one wonders how the development of theological aesthetics would have been different if Bavinck's contribution initially had a wider circulation. Though a century late to the larger theological party, it may well prove to be just in time for those

35. Sherry, *Spirit and Beauty*, 75.

attempting to defend a fresh theological account of beauty in our late modern world.

Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck on the Subject of Education as seen in Two Public Addresses

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The names of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck are often spoken together because of their connection to the Free University of Amsterdam and Dutch Reformed theology. This institution was founded to provide a place for the arts and sciences to flourish under the banner of Christ. On the 20th of October, 1880, one of Abraham Kuyper's dreams was fulfilled when he delivered the inaugural address for the Free University. Kuyper is well known for his ability as an orator, and perhaps his most famous quotation comes from this address. At the height of the speech he said, "there is not one square inch in the whole domain of human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry: 'Mine!'"¹ Christ's domain over all spheres of creation would set the tone for much of the work he would perform throughout the rest of his career.

Although Herman Bavinck is perhaps less known for his oratorical ability than Kuyper, his written material suggests that he too was often given to public lectures.² This article will bring together two similarities between these two Reformed thinkers. In particular it will analyze what they said about education in two

1. Abraham Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty (1880)" in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt, (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998), 489.

2. For examples of these lectures in printed form, see Herman Bavinck, *Essays on Science and Religion*, ed. John Bolt, trans. Harry Boonstra and Gerrit Sheeres (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008).

public addresses: Kuyper's inaugural at the Free University in 1880 will be compared with Bavinck's Stone Lectures given at Princeton in 1908. The topic of education and the Christian was one that occupied both of their minds and often their writings. It is therefore one that is well worth examining.

What should be said at the opening of a university that has long been a dream and now has become a reality? The title of Kuyper's address was "Souvereiniteit in Eigen Kring" ("Sphere Sovereignty"). James Bratt notes that the English translation of this phrase is rather ambiguous. It could mean "sovereignty in its circle, referring to the pluralistic ontology Kuyper unfolds in the text. But it can mean just as well sovereignty in our circle, spelling out a pluralistic sociology and epistemology which Kuyper also argues for but which does not have ontological warrant."³ Whichever meaning may be appropriate, Kuyper takes this opportunity to explain why sphere sovereignty is so important to his understanding of what the Free University should be. He says in his opening remarks:

You expect me, then, to tell you how the school we are introducing fits into the Dutch garden, why it brandishes the liberty cap on the tip of its lance, and why it peers so intently into the book of Reformed religion. Let me link the answers to all three questions to the one concept of "sphere sovereignty," pointing to sphere sovereignty as the hallmark of our institution in its national significance, its scholarly purposes, and its Reformed character.⁴

Kuyper then divides the remainder of his address into three categories accordingly: national, scholarly, and Reformed. Since we are dealing specifically with the topic of education in these public addresses, we will examine only section two concerning the scholarly purposes.

3. James D. Bratt, introduction to "Sphere Sovereignty (1880)" in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt, (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998), 462.

4. Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty (1880)," 464.

Since sphere sovereignty is the driving principle behind what Kuyper is doing in this piece, it may be best to begin with a definition of sphere sovereignty: “For Kuyper, society was made up of various spheres such as the family, business, science, and art, which derived their authority not from the state, but directly from God, to whom they were accountable.”⁵ The phrase “sphere sovereignty” that he used to describe this system was first coined at this inaugural address and later expounded in the Stone Lectures that he delivered at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1898. With this definition in mind, Kuyper viewed the state as the leading sphere, or the “sphere of spheres, which encircles the whole extent of human life.”⁶ In his structure, the state has to be the leading sphere because the state sets the boundaries of the other spheres in law.

Viewing the state as the supreme power or “sphere of spheres” may seem rather stifling in a twenty-first century context involving the spread of democracy. Kuyper did allow for some means of checks and balances to be in place so that this power of supremacy was not overtly abused by the state. One of these checks was by means of education. He said on this October day that, “Among the means that God has granted nobler peoples to defend their liberties, scholarship often stands at the forefront” (475). Kuyper takes the Apostle Paul as a chief example of how education leads to liberty:

Among the spokesmen of the Holy Spirit the man of Tarsus was the academically trained, and it was from the Pauline treasure chest, not from the mystical John nor the practical James, that Luther drew the freedom of the Reformation. I well know that learning can betray liberty and has done so more than once, but this was despite and not by virtue of its sacred mission. In its authentic form God sent it to us as an angel of light. (475)

5. Peter S. Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 154.

6. Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty (1880),” 472; hereafter cited in text.

Although Kuyper's metaphor of Paul's academic training being the gateway through which the Reformation was born may be bit of a stretch, his point that education can serve as light to grant freedom from captivity is no less profound. Clarity of thought, Kuyper believes, is the means by which truth can be found in each sphere. "To be able to think of something that is, and thus to be able to put together in our reason what is mirrored in our consciousness, is an honor bestowed by God on our human existence. To possess wisdom is a divine trait in our being" (476).

Since he is founding a Christian university, one may expect Kuyper to argue at this point in his address that the knowledge coming out of his school would be the guiding light that grants liberty to the other spheres. Yet, he is not so presumptuous. Rather, he maintains that scholarship should remain sovereign in its own sphere and should "not degenerate under the guardianship of Church or State. Scholarship creates its own life sphere in which truth is sovereign" (476). Scholarship (or education) is vital to the concept of sphere sovereignty because it creates a sphere in which truth reigns supreme. Although the sphere of scholarship is separate from that of the church, this does not lead to a search for truth simply for its own sake. The search for knowledge and attainment of wisdom should end in "adoration of the only wise God" (476). Thus scholarship should ultimately lead back to God who is sovereign over all spheres of life.

For Kuyper, another practical application of sphere sovereignty in relation to scholarship pertains to the state: "What influence should the sphere of the state have over the sphere of learning?" The state is unique in that it administers justice and also "defines its sphere of justice" (477). Kuyper makes it clear that learning should never be merely a servant of the state. When scholarship becomes a tool of the state it becomes little more than a means of propaganda. In Kuyper's construction the state does not pour knowledge into the university, but rather the university disseminates knowledge to other spheres of life.

Kuyper believed that the scholarship that would arise from the Free University was necessary for multiple reasons. First, the

sphere of the state had seen fit to allow such an institution to exist. Although he believed that Christ was sovereign over all spheres, he did not argue that therefore all people groups of the country should by default support a Christian university. He said in this speech:

“When Jews and Roman Catholics are compelled to contribute to the support of a theological faculty that in fact is and must remain Protestant, is not the sense of justice offended? So when the law of the land recognizes our right to have our own institution, and the Sovereign of the land—as we have just heard—takes our free, unencumbered institution under the protection of justice, then does not a university supported by the people themselves offer a beautiful prophecy for learning and national life?” (478)

Because such an institution as the Free University was able to exist under the laws of the state, Kuyper believed that Christians should make to most of that opportunity by supporting the flourishing of scholarship in all fields of knowledge.

HERMAN BAVINCK AND EDUCATION IN THE STONE LECTURES

Herman Bavinck delivered the Stone Lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1908 some thirty years after the opening of the Free University of Amsterdam and ten years after Kuyper had delivered his Stone Lectures in 1898. The collection commonly referred to as Bavinck’s Stone Lectures consists of ten lectures. The preface to the 1908 edition notes that only six of them were actually delivered at Princeton.⁷ The lectures center primarily around the role of revelation in various fields of life such as philosophy, nature,

7. See preface to Herman Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation: The Stone Lectures for 1908–1909, Princeton Theological Seminary*, trans. Geerhardus Vos, Nicholas M. Steffens, Henry E. Dosker (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1908). Another interesting caveat noted in the preface is that Drs. Gerhard Vos and B.B. Warfield prepared the manuscript of the lectures and saw the book through the press.

history, religion, Christianity, religious experience, culture, and the future.

Like Kuyper, Bavinck also makes use of the term “sphere sovereignty,” but not nearly to the same extent as does Kuyper. As noted above, for Kuyper, sphere sovereignty was the driving principle that led him to influence culture for the name of Christ. For Bavinck, however, it seems that sphere sovereignty is more of a tacit Reformed Principle⁸ underlying his work. Early in his lectures he writes, “Although God is immanent in every part and sphere of creation with all his perfections and all his being, nevertheless, even in that most intimate union he remains transcendent. His being is of a different and higher kind than that of the world.”⁹ Just a few pages later, in a rather Kuyperian fashion, Bavinck again refers to this idea of spheres when he speaks of the place of Christianity within history:

... the desire has reasserted itself in modern theology and philosophy to do justice to this central fact of universal history, and to trace on all sides the lines of connection established by God himself between revelation and the several spheres of the created universe.¹⁰

There are at least two points to notice about this quotation. First, as the central fact of universal history to which he refers, is the place of Christianity in the unfolding of history. Bavinck seems to follow the pattern set out by Kuyper in which the creation mandate is a universal order to rule over creation. Second, Bavinck acknowledges God’s working in several different spheres, and he insists at the same time that God remains sovereign over these spheres by his providence.

8. The term “Reformed Principle” is a reference back to the third section of Kuyper’s inaugural address which bears this title. See Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty (1880),” 480–90.

9. Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation*, 22.

10. Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation*, 24.

When referring to a recent return to philosophy and religion, Bavinck notes how this return is taking place in all spheres: “It is not peculiar to this or that particular branch of learning, but manifests itself in the spheres of history, jurisprudence, and medicine, as well as that of natural science; its influence is no less strong in literature and art than in religion and theology themselves.”¹¹ Again, in this case the use of the term “sphere” is more of a passing, implicit principle than an overarching theme. From these examples one can see that sphere sovereignty seems to be an underlying principle in what Bavinck is doing in *Philosophy of Revelation*, but it is not the driving force of what he has to say about education as it is for Kuyper.¹²

As stated earlier, the primary aim of this paper is to examine Kuyper’s and Bavinck’s understanding of education in these two public lectures. As the title of Bavinck’s lectures suggests (i.e., *The Philosophy of Revelation*), his lectures were not primarily about education but rather about his understanding of revelation. He achieves his purpose in a twofold manner. First, he shows that much philosophical thought from the Enlightenment to his day effectively undermined any absolute belief in revelation. Second, he demonstrates how the reality of revelation in Christianity distinguishes it among other religions and philosophies. Hence he claims: “With the reality of revelation, therefore, Christianity stands or falls.”¹³ Bavinck applies this principle to the topic of education and argues that revelation, properly understood through the lens of Christianity, will lead one to a better understanding of revelation. Therefore, even though the primary purpose of his Stone Lectures is

11. Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation*, 30.

12. Surprisingly, the word “sphere” appears quite often in *The Philosophy of Revelation*, especially in the first half. However, these usages are generally similar to what has been noted above—sphere sovereignty is not a dominant theme. Cf. Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation*, 45, 86 (sphere is used three times on this page), 98, 99, 107, 129, 130, 149, 169, and 195. It is interesting to note that there is no reference to “sphere” in the latter third of the lectures.

13. Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation*, 20.

to present Christianity's view of revelation, the concept of education does play a major role in this work, albeit indirectly.

Education is a major topic of Bavinck's larger corpus. He published three books specifically on this topic.¹⁴ One of the first principles underlying Bavinck's philosophy of education was that education is not the final answer for how to better the individual or society. He saw this view as more of an unfulfilled enlightenment ideology. He says in his lecture, "All culture, whatever significance it may have, just as all education, civilization, development, is absolutely powerless to renew the inner man. For it always works externally, and does not penetrate into the heart of man."¹⁵ Education stands as an external force that can work towards change, but it is not ultimately the catalyst that can cause inner change as this belongs to the role of Christ in the human heart.

In *The Philosophy of Revelation* Bavinck's primary encounter with education comes in the tenth lecture, "Revelation and the Future." In this chapter Bavinck is pessimistic about modern man's blindness concerning his own goodness. He says that modern man "can conceive nothing more wonderful than this beautiful world. . . . He is in his own estimation no mere creature, but a creator and redeemer of himself and society" (272). Bavinck is too well aware of the depravity of man to believe that education can somehow serve

14. Herman Bavinck, *Handleiding Bij Het Onderwijs in den Christelijken Godsdienst* (Guide to the Teaching of Christian Religion), 1st ed. (Kampen: Kok, 1913), *De Nieuwe Opvoeding* (The New Education) (Kampen: Kok, 1928), *Paedagogische Beginselen* (Pedagogic Principles) (Kampen: Kok, 1904). Unfortunately, none of these books have been translated into English. The closest that the English reader may come in accessing these works is through Jakob Brederveld, *Christian Education: A Summary and Critical Discussion of Bavinck's Pedagogical Principles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Smitter, 1928). This anonymous translation of Brederveld's *Hoofddlijnen der paedagogiek van Dr. Herman Bavinck: met critische beschouwing*, Voor onderwijs en opvoeding 25 (Amsterdam: De Standaard, 1927), provides select translations and a critical discussion of Bavinck's *Paedagogische Beginselen*. See also Cornelius Richard Jaarman, *The Educational Philosophy of Herman Bavinck* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1935).

15. Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation*, 263; hereafter cited in text.

as a savior of society. Although he knew education in itself cannot renew the inner man, he was also aware of the important role that education plays in society. He writes, “Education is of far too great importance for the future of humanity to be abandoned to caprice or chance” (277).

One must work backwards, so to speak, to deduce what Bavinck is actually saying about education in this particular chapter. Given the chapter’s title, he makes an implicit prediction as to where the current state of what he calls the “modern man” (271) will lead if the path of ignoring revelation is followed further—nowhere good. If it is valid to infer that Bavinck believes the opposite of the position that he attributes to the modern man, then there are several points he makes implicitly about education that are worth noting.

First, his understanding of human depravity and the need of a redeemer are crucial to Bavinck’s educational philosophy. In his estimation the modern man does not view himself as a “mere creature, but a creator and redeemer of himself and society. More and more he becomes his own providence” (272). In broader terms the placing of man as his own redeemer has replaced Christ, the preeminent and only redeemer who is able to transform society.

Closely tied to the above ideas, Bavinck also writes that an evolutionary understanding of the human race as perpetually improving has led to a false understanding of the role of education in society. The belief that man has “evolved himself from the smallest beginnings” leads to the belief in the “grand and mighty man” (272). Having an overestimation of the ability of man, apart from Christ and revelation, leads only to man as the source of redemption. Bavinck goes on to explain that when the constant improvement of mankind is the *telos* of humanity, this view will eventually lead to a utilitarian society. He sees the ramifications of this utilitarianism as being racial manipulation, restriction of marriage to the mentally and physically capable, and eugenics of many brands.

With this framework in mind, Bavinck approaches his longest direct treatment of education in these lectures. He writes that the

modern man will base his view of education upon “genetic psychology” (278). He links this to a naturalistic, evolutionary view in which man must first become one with his surroundings and then must understand that the soul of man “is cognate with the souls of the animals and plants and all creatures” (278). Bavinck relates this view to education in that modern man must move away from giving attention to the training of the soul and from learning fixed dogmas. Education in the future will place the child and his or her peculiarities at the center:

The child is born good, for there is no hereditary sin; every defect in the child is only a hard shell, which contains the germ of virtue, which as such has the right not to be eradicated, but to be trained . . . if the child is not good in later life, then it has been a victim of its parents and teachers, and upon them lies the guilt. (279)

From this quotation one can gather that Bavinck did not accept a position on education in which a child is an empty vessel waiting to be filled with knowledge by the world. There must be some type of training present for the child to learn appropriately.

Although Bavinck focuses much of his attention on how what he terms the “doctrine of evolution” (280) has altered the modern man’s understanding of pedagogy, he ultimately decides that this is but one cog in a worldview within which the “conception of world and life has been formed under the influence of Christianity” (281). It seems that Bavinck’s argument concerning education in this instance is that, when it is removed from a Christian framework, it will begin to unravel. Thus he states that if there is to be a reformation in pedagogy, “it cannot be satisfied with a mere change in the system of education; it must proceed to a total rebuilding of society” (281).

Much can be gathered from this position in which a Christian framework is vital to understanding education. Much of what Bavinck has said about education in these pages could most likely be applied to other fields, or spheres, as well. He chooses to examine how an evolutionary framework apart from Christianity

would result in a fundamental shift in how education is practiced. To be exact, there would less of a focus upon fixed dogma, the development of the soul, and eternal matters. The focus would shift to a utilitarian mindset in which the goal of mankind is the improvement of the human race.

COMPARISON AND CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

Sphere sovereignty may be an underlying principle at work in Bavinck's thought at the time, but, as we have noted, it does not take center stage as it does for Kuyper. This is evident in that Bavinck saw the Christian tradition and beliefs of the church not as a separate sphere from education but as one that was indispensable for a proper view of education. Although education may appear as a separate sphere, it is intricately connected to a larger picture of how Christianity transforms various social systems. Bavinck makes the case that the educational system would hardly resemble its current state were the influence of Christianity removed. There does not appear to be as strong of a division between the relation of knowledge to the church and the academy as there is in Kuyper.

Perhaps the most important contribution Bavinck made to this discussion on education is with respect to whether his prophecies of "Revelation and the Future" have come true. First, regarding his opinion that an evolutionary framework will lead to genetic psychology taking the center stage, in a post World War era it seems unlikely that society would accept all forms of eugenics *prima facie*. His discussion here may have more relevance to biomedical ethics than to pedagogy. Second, Bavinck is correct that education today has less of a focus upon the development of the soul and upon the integration of the heart, mind, and soul. Bavinck pictures a distorted world in which "gymnastics, sports, and all kinds of play ought to take up a large . . . part in education" if this course of thought is followed (280). In the faulty world he imagines, theology, philosophy, and literature will be replaced by "natural sciences" that will allegedly further mankind. Bavinck is correct that, in most educational systems today, utilitarian ends (although

it is usually greater individual salary rather than the greater productive good) drive the direction of education.¹⁶ He offers an excellent counterbalance for a world that has forgotten the meaning of what it means to be an educated person. He is correct that the human race can never be improved to a perfect state as long as sin exists in a fallen world.

Bavinck's prediction concerning an overemphasis on individuality is also quite relevant. He states that, in the future, "They [i.e., parents and teachers] have to bow to the superiority of the child; a child is only another name for majesty" (279). His picture of the future is one in which autonomy and individual choice are society's top priorities.

Both Kuyper and Bavinck seem to sense the urgency of incorporating Christian teaching into one's worldview. Kuyper expresses his gratefulness that the state has allowed for such an institution to exist. On the other hand, he speaks to the bleak outlook that lies ahead if the modern man is separated from the Christian faith. Additionally, both of these figures are aware of the importance that education in the faith as well as education through the lens of faith plays in society. In Kuyper's view, scholarship serves as a sphere by which truth can be found in other spheres of life. For Bavinck, scholarship is still able to bring truth to the forefront, but it also brings light to the soul of the individual and to society. It is perhaps best to conclude with Bavinck's own thoughts on this subject:

Christianity is as religion much more than a matter of feeling or temperament; it embraces the whole man, all humanity, and the totality of the world. (279)

For education to be reformed it must involve a renewal of the heart, mind, and soul.

16. Numerous studies written in the last decade bemoan the decline of the arts in university settings in favor of more profitable industries such as sciences and engineering.

Neither “Copernican” nor “Van Tilian”: Re-Reading Cornelius Van Til’s Reformed Apologetics in light of Herman Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics*

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INTRODUCTION^{*}

As a Presbyterian it is a special pleasure to be with you here in the cradle of Presbyterianism in order to reflect upon the relationship between Herman Bavinck (1854–1921) and one of his American Presbyterian proteges—Cornelius Van Til (1895–1987). After providing a few introductory remarks on Van Til’s neo-Calvinist heritage, I will summarize his basic attitude toward Bavinck’s theology and provide a snapshot of how the English translations of Bavinck’s works have influenced the perception of Bavinck’s influence upon Van Til in recent scholarship. I will then adduce three lines of evidence which, when taken together, suggest

^{*}I wish to thank Professor John Muether and two student colleagues, Andrew McGinnis and Stefan Lindblad, for providing helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper. Also, subsequent to the delivery of this paper at the 2010 Edinburgh Bavinck Conference, I completed a thesis that further develops the themes, questions, and conclusions presented herein. See Laurence R. O’Donnell III, “Kees Van Til als Nederlandse-Amerikaanse, Neo-Calvinistisch-Presbyteriaan apologeticus: An Analysis of Cornelius Van Til’s Presupposition of Reformed Dogmatics with special reference to Herman Bavinck’s *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*” (ThM thesis, Grand Rapids, MI: Calvin Theological Seminary, 2011).

that Bavinck’s theological influence upon Van Til is pervasive. Finally, I will conclude with a brief analysis of Van Til’s appropriations of Bavinck’s thought and some reflections on the future of Van Til studies.

Van Til’s Neo-Calvinist Context

I have called Van Til an “American Presbyterian,” but his heritage is more Dutch Reformed than Presbyterian.¹ As a Dutch-American immigrant, Van Til grew up in the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC), completed his undergraduate studies at Calvin College, and attended Calvin Seminary for a year before matriculating at Princeton. While at Princeton his favorite professor was a fellow Dutch-American immigrant and former Calvin Seminary professor—Geerhardus Vos.² Upon finishing his

1. The following biographical sketch is based on John R. Muether, *Cornelius Van Til: Reformed Apologist and Churchman*, American Reformed Biographies (P&R, 2008), esp. chs. 1–3; cf. William White Jr., *Van Til, Defender of the Faith: An Authorized Biography* (Nashville and New York: Thomas Nelson, 1979); John M. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1995), 19–37; Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1998), 7–20.

2. On the scholarly affinities and strong personal relationship between Van Til and his favorite professor—Geerhardus Vos—see Muether, *Cornelius Van Til*, 51, 72; Edmund P. Clowney, “Preaching the Word of the Lord: Cornelius Van Til, VDM,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 46, no. 2 (1984): 235, 246; *idem*, “Professor John Murray at Westminster Theological Seminary,” in *The Pattern of Sound Doctrine: Systematic Theology at the Westminster Seminaries; Essays in Honor of Robert B. Strimple*, ed. David VanDrunen (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 38–39; William D. Dennison, “Analytic Philosophy and Van Til’s Epistemology,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 57, no. 1 (1995): 51–56; William Edgar, “Introduction,” in *Christian Apologetics*, ed. William Edgar, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003), 12; John M. Frame, “Systematic Theology and Apologetics at the Westminster Seminaries,” in *The Pattern of Sound Doctrine: Systematic Theology at the Westminster Seminaries; Essays in Honor of Robert B. Strimple*, ed. David VanDrunen (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 96; *idem*, “The Problem of Theological Paradox,” in *Foundations of Christian Scholarship: Essays in the Van Til Perspective*, ed. Gary North (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1976), 319–20; *idem*, “Cornelius Van Til,” in *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, ed. Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1993), 157; Richard B.

academic training, Van Til pastored for a year in the CRC. He turned down four job offers to teach at Calvin College and Seminary, including one offer to succeed his former systematics professor, Louis Berkhof.³ Therefore, although Van Til's academic career played out in a predominantly Presbyterian institution (Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia), his primary theological heritage is Dutch Reformed.

It is impossible, however, to reduce Van Til's theological pedigree to one tradition.⁴ He himself admits that a panoply of philosophical and theological tributaries flow into his thought,⁵ and

Gaffin, Jr., "Some Epistemological Reflections on 1 Cor 2:6–16," *Westminster Theological Journal* 57, no. 1 (1995): 103; White, *Van Til, Defender of the Faith*, 35–36, 45, 48; David VanDrunen, "A System of Theology? The Centrality of Covenant for Westminster Systematics," in *The Pattern of Sound Doctrine: Systematic Theology at the Westminster Seminaries; Essays in Honor of Robert B. Strimple*, ed. David VanDrunen (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 204; William D. Dennison, *Paul's Two-Age Construction and Apologetics* (Lanham, MD, London: University Press of America, Inc., 1985), 92–94; *idem*, "The Eschatological Implications of Genesis 2:15 for Apologetics," in *Revelation and Reason: New Essays in Reformed Apologetics*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint and Lane G. Tipton (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 203; Charles G. Dennison, *History for a Pilgrim People: The Historical Writings of Charles G. Dennison*, ed. Danny E. Olinger and David K. Thompson (Willow Grove, PA: The Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2002), 73–77, 121n25, 217–18.

