

Editorial

The 2010 Edinburgh Bavinck Conference

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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: Smitter, 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.