3. Muether, *Cornelius Van Til*, 155–60; cf. James Daane, *A Theology of Grace: An Inquiry Into and Evaluation of Dr. C. Van Til's Doctrine of Common Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1954), 16n1.

4. E.g., Van Til published apologetic critiques against modern developments both in American Presbyterianism and in the *Gereformeerde Kerken van Nederland*. See Cornelius Van Til, *The Confession of 1967: Its Theological Background and Ecumenical Significance* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1967); *idem*, *The New Synthesis Theology of the Netherlands* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1975).

5. E.g., in the "Introduction" to his *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969), n.p., Van Til presents the following long list of theological and philosophical influences: Charles Hodge, James Henly Thornwell, Robert L. Dabney, William G. T. Shedd, Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, D. H. Th. Vollenhoven, Herman Dooyeweerd, and G. H. Stoker. Later on Van Til adds B. B. Warfield and Geerhardus Vos to the list (p. 20). On Van Til's appropriation of Dooyeweerd's and Vollenhoven's

many of these streams remain uncharted waters in Van Til scholarship.⁶ Nevertheless, he explicitly identifies Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) and Herman Bavinck as predominant influences. “Wanting to follow the Reformers,” writes Van Til, “it was natural that I read and appreciated the works of those who before me likewise attempted to do so. I first used the works of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck.”⁷ Additionally, referring to his book, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, Van Til admits that “what has been advocated in this work has in large measure been suggested by Kuyper’s thinking.”⁸ Similarly, Van Til comments on his own

interpretation of the history of philosophy, see pp. 50–51. Cf. *idem*, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology: Prolegomena and the Doctrines of Revelation, Scripture, and God*, ed. William Edgar, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 13.

6. William Edgar, e.g., in Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, ed. William Edgar, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003), 57n4, makes the following editorial comment: “The full story of Van Til’s relationship to the Amsterdam philosophy, and especially to Herman Dooyeweerd, has not yet been told.” (On Van Til’s complicated relationship with Dooyeweerd, see Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic*, 18–19, 48–52; John M. Frame, *The Amsterdam Philosophy: A Preliminary Critique* (Pilgrim Press, 1972), 37–39). Likewise, Charles G. Dennison notes that Van Til’s relationship to Kuyper needs more study (*History for a Pilgrim People*, 136n54). Furthermore, few studies attempt to analyze Van Til’s appropriation of his self-named Reformed predecessors at any length. Owen Anderson, however, devotes a chapter to Van Til’s critiques of B. B. Warfield (see *Benjamin B. Warfield and Right Reason: The Clarity of General Revelation and Function of Apologetics* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005), ch. 4), and Brian G. Mattson evaluates Van Til’s critiques of Bavinck (“Van Til on Bavinck: An Assessment,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 70, no. 1 (2008): 111–27).

7. Cornelius Van Til, “My Credo,” in *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Theology and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til*, ed. E. R. Geehan (Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1971), 8–9; cf. *ibid.*, 11; White, *Van Til, Defender of the Faith*, 34–36. Van Til’s self-reflection upon his long academic career begins as follows: “In my days at Calvin College and Seminary I read Kuyper and Bavinck assiduously and followed them through thick and thin” (Cornelius Van Til, “The Development of My Thinking,” *A Letter To John Vander Stelt*, 1968; Reproduced in Eric D. Bristley, *A Guide to the Writings of Cornelius Van Til 1895–1987* (Chicago: Olive Tree Communications, 1995), 14).

8. Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 233–34.

apologetic method, asking, “And have I, following such a method, departed radically from the tradition of Kuyper and Bavinck? On the contrary I have learned all this primarily from them.”⁹ In terms of dogmatic influences, therefore, the Dutch neo-Calvinist stream is a prominent—if not the *most* prominent—tributary flowing into Van Til’s thought.¹⁰

Van Til’s Preeminent Esteem for Bavinck

Within this neo-Calvinist tributary, Van Til accords Bavinck the place of preeminence. He esteems Bavinck’s *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* as “the greatest and most comprehensive statement of Reformed systematic theology in modern times.”¹¹ His scholarly

9. Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 301; cf. similar remarks in *idem*, *Common Grace and the Gospel* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1972), 155–56; *idem*, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 13; *idem*, *The New Synthesis*, 30.

10. K. Scott Oliphint, “Forward,” in *The Defense of the Faith*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint, 4th ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), ix-x, asserts the following: “To understand Van Til’s contribution to Reformed apologetics, one needs to see not simply his criticisms of Kuyper, Bavinck, and Warfield, but, more importantly, the ways in which he was able to take the best of these Reformed theological giants and incorporate their theological insights into his own apologetic methodology.” *Idem*, “Appendix: Cornelius Van Til and the Reformation of Christian Apologetics,” in *Revelation and Reason: New Essays in Reformed Apologetics*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint and Lane G. Tipton (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 295n45, similarly asserts: “The Dutch influence of Van Til could arguably be the most significant influence that has contributed to his Reformed apologetic.” William Edgar, moreover, in editorial comments throughout Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, observes the following: Kuyper was Van Til’s “mentor” (320n4; cf. 17N7), and Van Til pervasively appropriated Bavinck’s doctrine of God (5, 29n8, 89n1, 319n1, 323n8, 335n33, 341n53, 353nn12, 14, 354n20, 369n1).

11. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 89; cf. *ibid.*, 29; *idem*, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 44; *idem*, *The New Synthesis*, 37; *idem*, Appendix 2 in White, *Van Til, Defender of the Faith*, 225; *idem*, *The Sovereignty of Grace: An Appraisal of G. C. Berkouwer’s View of Dordt* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1969), 27; *idem*, *The Theology of James Daane* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1959), 92; *idem*, *The Protestant Doctrine of Scripture*, In *Defense of Biblical Christianity* 1

interaction with Bavinck’s thought began early on in his academic career and continued throughout;¹² accordingly, nearly 1,200 references to Bavinck’s name pervade Van Til’s publications.¹³ It is no wonder, then, that Van Til admits that he is “greatly indebted to the great Reformed dogmaticians of modern times, such as Charles Hodge, Thornwell, Dabney, Shedd, Kuyper *and especially Herman Bavinck*.”¹⁴

(Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967), 29; *idem*, “As I Think of Bavinck,” *International Reformed Bulletin* 9, no. 27 (1966): 19–26; *idem*, “Bavinck the Theologian: A Review Article,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 24, no. 1 (1961): 48–49. Commenting on Van Til’s statement, William Edgar notes, “Herman Bavinck (1854–1921) was a major influence on Van Til. He was perhaps the most significant force in evangelical Reformed theology in the twentieth century” (*An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 89n1). For more on Van Til’s assessment of Bavinck, see Mattson, “Van Til on Bavinck”; Muether, *Cornelius Van Til*, 56, 115–16. Benjamin B. Warfield, who Van Til counts among his predecessors, provides a similar commendation: “He [i.e., Bavinck] has given us the most valuable treatise on *Dogmatics* written during the last quarter of a century—a thoroughly wrought out treatise which we never consult without the keenest satisfaction and abundant profit” (Benjamin B. Warfield, “Review of Herman Bavinck, *De Zekerheid des Geloofs* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1901),” *The Princeton Theological Review* 1, no. 1 (January 1903): 148).

12. Van Til’s second academic publication is his review of Bavinck’s *Paedagogische Beginselen* and *De Nieuwe Opvoeding* in the *Princeton Theological Review* 27 (Jan 1929): 135–36; cf. Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic*, 10; White, *Van Til, Defender of the Faith*, 77–78.

13. In terms of raw tabulation (i.e., no differentiation between text and footnotes, etc.) Van Til refers to Bavinck ~1,193 times throughout his collected works, third only to Calvin (~3,413 references) and Kuyper (~1,685 references). His most frequent references to Bavinck occur in the following books: *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 109 references; *idem*, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 105 references; *idem*, *The New Synthesis*, 103 references. In light of our thesis regarding Bavinck’s neo-Calvinist influence it is worth noting that Van Til references neo-Calvinist theologians (i.e., Kuyper and Bavinck) much more frequently than he does Presbyterian theologians, such as B. B. Warfield, ~652 references; J. Gresham Machen, ~354 references; the “Princeton Hodges” (i.e., C. W. Hodge, A. A. Hodge, and Charles Hodge), ~312 references; John Murray, ~42 references; and William G. T. Shedd, ~40 references. (NB: All tabulations are based on searches performed within the electronic collection of Van Til’s works (Cornelius Van Til, *The Works of Cornelius Van Til* (40 Vols.) (Logos Bible

Bavinck's Influence in Van Til Scholarship

Despite Van Til's copious references to Bavinck, the relationship between the two has been largely ignored in Van Til scholarship. This omission is likely due to the language barrier since Bavinck's *Dogmatiek* was not available in an unabridged English translation until 2008.¹⁵ Prior to the translation, many scholars highlighted Kuyper's influence upon Van Til, but Bavinck's influence was largely neglected.¹⁶ A nascent reassessment of

Software), <http://www.logos.com/products/details/3993>). Attempt was made to avoid duplicate entries by omitting references in the abridged edition of *The Defense of the Faith* when there were corresponding references in the unabridged edition. Also, all references within Bristley, *A Guide to the Writings of Cornelius Van Til 1895–1987*, were omitted.)

14. See "Introduction" in Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, n.p.; emphasis added. Bavinck's significant theological influence upon Van Til was noted in the following studies performed before the English translations of Bavinck's works, yet without elaboration: David Waring Diehl, "Divine Omniscience in the Thought of Charles Hartshorne and Cornelius Van Til: A Systemic Comparative Study" (PhD diss., Yorktown Heights, N. Y.: The Hartford Seminary Foundation, 1978), 48; Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 20; Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 10; *idem*, "Machen, Van Til, and the Apologetical Tradition of the OPC," in *Pressing Toward the Mark: Essays Commemorating Fifty Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, ed. Charles G. Dennison and Richard C. Gamble (Philadelphia, PA: The Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1986), 265; Wesley A. Roberts, "Cornelius Van Til," in *Reformed Theology in America: A History of Its Modern Development*, ed. David F. Wells (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 173–78; Phillip R. Thorne, *Evangelicalism and Karl Barth: His Reception and Influence in North American Evangelical Theology*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1995), 34; James Emery White, *What Is Truth? A Comparative Study of the Positions of Cornelius Van Til, Francis Schaeffer, Carl F. H. Henry, Donald Bloesch, Millard Erickson* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 36–38.

15. The unabridged English translation of Bavinck's *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* was completed between 2003 and 2008. For a brief history of abridged and unabridged English translations, see John Bolt, "Herman Bavinck Speaks English: A Bibliographic Essay," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 19 (2008): 117n1.

16. See Bernard Ramm, *Types of Apologetic Systems: An Introductory Study to the Christian Philosophy of Religion* (Wheaton, Ill: Van Kampen Press,

Bavinck’s influence, however, can be seen in Van Til scholarship subsequent to the translation. For example, in his 2008 biography of Van Til, John Muether describes Bavinck’s influence as follows:

Although interpreters often portray him as a hybrid of Kuyper and Warfield, Van Til himself generally included Bavinck in his list of interlocutors. Indeed, Bavinck is arguably the greatest of all of these influences, the evidence for which grows as Bavinck’s dogmatics is translated into English. . . . [H]e was less concerned with distinguishing himself from these antecedents than with applying their best insights with a rigorous consistency.¹⁷

Muether argues, furthermore, that one reason Van Til received sharp criticism within Presbyterian circles was a lack of familiarity with Bavinck.¹⁸ Most notably, Muether avers that “Van Til did not so

1953), 184–85, 202–08; Rousas John Rushdoony, *By What Standard? An Analysis of the Philosophy of Cornelius Van Til* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1959), 100, 157–58, 180–83, 206; *idem*, *Van Til*, International Library of Philosophy and Theology: Modern Thinkers Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1960), 12–15; Gordon R. Lewis, *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims: Approaches to Christian Apologetics* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976), 127; Jim S. Halsey, *For A Time Such As This: An Introduction to the Reformed Apologetic of Cornelius Van Til* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1978), 146, 156; Diehl, “Divine Omniscience,” 50–52; White, *Van Til, Defender of the Faith*, 34–35, 38–48, 60–62, 74, 77–78, 190; White, *What Is Truth?*, 38; Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 20; *idem*, “Systematic Theology and Apologetics,” 91; *idem*, “The Problem of Theological Paradox,” 295, 316; Thorne, *Evangelicalism and Karl Barth*, 34; Roberts, “Cornelius Van Til,” 173–78; Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 7–15, 596–600; *idem*, “Machen, Van Til, and the Apologetical Tradition of the OPC,” 264–65; *idem*, *Presuppositional Apologetics: Stated and Defended* (Powder Springs, GA and Nacogdoches, TX: American Vision Press and Covenant Media Press, 2008), 21–22; Kenneth D. Boa and Robert M. Bowman Jr., *Faith Has Its Reasons: An Integrative Approach to Defending Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2005), 256; Juha Ahvio, *Theological Epistemology of Contemporary American Confessional Reformed Apologetics*, *Schriften der Luther-Agricola-Gesellschaft* 59 (Helsinki, Finland: Luther-Agricola-Seura, 2005), 19–22, 30, 31n33, 37, 297, 322, 322n198.

17. Muether, *Cornelius Van Til*, 56.

18. Muether, *Cornelius Van Til*, 115, writes, “American Presbyterian disquiet over Van Til’s employment of presuppositional reasoning owed, as previously

much create a new apologetic as he refined Bavinck's approach, applying it to modernism, old and new."¹⁹ Similarly, Brian Mattson examines Van Til's criticisms of Bavinck in a 2008 journal article and concludes as follows:

Van Til's superficial and at-times uncharitable reading of Bavinck is unfortunate, but not nearly so unfortunate as the impression he gives that Bavinck has more in common with a "traditional" approach to epistemology and apologetics than he has in common with Van Til. If this article establishes anything it is the *deep affinity* in their theological instincts. Van Til never had an intellectual "friend" like Herman Bavinck.²⁰

Several recent Van Til studies, moreover, denote the English translations of Bavinck's works among their *raison d'être*.²¹ Therefore, with the language barrier removed, Van Til scholars are re-reading the Reformed apologist in light of his predominant dogmatic influence.

EVIDENCE FOR BAVINCK'S INFLUENCE UPON VAN TIL'S THOUGHT

Having introduced Van Til's neo-Calvinist heritage, his high esteem for Bavinck, and the reassessment of Bavinck's influence in the latest Van Til scholarship, I will now present three lines of evidence from Van Til's own writings which, when viewed as a

noted, to its unfamiliarity with the Reformed tradition, and especially unfamiliarity with Bavinck. Van Til imported many of his ideas from Bavinck, whose four-volume *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* was largely inaccessible to the English-speaking world."

19. Muether, *Cornelius Van Til*, 116.

20. Mattson, "Van Til on Bavinck," 127.

21. Donald Macleod, "Bavinck's Prolegomena: Fresh Light on Amsterdam, Old Princeton, and Cornelius Van Til," *Westminster Theological Journal* 68, no. 2 (2006): 261–62; Mattson, "Van Til on Bavinck," 111, 127; P. J. Fisk, "The Unaccommodated Bavinck and Hodge: Prolegomena with Natural Certainty," *Trinity Journal* 30 (2009): 107–08.

cumulative case, demonstrate the pervasive influence of Bavinck’s dogmatics upon Van Til’s apologetics.

Van Til’s Self-Identity as an Inheritor of Reformed Theology

The first line of evidence is Van Til’s self-identity. Van Til’s followers have frequently hailed him as the “Copernicus” of modern Christian apologetics.²² He has been lauded accordingly with the following Copernican résumé: he is said (1) to have launched the reformation of apologetics just as Calvin launched the reformation of theology,²³ (2) to have created an intellectual revolution,²⁴ (3) to be the most important theologian since Calvin,²⁵ (4) to have equaled

22. Oliphint, “Appendix: Cornelius Van Til and the Reformation of Christian Apologetics,” 280, originally published as “Cornelius Van Til and the Reformation of Christian Apologetics,” in *Die idee van reformasie: Gister en vandag*, ed. B. J. van der Walt (Potchefstroomse: Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir Christelike Hoër Onderwys, 1991); Frame, “The Problem of Theological Paradox,” 295; Clowney, “Preaching the Word of the Lord,” 242; Gary North, *Westminster’s Confession: The Abandonment of Van Til’s Legacy* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), 20–22. John W. Robbins, *Cornelius Van Til: The Man and the Myth* (Jefferson, MD: The Trinity Foundation, 1986), vii, dismisses the Copernican interpretation of Van Til as a “myth”; accordingly, he rejects Frame’s and North’s interpretations (among others) as mythological (*ibid.*, 1–2).

23. Greg L. Bahnsen, “Socrates or Christ: The Reformation of Christian Apologetics,” in *Foundations of christian Scholarship: Essays in the Van Til Perspective*, ed. Gary North (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1976), 239; cf. *ibid.*, 233–34; *idem*, “The Crucial Concept of Self-Deception in Presuppositional Apologetics,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 57, no. 1 (1995): 1n2; *idem*, *Van Til’s Apologetic*, 7.

24. Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic*, 16.

25. John M. Frame, “Backgrounds to My Thought,” in *Speaking the Truth in Love: The Theology of John M. Frame*, ed. John J. Hughes (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009), 14; *idem*, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord: An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2006), 352; *idem*, *The Doctrine of God, A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), 762. *Idem*, “The Problem of Theological Paradox,” 295, writes, “[W]hen one considers the uniqueness of his apologetic position and then further considers the implications of that apologetic for theology, one searches for superlatives to

the magnitude of Kant's revolution of philosophy,²⁶ (5) to have turned apologetics head over heels,²⁷ (6) to be the only significant advancement in apologetics since Thomas Aquinas.²⁸

However, the transformation of Cornelius into "Copernicus" appears oddly hyperbolic when contrasted against Van Til's own modesty and aversion to novelty.²⁹ In the first place, rather than promoting theological revolutions, Van Til vehemently polemicized against the heterodox "newness" that was appearing all around him. His self-named catalog of opponents includes: Presbyterianism's "new theology,"³⁰ Princeton's "new modernism" à la Barth and

describe the significance of Van Til's overall approach." Similarly, *idem*, *Cornelius Van Til*, 3, comments, "I have been criticized for using such superlatives to describe Van Til, but I intend to use them again, and to defend that use, in the present volume." At the same time, however, Frame admits that there is a need for a "sympathetic, comprehensive, critical analysis" of Van Til (*ibid.*, 3).

26. Frame, "The Problem of Theological Paradox," 297.

27. Charles G. Dennison, *History for a Pilgrim People*, 120.

28. Oliphint, "Appendix: Cornelius Van Til and the Reformation of Christian Apologetics," 280. Incidentally, the first edition of Avery Dulles' *A History of Apologetics*, Theological Resources (New York: Corpus Instrumentorum, 1971) contains no references to Van Til. The second edition includes three brief references to Van Til (*idem*, *A History of Apologetics*, 2nd ed., Modern Apologetics Library (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2002), 266, 322, 357).

29. Regarding Van Til's followers, Muether, *Cornelius Van Til*, 16, writes, "Some of them have made extravagant claims about Van Til and his legacy that would have embarrassed him. Disciples have lauded him as the most creative mind since Immanuel Kant and the greatest Christian thinker since John Calvin. The allegedly innovative features of his apologetic approach have been applauded for their proto-postmodernism and either credited or blamed for distancing both Westminster Theological Seminary and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church from their American Presbyterian past." William Edgar, "Introduction," in *Christian Apologetics*, ed. William Edgar, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003), 14, likewise asserts the following: "Cornelius Van Til is not the last word on apologetics, nor would he ever have claimed to be."

30. Van Til, *The Confession of 1967*, 1, declares the following: "Should the Confession of 1967 be adopted by that church [i.e., the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America], an entirely new phase in its life will be ushered in. This is true because this proposed Confession gives expression to and

Brunner,³¹ modernism’s “new hermeneutic,”³² the “new evangelicalism” and “new Protestantism” with their “new Christ,”³³ and the “new synthesis theology” from the Netherlands.³⁴ It is ironic therefore that some of Van Til’s interpreters have been quick to extol their “Copernicus” in terms of the very critique he leveled against his theological opponents—novelty.

In the second place, although he frequently wrote of Kant’s “Copernican revolution” in philosophy, Van Til never applied this

is based upon a new theology. Our concern in this booklet, therefore, is with the nature of this new theology which will be given creedal status if this proposed Confession is adopted by the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.” Cf. *idem*, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 11–12.

31. In a characteristic statement regarding the rise of heterodoxy at his Alma Mater, Cornelius Van Til, “More New Modernism at Old Princeton,” *Presbyterian Guardian* 18, no. 9 (September 1949): 166, exclaims, “Charles Hodge was one of the greatest systematic theologians of modern times. The man about to occupy the chair named after him does not believe in systematic theology at all.” See also *idem*, *The New Modernism: An Appraisal of the Theology of Barth and Brunner*, 3rd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1972); *idem*, “Has Karl Barth Become Orthodox?,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 16, no. 2 (1954): 135–81. Moreover, Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 181, describes Karl Barth’s theology as “the ‘new’ Protestantism rather than historic Protestantism.”

32. Cornelius Van Til, *The New Hermeneutic* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1974).

33. Cornelius Van Til, “The New Evangelicalism: Address of Welcome to Students Entering Westminster Seminary,” *Presbyterian Guardian* 26, no. 9 (October 1957): 131–132; *idem*, *Karl Barth and Evangelicalism* (Nutley, NJ and Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1964); Also see the following addresses within the book entitled “The Pamphlets, Tracts, and Offprints of Cornelius Van Til” in *idem*, *The Works of Cornelius Van Til (Software)*: “The New Protestantism—1962” and “The New Christ—1958.”

34. Van Til, *The New Synthesis*, 10, describes this book as follows: “The thesis of this essay is that the change of direction in Holland is one which is marked by a turning away from the traditional Reformed Faith, and toward the reinterpretation (*Umdeutung*) of it in terms of the post-Kantian freedom-nature scheme of thought, and, in particular, of neo-orthodox theology. We shall be concerned chiefly with the new direction so far as it affects theology and, in particular, hermeneutics. But the new direction in theology and hermeneutics involves and presupposes the post-Kantian methodology of science and

description to his own work.³⁵ To the contrary, following the long tradition of Protestant distaste for theological novelty exemplified by Calvin,³⁶ Francis Turretin (1623–1687)³⁷ and Charles Hodge (1797–1878),³⁸ Van Til insisted that he did *not* build his apologetic *de novo*.³⁹ He intentionally described himself not as a revolutionary, but as a self-conscious inheritor of “Christianity as interpreted in

philosophy as well. Finally, the new direction in theology is, apparently, effecting a new direction in the ecclesiastical situation of the *Gereformeerde Kerken*.”

35. E.g., Cornelius Van Til, “Nature and Scripture,” in *The Infallible Word: A Symposium by the Members of the Faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary*, ed. Ned Bernard Stonehouse and Paul Wooley, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1967), 296, defines the term as follows: “Kant’s great contribution to philosophy consisted in stressing the activity of the experiencing subject. It is this point to which the idea of a Copernican revolution is usually applied.”

36. For a classic statement of Protestant “unoriginality,” see John Calvin, “Prefatory Address to King Francis I of France,” in *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, 2 vols., Library of Christian Classics (Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 9–31. In response to the allegation of theological novelty leveled against the French Protestants, Calvin replies as follows: “First, by calling it ‘new’ they do great wrong to God, whose Sacred word does not deserve to be accused of novelty. Indeed, I do not at all doubt that it is new to them, since to them both Christ himself and his gospel are new. But he who knows that this preaching of Paul is ancient, that ‘Jesus Christ died for our sins and rose again for our justification’ [Rom. 4:25 p.], will find nothing new among us” (pp. 15–16). Cf. William S. Barker, “The Historical Context of the Institutes as a Work in Theology,” in *A Theological Guide to Calvin’s Institutes: Essays and Analysis*, ed. David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 4–7.

37. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992), I:xlii, writes: “Let other books, then, be commended by their novelty. I do not want this statement to justify mine. I avoided it most diligently lest it should contain anything new, a stranger from the word of God and from the public forms received in our churches, and nothing is built up there that is not confirmed by the vote of our most proven theologians of highest reputation.”

38. D. G. Hart, “Systematic Theology at Old Princeton Seminary: Unoriginal Calvinism,” in *The Pattern of Sound Doctrine: Systematic Theology at the Westminster Seminaries; Essays in Honor of Robert B. Strimple*, ed. David VanDrunen (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 3–4.

the Reformed creeds, as championed by Kuyper, Bavinck, Hodge, Warfield and Machen.”⁴⁰

Van Til’s Placement of Apologetics in Theological Encyclopedia

The second line of evidence serves primarily as a conduit between the first and third, yet it is also significant in its own right, namely, the relationship between apologetics and systematic

39. Van Til, “My Credo,” 11, writes, “Seeing, therefore, the failure of even Reformed theologians and apologists in their efforts to defend consistently the self-attesting Christ of Scripture, it became clear to me that new ground work needed to be done. I did not, however, undertake this task *de novo*. I learned much from other men, just as I did in theology from Kuyper and Bavinck.”

40. Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint, 4th ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 276. Similar self-descriptions by which Van Til aligns himself behind the classic modern Reformed theologians abound in his writings. E.g., *idem*, *The Defense of the Faith*, 103, asserts the following: “It is on the basis of the work of such men as Charles Hodge, Herman Bavinck, and B. B. Warfield, to mention no others, that we have formulated the broad outline of the Reformed life-and-world view. It is only by the help of such men that we have been enabled to attain to anything like a consistent Protestantism.” *Idem*, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 23, further describes his reliance upon Reformed theologians as follows: “The greater part of what is presented here is due to the fact that the writer stands on the shoulders of the great Reformed thinkers mentioned above. He is merely gathering together the thoughts found over a widely diversified body of their writings in order to present briefly that which basically they have taught.” The theologians “mentioned above” include “the great Reformed dogmaticians of modern times, such as Charles Hodge, Thornwell, Dabney, Shedd, Kuyper and especially Herman Bavinck. Back of all of them stands that master theologian and exegete of Scripture, John Calvin, whose writings have been constantly consulted” (see “Introduction,” n.p.; cf. *ibid.*, 254). “It is to this basic approach,” Van Til similarly remarks, “of Kuyper and Bavinck, of Charles Hodge and B. B. Warfield and Geerhardus Vos (ignoring or setting aside the remnants of the traditional method that is found in their works) that appeal is made in this work” (*ibid.*, 20). Cf. *idem*, *Christian Apologetics*, 57n4, 101, 107n33, 115; *idem*, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 5–7, 13, 29n8, 70, 89, 89n1, 112n15, 320n4; *idem*, *The Defense of the Faith*, 2, 23–24, 27, 27n1, 103, 113, 143n43, 237, 264, 276, 284, 382, 395; *idem*, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 33–34; Bahnsen, “Socrates or Christ,” 234; White, *Van Til, Defender of the Faith*, 34–36; Muether, *Cornelius Van Til*, 56.

theology in Van Til's thought. In *Christian Apologetics* he explains this relationship as follows:

It is apparent from our discussion so far that systematic theology is more closely related to apologetics than are any of the other disciplines. In it we have the system of truth that we are to defend.⁴¹

Likewise, in *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* Van Til argues that systematics arranges the fruits of exegesis and biblical theology “into a concatenated system” and that apologetics then defends and vindicates this system “against false philosophy and false science.”⁴²

In *The Defense of the Faith*, moreover, Van Til presents the relationship in similar terms yet again. Before one can defend the faith, he reasons, one must first know the faith that is to be defended. He thus avers that apologetics must receive its statement of faith from the other theological disciplines, especially systematic theology, before it can defend that faith.⁴³ He cites the work of his

41. Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 23.

42. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 17; cf. Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield* (1932; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2000), IX:51, 93. Van Til's use of Warfield's language (i.e., a “concatenated system”) is intentional; for, even though Van Til rejects Warfield's position regarding the place of apologetics in theological encyclopedia and prefers Kuyper's view instead (*pace* K. Scott Oliphint's editorial note in Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 352n27), he attempts nonetheless to incorporate insights from Warfield's view in order to prove his own Presbyterian credentials. For Van Til's explications of the so-called “Old Princeton vs. Old Amsterdam” debates, see Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 345–82. (At 345n1 Van Til notes that most of this chapter recapitulates material from ch. 8 in *idem*, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 221–54. In this latter work Van Til further remarks that his argument presupposes the material found in *idem*, “Nature and Scripture.”)

43. Johannes Heinrich August Ebrard, *Apologetics; Or The Scientific Vindication of Christianity*, trans. William Stuart and John Macpherson, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1886), 2–3, presents a similar argument: Christian apologetics is not the science of defense *in abstracto*, but the defense of its concrete object, namely, Christianity.

former professor, Louis Berkhof, as an example of the Reformed system of faith.⁴⁴

To summarize Van Til’s position, apologetics relates to systematic theology as the scout relates to the general—the former receives his battle plans from the latter.⁴⁵

This position has obvious implications for how he views his task as an apologist. “I have never been called upon to work out any form of systematic theology,” asserts Van Til. “My business is to teach Apologetics. I therefore presuppose the Reformed system of doctrine.”⁴⁶ Leaving aside the obvious question which presents itself here—whether Van Til at times acted more as a theologian than an apologist⁴⁷—his stated job description raises a simple practical question in light of his formulation of the relationship between apologetics and systematics: if Van Til is not a theologian, then whose system of doctrine does he presuppose for his own apologetics? This question leads into our third line of evidence.

Van Til’s Appropriations of Bavinck’s Thought

In the preface to *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* Van Til makes a modest statement regarding his reliance upon earlier theologians. “My indebtedness,” he writes, “to such former

44. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 28–29.

45. I am summarizing Van Til’s own martial metaphors—the messenger boy, the scout, the big guns and little guns, etc.—which he uses to describe the relationship between apologetics and systematics. See Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 18–23; *idem*, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 18–19.

46. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 27.

47. So Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 299; *idem*, “The Problem of Theological Paradox,” 295–300. Likewise, Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic*, 15, argues that Van Til is at least as much of a theologian as an apologist, if not more the former than the latter. An outstanding example of Van Til’s own creation of new theological formulations is his idiosyncratic formulation of the doctrine of the trinity as “one person” and “three persons.” See Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 363–68, 363n45; cf. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 65–71; Lane G. Tipton, “The Triune Personal God: Trinitarian Theology in the Thought of Cornelius Van Til” (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2004).

Reformed theologians as Louis Berkhof and, back of him, Herman Bavinck and Abraham Kuyper, is apparent throughout.”⁴⁸ A comparison of Van Til’s work with Bavinck’s and with Berkhof’s writings, however, reveals that his passing comment is significantly understated; for, throughout the book he appropriates extensive amounts of Bavinck’s and Berkhof’s works, sometimes paraphrasing them, other times copying them thought-for-thought, word-for-word, frequently without citation.⁴⁹ Specifically, he appropriates Bavinck’s thought in the following three ways.

First, Van Til explicitly references Bavinck’s name nearly 100 times. In chapters 2 and 3, for example, Van Til admits that his thoughts on Christian epistemology are a summary of Berkhof’s and Bavinck’s more detailed presentations of theological *principia*.⁵⁰ In chapter 5, Van Til again summarizes Bavinck’s formulations of theological *principia*, even translating two passages from Bavinck’s *Dogmatiek* into English before criticizing Bavinck’s alleged inconsistencies.⁵¹ Similarly, Van Til begins chapter 6 by summarizing Bavinck’s historical analysis of conceptions of revelation.⁵² In chapter 15, moreover, Van Til’s discussions of innate

48. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 13.

49. William Edgar, in the “Introduction” to Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 5, writes, “The last chapters on the doctrine of God follow Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics* rather closely.” However, Van Til follows Bavinck closely not only in the latter chapters but throughout the book. For example, his first explicit appropriation of Bavinck’s thought is found in ch. 2 (pp. 29ff.), which Edgar himself notes (29n8, 70n32). I am choosing to omit Kuyper in the following analysis since Van Til only references Kuyper tangentially and does not appropriate his writings to the same extent as he does Berkhof’s and Bavinck’s. For Van Til’s explicit references to Kuyper, see pp. 17–18, 50–55, 349n3; Pp. 379–85 are possibly an implicit appropriation of Kuyper’s thought (cf. Edgar’s editorial note, 379n36). On Berkhof’s appropriation of Bavinck’s thought, see note 74 below.

50. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 29–30, 70.

51. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 89–91. For an analysis of Van Til’s criticisms herein and elsewhere, see Mattson, “Van Til on Bavinck.”

52. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 117–18, 118n4. Cf. William Edgar’s editorial notes regarding Van Til’s appropriation of Bavinck’s thought at 118nn4–6 and 119n10.

and acquired knowledge of God are prefaced with the assertion that if we begin with Bavinck’s view then “we cannot go far wrong,”⁵³ and his entire treatment of these topics is a critical discussion of Bavinck’s formulations. Additionally, in chapters 16 and 18 Van Til’s explications of God’s incommunicable⁵⁴ and communicable⁵⁵ attributes are largely summaries of Bavinck’s formulations.⁵⁶ Even in Van Til’s discussion of the trinity in chapter 17, which incorporates a wider compendium of theologians than his other chapters,⁵⁷ Van Til nevertheless gives Bavinck the predominant theological voice.⁵⁸

Second, in addition to these extensive explicit references, Van Til tacitly appropriates large amounts of Bavinck’s thought especially in his chapters on the doctrine of God. For example, in chapter 10 Van Til’s presentation of “the names used to indicate special revelation” and “the modes of special revelation”⁵⁹—nearly

53. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 310, 314.

54. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 323–47. Van Til explicitly references Bavinck’s *Dogmatiek* throughout this section at 323n8, 327nn15–16, 333n27, 334nn28–30, and 335n31. Cf. William Edgar’s editorial notes regarding Van Til’s appropriation of Bavinck’s thought at 335nn32–33 and 341n53.

55. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 369–97. Van Til explicitly references Bavinck’s *Dogmatiek* throughout this section at 370n3; 371nn4–5, nn8–9, n11; 372nn12–13; 373n17; 377n29; 378n32; and 388n50. Cf. William Edgar’s editorial notes at 369n1, 371n10, 374n19, 375n23, 377n28, 378n33, 379n36, 385n40, 386n43, 388n49, 390n54, 391n56, 392n57, 394n63, and 396n66.

56. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 110–37, 148–255.

57. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 348–68; Note Van Til’s references to Kuyper (349n3), Berkhof (350n5), A. A. Hodge (351n7), W. G. T. Shedd (352n9), Calvin (352n10), B. B. Warfield (352n11, 360n34, 361nn35–38), Charles Hodge (355n23, 357n27).

58. See Van Til’s references to Bavinck at 353n12, 354nn17–19, 355n21, 362n42, 363n43, 364n46; cf. William Edgar’s editorial notes at 348n1, 349n4, 353n12, n14, 354n20.

59. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 202–22.

20 pages of material—is a close synopsis of Bavinck’s longer treatment of the exact same topics, yet without citation.⁶⁰ Similarly, Van Til’s discussion of the names of God in chapter 16⁶¹ is a virtual reproduction of Bavinck’s presentation, again without citation.⁶²

Third, beyond explicit citations and tacit appropriations, several of Van Til’s apologetic motifs derive from Bavinck’s thought. For example, Van Til’s programmatic statement regarding humanity’s epistemological duty to “think God’s thoughts after him”⁶³ is rooted in Bavinck’s assertion that “a theologian’s sole responsibility is to think God’s thoughts after him and to reproduce the unity that is objectively present in the thoughts of God and has been recorded for the eye of faith in Scripture.”⁶⁴ Likewise, Van Til’s programmatic

60. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 324–39; cf. Louis Berkhof, *Introduction To Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), 133–36. Contra William Edgar’s assertions in Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 202n33, 204n35, 204n37, 205n39, 212n59, 216n69, that Van Til is appropriating materials from B. B. Warfield and Berkhof: (1) Warfield himself lists Bavinck as among his sources (Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin Brekinridge Warfield* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1932; Repr. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2000), 1:32–34); (2) Van Til’s list of Hebrew and Greek words, including the proof texts, is *exactly* the same as Bavinck’s; (3) Van Til’s entire ch. 10 follows Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics* closely. Edgar therefore fails to see that both Warfield and Berkhof are themselves appropriating Bavinck’s material.

61. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 319–22; cf. William Edgar’s editorial notes regarding Van Til’s appropriation of Bavinck’s thought at 319nn1–2.

62. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:137–47; cf. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh; Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), 48–51.

63. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 292, 364, 376, 387; cf. *idem*, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 16; *idem*, *Christian Apologetics*, 77, 131, 140, 172; *idem*, *The Defense of the Faith*, 124, 130, 151, 329; et al.

64. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:44; cf. *ibid.*, 588. James Eglinton, “Bavinck’s Organic Motif: Questions Seeking Answers,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (2010): 51–52, notes that Bavinck’s dictum reflects the wider organic motif underlying his thought, a motif which posits Christ as the center of all history. The fact that Van Til praises Bavinck’s dictum but criticizes Bavinck for being inconsistent with it provides further warrant for viewing Van Til’s

insistence that the ontological trinity is the necessary presupposition of all predication⁶⁵ is adumbrated—according to Van Til’s own evaluation—in Bavinck’s critique of the followers of Berkouwer whom he labels as the “*Cahiers* men.”⁶⁶ Furthermore, given his praise of “the analogical system of Bavinck” in opposition to Aquinas,⁶⁷ Van Til’s repeated insistence that humans can only know God *analogically*⁶⁸ is likely a recapitulation of Bavinck’s formulations regarding analogical knowledge of God.⁶⁹ Also, Van Til’s seemingly odd statements regarding the epistemological necessity of circular reasoning⁷⁰ are recapitulations of Bavinck’s formulations regarding the circularity inherent in theology’s

formulations as a recapitulation of Bavinck’s; See, e.g., Cornelius Van Til, “Review of *Paedagogische Beginselen*, Dr. H. Bavinck, Derde Druk (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1928) and *De Nieuwe Opvoeding*, Dr. H. Bavinck, Tweede Druk, (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1928),” *Princeton Theological Review* 27 (1929): 135–36.

65. E.g., Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 59, writes, “Human knowledge ultimately rests upon the internal coherence within the Godhead; our knowledge rests upon the ontological Trinity as its presupposition”; cf. *ibid.*, 13, 80–81, 124, etc.

66. Van Til, *The New Synthesis*, 94.

67. Van Til, *The New Synthesis*, 37–40; quote at p. 40.

68. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 31–44, 63, 97, 116, 177–85, 274, 279, 292, 294, 298, 328, 373–75, 381, 384, 393.

69. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:47–52, 70, 107–111, 121, 130, 131, 134, 136, 137, 186; cf. Diehl, “Divine Omniscience,” 50. Michael S. Horton, “Consistently Reformed: The Inheritance and Legacy of Van Til’s Apologetic,” in *Revelation and Reason: New Essays in Reformed Apologetics*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint and Lane G. Tipton (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 131–148, argues that Van Til inherited the Creator-creature distinction and its correlate, analogical reasoning, “from the Amsterdam school” (p. 135); however, he does not note that it is from Bavinck specifically that Van Til appropriates the phrase “thinking God’s thoughts after him” nor that it is from Bavinck and Berkhof specifically that Van Til appropriates the language of theological *principia*.

70. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 242–44; *idem*, *Christian Apologetics*, 130; *idem*, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 33; *idem*, *The Defense of the Faith*, 123, 314–26.

principia,⁷¹ especially as these formulations are summarized by Berkhof.⁷²

On the basis of these three types of appropriations clearly evident throughout Van Til's *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, the answer to our question—From whom does Van Til the apologist receive his statement of the Reformed faith?—is largely Herman Bavinck.

BRIEF ANALYSIS

Van Til's extensive appropriation of Bavinck's thought is not surprising when the following pieces are put together: (1) Van Til identified himself as an inheritor of Reformed theology, not an innovator; (2) His view of theological encyclopedia necessitates that apologetics receives its statement of faith from systematics; (3) He defined himself as an apologist, not a dogmatician; (4) He esteemed Bavinck as the greatest of the modern Reformed theologians. Ergo, on his own terms it makes sense that Van Til would frequently appropriate materials from the dogmatician who had produced "the greatest and most comprehensive statement of Reformed systematic theology in modern times."⁷³

Neither is Van Til's extensive appropriation of Bavinck's thought novel. In fact, Van Til could be viewed as simply following the example of his own teacher, Louis Berkhof, who appropriated Bavinck's theology even more pervasively than did Van Til.⁷⁴

71. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:253, 455–59, 581–600.

72. Pace Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 301–09, and Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 143n144, 170n42, 201–02, 214n116, 218n128, 284–85, 482–83, 518n122, both of whom attempt to analyze Van Til's formulations regarding circularity without comparing Berkhof's and Bavinck's formulations, Van Til virtually repeats the formulation of Berkhof, *Introduction To Systematic Theology*, 125–26.

73. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 89.

74. Henry Zwaanstra, "Louis Berkhof," in *Reformed Theology in America: A History of Its Modern Development*, ed. David F. Wells (Grand Rapids, MI:

Furthermore, Bavinck’s neo-Calvinist theology casts a large shadow over Reformed theology on both sides of the Atlantic.⁷⁵ In addition to Van Til and Berkhof, Bavinck’s influence can be clearly seen in the writings of B. B. Warfield,⁷⁶ Gerrit Berkouwer,⁷⁷ Anthony Hoekema,⁷⁸ Herman Hoeksema,⁷⁹ Gordon Spykman,⁸⁰ Carl Henry,⁸¹ John Frame,⁸² and Van Genderen and Velema.⁸³ Also, several recent studies investigate Bavinck’s influence upon Karl Barth,⁸⁴

Baker Book House, 1997), 135–156; originally published as part of a previous book with the same title (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985); see also Richard A. Muller, “Preface to the New Edition of Louis Berkhof’s Systematic Theology,” in *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), v–viii; John Bolt, “Grand Rapids Between Kampen and Amsterdam: Herman Bavinck’s Reception and Influence in North America,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 38 (2003): 277; Oliphint, “Forward,” 29n10; Malcolm B. Yarnell III, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2007), 49. On the mutual scholarly affinities between Berkhof and Van Til, including an offer by Calvin Seminary for Van Til to succeed Berkhof as professor of dogmatics, see Muether, *Cornelius Van Til*, 44, 51, 99, 124, 153, 160; *idem*, “The Whole Counsel of God: Westminster and the OPC,” in *The Pattern of Sound Doctrine: Systematic Theology at the Westminster Seminaries; Essays in Honor of Robert B. Strimple*, ed. David VanDrunen (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 227; White, *Van Til, Defender of the Faith*, 38.

75. That Bavinck’s profound influence has been appreciated in European Reformed scholarship long before the English translation of Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics* is evident, e.g., in G. C. Berkouwer’s extensive references to Bavinck in *A Half Century of Theology: Movements and Motives*, ed. Lewis B. Smedes, trans. Lewis B. Smedes (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), originally published as *Een halve eeuw theologie: motieven en stromingen van 1920 tot heden* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1974). “Bavinck died in 1920,” notes Berkouwer, “but the theological issues he raised kept stirring the minds of others” (p. 11). (NB: Berkouwer’s year is a typo; Bavinck died in 1921.) Regarding Bavinck’s transatlantic influence, moreover, John Bolt, “Grand Rapids Between Kampen and Amsterdam,” 270, remarks that “the history of twentieth century Dutch Reformed theology in The Netherlands and in North America is in significant measure a story of conflicting appeals to Bavinck.”

76. Benjamin B. Warfield, *Are They Few That Be Saved?* (Our Hope Publications, 1918), 45n7; *idem*, *Counterfeit Miracles* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1918), 27–28; *idem*, *The Plan of Salvation: Five Lectures Delivered at The Princeton Summer School of Theology, June, 1914* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1915), 37, 65n48; *idem*, *The*

Geerhardus Vos,⁸⁵ the Reformed epistemology movement,⁸⁶ and the reception of geology in the Dutch-Reformed tradition.⁸⁷ The magnitude of Bavinck's influence is being analyzed more and more as scholars are reading Bavinck in English. Therefore, viewed within the context of Bavinck's transatlantic influence, Van Til's extensive appropriation of Bavinck's thought is slightly less jarring; for, Van Til is one among many American theologians who sought

Works of Benjamin B. Warfield (1932; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2000), 1:34, 112; 2:141, 171, 463; 3:39, 280n36, 367; 4:224n180; 5:125, 161n61, 182n115, 263n103, 306n45, 366; 7:297–98, 326n45; 8:385n78, 388n86, 558n214, 569n20; 9:252n20, 256n29, 279; *idem*, “Review of Herman Bavinck, *De Zekerheid des Geloofs* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1901)”]; cf. Henk Van den Belt, “Herman Bavinck and Benjamin B. Warfield on Apologetics and the Autopistia of Scripture,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (2010): 32–43. Hence not one (Berkhof) but two (Warfield and Berkhof) of Van Til's eminent predecessors imbibed large drafts of Bavinck's *Dogmatiek*.

77. Gerrit Cornelis Berkouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics*, 14 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1952–1976).

78. Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986); *idem*, *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989); Also note that Hoekema completed two dissertations on Bavinck, including, *idem*, “The Centrality of the Heart: A Study in Christian Anthropology with Special Reference to the Psychology of Herman Bavinck” (Th.D. Diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1948); *idem*, “Herman Bavinck's Doctrine of the Covenant” (Th.D. Diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1953).

79. Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2004).

80. Gordon J. Spykman, *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992).

81. Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 6 vols. (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 1976), esp. vols. 2, 5, and 6.

82. Frame, *The Doctrine of God*.

83. J. Van Genderen and W. H. Velema, *Concise Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. M. Van der Maas, trans. Gerrit Bilkes (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008).

84. On Barth's critical appropriation of Bavinck's theology, see John Vissers, “Karl Barth's Appreciative Use of Herman Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (2010): 79–86; Cornelis Van der Kooi, “Herman Bavinck and Karl Barth on Christian Faith and Culture,” *Calvin*

to transplant the cream of the neo-Calvinist dogmatics crop into the fields of American Reformed theology.

CONCLUSIONS

Two conclusions may be drawn from our brief investigation of Van Til’s neo-Calvinist context, his high esteem for Bavinck, the nascent reassessment of Bavinck’s influence in Van Til scholarship, and Van Til’s appropriations of Bavinck’s thought.

First, the Copernican interpretation of Van Til is untenable. Even though his heritage cannot be reduced to one source, Van Til is more accurately interpreted as a neo-Calvinist rather than a Copernican revolutionary insofar as he appropriates extensively from Bavinck’s dogmatics. Likewise, usage of the adjective “Van Tilian” does not accurately reflect Van Til’s own modesty, his aversion to novelty, nor his extensive appropriations of Bavinck’s thought.

Second, even though several recent studies evince a growing

Theological Journal 45, no. 1 (2010): 75–76.

85. On the striking similarities between the lives and thought of Vos and Bavinck, see George Harinck, “Herman Bavinck and Geerhardus Vos,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (April 2010): 18–31; cf. Bolt, “Grand Rapids Between Kampen and Amsterdam,” 273n50; Edgar, “Introduction,” 3, 12.

86. Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Herman Bavinck—Proto Reformed Epistemologist,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (2010): 133–46; Alvin Plantinga, “The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology,” in *Rationality in the Calvinian Tradition*, ed. Hendrik Hart, Johan Van der Hoeven, and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), 363–83; *idem*, “The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology,” in *Major Themes in the Reformed Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992).

87. D. A. Young, “The reception of geology in the Dutch Reformed tradition: the case of Herman Bavinck (1854–1921),” in *Geology and Religion: A History of Harmony and Hostility*, ed. Martina Kölbl-Ebert, Geological Society Special Publication 310 (London: The Geological Society, 2009), 290, lists the English translation of Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics* as one of the motivating factors for his study.

awareness of Bavinck's influence upon Van Til's thought, there is much more work to be done. For example, no one has analyzed the extensive appropriations of Bavinck's thought throughout *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*. Furthermore, Van Til's polemics have not been studied in light of his reliance upon Bavinck's thought, despite the fact that Van Til's uses Bavinck's dogmatics as the primary theological criterion by which he (1) vehemently rejects Barth's theology, (2) criticizes Berkouwer's later theology as a devolution from Bavinck to Barth, and (3) polemicizes against what he terms the "new synthesis theology" of the Netherlands. Similarly, no one has studied Van Til's appropriation of Kuyper's formulations regarding the two kinds of science, nor Bavinck's differences with Kuyper on this point. An analysis of Van Til's idiosyncratic deviations from Bavinck's formulation of the doctrine of the trinity also remains outstanding.

The English translations of Bavinck's works offer Van Til scholars an unprecedented opportunity to re-read the Reformed apologist in light of his primary dogmatic resource. Since Bavinck's pervasive theological influence upon Van Til's thought is undeniable, then, to borrow Van Til's metaphor, the scouts need to report back to the general for a reassessment of the battlefield. Only in this way can an adequate assessment be made of Van Til's presupposition of the Reformed system of doctrine.

Herman Bavinck and Augustine on Epistemology

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“THIS ENTIRE DOGMATIC DEVELOPMENT IN EAST AND WEST
CULMINATED IN AUGUSTINE.”¹

Herman Bavinck stands on the shoulders of St. Augustine. Even a cursory examination of the full range of his cited materials clearly reveals that Bavinck was immersed in Augustinian studies and that the trajectory of Bavinck’s theology rests on his interpretation of Augustine. In this way it could be argued that Bavinck is a neo-Augustinian writer rather than simply a neo-Calvinist. A thorough examination of Bavinck’s theological concerns as well as his method shows that Augustine is a primary influence in the *Reformed Dogmatics*. Particularly with respect to epistemology, the basic groundwork and prolegomena of Bavinck’s thought, it is Augustine that has shaped the *Reformed Dogmatics*. This is not to say that Bavinck takes Augustine wholesale. Nor does he endorse any one thinker uncritically. Rather he works within the Christian tradition as a whole, a tradition in which Augustine is dominant. As we shall see there is no perfect agreement between Bavinck and Augustine, yet Augustine’s philosophy of knowledge is seminal in Bavinck’s ecclesiology.

1. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 136.

EPISTEMOLOGY: THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH

With respect to epistemology, Augustine is the perfect conversation partner for Bavinck in the sense that he dealt with contemporary problems in epistemology that had their analogs in modernity. For Augustine, philosophy could not be divorced from theology but was a search for truth. How can we, as finite and mutable creatures, know the infinite and unchangeable God? From the opening pages of the *Confessions*, questions of epistemology consumed Augustine's thoughts. Interestingly, these very questions also drive the prolegomena of Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*: "What is truth in the area of religion, and where can it be found?" He goes on to say, "In religion a human witness and human trust is insufficient; here we need a witness from God to which we can abandon ourselves in life and in death. 'Our heart is restless until it rests in Thee, O Lord!'"² Here it seems that Bavinck has so appropriated and even internalized Augustine's thought that a citation or footnote to the opening stanza of the *Confessions* is not even needed. Augustine has given Bavinck a language to search for truth. What are the features of this epistemic quest?

"Augustine himself was consumed by this burning love of truth," notes Bavinck. "Admittedly, Augustine accepted two cognitive organs, sense and intellect."³ Augustine's view of creation and of the body was distinctive in his day. Contra the Manichees and neo-Platonists, he upheld the goodness of the body and the ability of the body in creation to apprehend reality. In Book 10 of the *Confessions* Augustine deals extensively with noetic possibilities and human sense organs as valid receptors of real knowledge. For example, he writes:

I turned my gaze on other things. I saw that to you they owe their existence, and that in you all things are finite, not in the sense that the space they occupy is bounded but in the sense that you hold all things in your hand by truth. So all

2. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:462.

3. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:137.

things are real insofar they have being, and the term ‘falsehood’ applies only when something is thought to have being which does not.”⁴

Yet, for Augustine intellectual assent had priority over sense perception in epistemology. Drawing on the extensive influence of neo-Platonism, Augustine, while he did not denigrate the sense perceptions, upheld the mind as primal to knowing. He writes, “From there again I ascended to the power of reasoning to which is to be attributed the power of judging the deliverances of the bodily senses.”⁵ Even though the body is good, the intellect carries the weight of the epistemic search. The mind, in fact, is what distinguishes humans from the animals. It leads us into truth and finally into all joy:

The happy life is joy based on the truth. This joy grounded in you, O God, who are the truth, my illumination, the salvation of my face, my God (Ps. 26:1, 41:12). The happy life everyone desires; joy in the truth everyone wants. I have met with many people who wished to deceive, none who wished to be deceived. How then did they know about this happy life unless in the same way that they knew about the truth?⁶

While Bavinck commends the right use of both sense and intellect, he feels that Augustine falls too far into neo-Platonism with its exaltation of the mind. Bavinck was never one for repristination but rather contextualization of the best that Christian philosophy offers throughout history. More specifically, he thought a balance between sense perception and intellectual cognition was necessary; for, after all, he was a man of modernity and scientific progress, and he held that “the created world is the external foundation of knowledge for all science. . . . But that is not enough. The Logos who shines in the

4. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 193.

5. Augustine, *Confessions*, 127.

6. Augustine, *Confessions*, 199.

world must also let his light shine in our consciousness.”⁷ The search for truth begins and ends with the Divine Logos who illuminates the external world and our internal perceptions. In his critique of modern science and sundry ways of knowing, he takes up the categories that Augustine develops—sense and intellect—and evaluates his opponents on those grounds. How can we make sense of what has been revealed in creation? The world must not only be perceived but also interpreted. Yet in observing the world it is clear to see that people do not interpret the world similarly. A multiplicity of cultures, religions, and fields of study vie for attention and allegiance.

According to Augustine the Fall had disastrous consequences for the basic principles of cognition. The Fall distorted perception and cognition, and the result was a need for different media in which to communicate thoughts and ideas. What once was lucid has now become obscure and hidden. Ancient philosophy’s quest for wisdom entailed the use of signs, and Augustine locates the origin of both signs and symbols in the Fall of mankind, an event which dislocated human consciousness.⁸ Before the Fall there was perfect knowledge and unbroken fellowship. But after the Fall communication and cognition are hampered by sin, and we cannot speak of things in themselves but must employ signs, metaphors, analogies, and symbols. These things are necessary yet imperfect in their ability to forge and maintain civic peace. This is an idea found in Plato as well as Aristotle, namely, that images are not only inferior to rationality but also that they strain our social relationships and cause alienation.⁹ The tower of Babel is one of Augustine’s favorite examples of the way in which human sin and symbolic language are inextricably linked.¹⁰ What are we to do?

7. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:233.

8. Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley, CA: University California Press, 2000), 258.

9. A discussion of this point, albeit brief, is found in Robin Barrow, *Plato, utilitarianism and education* (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), 49.

Language, as a system of signs, is potentially the source of both alienation and joy. Joy comes through the mediation of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit that is needed to grant general revelation to all of humanity and special revelation to the elect. The ways in which signs alienate and cause joy is another way in which Bavinck follows Augustine in exploring areas of common grace as well as antithesis. Though fallen humanity can use signs and symbols to create cultures of peace and order, temporally speaking, the common grace given to all humanity is insufficient. The Holy Spirit is needed in the apprehension of signs and symbols to know the Truth that leads to joy. Thus, pneumatology and epistemology go hand in hand for Bavinck and Augustine.

How then are we to regard “pagan” knowledge? And is Christian truth in any way distinctive?

SIGNS: COMMON GRACE AND ANTITHESIS

Methodologically, the whole of the *Reformed Dogmatics* follows the form and pattern of Augustine’s major works: *Confessions*, *The City of God*, and *On Christian Teaching*. These works attempt to articulate a vision for a distinctly Christian culture amidst the pantheon of gods and varieties of religions in late Antiquity. Having been immersed in various religions and philosophies, Augustine, on one hand, had to pay homage to their contributions, yet at the same time he drew sharp distinctions between church and culture. Likewise, Bavinck, beginning in the *Prolegomena* and continuing to the very end of the *Reformed Dogmatics*, draws out the tension found in common grace and the accompanying resolution found in the antithesis. Additionally, using juxtaposition as a literary mode, there was very little question for Augustine that the books of the Platonists held treasures of wisdom and were quite learned in themselves. The same held for Bavinck in his search for truth in modernism and scientific inquiry.

10. Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R.P.H. Green. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 32.

Yet something more is needed—an authority from above that will lead us into objective truth and provide subjective assurance of that truth.

In sharp relief to common grace, Augustine used the antithesis to give Christian doctrine, and its unique way of knowing, primacy over all other religions and their ways of knowing. He writes:

In the symbol of the cross every Christian act is inscribed, to hope for heaven, to avoid profaning the sacraments. . . . The insignificance of the amount of gold, silver, and clothing which that people took away with it from Egypt, in comparison with the wealth that it later attained in Jerusalem . . . is the measure of the insignificance of all knowledge, I mean useful knowledge, that is collected from the pagan books, when compared with the knowledge contained in the divine scriptures.¹¹

Thus God has given special revelation to guide and lead God's people into all truth and abundant life. The Scriptures, the written Word of God, capture the historic unfolding of God's redemptive plan in time and space. As Bavinck says, "The Scripture does not give us data to interpret, it is itself the interpretation of reality."¹² Christianity, more than any other religion, gives light and life to pilgrims until the Day when all signs and symbols are done away with and we shall see face to face. But until the Parousia we are left to look through the dim mirror of signs and symbols. Thus the tensions of common grace and antithesis remain as well as a myriad of other problems with "knowing."

One place where this epistemological tension bears significant weight is in ecclesiology. This divide is a philosophical one—one of epistemology and hermeneutics. In the Donatist controversy the same basic questions of epistemology were applied to the sphere of the church. Where is the church? How do we know? To claim that

11. Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, 66–67.

12. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:354.

Bavinck is a neo-Augustinian theologian requires that we address Bavinck's opposition to Augustine's ecclesiology.

ECCLESIOLOGY: THE SEARCH FOR THE TRUE CHURCH

B.B. Warfield states:

The problem which Augustine bequeathed to the Church for solution, the Church required a thousand years to solve. But even so, it is Augustine who gave us the Reformation. For the Reformation, inwardly considered, was just the ultimate triumph of Augustine's doctrine of grace over Augustine's doctrine of the Church.¹³

In line with Warfield, Bavinck stands in the Reformed tradition with respect to this difficulty of relating ecclesiology and soteriology. According to Augustine, the church was the locus of salvation, the dispenser of grace, the seat of authority, and the guarantor of Scripture. He believed that the church was the mother of believers.¹⁴ The Reformation owed to Augustine grace, but it had to resolve the problem of the church just as Warfield stated.

Though the Reformation owes much to Augustine, Bavinck claims that Augustine not only laid the foundation for Roman Catholicism but also strengthened it.¹⁵ Thus we must ask: is Bavinck's reading of the Donatist controversy correct? The sacraments as means of grace are certainly at stake, but also the nature of the church, the bride of Christ. Again, this is about how we are to regard the epistemic problem of signs and symbols. As Peter Brown notes:

13. Benjamin B. Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), 321–22.

14. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:138.

15. Herman Bavinck, *Saved by Grace: The Holy Spirit's Work in Calling and Regeneration*, ed. J. Mark Beach, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 36.

Augustine's writings against the Donatists betray his increasing absorption of the common stock of ideas available to African Christians—above all, of the idea of the Church as a clearly distinguished group in society, marked out as the sole possessor of a body of 'saving' rites."¹⁶

It has already been acknowledged that as contingent and fallen creatures, humans are in need of forms and signs and that the church and its sacraments are the signs par excellence by which we come to know the truth. Looking at how Augustine reasons is instructive: he does not quarrel with their use of the Sacraments but appeals to the authority of Scripture for catholic unity.

In his correspondence with the Donatists, Augustine appeals to a Christian unity and holiness that is not based upon the hierarchy of the church or the sacraments but upon Scripture itself:

See the Scripture we share, see where we come to know Christ, see where we come to know the Church. If you hold on to Christ, then why don't you hold on to the church itself? If you believe in Christ because of the truth of the Scripture, although you can read of him, but not see him, why do you deny the church, which you can both read of and see?¹⁷

He appeals to them as fellow Christians, not as people outside the grace of God. He addresses the Donatists as brothers, pleading with them in love to return to the Church because they are Christians but are not acting as Christians.¹⁸ Augustine does not want schism. His appeal is based in Scripture, not in the nature of the sacraments but in the authority of the Word of God which reveals to us knowledge of Christ and the Church. That is the heart of his argument.

16. Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley, CA: University California Press, 2000), 221.

17. Augustine, *Political Writings*, ed. E.M. Atkins and R.J. Dodaro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 173.

18. Augustine, *Political Writings*, 169.

Thus if Bavinck concludes that the Donatists were a legitimate form of Christianity, then is he a Donatist? No. For Bavinck agrees with Augustine that schism is sin and that the Word of God has authority to reveal knowledge of Christ and his Church.¹⁹ Where is the church? Augustine could not conceive of a pure church, one without spot or wrinkle in this life. Rather, he acknowledges that the church is a mixture of wheat and chaff. Though the Roman Catholic church adopted papal infallibility in 1870, it was Augustine who, centuries earlier, contended for catholic unity on the basis of Scripture—a very Reformed practice indeed.

CONCLUSIONS

Admittedly, Bavinck does not take issue with the concept of the church as institution per se, but rather that it is the sole means of grace and salvation in the world. He emphasizes the organic conception of church, and he upholds the Scriptures as the sole and primary locus of authority for the Christian. Bavinck never divorces the means of grace from Scripture. “Scripture is the light of the church,” he writes,

the church the life of Scripture. Apart from the church, Scripture is an enigma and an offense. Without rebirth no one can know it. . . . Scripture explains the church; the church understands Scripture.²⁰

This dynamic is reciprocal, one in which the church and Scripture are inextricably linked. The written set of signs and symbols that communicate God’s revelation gives life to the church through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Yet the issue at hand for Bavinck, throughout the *Reformed Dogmatics*, is the deplorable idea of hegemony. Augustine would certainly defend the notion of Church

19. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 4, *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 316–19.

20. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:384.

as institution, but so would the neo-Calvinists defend the church as the place that rightly interprets the Word and distributes the grace of God through the sacraments. Indeed, placing authority in the human institution, the cult, and not the Scripture—that is deplorable for Bavinck. So also the notion of institutional coercion that limits the freedom and grace that Scripture and the Spirit together bring must be denounced. This means that, just as Bavinck could rail against Augustine’s use of coercion against the Donatists, so also he could quickly critique Calvin’s persecution of Servetus.

In Tridentine Roman Catholicism—a hierarchy that promulgates papal infallibility—there is but a semblance of unity. In Reformed Christianity it is the Scripture that brings life and freedom. “It [Scripture] alone,” writes Bavinck, “is able to maintain the freedom of the Christian; it is the origin and guarantee of religious liberty as well as of our political freedoms.”²¹ Yet, for both Bavinck and Augustine alike, the Word is only correctly interpreted by the elect under the sovereign power of the Holy Spirit. This is a very high view of the church wherein, apart from the Spirit-led interpretation of the Scripture through the church, the book is but a fog and can only condemn us. And if in the end it is the coercive aggregation of power that Bavinck is worried about, Augustine has the same reservations. Augustine undoubtedly maintained a skepticism about the human condition with its deep inclination toward hubris, a skepticism incompatible with papal infallibility. Ostensibly, Augustine did not live long enough to devise a polemic against the First Vatican Council of 1870.

In the end the doctrine of the church is really an epistemology of the church, an outworking of the *principium cognoscendi* of the *Reformed Dogmatics*, a practical application of the philosophy of knowledge. Regarding epistemology in general—its content and method—it is clear that Bavinck relies heavily on Augustine. And while on the surface Bavinck is troubled by Augustine’s doctrine of the church, a close reading of the letter to the Donatists shows that Augustine was the Reformer of the church in his day. Hence what

21. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:479.

Bavinck writes about Augustine holds true, perhaps even more than we can fully comprehend:

He is the universal teacher. Even philosophy neglects him to its own detriment. And because of his fascinating style, his refined, precise, highly individual and nevertheless universally human way of expressing himself, he more than any other church father, can still be appreciated today. He is the most Christian as well as the most modern of all the fathers; of all them he is closest to us.²²

22. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:139.

“To See Darkness, To Hear Silence”: St. Augustine, Herman Bavinck, and the Incomprehensibility of Evil

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With trademark candor the Dutch Reformed theologian, Herman Bavinck, begins his account of the origin and nature of evil as follows: “The question of the origin of evil, second to that of existence itself, is the greatest enigma of life and the heaviest cross for the intellect to bear.”¹ In his treatment of this topic, Bavinck exhibits clarity of thought, biblical acumen, a broad and deep understanding of the history of the doctrine, and a mastery of the conceptual issues involved. Still, with regard to the nature and origin of sin and evil, he must humbly accept and acknowledge the limits of his understanding. “When all is said and done, sin proves to be an incomprehensible mystery.”² Bavinck, however, was not the first to declare the utter incomprehensibility of sin and evil; he stands squarely on the shoulders of St. Augustine. This essay will explicate Bavinck’s doctrine of the incomprehensibility of sin and evil in light of its Augustinian roots.³ First, it will show how

1. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 3, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 53.

2. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:145.

3. Bavinck uses “sin” and “evil” as seemingly interchangeable terms. While nowhere making a clear distinction between the terms, Bavinck tends to use “sin” for highlighting the centrality of “agency” in the intrusion of evil into the good creation. This is perhaps because, for Bavinck, sin is primarily an “ethical phenomenon,” the origin of which lies in trespass of God’s law. See Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:138. “Evil,” then, refers to the *effects* of sin on the good

Augustine’s account of evil as privation arose over the course of his polemic with the sect of the Manicheans. Next, it will show how Bavinck, attempting to be more faithful to the witness of Scripture, tried to emphasize the positive quality of evil while still affirming its privative character. Finally, it will show why Bavinck’s conclusion—that evil is incomprehensible—is especially apt given his trinitarian realist epistemology.

AUGUSTINE ON THE NATURE OF EVIL

Early in life around the age of nineteen, Augustine encountered a book written by Cicero, entitled, *Hortensius*, which caused him to convert to a life of philosophy—the pursuit of wisdom.⁴ From that point on, a single question tormented him: *what is the cause of evil?* He wrote later, “That is a question that gave me great trouble when I was a young man. It wearied me and drove me into the arms of heretics.”⁵ These “heretics” were, of course, the Manichees.

The Manichaeian answer to the problem of evil . . . was simple and drastic. . . . They were dualists: so convinced were they that evil could not come from a good God, that they believed that it came from an invasion of the good . . . by a hostile force of evil, equal in power, eternal, totally separate.⁶

For the Manichees, both good (i.e., God) and evil are *substantial*, “two masses, one opposed to the other, both infinite but with the

creation, whereas for those outside of Christianity (e.g., the Manicheans) evil is a positive force opposed to God. Throughout this essay, I will also use “sin” to highlight fallen agency and “evil” to communicate a more general opposition to “good.”

4. Augustine, *Confessions*, ed. & trans., Albert Cook Outler (Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc., 2002), 3.4.7.

5. Augustine, “On Free Will,” in *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, ed. J.H.S. Burleigh (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1979), 1.2.4.

6. Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 35–6.

evil more contracted and the good more expansive.”⁷ As in Pagan and Greek religions before, materiality was seen as a great evil, and the Creator God of the Old Testament “was rejected as a malevolent demon.”⁸ Through asceticism and ritualistic eating, the Manichaean follower sought to release his “good soul” from its bondage to the “corrupt body.”⁹

Augustine, of course, was not long satisfied with this dualistic answer, but he continued to wrestle with the question: whence is evil? It became the chief stumbling block to his acceptance of the Christian faith. In his *Confessions* (Book VII), Augustine recounts the major development in his understanding of the origin of evil, which ultimately cleared that path for his conversion to Catholic Christianity (in Book VIII). Through the teachings of Ambrose of Milan, Augustine had come to hear of allegorical interpretations of the Scriptures that indicated that the free will was the cause of human evil, but he could not understand where the evil inclination could come from.

If the devil is to blame, who made the devil himself? And if he was a good angel who by his own wicked will became the devil, how did there happen to be in him that wicked will by which he became a devil, since a good Creator made him wholly a good angel? By these reflections was I again cast down and stultified.¹⁰

It was in this state that Augustine came across “certain books of the Platonists,” most likely the neo-Platonic literature of Plotinus (7.9.13). These books gave Augustine insight into the metaphysical nature of “Being.” “And,” he writes, “I viewed all the other things that are beneath thee, and I realized that they are neither wholly real nor wholly unreal. They are real in so far as they come from thee; but they are unreal in so far as they are not what thou art”

7. Augustine, *Confessions*, 5.10.19.

8. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 39.

9. *Ibid.*, 36.

10. Augustine, *Confessions*, 7.3.5; hereafter cited in text.

(7.11.17). God is the One Who Is—“Being” itself. Everything that exists derives its existence from God, and yet only God can exist immutably, for if anything else were immutable, it would be divine.

And it was made clear to me that all things are good even if they are corrupted. They could not be corrupted if they were supremely good; but unless they were good they could not be corrupted. If they were not good at all, there would be nothing in them to be corrupted. (7.12.18)

Armed with this Neo-Platonic understanding of divine “Being,” Augustine returned to the problem of evil.

If, then, they [i.e., created things] are deprived of all good, they will cease to exist. So long as they are, therefore, they are good. Therefore, whatsoever is, is good. Evil, then, the origin of which I had been seeking, *has no substance at all*; for if it were a substance, it would be good. (7.12.18; emphasis added)

For the first time Augustine was able to recognize that evil is not substantial. Only that which is created by God has substance, and evil cannot be created by a good God. What is evil then? It is the privation (*privatio*) of good (being). It does not even *exist* in the strict sense of the word.

Augustine then inquires whether there is such thing as a created evil in the natural world. “To thee,” he writes, “there is no such thing as evil, and even in thy whole creation taken as a whole, there is not; because there is nothing from beyond it that can burst in and destroy the order which thou hast appointed for it” (7.13.19). And later he remarks that “there is no health in those who find fault with any part of thy creation” (7.14.20).

And what of sin, the personal aspect of evil? “I found,” answers Augustine, “that it was no substance, but a perversion of the will bent aside from thee, O God, the supreme substance, toward these lower things, casting away its inmost treasure and becoming bloated with external good” (7.16.22). Notice that, in sinning, the will does not turn toward something evil but only toward a lesser

good. “So the deed is the evil thing,” reasons Augustine, “not the thing of which the sinner makes an evil use. Evil is making a bad use of a good thing.”¹¹ This is so because there are no evil “things” in a world created by a good God—“no nature is evil so far as it is naturally existent. Nothing is evil in anything save a diminishing of good.”¹² “If sin be natural, it is not sin at all.”¹³

AUGUSTINE AND THE INCOMPREHENSIBILITY OF EVIL

While Augustine’s understanding of the nature and origin of evil had developed well beyond his Manichaean days, he was still left with major conceptual difficulties. “Augustine located the source of evil in the wrong use of the will, but he had great difficulty in explaining why the will of man was perverted so as to allow evil to arise in him.”¹⁴ “He struggled to understand how evil might have arisen in rational natures which had been created good by God.”¹⁵ In other words, Augustine could not logically get Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Paradise. In an early polemical work against the Manichees, *De libero arbitrio*, Augustine developed at length the idea that the free will of the human being is the only cause of evil. And yet, after pages and pages of laborious dialogue, he is left at a stalemate:

But perhaps you are going to ask what is the cause of the movement of the will when it turns from the immutable to the mutable good. That movement is certainly evil, although free will must be numbered among good things

11. Augustine, “On the Nature of the Good,” in *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, ed. J.H.S. Burleigh (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1979), 338.

12. *Ibid.*, 330.

13. Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (New York: Random House, Inc., 2000), 11.15.1.

14. Guy H. Ranson, “Augustine’s account of the nature and origin of moral evil,” *Review & Expositor* 50, no. 3 (July 1, 1953): 317.

15. J. Patout Burns, “Augustine on the origin and progress of evil,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 16, no. 1 (March 1, 1988): 17.

since without it no one can live aright. We cannot doubt that the movement of the will, that turning away from the Lord God, is sin; but surely we cannot say that God is the author of sin? God, then, will not be the cause of that movement; but what will be its cause? If you ask this, and I answer that I do not know, probably you will be saddened. And yet that would be a true answer. *That which is nothing cannot be known.*¹⁶

Later, in an attempt to make Adam and Eve’s sin more intelligible, Augustine would relocate the primal sin to that of the angels—in particular, to Satan. And yet, the difficulty remains as to how a heavenly being could knowingly turn away from God, the supreme Good. Augustine attempts to speak of a “deficient cause” rather than an “efficient cause,” but to have knowledge of such a cause would be “as if someone sought to see darkness, to hear silence.”¹⁷ One is left wondering whether Augustine has embarked on “the philosophically misguided quest for a causal explanation of the first instance of willing evil;”¹⁸ whether “he should instead have left it as a ‘brute fact’ which the theologian can only point to but in no way comprehend.”¹⁹

HERMAN BAVINCK’S REVISED AUGUSTINIAN ACCOUNT OF THE NATURE OF SIN

Bavinck follows Augustine’s interpretation of the nature and origin of sin, yet he critiques it and revises it along the way. Bavinck first treats the origin of sin and then the nature of sin. For the sake of clarity, I will proceed in the opposite direction.

16. Augustine, “On Free Will,” 2.20.54.

17. Augustine, *City of God*, 12.7.1.

18. Robert F. Brown, “The first evil will must be incomprehensible: a critique of Augustine,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 46, no. 3 (September 1, 1978): 316.

19. *Ibid.*, 317.

The main feature of Bavinck's account of the nature of sin that is pertinent to the current discussion is the dialectic tension he holds between sin's *privative* character and its *positive* character. Bavinck recounts and upholds the ancient Christian tradition of viewing sin as privation. He recognizes how Augustine's polemic against the Manichees reinforced his denial of the substantial nature of sin. "To that extent," he remarks, "[it is] completely correct and to be accepted without reservation. Sin is not a substance, neither spiritual nor material, for then it would either have God as its cause or else God would not be the creator of all things."²⁰

Note that, while Bavinck does not deny the system of "Being" that undergirded Augustine's account of evil as privation, he places its center of gravity more in the biblical account of creation than in a Greek metaphysic. Bavinck, therefore, tends to draw the antithesis between what is "natural" and what is "defective of nature" rather than between "being" and "privation" of being (3:136).

All that is natural, to the degree that it is natural, is good. Evil can therefore only be something *about* the good. There cannot be any evil at all except in something good, because it cannot be except in something natural. (3:136; italics added)

Evil always has this subordinate relation to nature—it cannot create or destroy nature, nor can it affect the essence of natural things (3:139). "In its operation and appearance, sin is always doomed to borrow, despite itself, from the treasury of virtue. . . . It is a parasite of the good" (3:139).

Bavinck, however, does not simply stop at affirming the privative character of sin. For him, "it is also clear that sin cannot be adequately described with the concept of privation. Certainly it is not a mere lack, pure nonbeing, but also an active and corrupting principle, a dissolving, destructive power" (3:137). Simply as privation of good, sin loses much of the potency with which the

20. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:137; hereafter cited in text.

Scriptural witness describes it. What matters in the description of sin is not simply that it has a negative quality, but that it is a desecration of a nature that was created to be good—what matters is the violation of the *oughtness* of creation. Therefore, Bavinck stresses the ethical character of sin (3:138–39). With regard to the metaphysical realm, sin is privation; with regard to the ethical realm, it is the active transgression of a law. Holding these two aspects of sin in tension, Bavinck speaks of sin as an “*active privation*” (3:138). And yet, the question arises, from whence does a “privation” get power to become “active”?

HERMAN BAVINCK ON THE INCOMPREHENSIBLE ORIGIN OF SIN

As a Reformed theologian Bavinck has as his starting point a high view of the sovereignty of God. God is the creator of all that is. Related to his creative power is his continued providential rule over all of creation and history. Given this idea of an omnipotent God, and given the existence of sin, one may be tempted to include sin in God’s purpose for creation. But Bavinck categorically rejects this as a confusion of the doctrine of creation with that of the fall.

What is important is that, according to Scripture, the fall is essentially distinct from the creation itself . . . it is a power that does not belong to the essential being of the creation, a power that originally did not exist, but that came by way of disobedience and transgression, that has entered creation unlawfully, and did not belong there. (3:74)

In saying this, one need not deny that God is still completely sovereign nor that God bends sin and evil toward good ends; for Bavinck argues that “all this is attributable, not to sin, but to the almighty power of God, who is able to bring good out of evil, light out of darkness, and life out of death” (3:78).

Bavinck honestly recognizes that God’s sovereignty must be viewed in relation to the question of sin. For even though “Scripture strongly distances God from all wickedness,” he writes, “[it also] firmly announces . . . that his counsel and government also extend

to sin. God is not the author of sin, yet it does not lie outside his knowledge, his will and his power” (3:59).

It will not do simply to draw a distinction between God’s *permissive* will and his *active* will, for this distinction does not make sense when one speaks about a truly omnipotent God. “After all, one who can prevent an evil, but, while quietly looking on, lets it happen is as guilty as one who commits that evil” (3:62). No, “permission” does not “get God off the hook,” so to speak. For Bavinck, God cannot be the cause of sin, but nothing can exist that is outside of his will. Therefore, “God most certainly [must have] willed the *possibility* of sin. The possibility of sinning is from God. The idea of sin was first conceived in his mind” (3:66). Like Augustine before him, the only way for Bavinck to understand this is to designate to God *deficient* causality: “Light cannot of itself produce darkness; the darkness only arises when the light is withdrawn. God, therefore, is at most the negative or incidental cause of sin; its real and positive cause is located in human beings” (3:63).

As to the human, ethical origins of sin (i.e., how to get Adam and Eve out of the Garden), Bavinck is perplexed.

With all this we have established nothing other and nothing more than the possibility of sin. How that possibility became a reality is and will presumably remain a mystery . . . the explanation eludes us, not only in connection with the origin of the first sin but over and over with respect to all sorts of human deeds and actions. . . . Every human being is a mystery, and every action is grounded in something other and deeper than the environment. To a much greater degree, the same applies to sin. Here we enter the mysterious area of moral freedom and face a phenomenon that in the nature of the case, as it concerns its origin, escapes explanation . . . it is “like trying to see the darkness or hear the silence.” (3:69; cf. Augustine, *City of God*, 12.7.1)

For Bavinck, what is important is not discovering a reason for sin’s existence that would make it comprehensible. In a good world created by a good God, sin is an utterly foreign intrusion. “Sin *exists*, but it will never be able to justify its existence. It is unlawful and irrational” (3:70). Sin is, at base, a paradox: “it always *had to be* there [i.e., within God’s providential purposes and rule] as something that *ought not* to be and has no right to exist” (3:74).

BAVINCK’S TRINITARIAN REALIST EPISTEMOLOGY AND THE INCOMPREHENSIBILITY OF EVIL

Not only does the incomprehensible nature of sin follow from the scriptural witness, but also it fits within Bavinck’s overall account of human knowing. The final section of this essay will provide a brief sketch of Bavinck’s epistemology, explaining why it leaves no possibility for human understanding of the origin and nature of sin and evil.

In the first volume of *Reformed Dogmatics* Bavinck explores the foundations of human thought. He takes issue with the two major epistemological movements of his day: rationalism and empiricism. Rationalists, taking their cue from ancient neo-Platonists, believe “that sense perception yields no knowledge because it is focused on changing phenomena.”²¹ Perceptions can be, and often are, flawed and unreliable. True knowledge can only be found through the process of rational thought. Therefore, when the rationalist seeks knowledge, he turns inwards. This is exemplified in the philosophy of Descartes, who “found his fixed starting point in thought and from it inferred being: *cogito ergo sum*” (I think, therefore I am) (1:215). For rationalists, such as Fichte, Schelling, Hegel and Kant, “the origin of knowledge is to be found in the subject” (1:215). It is not difficult to see how this philosophical stance on knowledge could devalue the importance of

21. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 215; hereafter cited in text.

sense perception, and, as with Kant, lead to an epistemological cynicism. If the true source of knowledge lies within the subject, how can one possibly trust that the world they experience corresponds to reality?

Bavinck continues: “Diametrically opposed to rationalism is empiricism . . . its starting point is always the principle that sense perception alone is the source of our knowledge” (1:219). Empiricists, such as Bacon, Lock, Hume, and Mill, deny the ability for humans to know anything that is not first perceived through the senses. Knowledge, for them, is science narrowly conceived. Only the exact sciences, such as logic, mathematics, chemistry, and astronomy can truly constitute knowledge, for only they can be observed. History, philosophy, and theology can only consist of guesses and abstractions.

While Bavinck sees truth in both positions, he ultimately finds neither tenable. Rationalism is “directly contrary to life and experience” (1:217), and empiricism categorically excludes “precisely the knowledge that is most important to human beings” (1:221). Bavinck agrees with the empiricists in that “the starting point of all human knowledge is sense perception” (1:226). “One must first live, then philosophize” (1:223). But, according to Bavinck, one must *also* philosophize; knowledge does not end in passive experience:

The primary impetus [for knowledge] therefore comes from the sensible world; it impinges upon the human mind, arouses it, urges it to action. But the moment the intellect is activated, it immediately and spontaneously works in its own way and according to its own nature. (1:226)

The problem, however, still remains: how can we be sure that the content of our intellect corresponds to a reality outside of us?

For Bavinck, the only way one can hold to such a realist epistemology is by acknowledging God as the source of all knowledge. Augustine, too, had made a similar move, but he had done so within a neo-Platonic and therefore highly rationalistic framework. He writes:

We listen to Truth which presides over our minds within us, though of course we may be bidden to listen by someone using words. Our real Teacher is he who is so listened to, *who is said to dwell in the inner man, namely Christ*, that is, the unchangeable power and eternal wisdom of God.²²

Whereas, for Augustine, all true knowledge comes from God through internal contemplation, for Bavinck, true knowledge comes from God mediated through God’s creation. “It is the same Logos,” asserts Bavinck, “who created both the reality outside of us and the laws of thought within us and who produced an organic connection and correspondence between the two.”²³ He insists, furthermore, that this is the case not only in theology but also in all of science and life:

... God is the first principle of being . . . all things are based on [his] thoughts and are created by the word. It is his good pleasure, however, to reproduce in human beings made in his image an ectypal knowledge that reflects his archetypal knowledge . . . in his own divine mind. He does this . . . by displaying them to the human mind in the works of his hands. . . . But that is not enough. We need eyes in order to see. . . . There just has to be correspondence or kinship between object and subject. The Logos who shines in the world must also let his light shine in our consciousness. That is the light of reason, the intellect, which, itself originating in the Logos, discovers and recognized the Logos in things. It is the internal foundation of knowledge. (1:233)

For Bavinck, all human knowledge has a trinitarian basis. God is the source of all being. It is created through his Word, the Logos. Through God’s Holy Spirit, our faculty of reason (logos) corresponds to created reality (created through the Logos). This is part of human nature, given at creation, and upheld in God’s

22. Augustine, “The Teacher,” in *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, ed. J.H.S. Burleigh (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1979), 100; italics added.

23. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:231; hereafter cited in text.

providence by his common grace. “It is God alone who from his divine consciousness and by way of his creatures conveys the knowledge of truth to our mind—the Father who by the Son and in the Spirit reveals himself to us” (1:233).

Notice what happens if one tries to fit evil into this equation. If “it is the same Logos who created both the reality outside of us and the laws of thought within us and who produced an organic connection and correspondence between the two” (1:231), then evil can have no place in human comprehension. God did not create it. This is slightly different from Augustine’s “that which is nothing cannot be known,”²⁴ because Bavinck wants to hold to a more positive conception of evil—it is an *active privation*, not simply nothing. We can speak of evil’s existence; we just cannot comprehend what we are saying when we do so. We can experience evil and sin, and we can come to feel some of its power, but our rational faculty cannot truly form a concept of evil that corresponds to its reality; for, all knowledge is mediated through God’s creation. Evil, then, is incomprehensible and can never be made comprehensible within Bavinck’s epistemological framework. Therefore, he is absolutely consistent when he claims that “the impossibility of explaining [sin and evil] should be said openly and clearly: we are here at the boundaries of our knowledge.”²⁵

This essay has presented Bavinck’s account of the incomprehensibility of sin and evil. First, it explained the Augustinian roots of the doctrine of the privative character of evil and showed that Augustine, although attempting to do so, could not make original sin comprehensible. Next, it showed how Bavinck built upon these Augustinian roots, while critiquing and revising them. In an attempt to be more faithful to the Scriptures, Bavinck stressed both the positive character of sin and evil and its privative character: sin is an *active privation*. Bavinck, aware of the tension between God’s omnipotence and the existence of evil, declared sin to be incomprehensible, an utter paradox. “It is the greatest

24. Augustine, “On Free Will,” 2.20.54.

25. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:70.

contradiction tolerated by God in his creation, yet used by him in the way of justice and righteousness as an instrument for his glory.”²⁶ Finally, this essay argued that Bavinck’s conclusion, far from being simply a frustrated admission of defeat, was ultimately consistent with his epistemological framework. All knowledge, not just religious knowledge, is mediated to us through God’s creation—he created the external reality that we seek to know as well as our internal faculty of knowing. It is God who ensures a correspondence between our mental concepts and external reality. God, however, did not create evil, and therefore we cannot form a mental construct that could accurately correspond to its nature and origin. It is incomprehensible, *tout court*. Trying to understand it is like trying “to see darkness, to hear silence.”²⁷

26. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:145.

27. Augustine, *City of God*, 12.7.1.

Herman Bavinck and Radical Orthodoxy: Elements of Participation in the *Reformed Dogmatics*

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This paper gives a short introduction to my current research about the theological movement known as *Radical Orthodoxy* (RO) in combination with Herman Bavinck's theology. Since this occasion is a Bavinck conference, this paper focuses mainly on Bavinck and not on RO. However, to introduce my theme and to explain why I am reading Bavinck the way I do, I have to explain shortly what RO is and how it is related to Bavinck's theology.

RADICAL ORTHODOXY

What is RO? The people connected to it do not like to see it as a clear theological "school" or even a movement. Instead, they prefer to consider it as a shared theological sensibility and more of a loose tendency among theologians.¹ However, what sensibility is shared?

The first characteristic is that RO theologians want to develop a post-secular theology. In the introduction to the opening volume of the radical orthodoxy series which started in 1999, the main representatives of RO—John Milbank, Graham Ward, and Catherine Pickstock—write that they want to "reclaim the world by situating its concerns and activities within a theological

1. J.K.A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-secular Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 63–70.

framework.”² Modernity has ironically proven not to honour the material as it intended to do, and RO claims that a fully theological stance is needed to overcome this.

In this respect the intentions of RO sound quite similar to the theological project of neo-Calvinism. There are important resemblances between their standpoint and the theological robustness of the works of Kuyper and Bavinck. Reformed theologians immediately recognized the main statements of RO as echoing Kuyper’s famous dictum: “There is not a single square inch of creation concerning which Christ does not say ‘Mine!’”³

In the second place, we must have a look at RO’s central theological framework—“participation.” By this they mean participation of the created in the divine, a concept that, according to Milbank, Ward, and Pickstock, stems from Plato and was successfully taken up and reworked by Christianity. Of course, this idea is linked with currents of thought that focus on some kind of “Deification” or “Panentheism” and might distance their position immediately from Reformed theology, which insists firmly on the border between the Creator and the created. However, they have strong reasons to emphasize this theme which are worthwhile to consider. Participation envisages all created beings as intimately related to God. Finite things are nothing in themselves but are seen as purely gifts from God and as giving themselves back to God. So, one can detect what they call a trinitarian logic or movement in things: things derive their existence from God and give themselves back to God. “All there is, is only because it is more than it is,” as it is strikingly formulated in the introduction. So, implicitly, RO calls for a resurgence of metaphysics.

2. J. Milbank, G. Ward, C. Pickstock, *Radical Orthodoxy: A new theology* (London: Routledge, 1999), 1.

3. J.K.A. Smith and J.H. Olthuis (eds.), *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition: Creation, Covenant and Participation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

BAVINCK ON KNOWLEDGE AND THEOLOGY

Of course, Bavinck scholars will recognise these themes in Bavinck's works. In my first reading of the *Reformed Dogmatics*, for example, I was struck by the resemblances between key points of RO and Bavinck's thought, which is not to say that I did not notice great differences as well. In this paper my reading of Bavinck is restricted to some important remarks in his prolegomena.

What is theology, according to Bavinck? From the outset, it is clear that Bavinck intends to give his dogmatics a trinitarian character. The whole world stands in a trinitarian movement from God to God. It is the task of theology to participate in this very movement. When writing about the task of science, Bavinck argues that its aim is or should be *truth*. If theology wants to be scientific, it should be aiming for the truth that underlies all our changing and unstable worldly phenomena. In other words, theology should be metaphysical. And if theology does this, then "it returns to the old view of theology,"⁴ Bavinck writes in the second and later editions of his *Dogmatics*. He expresses the same thought even more profoundly in the first edition. There he states that theology, aiming for truth, "returns immediately to God himself and becomes again, in the strict sense, theology"—by which he must mean that theology partakes in the speaking and thinking of God himself.⁵

Later on Bavinck writes in the same fashion when he defends, against the German theologian Julius Kaftan, the point that theology focuses on knowledge and not on the moral will in a neo-Kantian sense. Thus he writes:

Science exists for God's sake and finds its final goal in his glory. Specifically, this then is true of theology; in a special sense it is from God and by God, and hence for God as well. But precisely because its final purpose does not lie in any

4. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 37.

5. Herman Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, vol. 1, 1st. ed. (Kampen: J.H. Bos, 1895), 8.

creature, not in practice, or in piety, or in the church, amidst all the [other] sciences it maintains its own character and nature. Truth as such has value. Knowledge as such is a good. To know God in the face of Christ—by faith here on earth, by sight in the hereafter—not only *results* in blessedness but *is* as such blessedness and eternal life. It is this knowledge dogmatics strives for in order that God may see his own image reflected and his own name recorded in the human consciousness.⁶

Two biblical texts that continually accompany Bavinck's comments on knowledge and the character of theology are striking. The first is John 17:3 (NIV): "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." For Bavinck, salvation is simply equated with knowing God. The second text is Romans 11:36 (NIV): "For from him and through him and to him are all things. . . ." Bavinck reads the trinitarian movement in this world as "from God to God."

This is a point which Bavinck stresses time and again: the task of human thinking and especially of theological thinking is to rethink the thoughts of God. God has complete knowledge of himself, and we will never know God the way He knows himself. Nevertheless, our knowledge of God participates in God's knowledge. This participation is also stressed when Bavinck discusses the *principia* of theology. He uses the classic distinction between *theologia archetypa* and *ectypa* (God's knowledge of himself and our knowledge of God), but Bavinck wants to make clear that the three *principia* he distinguishes are "essentially one," rooted in the trinitarian being of God.⁷

6. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:53–54.

7. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:214.

ELEMENTS OF PARTICIPATION

When we analyse this conception of theology in light of the tradition, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Bavinck is using elements of neo-Platonism. Or, as we perhaps should say: Bavinck stands in the respected Christian tradition that absorbed elements of neo-Platonism to speak faithfully about the relationship between God and creation. The paragon of this tradition is Thomas Aquinas, whose conception of theology is close to Bavinck's.

It is the common opinion about Thomas Aquinas that he connected his inherited Christian doctrinal tradition with the new (in his time) "scientific" way of looking at the world which was found in the works of Aristotle and that he was also heavily influenced by a more neo-Platonic line in the Christian tradition as found in Augustine and, more profoundly, in the works of Pseudo-Dionysius, Scotus Erigena, and Maximus Confessor. These influences can be observed in the so-called *exitus-reditus* concept that he uses in his *Summa Theologiae*: all created things go out from God and return to God. This movement is even said to be the basic scheme of his *Summa*.⁸ It is exactly this movement, connected with the Trinity, that is decisive for Bavinck's concept of theology, as we have seen. So what we can say about Bavinck's conception of theology, I contend, is at least that it contains elements of participation. Again, this is not to say, of course, that Bavinck would not have major objections to this scheme.

When Bavinck writes about method and organization of theology, he admits that he would have no serious objections against a trinitarian organization of dogmatic theology. "It commends itself," he writes, "by its purely theological character. Nature and history are both subsumed under God." However, there is the danger of speculative misuse when philosophers or theologians tend to sacrifice history to the system and to incorporate cosmogony into the

8. This was argued first by M. D. Chenu in 1939 but has been recently challenged by R. te Velde in his *Aquinas on God: The Divine Science of the Summa Theologiae* (Farnham: Asgate, 2006), 9–18.

trinitarian life of God, turning it into theogony.⁹ Bavinck interestingly mentions the names of Erigena, Böhme, Baader, Schelling, and Hegel in this occasion. And he mentions these names more often in his dogmatics: they represent kinds of thought that envision God and the world too harmoniously together and end up in some form of monism or pantheism.

Here we begin to recognise a stance that Bavinck takes throughout his *Reformed Dogmatics*, especially in his account of the doctrine of God and Creation: on the one hand he fences off his position against deism, which creates a gap between God and creation; but on the other hand he argues against a form of pantheism, which erases the border between creator and creature. So, there is a limit to Bavinck's sympathy for participatory views on the relationship between God and the world.

However, if we can find in Bavinck's work a slight preference for the intentions of one or the other; or, perhaps better, if we can determine which position he opposes most, I would contend that Bavinck is more strongly opposed to the deistic than the pantheistic view. In continuity with his ability to see important truths in widely varying opinions, he really does see some truth in all kinds of thought that keeps God and creation intimately connected. This desire resonates with his own theological view, which I already called "trinitarian" and in which the Logos plays a central conceptual role as a mediator between creator and creation. Not only is the Logos our way to know God, but also it is the only way to know at all. It is in the Logos that we have connection to reality, to created things, and to the Creator. The Logos is the principle that connects subject and object, that makes them "correspond" in "an organic way."

In all this—and I want to end here with a more general statement—we see Bavinck as someone who is aware of the need to draw distinctions between subject and object, between God and the world, and between the persons of the Trinity. But more importantly we see his longing for oneness, for harmony, for a

9. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:111–12.

subsuming of all difference under the one and true God, who is the beginning and end and the only true existence of all things.

An Impenetrable Mystery: Herman Bavinck's Concept of Regeneration and Its Sources

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Is it possible to write a dissertation on a dogmatic subject about which the primary source material covers less than 70 pages? When we look to §49 of Herman Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*—"Calling and Regeneration"—it looks like it is just a small part of his magnum opus. Nevertheless, this small section is like a stone in a pond: it creates multiple dogmatic and anthropological waves which affect the entire theological pool. When one looks to Bavinck's in-depth approach to the subject and to his extensive use of a broad range of sources, it becomes increasingly clear that a scientific study on his formulation of regeneration is more than justified.

My dissertation is under the supervision of Jan Hoek, Professor of Reformed spirituality at the Theological University of the Protestant Church in Kampen (PThU). The main question of my study is: What is the concept of Bavinck's theology of regeneration? And how does he use the dogmatic developments pertaining to regeneration from Reformed theology to modern theology?

The method I use is twofold. First, I examine the theological-dogmatic developments of regeneration from sixteenth-century Reformation to nineteenth-century Dutch neo-Calvinism. Second, I analyze Bavinck's description of regeneration throughout many of his works, both published materials and unpublished writings found in the Bavinck Archive in Amsterdam.

My study is divided in two parts. The first part is a dogmatic-historical overview on the development of the theology of regeneration from Calvin to Kuyper. The second part is a description and examination of Bavinck's concept of regeneration and its development. More specifically, the former part draws a historical line starting in the Reformation and continuing through Reformed Scholasticism, Puritanism, the Dutch Second Reformation, the German *Vermittlung-theologie*, the nineteenth-century Neo-Kantian and Lutheran theology, modern theology, Dutch Ethical Theology, and neo-Calvinism. The sources that I use—such as Calvin, Dordtse Leerregels (the Canons of Dort), *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae*, Perkins, Voetius, Maccovius, Van Aalst, Vitringa, Schleiermacher, Ritschl, Herrmann, Gennrich, Scholten, Muller, and Kuyper—are works to which Bavinck refers most in this section of his writings.

This historical survey has a twofold purpose. First, it gives insight into important developments in the theology of regeneration through almost four centuries. Second, it provides insight into how Bavinck analyzed these sources and historical developments. Again, all the theological works that are examined in this dogmatic-historical overview are of great importance to Bavinck's formulation of regeneration.

Why this extensive overview of historical-theological developments? This broad horizon is the outcome of a profound examination of Bavinck's works focused on his concept of regeneration and his sources.

So we come to the second part of my study—the main part. Upon an initial examination, Bavinck's concept of regeneration seems to contain only a small amount of material: (1) a section in his *Reformed Dogmatics*, (2) articles published in *Calling and Regeneration*, and (3) selections from his various books such as *Magnalia Dei*. Furthermore, we all know that in his context there was the exhaustive discussion about the Kuyperian concept of “Veronderstelde Wedergeboorte” (presumptive regeneration), which doctrine created much debate in the Reformed Churches. But to say regarding these sources, “Here we have the most important materi-

als for describing the concept of regeneration in Bavinck's thought," is much too simple; for, in Bavinck's thought the subject of regeneration is not only greatly important but also highly complex. Additionally, the concept plays an important role in his theological development.

I make a distinction between the younger Bavinck (i.e., the Professor in Kampen) and the older Bavinck (i.e., the Professor in Amsterdam). The younger Bavinck wrote the first edition of his *Reformed Dogmatics* and the short articles on *Calling and Regeneration*. As is evident in these works, the younger Bavinck refers most frequently to Reformed Scholastic theologians and to Reformed theological works. The frame of his concept is worked out like a scholastic *ordo salutis*: calling, regeneration (divided into internal and external calling), faith, conversion, and so forth. However, during this phase the younger Bavinck also wrote his unpublished *Reformed Ethics* manuscript which was found recently in the Bavinck Archive in Amsterdam. In this manuscript we meet a more spiritual and practical approach to regeneration than in the *Reformed Dogmatics*, and we definitely see a clear influence of Puritanism and the Dutch Second Reformation. For example, we find the question about the foregoing works of the Holy Spirit, like Perkins described.

It is striking that, although the younger Bavinck made an intensive study of the Dutch Ethical Theology represented in works such as *De Ethische Theologie van Chantepie de la Saussaye*, it looks like there is no apparent influence of this theological stream on Bavinck's thought with respect to regeneration. When it comes to the modern theology of Scholten and Bavinck's other teachers, it looks like these influences did not leave a trace in his early publications. But we know from his letters that the young Kampen professor had his interest, vision, and struggles with the broadness of theology, but we do not find these in his early books or manuscripts such as the first edition of his *Reformed Dogmatics*, his *Reformed Ethics* manuscript, or his lecture notes (either the collections made by himself or by his students). So we can say, as a preliminary conclusion, that the young Bavinck wants to be a fully

Reformed theologian when it comes to regeneration. The new developments in theology remain in the background.

Then, indeed, things change. Bavinck becomes Professor of dogmatics at the Free University in Amsterdam. He publishes the second edition of his *Reformed Dogmatics*, and in this edition the amount of material on calling and regeneration has more than doubled! It has also been revised. I have studied these additions and revisions in several ways.

First, I have made a close comparison between the first and second editions. The difference is obvious: the text of the first edition is mainly still there in the second edition, but there is a huge increase of material. Thus it is intriguing to discover what the new material covers.

Second, I have examined all his sources listed in the footnotes—more than 220 in this section alone! In distinction from his first edition, Bavinck refers to a very broad horizon of theological sources ranging from Reformation theology and Reformed scholasticism to German Vermittlungs-theologie to modern theology. Additionally, a marginal attempt at an interdisciplinary approach can be detected. For example, Bavinck incorporates insights from the new anthropological science of psychology (James).

But, most importantly, it appears from the second edition of his *Reformed Dogmatics* that Bavinck made an extensive study of new theological developments concerning regeneration. This development did not occur primarily in relation to the contemporary discussions about “veronderstelde wedergeboorte.” For it appears that that discussion did not interest the older Bavinck. Rather, he became more and more interested in the anthropological dimension of regeneration—a development that suits the way that Bavinck moved from theology to anthropology.

Furthermore, we must note that the anthropological dimension of regeneration which we find in the second edition of the *Reformed Dogmatics* was an important subject of discussion in the neo-Kantian and Lutheran theology of the late nineteenth-century. The older Bavinck refers often to theologians such as Schleier-

macher, Ritschl, Herrmann, and Gennrich, and he frequently references contemporary Lutheran theologians from Germany. Hence it is obvious that the older Bavinck is engaged in an extensive discussion with a broad horizon of theological and anthropological sources. Bavinck's other writings, such as his letters and college notes, confirm this development toward emphasizing anthropology.

My study involves two presupposition. First, recent Bavinck scholarship has demonstrated that, when Bavinck is in discussion with other theological traditions, he does not merely reference and describe formulations from these traditions as concepts to be rejected. Rather, when Bavinck cites from a broad horizon of theological traditions, he quietly attempts to incorporate these streams into his own formulations. Second, when we read Bavinck we must keep in mind that there are several layers in his works. This fact is related to his developments through the years. Also, we must give attention to the diversity of targets within his works; for, in his writings we meet not only Bavinck as a dogmatic theologian but also as an irenic churchman and a philosophical anthropologist. The purpose of each work guides its content, and therefore we must reckon with Bavinck's aims in his various publications.

My ongoing research justifies the following preliminary conclusion: Bavinck has been loyal to the so-called orthodox *ordo salutis*. It is like a frame for his theology of regeneration. He loved the words used to describe regeneration in the Dordtse Leerregels which he cites at the end of his treatment of this topic. But through the years his concept was broadened with anthropological, spiritual, and psychological dimensions. This enrichment comes forth primarily from his engagement with nineteenth-century German theology and his interest in the new insights arising from the new anthropological sciences. But, how deep and how broad his theology of regeneration finally may be, Bavinck says himself: regeneration is an impenetrable mystery.

The Kingdom of God, The Highest Good

Herman Bavinck

Translated by Nelson D. Kloosterman

INTRODUCTION*

[28] Amid all the distress surrounding the discipline of theology today, it is undoubtedly a heartening phenomenon that the science identified as Ethics seems to be enjoying an unheralded resurgence of interest, compared to former times. This does not mean, of course, that everything in this discipline is flourishing. Not all of the causes to which Ethics is indebted for this resurgence are heartwarming. The way in which people try to dislodge the firm foundations of this discipline, or seek to caricature and deny its eternal principles, is far from encouraging. But that people are curious about the moral life and attempt to clarify its nature, principle, and essence, do provide reasons for rejoicing and gratitude, I think.

Formerly, the discipline of Ethics received sparse attention, consisting mostly of explaining the doctrines of virtues and duties. Simply knowing what kind of persons we must be is inadequate,

*The following essay is a lecture that Bavinck delivered to the Student Corps of the Theological School in Kampen—*Fides Quaerit Intellectum*—on 3 February 1881. The lecture was originally serialized in *De Vrije Kerk: Vereeniging van Christelijke Gereformeerde Stemmen* 7 (April–August 1881): 4:185–92; 5:224–34; 6:271–77; 7:305–14; 8:353–60. These articles were republished as a single essay in the collection of Bavinck essays prepared by his brother, C.B. Bavinck, *Kennis en Leven* (Kampen: Kok, 1922), 28–56. The pagination from *Kennis en Leven* is provided in brackets: []. The Editor wishes to thank Calvin Seminary ThM student, Gayle E. Doornbos, for her excellent editorial assistance with modernizing the footnotes for this translation.

however, for realizing the moral good—the description of which is supplied by the doctrine of the virtues. Nor is it sufficient to know the duties or laws according to which we must pursue that moral good. We also need to understand those moral goods themselves according to their nature and essence, in their unity and interconnectedness, in order to realize them within and around us.

Perhaps the most influential theologian of the nineteenth century was Friedrich Schleiermacher, who was both deeply misunderstood and too highly esteemed.¹ Yet it was he who identified that above-mentioned flaw in the earlier view of Ethics and ensured a fixed place in this discipline for the “doctrine of virtues” (*Güterlehre*). In this way he contributed a complete revision and an enduring benefit to the discipline of Ethics.

[29] Add to this the fact that, formerly, people placed earthly and heavenly goods alongside each other and failed adequately to plumb the depths of their interrelationship, which is one of the most difficult problems that exists. People usually hesitated to include earthly goods in the realm of the moral, thereby running the risk of viewing the moral good only spiritualistically.

Our current age represents such a sharp opposition to that direction. People had been holding out hope for a future that was gloriously portrayed and eagerly believed, one that would make up for all our suffering. When it did not happen, they have been trying to recover their loss by bathing in the delights of the moment. The invisible, eternal goods—people had been waiting for them in vain for so long that they turned to the temporal and the visible for what they could give! The invoice for the difference, already charged to heaven’s account, has remained unpaid and has in fact turned out to be worthless. For a long time already people have been believing; now they want to see, indeed, to live and to enjoy themselves. And since the future is delivering nothing, the sooner the better, the more the better.

1. For evaluating our perspective regarding Schleiermacher, one might find the article written about him by Nesselmann in *Der Beweis des Glaubens* 5 (1869): 103–15, to be helpful.

That very challenging relationship between this life and the life to come, between earth and heaven, between the temporal and the eternal, the visible and the invisible—people have come to resolve this challenge most simply by insisting that one side of this relationship does not exist. In opposition to that materialist impulse of our age, though acknowledging the truth this monumental error contains, I shall proceed to share with you a glimpse of the glory of our catholic, Christian faith, as I speak to you about the Kingdom of God as the highest good.

The choice of this as my subject immediately offers me the significant advantage that I am standing at the heart of a concept that is genuinely biblical and specifically Christian. This notion could never have grown in pagan soil. All the elements that constitute this concept are absent in paganism. The value and significance of personality remains unknown and uncomprehended; the individual-personal has no unique purpose but appears as a mere means and instrument for the group. Thus the pagan worldview lacks the concept of humanity as a single interrelated organism and could never come up with the idea of a kingdom in which both the individual and the group would develop their full identities. Moreover, the religious moral life was tied most closely with political life and never attained independence. The ethical remained indistinguishable from and virtually bound to the physical, attaining no independent dominion, and appearing as merely a particular mode of the one, grand, all-encompassing process of nature. Just as on Mount Olympus, [30] fate exercised dominion over the gods, so too on earth the freedom of personality was bound by the chains of impersonal nature.

Consequently, the highest good was viewed variously as being either individualistic or communistic, either exclusively sensual or abstractly spiritual. The highest good was identified variously: with Aristotle, for example, as the happiness (*eudaimonia*) of the individual, or with the Stoics, as living according to nature, or with Epicurus as happiness experienced through desire. Even for the “spiritual” Plato, who delved so deeply into the essence of the good, the highest good consisted in being released from the senses and

being elevated to true, pure, ideal being, to be achieved under the reign of philosophy and realized in the State, wherein everything is common and the individual is completely subjected to the power of the group.

Basically none of the ancients got beyond a morality of utility and calculation. The notion of a Kingdom of God that fosters the development of both individual and community, that is both the content and the goal of world history, encompassing the whole earth and all nations, such an idea arose in neither head nor heart of any of the noblest of the pagans.²

The matter was different among Israel. Through divine revelation a “middle wall of separation” was erected between that people and the pagans in almost every area of life. Israel was the people of the Sabbath, the pagans were the people of the week. In art, science, statecraft, in everything belonging to the arena of culture, Israel was far inferior to many a pagan nation. But to her the words of God were entrusted. She knew the value and significance of personality, first of all of God’s personality, but then also that of his image, human beings. For that reason Israel kept in view first and foremost that dimension of a person whereby one would rest in and depend on God. By contrast, the pagans developed especially that dimension of human personality whereby one stood above and over against nature. But since true freedom lay in serving God alone, the freedom idolized by pagans had to result in bankruptcy. Israel’s destiny, by contrast, lay embedded in the requirement to be holy as God is holy. Israel was called to be a Kingdom of God, to constitute a theocracy wherein God’s will governed and directed everything. Amid Israel, the Kingdom of God was enclosed within the narrow boundaries of the national state. It was not a unique sphere alongside the state and alongside culture, but existed within them and included them, exercising dominion over all the rest. [31] In this way the Kingdom of God was particularistic, and it had to be in order to attain historical

2. Cf. Friedrich Überweg, *Geschichte der Philosophie in Das Altertum*, vol. 1, 5th ed. (Berlin: Max Heinze, 1876).

existence, in order not to be obscured or to hover as an abstract idea somewhere above history, in order genuinely to enter into the history of the human race.³ Only by means of that particularistic character could the Kingdom of God genuinely become, if I may put it this way, a “universal-historical Power” (*universal-geschichtliche Potenz*).

So from the very beginning, the Kingdom of God possessed a universal scope.

Israel’s God was the God of all peoples. The meaning of personality was familiar, which included the idea of a single humanity. Israel herself was fully aware of that very special calling to constitute a Kingdom of God, so much so that as the luxuriously chivalrous period of the judges was drawing to a close, the very serious question arose whether earthly kingship was compatible with theocracy. Samuel resolved this by making Israel’s kingship an instrument of God’s rule. But soon thereafter they became separate. Often kingship in Israel became an instrument for opposing theocracy. And to the extent that the national state and the Kingdom of God became disassociated and came to stand sharply in opposition to each other, in Israel’s history the Kingdom of God became disconnected from the national character and became more and more universal-human, purely ethical.

At that point, the most remarkable and heartwarming phenomenon appeared that had ever appeared in the history of the human race. In the tiny land of Palestine, closely surrounded on all sides by pagans, the gaze of Israel’s faithful ones looked toward the future, the last day, encompassing all the earth and all the peoples. Israel’s prophets, whose gaze looked far beyond the limits of the nation, contrary to every empirical proof and all outward evidence, strengthened by their expectation and the heroism of their faith, spoke of the ends of the earth one day being full of the knowledge of the Lord.

3. Cf. E. Riehm, “Der Missionsgedanke im Alten Testament,” in *Allgemeine Missions-Zeitschrift*, vol. 7, eds. Gustav Warneck and Julius Richter (October 1880), 453–65.

When after the Exile another attempt was launched to provide the Kingdom of God a visible form and a historical face, that attempt failed as well, and at that point prophecy ceased. But the Jewish people did not forget their calling, clinging anxiously to the once-spoken prophetic word, developing their expectation still further. In the apocalyptic, apocryphal literature of the Old Testament, an entire messianic dogmatics was developed. [32] Because it lacked prophetic animus and genuine understanding, its high and lofty ideal was packaged within national limitations, cast within sensate forms, and thereby defiled and materialized.⁴

Then the Elijah of the New Testament appeared proclaiming the approach of the Kingdom of Heaven. And then appeared the One in whom the Kingdom of God was fully present, who was its Founder, and from whom alone this Kingdom could expand and develop still further. In line with the prophets, Jesus removed the national, tight-fitting garment with which Judaism had clothed, indeed, had concealed, but—and let us not forget this—had also preserved such a glorious idea. For Jesus, the Kingdom of God was the purpose of all of his activity, the main content and central idea of his teaching, whose essence, expansion, development, and fulfillment were presented by him in the most variegated way, with and without parables. Moving outward from his own person, he established this Kingdom in the hearts of his disciples.

Initially, the Kingdom of God was realized in the church. But to the extent that this Kingdom entered into the world, the two became distinct. The contrast between church and world lost something of its sharpness. The Kingdom of God permeates the world and the world permeates the church. Its catholicizing impulse, however, surrenders neither term, and reconciles the tensions through a process of give and take, and where necessary, makes the ideal crystal clear in the face of the real.

4. Cf. Carl Wittichen, *De Idee des Reiches Gottes* (Göttingen: Dietrichsche Buchhandlung, 1872), 90–162; and Emil Schürer, *Lehrbuch der Neutestamentlichen Zeitgeschichte* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1874), 511–99.

By wedding itself to the state, the church distances itself from none of its former claims as it identifies itself with the Kingdom of God. According to the Roman Catholic perspective, the *regnum Christi* is identical to the *regnum pontificium*, and the earthly Kingdom of God is completely identical to the historical organization of the established Roman Catholic Church. In this way the Jewish theocracy is imitated in the church. Christianity is judaized and ethnicized.

In opposition to that organization, the Reformation registered its sharp and well-considered protest. Cleansing Christianity of its Jewish and pagan elements, the Reformers once again viewed the Kingdom of God in its ideal, spiritual, eternal character and declared in their distinction (not separation) between the visible and invisible church that here on earth the Kingdom of God can never be perfectly realized in a visible, historically-organized community. Nonetheless, it may be viewed as quite remarkable that, despite the prominent place occupied by the term *Kingdom of God* in Holy Scripture, especially in the prophetic books and in Jesus' teaching, this term nevertheless virtually disappeared from Protestant theology, [33] and gets replaced by the phrase *invisible church*. Without losing anything of the rich content contained in this idea, however, the phrase *Kingdom of God* cannot continue to be neglected. For that reason, I am going to try to present to you *the Kingdom of God as the highest good*, unfolding its content, which, on account of its richness, can be described only in its main features. To do that, I wish to give you as guideposts these four ideas:

1. The essence of the Kingdom of God
2. The Kingdom of God and the individual
3. The Kingdom of God and the community (family, state, church, culture)
4. The completion of the Kingdom of God

1. THE ESSENCE OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

You all know the captivating idea of Pascal: “l’homme n’est qu’un roseau, le plus faible de la nature, mais c’est un roseau pensant” (“man is a reed, the weakest of nature, but he is a thinking reed”). Even, so Pascal continues, were the universe to slay man, he would be nobler than the entire cosmos, for he *knows* that he dies. So the cosmos exists to be known, understood, and dominated by man. Were you able to conceive of a world that always proceeded in its orbit without being able to deposit its image within human consciousness, the existence of such a world would be a non-existence like an eternal night, illuminated by no beam of light whatsoever.

But personality rises above the dark impulse of nature and dwells in the kingdom of light, of spirit, and of freedom. This is like the fanciful myth wherein Aphrodite emerges from the mist of the waves to bestow fertility and life upon the still and dead creation. Similarly, human personality rises above the world and bestows upon it the rays of enlightenment. And still, though he proceeds far beyond the world, man is not from the world. Yet he does not stand in relation to the world as a stranger, but belongs to the world, is related to the world, and is most intimately bound to the world with the strongest of bonds, by means of his own organism.

Even as the human personality, spiritual, invisible, and eternal in its essence, nevertheless requires the material body as the instrument of its activity and of its outward manifestation, so too the Kingdom of God as the highest good for humanity is indeed a kingdom that in its essence surpasses everything temporal and earthly. This in no way means, however, that the Kingdom of God therefore exists in enmity against [34] everything temporal and earthly, but much rather needs them as its instrument and is prepared to be an instrument for their sakes. At its core, in the depths of its being, the Kingdom of God is spiritual, eternal, invisible. It does not come with outward form (Luke 17:20), does not consist in food and drink (Romans 14:17), is invisible and intangible. For it is the Kingdom of Heaven, of heavenly origin. And

through heavenly, supernatural powers the Kingdom was established on earth, it is still being developed, and its future guided. But it is abstract and spiritual, though not simply a logical deduction lacking any reality. The contrast that to us is so familiar, between the sensual and the spiritual, is entirely foreign to Scripture. The Kingdom of God as the highest good consists in the unity, the inclusion, the totality of all moral goods, of earthly and heavenly, spiritual and physical, eternal and temporal goods.

The good can constitute a unity, and it does that automatically. By contrast, sin is unable to do that. Sin dissolves; sin “moves from forged unity into diversity”; sin propagates atomism and individualism to the extreme. Sin is a disorganizing power possessing no reason for existence and thus no purpose in itself. So sin can never have value as being inherently desirable, nor does it obligate anyone to follow. Sin is really unnecessary, absolute immorality, existing without a right to exist. Therefore sin can never establish an entity, a kingdom that proceeds from itself. It constitutes merely a kind of *contrat social* (social contract), because in no other way than as an organized power can sin attain its goal, which lies outside of it, namely, the destruction of the good, and only in this way can it break down the Kingdom of God. So when the Kingdom of God shall be perfected and no longer be exposed to the attacks of Satan, at that point the kingdom of sin will be split into pieces, all its elements destroyed, and it will turn against itself.

The good, however, constitutes a unity. Freed from the destructive power of sin, it automatically organizes. The good is at the same time the beautiful; it consists in perfect harmony. The Kingdom of God in its perfection is the unity of all moral goods.

Here on earth, however, all those goods are not yet one; here, holiness and redemption, virtue and happiness, spiritual and physical good do not yet coincide. More often here on earth the righteousness of the Kingdom of God is bound up with the cross, and through many tribulations we must enter the Kingdom of Heaven (Acts 14:22). Earthly goods, like wealth, honor, and prosperity, can even be impediments, as they were for the rich young man (Mark 10:23). For when, through sin, all these goods

lose their bond of unity, each of them coming to be separated in isolation from the others, [35] they thereby all the more easily become instruments of sin.

But in itself the Kingdom of God is not hostile toward all those goods. Rather, the Kingdom of God is independent from all of those externalities; it exists above them, enlists them as its instrument, and in so doing returns to them their original purpose. For this reason Jesus came with the demand: seek first the Kingdom of God and its righteousness, and all the rest is then not vain, unprofitable, and sinful, but will be added to you; added, for one who possesses the righteousness of the Kingdom of God will certainly inherit the earth.

That which constitutes the bond, the unity of all those goods, is spiritual in nature, namely, righteousness. It is the righteousness that consists precisely in each thing existing according to its own nature, receiving its proper place, and being complete in its nature and essence. To that righteousness everything is subordinated, but also to that righteousness everything owes the preservation and perfection of its essence. Just as within a human being, the personality is the highest, and the body must be its instrument, so too in the Kingdom of God everything earthly, temporal, and visible is subject to the spiritual and eternal. Since the spiritual and eternal, in order to exist in reality and not just in the mind or in the imagination, must always be personal, so too the Kingdom of God is a Kingdom of free personalities.⁵ There the personality of each is fully developed and answers to its purpose.

For the righteousness of the Kingdom of God consists in this, that a person may be fully a person, such that everything within a person may be subject to the person's spiritual, eternal essence. At the moment everything within a person is torn apart, and what should be together has been torn asunder. Understanding and heart, consciousness and will, inclination and power, feeling and

5. Cf. M. des Amorie van der Hoeven, *Over het wezen der godsdienst en hare betrekking tot het Staatsregt* (Amsterdam: P.N. van Kampen, 1854), 12.

imagination, flesh and spirit, these are all opposed to each other at the moment, and they compete with each other for primacy.

But in the Kingdom of God all of those are once again pure instruments of the personality, arranged in perfect order around the personality as its center. There the darkened natural life no longer exists, nor any unwitting impulse. Everything moves outward from the center of the personality and returns there. All powers exist in the full light of consciousness and are fully included in the will. All compulsion is excluded since it is a kingdom of the spirit and thus of freedom. In this kingdom the natural and the visible are placed completely under the perspective of the spiritual and eternal; the physical is a pure instrument of the ethical even as everything, including our own body, which belongs to our persons and yet is not identical to our persons, [36] stands completely in the service of our personality and is glorified precisely as an instrument of the dominion of the spirit.

So the Kingdom of God is a kingdom of free personalities where each personality has reached its full development. But it is a *kingdom* of free personalities who do not live separated from each other, like individuals, but who together constitute a kingdom and are bound to each other in the most complete and purest community. The Kingdom of God is not an aggregate of disparate components, nor even an entity bound together accidentally by a communal interest. It is not simply a *société*, a club, an association like those we see established everywhere nowadays. All those contemporary associations of men and women, boys and girls, or young people, formed as they are around various interests and for various purposes, owe their existence mostly, or at least partially, to the reigning individualism of our day.

But the Kingdom of God is a *kingdom*, the social kingdom par excellence where communal life obtains its highest development and its purest manifestation. It is the most original kingdom that exists, and earthly kingdoms, including the natural kingdom, are but a faint image and a weak likeness. It is an entity where the individual parts are built for each other and fit each other, bound together by the most intimate fellowship, dwelling together under

one higher authority which forms the law of this entity. So it is an organism whose totality not only precedes and transcends the individual parts but also simultaneously forms the basis, the condition, and the constitutive power of the parts. At the same time it is no Platonic State where the rights of the individual are sacrificed to those of the group. Rather, the opposite is the case. The Kingdom of God in fact maintains everyone's personality, securing its full-orbed development.

Even individuality is not thereby destroyed because it is not an imperfection but that which supplies the essence of each person and distinguishes one from the other.⁶ Without that individuality an organism would not even be able to exist. The Kingdom of God would cease being the most perfect, the most pure organism if the hand were no longer the hand, the eye no longer the eye, and each member of that organism were no longer itself. "If all were a single member, where would the body be?" (1 Cor. 12:19ff.; cf. Rom. 12:4ff.).

Precisely by means of the single shared life of the organism, the individual members of the organism are maintained and preserved in their differentiation and uniqueness. The Kingdom of God, therefore, is no lifeless, [37] petrified atomism, no bare uniformity, but a unity that includes and harmoniously incorporates an infinite multitude. Exactly for that reason the Kingdom of God is the highest, the most perfect community, because it guarantees to each one's personality the most completely well-rounded and richest development of its content. For the unity of an organism becomes the more harmonious, the more rich, and the more glorious to the degree that the multitude of parts increases.

For example, there is very little unity alongside very little diversity in a rock. Every rock looks like the others, and every piece of rock is just another rock. But we encounter unity amid increased diversity already with a plant. Still more with an animal. We see the most rich and most glorious unity amid diversity in a human being

6. Cf. Alexandre R. Vinet, "Sur l'individualité et l'individualisme" in *Mélanges* (Paris: Chez les éditeurs, 1869), 83–101.

in whom we see an incalculable diversity, an inexhaustible wealth of phenomena, an inexpressible fullness of capacities and gifts and powers. The entire world is recapitulated and represented within a human being. A human being is truly a microcosm. And yet that entire plethora of phenomena is harmoniously bound together and organically arranged in the personality, which itself is eternal and far surpasses that entire plethora, as it knows that wonderful organism by means of its consciousness and rules it by means of its will.⁷

So then, what the human being is for the world, that is what the Kingdom of God is for the human being. There the richest harmony rules together with the perfection of beauty. There the most glorious and purest unity reigns among the most inscrutable wealth and the most incalculable diversity.

Imagine it if you can: every member of that organism known as the Kingdom of God is genuinely a personality with a completeness of life developed fully in every aspect. That Kingdom itself is, in its totality, yet another personality formed along the same lines. For the personality is the most basic and original source of every system, *das Ursystem*, as Stahl calls it.⁸

The Kingdom itself is also an organic personality whose head is Christ and whose subjects constitute the body. Just as each personality has and must have an organism known as the body, so too the church is the body, the pure organism of Christ's divine-human personality, the *pleroma*, to use Paul's profound expression (Eph. 1:23), of him who fills all in all. Thus, the Kingdom of God is the reconciliation of both individualism and socialism, the fulfillment of the truth of both. It could even be said that in the Kingdom of God the individual exists for the sake of the whole even as the whole exists for the sake of the individual.⁹

7. Cf. the chapter, "le principe de l'excellence," in Paul Janet, *La Morale* (Paris: Ch. Delagrave, 1880), 55–85.

8. Friedrich J. Stahl, *Die Philosophie des Rechts*, vol. 1, 4th ed. (Heidelberg: J.C.B. Mohr), 500.

[38] In the community of the Kingdom of God, as we said, Christ is the head. The Kingdom of God is, then, a *Kingdom of Christ*. Apart from sin, the Kingdom of God would have existed among humanity from the very beginning and would have developed completely normally. Through sin, the Kingdom of God was disrupted, the various goods contained in the Kingdom were torn asunder, and the triad of the true, the good, and the beautiful was broken. God wanted to restore his Kingdom for which he supplied the shadow and preparation already in Israel's theocracy, and in the fullness of time he sent his Son to establish it upon earth. On account of sin, therefore, the Kingdom of God became a Kingdom of Christ. He was anointed King in that Kingdom, and he exercises its sovereignty until he has destroyed every dominion and every authority and power and has placed all his enemies under his feet (1 Cor. 15:24–25). That is how long he must reign as King.

So the Kingdom of God is a Kingdom that does not yet exist fully but is coming into fuller existence, a Kingdom that cannot expand and develop in any other way than through fierce conflict. For the single and absolutely authoritative demand is that of *righteousness*, the requirement of absolute perfection. It cannot abandon this demand without destroying itself so that nothing will enter that Kingdom that defiles and does detestable things and speaks lies (Rev. 21:27). Thus it is a militant kingdom, one that cannot simply incorporate something just as it is, but must conquer and wrest from the dominion of sin everything it embraces. Since it is spiritual in nature, however, it employs only spiritual weapons. For its expansion, the Kingdom of God recognizes no other authority than the almighty power of divine grace.

In this way the Kingdom of God possesses a redemptive and sanctifying character. Just as Christ is the Founder, so too he is the moving power of the Kingdom, and he determines the nature and the manner of its development. The incarnation of the Word, the all-dominating fact and fundamental principle of all science, is also

9. Hans Lassen Martensen, *Die Christliche Ethik Allgemeiner Theil*, 3rd ed. (Gotha: Besser, 1878), 259–303.

the source and continuing principle of the Kingdom of God. The incarnation indicates that the divine, the eternal, the invisible does not hover above us at an unreachable height (Rom. 10:6–8), but has entered into the human, the temporal, and the visible, and now appears to our eyes in no other way than physically—in human form and in a human manner.

This is also the leading principle that now determines the nature of the expansion of the Kingdom of God. What is genuinely human may never and nowhere be snuffed out or suppressed. Always and everywhere the genuinely human must be made an organ and instrument of the form in which the divine exists. The Kingdom of God awaits that unity, which we behold in Christ in an entirely unique manner, in every domain of human living and striving, in order to make each thing real according to its nature. [39] It seeks to do this, however, not like the Greeks for whom the divine disappeared into the human, nor like the followers of Buddha for whom the human is swallowed up in the divine. The unity of the Kingdom of God seeks to maintain both the essentiality and independence of the divine and the human so that the human may be a pure and unblemished instrument of the divine and the divine may manifest itself bodily in a completely human manner (Col. 2:9).

The incarnation itself teaches us that this is possible. The human itself is not sinful but has become the instrument of sin. The earth lies between hell and heaven. It is the land of relativity. Just as the earth is hardly the worst evil—hell—so too the highest good—the Kingdom of God—is not completely realized. Neither absolute evil nor absolute good is to be found anywhere on earth. Both principles exist on earth together and alongside one another. The two are intertwined, wrestling and contending against each other, but, contrary to what some try to tell us nowadays, they are never swallowed up into each other. Just as Peter was at one time the prize in the conflict between the praying Jesus and Satan, who wanted to sift him as wheat (Luke 22:31), in the same way there is a contest for the whole earth and all of humanity between Satan and Christ. The contest between those two personal powers—not

between merely abstract ideas or vague principles, but between both of those Kingdom heads and crown-wearers—lends to history its terribly tragic character. The question nevertheless is whether all that is human will share in Satan's disdain or in Christ's glory, whether this earth will belong to hell or to heaven, whether humanity will become demon or angel.

Viewing nothing human as foreign but as spiritual in nature, the Kingdom of God is universal, bound to no place or time, embracing the whole earth and everything human, independent of nation and country, of nationality and race, of language and culture. In Christ Jesus what is legitimate is only what has been created anew, with no exceptions. This is why the gospel of the Kingdom must be brought to all nations, to all creatures, not only to people but to the entire creation (Mark 16:15). The Kingdom of God extends as far as Christianity itself. It exists wherever Christ rules, wherever he dwells with his Spirit. Everything earthly, insofar as it is cleansed and consecrated through Christ, constitutes the Kingdom of God.¹⁰ Having entered history, having through Christ been made into a world historical power, yes, into the driving force of all history, the Kingdom expands and develops *vel nobis dormientibus* (even while we are sleeping). It proceeds quietly [40] and unobserved, more quickly than we perhaps might imagine, like the leaven that a woman takes and hides in three measures of flour until all of it is leavened (Matt. 13:33), or like a mustard seed, which “is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches” (Matt. 13:31).

As the Kingdom of Christ it is thus characterized as becoming, as unfolding, awaiting its completion. Then, when it is complete, when every opposition has been vanquished and the kingdom itself is completely sanctified, then Christ will return the sovereignty

10. Cf. Kloje, “Christenthum” in *Real-encyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche Christenthum*, ed. Johann Jakob Herzog, 22 vols. (Gotha: Rudolf Besser, 1854–1868), 2:674–81.

granted to him to the One who bestowed it, and will give the Kingdom without spot or wrinkle to his God and Father.

In this manner the Kingdom of God is thus, finally, a *Kingdom of God*. Christ does indeed remain the Head of the body through whom all the divine life is supplied from God to us in a human fashion, and in turn everything of ours, all that is human, glorifies God as a well-pleasing sacrifice consecrated to him. But the absolute sovereignty is then exercised by God himself, who is the Fountain and the Source of all sovereignty, the Lord of lords, the King of kings. The Kingdom of God is a *Kingdom*, the most noble and glorious kingdom imaginable. It is no imperium, for that makes us think of a world power and of tyrannical domination, but this is a Kingdom in which sovereignty rests upon the perfect power of the One who exercises it. In the Kingdom of God, God himself is the King-Sovereign. In this Kingdom he rules over a free people who serve him willingly and who find in that subjection precisely the source and the security of all their freedoms.

2. THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE INDIVIDUAL

That Kingdom, whose essence we have attempted to make known to you, is, as the unity of all moral goods, the highest good for each person, for every individual no matter who and what he may be. To all without distinction, the Kingdom comes with the intensely serious demand to surrender everything else on its behalf, even father and mother, sister and brother. For it is the pearl of great price which a merchant found and went out to sell everything he possessed so that he might purchase it (Matt. 13:44).

Nor is the human person a quickly passing developmental moment in [41] the grand process of nature. A human person exists not merely for the sake of something else, but a person's existence has value in itself. The human person possesses an inherent goal or purpose. For each person that purpose is to be always fully himself, that is, to be his personality. The goal of personal existence is simply to obey that law given us by God simultaneously as the law

of our own personality and as the law that continues to echo faintly in the human conscience. As we exist in the present we are bound on all sides by various attachments that are foreign to us. This law, resounding above nature, governs us more often than we think. Natural life occupies an extremely broad place within our existence. So extremely broad, in fact, that this natural life appropriates a third of our entire earthly life through our sleep, and thereby dooms our personality, our consciousness, and our will to inactivity.

Moreover—and this is the real slavery of our personal spiritual lives—in our conscious life we are also bound by that law in our members which engages in conflict against the law of our mind. Sin is the enemy of the personality to which it nevertheless owes the possibilities of its existence. Sin desires no self-consciousness and no freedom; sin hates both of these with a perfect hatred. It moves about in the dark recesses of life. The coercion of nature is the ideal form of the power with which sin desires to rule. For that reason sin hides us from ourselves; sin pretends and dissembles with us. Knowing oneself, after all, is the first step on the road to conversion.

By contrast, we all receive the demand that we always be fully self-conscious and genuinely free in order to live that spiritual eternal life that we lost through sin, in order that we be ruled by nothing else than the law of our own spiritual being which makes all the rest an instrument of our personality. Our calling is to take up this dark natural principle which we now carry within us, to expose it completely to the light of our consciousness, to peer through ourselves thoroughly, leaving nothing darkened within us. Our calling is that our entire being and essence be reflected in the mirror of our consciousness, and that we thus become like God, who is nothing but light and in whom is no darkness (1 John 1:5).

It comes down to this: making our personality the only cause of all our thinking and acting. We are called to embed our entire personality in every deed, in every thought, in order to do nothing un-self-consciously and arbitrarily, but to do everything with full consciousness and will, freely and morally.

This demand corresponds fully with that of the Kingdom of God and can be fulfilled only through the work of that Kingdom. Every other good that we pursue unconsciously and unintentionally [42] becomes ours only partially and can produce some benefit to us. By contrast, every labor for the Kingdom of God that is done without consciousness and will, without our entire personality, is impossible—at least vain and useless—for ourselves, and worse yet, it destroys us eternally.

In a certain sense everybody without distinction labors for the Kingdom of God, voluntarily or involuntarily, if not as an independent collaborator, then as a blind and will-less tool. For if we ourselves are unwilling to work for the Kingdom of God freely and without compulsion, then Almighty God will still use us as an unwilling instrument to do everything that his hand and his counsel had determined beforehand should happen. In this sense even Satan collaborates for the Kingdom of God. For just as the curse comes from evil,¹¹ going so far as to seek the good opportunity for sin, even so it is the privilege of the good to turn evil for good. But then once God has used us, God will treat us not as persons but as blind tools and cast us away from before his face. Just as the Kingdom of God is a kingdom of free personalities, even so it can be brought into existence within us only through our full personality with consciousness and will, or, as the Scripture puts it, with all our mind and will all our soul and with all our strength. But also in return, we are called to labor for that Kingdom with consciousness and will, to advance it freely and independently within and beyond us, to consecrate our entire lives to it. We are equipped to count everything in connection with this labor to be the source for tempering our will, for strengthening our consciousness, for doubling our strength, for expanding our spirit to the full range of our personality, and for laying up a treasure which neither moth nor rust can consume.

11. August Tholuck, *Die Lehre von der Sünde*, 8th ed. (Gotha: Perthes, 1862), 19.

Even as the Kingdom enlists our entire personality and all our strength, it also demands us *perpetually*. We are indeed still bound here on earth; we do not rule time but are often ruled by it. Nevertheless, the ideal that we must attempt to grasp is that we be free of time and that we distance ourselves from this freedom only as much as necessary in order to maintain our personality. God never grants us time off in order not to be what we are supposed to be. As someone who himself is working until now, he demands that we be like him in that respect and, like Christ, work as long as it is day. In itself, time is an empty form, without content and therefore “tedious.” But time is given to be filled with eternal content, and for this reason it always flows into eternity so that thereby time itself “contains eternity in every moment.” [43] After all, eternity is no intellectual deduction, no barren shape, no empty void, but precisely the opposite: eternity is time with an infinite, eternal content in every moment. God is working *all the time*; he fills every moment with eternal content and thus does everything in its time even as he sent his Son in the *fullness* of the times. Our time is genuinely full and filled only when we do not spend it on things that serve merely to pass the time but only when we fill time with laboring in work that is eternal and abiding. So we are called to work not for the food that perishes but for the food that endures unto eternal life (John 6:27). In summary, our time must be filled with work on behalf of the imperishable and immovable Kingdom of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

This is not to say, however, that we need to labor for that Kingdom of God apart from any earthly calling. To be sure, the Kingdom of God is not *of* the world, but it is nevertheless *in* the world. The Kingdom does not exist within the narrow confines of the inner closet, restricted to church and monastery. The Kingdom is not entirely “other worldly” but has been established by Christ upon earth and stands in a most intimate—yet for us in many respects inexplicable—relationship with this earthly life and is prepared by this life. Nevertheless, it is just as true that the Kingdom is not exhaustively present in this life, it is not merely “this worldly.” The Kingdom *is* and *becomes*.

The eternal Sabbath is not yet here, and yet we have a foretaste of it already now. At this point, however, Sunday and the rest of the week exist alongside each other. Our heavenly calling is not swallowed up in our earthly calling.

We must be on guard against both errors. On the one hand, our earthly calling may not be misunderstood on account of various ascetic, pietistic, and methodistic emphases, while, on the other hand, our heavenly calling may not be denied on account of theoretical or practical materialism. Our ideal continues to be that we exalt the other days of the week to the loftiness of the Sabbath and that we continually exercise our heavenly calling more and more in and amid our earthly calling.¹²

Our earthly calling is, after all, the temporal form of our heavenly calling. It is marked somewhat by the sentiment that “in order to be an angel, you must first be a fit human being.”¹³ Our earthly calling has been given to us, says Calvin,¹⁴ so that we may have a firm foundation and not be cast about hither and thither for our entire lives. By means of our earthly calling we form ourselves, therefore, with a view to developing our personality and preparing a pure instrument for it in our body and in all things earthly.

[44] It is a distinguishing feature of Christianity that it does not condemn any earthly calling in itself nor does it consider any earthly calling in itself to be in conflict with our heavenly calling. The Greeks viewed manual labor as something embarrassing and assigned it to their slaves. But Christianity recognizes no dualism of spirit and matter and views nothing as unclean in itself. A person who does not labor, who has no occupation, also has no calling, becomes deadweight for society and thereby disgraces his human

12. Martensen, *Die Christliche Ethik*, vol. 2 (Gotha: Besser, 1878), 352–64. Cf. also Luther’s reflections regarding our earthly vocation in Christoph Ernst Luthardt, *Die Ethik Luthers*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Dörffling und Franke, 1875), 71ff.

13. Johann Julius Baumann, *Handbuch der Moral, nebst Abriss der Rechtsphilosophie* (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1879), 238.

14. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 3.10.6.

nature. For only in an occupation can we demonstrate and develop what lives within us. Only in an occupation can we manifest ourselves, not only to others but also to ourselves. Only in this way do we learn to know ourselves, our strengths, our capacities, and thus obtain awareness of the content of our own personality. Only in this way can we become a full personality, fully human. Otherwise not only our physical powers but also our spiritual and moral powers suffocate and corrode within us.

However, we must devote every effort to choosing that earthly occupation in which the exercise of our heavenly calling is not hindered for us, for our individuality, and for our powers. For this demand abides, namely, to bring this life, its calling and its labor, into relationship with the eternal, to view all that is temporal and earthly *sub specie aeternitatis*. Otherwise, to echo Calvin once more, the components of our living will always lack symmetry.

Everything earthly must thus remain subservient to the Kingdom of Heaven. We must possess everything as though not possessing (1 Cor. 7:30) such that we are willing to surrender anything if it comes into conflict with the demand of the Kingdom of God.

In other words, everything may be our domain such that we possess it and rule over it so that it functions as the instrument of our personality. Every pursuit of more than we can rule over, more than we can actually make our domain, is immoral and conflicts with the Kingdom of God and its righteousness.

As soon as what is earthly possesses us and rules over us, whether goods or kindred, art or science, the demand must be repeated that Jesus gave to the rich young man: go, sell everything you own and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven (Matt. 19:21). For everything earthly has been given to us in order with it to cultivate our personality, in order to make it an instrument of God's Kingdom.

Indeed, everything comes down finally not to what we accomplish through our earthly work, for often the work we accomplish is broken to pieces before our eyes by God himself. But

the essential feature of all our labor that we perform under the sun is what we become through our work what our personality acquires by way of the consciousness, spirit, power, richness, and fullness of living. [45] That is what abides. That is never lost. That does not disappear like so many insignificant works of our hands. That is what we carry with us out of this world into the future world. That constitutes the works that follow us.

We are, finally, the totality of what we have ever willed, thought, felt, and done. The profit that we yield for ourselves in this way is profit for the Kingdom of God. Even a cup of cold water given to a disciple of Jesus receives a reward. God calls us to work in such a way that, amid all that we do, we should envision the eternal work that God desires to bring about through people, knowing that we cannot be lord and master of ourselves and of the earth in any other way than in subjection to him. And in that consciousness, working with all our powers as long as it is day, God calls us to subject all that is visible and temporal to ourselves in order then to consecrate it along with ourselves as a perfect sacrifice to God—even if our work space be ever so small and our occupation ever so nondescript. This is truly and essentially working for the Kingdom of God.

3. THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE COMMUNITY (FAMILY, STATE, CHURCH, CULTURE)

The Kingdom of God is the highest good not only for the individual but also for the whole of humanity. It is a communal project that can be realized only through united powers. It is the most universal good imaginable, and therefore also the destiny and goal of all those life spheres that exist in a society.

There are especially three of them: state, church, and culture. Each of these three develops the human personality in terms of a particular aspect. The state regulates mutual human relationships;

the church norms their relationship to God; and culture governs relationships with the cosmos or the world.

Rather than being an additional fourth life sphere alongside these, the household or family is the foundation and the model of these other three life spheres. The family possesses a religious-moral element in its piety, a juridical element in its parental authority and sibling affection, and an element of culture in family nurture. All three life spheres lie embedded within the family in a complex way, and each is connected to the family. Since the Kingdom of God consists of the totality of all goods, here on earth one finds its purest image and most faithful representation in the household family.

The Kingdom of God is the Father's house. Family relationships are applicable there as well. God places us in relationship to himself as children. [46] We are born of him and thus resemble him; only a child resembles the father. God is King, but at the same time Father of his people. Jesus called the subjects of this King the children of the Kingdom (Matt. 8:12 and 13:38). Christ is the oldest, the firstborn, among many brothers, and everyone who does the Father's will is Jesus' brother and sister and mother (Rom. 8:29; Matt. 12:50). For this reason the family will correspond to its design to the extent that it constitutes a Kingdom of God in miniature. For the Kingdom of God does not exist for the sake of the family, but, as is true of everything else, the family exists for the sake of the Kingdom of God. The husband is the image and the glory of God, head and priest of the family, as Christ is the head of the church (1 Cor. 11:7; Eph. 5:23). God gives us children so that we may form them into children of God. The relationships of family life have their reflection and standard in that communal life of a much higher order, found in the Kingdom of God. Should the demand of the Kingdom of God occasionally conflict with the duties of the family, such that the latter must yield (Matt. 10:37), anyone who leaves house or parents or brothers or wife or children for the sake of the Kingdom of God will receive back many times in this age and in the age to come eternal life (Luke 18:29).

In the family everything is yet undifferentiated. There we find a natural life that has not yet entirely transitioned into the free, ethical, personal life, but nonetheless is destined from that unconscious and involuntary identity to develop into complete independence and freedom.

State, church, and culture constitute those life spheres that have achieved independence in terms of those elements already present to a smaller or larger degree in the family. Let us consider for a moment the relationship of each of these three to the Kingdom of God.

First, something about the relationship of the church and the Kingdom of God.¹⁵

Religious life developed into its true essence and full independence for the first time within Christianity, becoming independent of civil and political life to which religion had always been closely associated among the Greeks and the Romans. Christ rendered religious life—faith in him—independent of changing earthly circumstances. Thus we see that Christianity established but one church as a single unique sphere alongside the state and culture. This occurred because faith in Christ is completely independent and develops a unique life that differs in specific ways from every other kind of life.

[47] Certainly Christianity is in the first place a religion, but not merely a religion. It is an entirely new life that can penetrate and enliven every life sphere and life form. Thus Christianity is not coextensive with the church. It is far too rich to allow itself to be pressed within its walls. Indeed, it would not be the true religion if it had no influence on the richly fulsome human life. Christianity

15. Cf. Johannes H. A. Ebrard, *Dogmatik*, vol. 2 (Konigsberg: Unzer, 1862), 388; U. Hauber, “Kirche” in *Real-Encyclopädie*, 7:561; Carl Immanuel Nitzsch, *System of Christian Doctrine*, trans. Robert Montgomery and John Hennen (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1849), 361ff.; Rich Adelb Lipsius, *Lehrbuch der evangelisch-protestantischen Dogmatik*, 2nd ed. (Braunschweig: Schwetschke, 1879), 763ff.; and Albrecht Ritschl, *Die christliche Lehre von der Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung*, vol. 3, 4th ed. (Bonn: A. Marcus, 1895), 270ff.

cannot be restricted to the church as an historical organization viewed as a visible community. For that reason we speak of a Christian society, of a Christian school. There is nothing human that cannot be called Christian. Everything within and outside the church that is enlivened and governed by Christ who exercises sovereignty over all things, constitutes and belongs to the Kingdom of God. For Rome, the church and the Kingdom of God are one. Thus, Rome's church views everything that does not flow from it and is not consecrated by it to be unholy and profane. But the Reformation recognized the life spheres outside the church in their independence. No Protestant church may denigrate the territory of human living outside the church as unclean or profane. Rather, we must accept the distinction between the church and the Kingdom of God. The church *already exists*; the Kingdom of God *is becoming*. The church is an historical, visible organization; the Kingdom of God is invisible and spiritual. The church was established for the first time by Christ to be a unique sphere for the cultivation of the Christian-religious life. The Kingdom of God has existed since the beginning of the world. The Kingdom of God was present already among Israel. It progresses secretly like leaven and does not—unlike the church—constitute a separate community over against the state and culture.

Far from losing anything of its significance by accepting this distinction, the church instead rises in value and fulfills its calling all the more when it understands that the church itself is not the Kingdom of God and cannot be the Kingdom of God, but is the means of preparing for the Kingdom of God and ensuring its arrival.

For apart from the historical organization, the power, and the activity of the church, Christianity would be unable to maintain itself, to find entrance, to be a power in history, and would dissolve into a collection of vague and rarefied notions.

That is the significance of the church, but its goal lies in part beyond itself, in the Kingdom of God. The church is not itself the Kingdom of God in its entirety, but the indispensable foundation of the Kingdom of God, the preeminent and best instrument of the

Kingdom of God, the earthly institution, the heart, the core, the living center of the Kingdom of God.

With that self-understanding the church aims to consecrate people to God, not only in their religious life but also, proceeding from that source, in their natural life, moral life, civic life, and political life. Sunday may not stand alongside the other days of the week but must sanctify them [48] and seek to lift them up to their highest purpose. The church is what she is supposed to be when she labors beyond herself and is not satisfied when people are pious on Sundays in church. Only then will the church—as the preserver and bearer of the noblest good of humanity, namely, the truth that is according to godliness—strive to bring that good into contact with all other moral goods and in this way advance the coming of that Kingdom of God, which, as the unity of all goods, does not destroy the good of the church but incorporates it within itself in its purified form.

Just as remarkable, in the second place, is the connection that exists between the state and the Kingdom of God. No matter how often the state misunderstands that connection or even denies it altogether, that may not induce us to muffle the protest that the state, which has been instituted by God, is not a necessary evil but a very real good. After the church, the state is indeed the greatest and richest good on earth. Only through the state is that community life required of human beings made possible wherein a person, for the first time, can develop his full personality.

Family, church, culture, all the various spheres of rich human living do not owe their origin and existence to the state—they possess a “sphere sovereignty”—but they do nonetheless owe to the state the possibility of their development. The state secures the full unfolding of human personality. The state, however, is not the highest good but finds its purpose and goal in the Kingdom of heaven. Anyone who misunderstands this will eventually end up denying the church her noblest calling and instead value the state itself, viewed as the creator of culture and caretaker of freedom and equality, as the initial realization of the Kingdom of God. And denying every connection of the state to the eternal, people will

view the state as the highest good and the highest purpose of humanity, as that which alone is worth living for.

Such a glorification of the state destroys the freedom and independence of human personality. The state develops only one dimension of human personality, namely, justice. The state is not, contrary to Rothe,¹⁶ the moral community, but merely one particular form of moral community. It consists of morality merely in the form of justice. The purely ethical lies beyond its domain. Therefore it must recognize and maintain the various life spheres of family, church, and culture, and so forth, in their independence.

Moreover, the state is always national and particular, an *Einzelstaat*, or individuated state. So it cannot be the highest, which is to say, universal good. [49] But the Kingdom of God is one and the same over all the earth. It knows no boundaries of land or nationality. Each state and each nation has its purpose and reason for existence in terms of that Kingdom. The Kingdom does not call the state to surrender its special, national calling. On the contrary, just as the individual person must not seek the Kingdom of God outside of but in his earthly vocation, so too the Kingdom of God does not demand that the state surrender its earthly calling, its own nationality, but demands precisely that the state permit the Kingdom of God to affect and to penetrate its people and its nation. Only in this way can the Kingdom of God come into existence. For this Kingdom is not a labor of these or those people, not even of one nation and of one state, but of all peoples and all states. It is the total task (*Gesammtaufgabe*) of the human race.

As we saw with the individual, so also each nation and every state makes its own contribution to that task and adds its own value, willingly or unwillingly, consciously or unconsciously. Thus the Kingdom of God does not vitiate the individuated state (*Einzelstaat*), the nationality and particular calling of a people, but purifies them and incorporates each individual state and nation as a particular instrument in the cooperation of the whole.

16. Richard Rothe, *Theologische Ethik*, vol. 2 (Wittenberg: Zimmermann, 1867), § 422–48.

When it understands its purpose in this way, the state maintains its true nature and labors for its own perfection. To be sure, the state cannot establish the Kingdom of God. The state is not redemptive. Nor may the state attempt to foster the free, moral, spiritual life. The state functions in terms of the law. But by holding that law in high esteem, by cultivating respect and reverence for the law, by upholding its majesty, by inculcating respect for the moral world order as the unconditionally valid moral order, the state can become a tutor unto Christ. In this sense the state can and indeed does have the calling to labor for the Kingdom of God. By providing space for the various life spheres to do their work, and by guaranteeing for each of its subjects the development of this full and variegated life of the personality, the state fulfills its own nature and works for that Kingdom, which itself is also a state wherein God Himself is the Lord and absolute King-Sovereign.

Thirdly, it remains for us yet to discuss the connection between culture and the Kingdom of God.

As with the state, so also with culture: before the Reformation they both existed in service to the church. The Reformation restored to culture its freedom and independence. The right of culture is expressed in the mandate: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Gen. 1:28; cf. Gen. 9:1–3). Culture exists because God bestowed on us the power to exercise rule over the earth. It is the communal calling of [50] the human race to make the world its own and to shape it as the property and instrument of personality. Humanity was given power to transform the entire treasury of created life forms, whether spiritual, moral, as well as natural, into a pure organism and to rule over it. That occurs in two ways: science and art. In order to rule over nature in the broadest sense, its essence, operation, pathways, and laws must be known. Here as well the saying is valid that only the truth makes one free. In ruling over nature, every form of arbitrariness is immoral and irrational. As Francis Bacon wrote, *Naturae non imperatur, nisi parendo* (we cannot command nature except by obeying her). Science

incorporates nature in the understanding, casts its image in our soul, and reproduces it through ourselves in thought and in word.

But knowledge is power. To know is to be able. In the most universal sense, art renders nature, as an instrument of our will, serviceable to a higher purpose and transforms it through us into a work of art, into a complete artistic organism.

For the third time in the history of the world, culture has become a power. First came the Hamite culture of Assyria, Babylon, and Phoenecia. Then followed the Japhethite culture of Greece and Rome, whose culture remains the foundation of our own and in philosophy, art, and jurisprudence still sets the standard for our own. Today, modern culture emancipates itself more and more from Christianity, denigrating the church to the status of maidservant and slave girl. To that extent modern culture also faces the judgment that came upon the Hamite and Japhethite cultures: destruction through debauchery and sensuality, worshiping genius and deifying the material, of which Babylon and Rome are the abiding symbols in Scripture.

From these considerations we see that culture can find its purpose and reason for existence only in the Kingdom of God. The lord of the earth is but the child of God. Idolizing the material and serving the flesh is the destination of all who acknowledge no master above themselves. For then nature is too powerful for us, and compels us to bow before its tremendous forces. But when by God's hand we are elevated above the material, then we are more powerful than the material, then we develop the material with our own hand and form it into an instrument of personality. Then culture is a deeply essential good, worthy not of our denigration but of our amazement.

Cult and culture ought then to be sisters, independent to be sure, but still sisters, bound to each other through love. And even though Martha, who represents the culture that is occupied with many things, may differ from Mary, who represents the cultus that has chosen the best portion, nevertheless the truth remains that Jesus loved them both.

The ideal is that the oppositions appearing everywhere—with the individual, the family, the state, the church, culture, and so forth, and whereby [51] each of these repeatedly interferes with the others—that all those oppositions gradually disappear and find their resolution in the unity of the Kingdom of God.

To the extent that each of these various life spheres answers more and more to its essential idea, it loses its sharpness and isolation from the others and prepares the way all the more the coming of the Kingdom of God. For that kingdom, since it is the highest good, destroys nothing but consecrates everything. It includes every good, a kingdom wherein all the moral good that is now spread throughout various spheres and comes into being in each sphere according to its nature and in its appropriate manner, is incorporated as purified and perfected. It is a kingdom wherein the human personality obtains its richest and most multiform manifestation, a community life of the highest order wherein all oppositions are reconciled and individual and community, state and church, cultus and culture are integrated in perfect harmony. It is a kingdom wherein the true, the good, and the beautiful are perfectly realized and have become one. In this Kingdom of God, full sovereignty is handed over to the Messiah, a sovereignty that had descended from him in the various life spheres and returns completely once more to God, who will be all in all.

So in spite of so much that seems to contradict it, do not deprive me of the idea that this Kingdom of God is the essential content, the core, and the purpose of all of world history. Let not my faith and my hope seep away whereby I acknowledge that the historical description initially summarized by Israel's prophets and set forth so profoundly and gloriously by Paul in his letter to the Romans will finally appear to be the true portrait, namely, that the history of the nations and of their states finds its principal idea and explanation to be the Kingdom of Heaven.

4. THE COMPLETION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

It might appear that up to this point I have lost sight of the tremendous opposition between the Kingdom of God and that of the world. It might seem as though I harbored the naïve notion that by means of mission and evangelism, by means of Christian philanthropy and anti-revolutionary politics, that opposition would gradually disappear and the world would slowly be won for the Kingdom of God. But that notion has no appeal to me. Even if the prophetic word of Scripture were not enough, then a glance around would be able to disabuse me of such illusions. Although God desires to expand his Kingdom on earth [52] through people, although our working for that kingdom remains our treasured calling and duty, although between our activity and the coming of the Kingdom of God there certainly and undeniably lies a close connection, the Kingdom of God is not purely a product of our moral activity. Even as it was established from beyond the world, and develops and expands by means of supernatural powers, so too the completion of the Kingdom of God is a supernatural act that occurs by means of divine cataclysmic intervention.¹⁷

Earthly history is not finished with the coming of the Kingdom of God, but it is interrupted by its completion. If history is not a process of nature, but genuine history and real action, a connected series of acts, then the wrestling such history displays to us must also reach a climax wherein the kingdom of Christ and that of Satan are arrayed so sharply against each other, as Christ and Antichrist fight for the final, decisive victory. The good ones become increasingly better, but the evil ones become increasingly worse. The completion of the Kingdom of God cannot occur any other way than after the absolute manifestation of the evil one, that is, the Antichrist. Nevertheless, that divine cataclysmic intervention will not occur without preparation and mediation (*Vermittelung*). Just as with everything God does, this occupies the primary focus when

17. Cf. Kling, "Eschatologie," in *Real-Encyclopädie*, 4:154–57, M. Ebrard, "Offenbarung Johannes" in *Real-Encyclopädie*, 10:574–90, and Lange, "Wiederkunft Christi," in *Real-Encyclopädie*, 18:126–32.

the time is “full.” The Kingdom of God cannot be completed before all the material is present from which the Kingdom of God will be constructed. All of the moral goods must first come into existence, all of the elect must be gathered together.¹⁸

The completion of the Kingdom of God or of the kingdom of Satan partially occurs for each individual immediately after death. This life is, by virtue of an indestructible connection, decisive for the life to come. Nevertheless, the situation that arises for each person at death is not only immutably decisive, but preliminary as well. The lot of the individual is determined definitively only in connection with the lot of the whole, only at the end of history in the universal judgment. Before then, here on earth and beyond this arena the contest continues between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan, between life and death, light and darkness, spirit and flesh, Christ and Antichrist.

That conflict continues throughout all of history, from the moment when enmity was established between the two. The Kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world develop alongside and over against each other, the latter, however, in order time and again to be destroyed, but also time and again to be restored. History is a sequence of failed world kingdoms, [53] of kingdoms erected apart from God and in opposition to him, supported and built by human power. The Tower of Babel was the first failed attempt at constructing such a world kingdom. But time and again it was attempted, in the kingdoms of Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar, of Xerxes and Alexander, of the Roman emperors, all the way to the kingdom of Napoleon himself. Babel and Rome brought such a world kingdom to the pinnacle of development and therefore also to its deepest fall, and both have remained fixed symbols and types in the Christian church of the kingdom of the world.¹⁹

Israelite prophets, seers, and watchmen on Zion’s walls saw the signs of the times and explained them in the light of the Kingdom of

18. Rothe, *Theologische Ethik*, vol. 2, § 449–58, 559–601.

19. Chantepie de la Saussaye, *De Toekomst: Vier eschatologische voorlezingen* (Rotterdam: Wyt, 1868).

God. Their nation was small, their national influence was little, but the light of that kingdom supplied them with a world-encompassing and centuries-embracing view that extended further than any view ever obtained by the greatest wise men. In that same light of the Kingdom of heaven, that is, in the light of their prophecy, history must still be viewed, its riddles solved, its signs understood and explicated.

Scripture is the Book of the Kingdom of God, not a book for this or that people, for the individual only, but for all nations, for all of humanity. It is not a book for one age, but for all times. It is a Kingdom book. Just as the Kingdom of God develops not alongside and above history, but in and through world history, so too Scripture must not be abstracted, nor viewed by itself, nor isolated from everything. Rather, Scripture must be brought into relationship with all our living, with the living of the entire human race. And Scripture must be employed to explain all of human living.

The portrait and explanation of these world kingdoms in the light of the Kingdom of God reaches its climax, in the Old Testament, in Daniel's prophecy. There the world kingdom is portrayed with the image of a metal statue standing on feet of clay that was ground to dust by a hewn stone, symbolizing the Kingdom of God that will exist into eternity (Dan. 2). Elsewhere, in the seventh chapter, that world kingdom is portrayed for us as a beast from the depths that was slain and destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. By contrast, power and dominion and honor and the kingdom were given unto all eternity to the Son of Man who appeared on the clouds of heaven. This prophecy continued into the New Testament and is closely connected to the picture in John's Book of Revelation.

In the New Testament the universal expectation is that the princes and nations of the earth will once more array themselves against the Lord [54] and against his Anointed. Frightening times precede the coming of God's kingdom. Everything human—the state, the church, and culture—will once more offer themselves as instruments of Satan.

On such a basis this prince of the world will, as it were, constitute a surrogate of the three offices of Christ. He fashions for himself an instrument, namely, the state, the world kingdom presented by John with the image of the beast that rises from the sea, the vibrant world of nations—that is Satan’s kingly office (Rev. 13:1–10). He fashions for himself an instrument in the church, the apostate church, portrayed as Babylon, the great harlot sitting upon the scarlet beast that rises from the bottomless pit (Rev. 17)—that is Satan’s priestly office. Finally, he fashions false culture into an instrument of his activity, the beast that rises from the earth and the power of the world kingdom established by means of false arguments and great signs (Rev. 13:11ff.) and leading the spirits astray—that is Satan’s prophetic office.

The world kingdom comes to be concentrated, and finds its highest manifestation, in the Antichrist, the man of sin, in whom humanness has become diabolical, who sinks down into bestiality and, supported by the false church and the false culture, places himself in the temple of God, presenting himself as though he were God (2 Thess. 2).

But at the apex of its power, the world kingdom will also have reached the end point of its development. First, Babylon, the great city, falls (Rev. 14:8, 17:18). Deprived of the support of the false church, the world kingdom and the false prophet can no longer survive. Both are seized and thrown alive into the lake of fire (Rev. 19:20). Deprived of its human instruments and no longer able to work through people upon people, Satan himself is seized and bound for a thousand years. At that point the time has arrived of the so-called thousand-year kingdom.

In the period of the early Christians chiliast belief was universal, or at least widespread. Still more than with the opposition of Origen in the East, however, the opposition of Augustine in the West occasioned the fall of chiliasm when the place that the church occupied in the world changed. Instead of being persecuted, the church came to dominate society. Once Christians became contented with themselves and satisfied with the age in which they lived, they thought that the Kingdom of God had

been virtually realized among them. Chiliasm retreated to the sects which, because they came under persecution, continued fixing their hope on the future.

The Reformers and later Reformed were particularly less inclined toward this chiliast error (*error Chiliastarum*). But this could reverse. Belief in a thousand-year kingdom is held today by not a few as proof of incontestable orthodoxy. In any case, of all the loci in Christian dogmatics, Eschatology is one that has received the least consideration and development. [55] Frequently in this area a response of *non liquet* (Scripture does not say) must be given in place of a decisive answer.

Regardless of what one believes about the nature, duration, and timing of such a kingdom, chiliasm does contain a profoundly true element.²⁰ For with chiliasm, the Christian faith expresses the certainty and indubitable knowledge of its truthfulness and its ultimate triumph. Therein the Christian faith celebrates its apotheosis and develops its own philosophy of history. In the first century and still today, chiliasm was and is the first concession that the Kingdom of God would come not abruptly, not simply accompanied by a divine cataclysmic intervention, but also in part through and after an earthly preparation. It constitutes a transition between the “here” (*Diesseits*) and the “hereafter” (*Jenseits*). Irenaeus expressed the attractive idea that in the thousand-year kingdom believers would, by means of personal concourse with Christ, be prepared for beholding God. Chiliasm expresses the healthy expectation that Christianity will once again manifest its full blessing and bounty of its life, in spiritual, moral, and natural arenas. The social power and significance of Christianity must appear once more to the eyes of all the nations. After the preliminary victory of the anti-Christian powers within church, state, and culture, there will come a time of righteousness and peace. Nature is initially glorified, understood, and ruled. Peace will dwell even in the animal world (Isa. 11:6–9). On earth it will be a

20. Isaak August Dorner, *Geschichte der Lehre von der Person Christi*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart : Liesching, 1845), 1:232–46.

paradisaal situation, the last preparation, the richest harvest for the Kingdom of God, the great harvest from among Jews and pagans. Then Christianity will understand its world mission and fulfill its calling to purify the state from all ungodly and anti-godly power, to cleanse the church of all harlotry with the world, to purify culture from all vanity and false prophecy.

But this is not yet the end. One final critical contest must be waged. The anti-Christian powers are certainly bridled but not subdued. Satan will be unleashed. And at that time the question will be able to be put clearly: will this earth belong to God or to Satan? For or against the kingdom of God will then be the war cry accepted and acclaimed with consciousness and will by everyone.

While at the present time the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan still dwell alongside each other, the boundaries of both cannot be accurately distinguished by our eyes. But at that time, both will manifest themselves in their true form before the eyes of all. Every pretense will then fall away, every excuse will then be in vain. And when the kingdom of God makes itself known in its full glory, in its genuine essence, as the highest good, [56] then the kingdom of Satan will also display its true and naked form as the highest evil. At that point it will commence battle in conscious revolution, in public enmity against the Kingdom of God. That final wrestling will be fierce but brief, unspeakably intense and decisive for eternity.

Then I saw, writes John, a new heaven and a new earth. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying: behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them and they will be his people. Then the kingdom of God will be complete, the destination of history will have been reached. All things will be renewed, all oppositions reconciled. A new development will begin, no longer restrained by sin but progressing from virtue to virtue and from strength to strength. A new and eternal work awaits us there with which we will fill eternity but which we will perform without disturbance and without exhaustion; for each one's organism will stand completely in service to each one's personality. There will be no night, there will be no time. Even distances will disappear there

before the dominion of spirits. The Kingdom of God will be exalted above the limitations of time and space and will completely fulfill both time and space. The Kingdom of God will include everything in heaven and on earth. By the blood of the cross, Christ has reconciled all things to himself and thus to each other (Col. 1:20). Under him as the Head, everything will be gathered into one and recapitulated in him (Eph. 1:10). God himself will delight in the work accomplished by his hands, and when we behold it, the song will flow from our lips: every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. God himself is its Designer and Builder (Heb. 3:4; 11:10).

Pearls and Leaven

Herman Bavinck and Islam

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Herman Bavinck and Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857–1936) met for the first time in September 1874 at the University of Leiden where both had enrolled as theology students. These two highly gifted students began a friendship (and correspondence) that lasted a lifetime notwithstanding different religious convictions and temperaments: Bavinck was orthodox and Reformed; Snouck Hurgronje was *vrijzinnig* (freethinking, liberal); Bavinck went on to become a Reformed pastor and the greatest Reformed theologian since John Calvin; Snouck Hurgronje turned to the study of the Semitic languages, especially Arabic, and became one of the only Westerners to have actually entered Mecca, a colonial adviser to the Dutch government, professor of Oriental Studies at Leiden, and recognizably one of the foremost Islamic scholars of his day. The correspondence between the two men has been transcribed and published (J. de Bruijn and G. Harinck, eds., *Een Leidse Vriendschap: De Briefwisseling tussen Herman Bavinck en Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, 1875–1921* [Baarn: Ten Have, 1999]), and the passages below are translations from this collection by John Bolt and George Harinck.

BAVINCK TO SNOUCK HURGRONJE, JANUARY 28, 1915

In 1914 the Ottoman Empire (Turkey) had taken the side of the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary) against the Entente (U.K., France, Russia, and later Italy and U.S.A.). The Germans had

cultivated this alliance, and a jihad was called by the Turkish Sultan who, as Caliph, was the head of world Islam. Hurgronje wrote an article, "Holy War made in Germany," (*De Gids* LXXIX [1915], I, 115–147). Bavinck's letter to Snouck Hurgronje indicates his basic agreement with the latter's profound criticism of the German government but contends that the criticism does not go far enough. Here are some excerpts from the letter that show Bavinck's grasp of basic issues that remain with us today—in so many areas Bavinck had a gifted prescience because he understood *spiritual* powers and earthly powers.

. . . [though] I agree with the general direction of your article, I would go even further in condemning the Islamic politics of Germany and its toying with Islamic "holy war"—the whole business of Islamic politics, first by England, and then by Germany, thrusts the holiest treasures aside for the concerns about influence and power.

Bavinck then goes on to dispute Snouck Hurgronje's hope that exposure to the West—to the modern world—will diminish the drive to jihad in Islam. He faults Snouck Hurgronje for not fully appreciating the *religious* character of Islam—thinking of it too much as just a civilization.

I read in your article that you consider jihad to be a medieval institution that even the Muslim world itself is outgrowing . . . that there are a small group of "modern" Muslims who desire change (though they are outnumbered and not very influential) . . . that the Caliphate is merely a honorific . . . and that the jihad is losing its power among Muslims . . . that cultural influences will moderate the Muslim world. . . .

I see things quite differently; I have different presuppositions. . . . The danger of conflict [with the Muslim world] will remain as long as Islam remains Islam; no cultural influence will alter that. . . . It is precisely because I am not as sanguine as you are about the awakening of Islam, because I judge culture and civilization to be less powerful than religion and consider the strength

and influence of intellectuals far below that of the masses, particularly those who are driven by a religious idea—that is why I consider the German Islamic politics to be so dangerous.” (Translated by John Bolt)

SNOUCK HURGRONJE TO BAVINCK, DECEMBER 30, 1908

On December 30, 1908, Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje wrote a letter to Bavinck on the occasion of receiving a copy of his *Philosophy of Revelation*. Key religious and theological differences between the two friends can be seen in Snouck Hurgronje’s reaction to Bavinck’s Stone Lectures:

Your position regarding Scripture seems weak to me, because on the one hand this position more or less neglects or hushes up the immense problems that even the most conservative and careful historical criticism presents; and on the other hand, because the objective character of revelations are spoken by a human mouth, written by a human hand, and canonized by a human decree, and thus are in the end subjective. I do not want to question the right to reach to this acknowledgement, but the value of an objective, infallible standard for all things, that is determined quantitatively and qualitatively by subjects, is as relative as any other persistent conviction. (Translated by George Harinck)

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