

Beyond the Schleiermacher-Barth Dilemma: General Revelation, Bavinckian Consensus, and the Future of Reformed Theology

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We find ourselves at the end of the twentieth century confronted with a set of mutually exclusive approaches to theology that appear to brook no compromise.

—D. Lyle Dabney, in *The Future of Theology*

Special revelation certainly is set antithetically over against all the corruption which gradually entered into the life of the peoples, but it takes up, confirms, and completes all that had been from the beginning put into human nature by revelation and had been preserved and increased subsequently in the human race. The earlier view, which exclusively emphasized the antithesis, no less than that now prevalent which has an eye only for the agreement and affinity, suffers from one sidedness.

—Herman Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation*

The Schleiermacher-Barth Dilemma

The doctrine of general revelation in contemporary Reformed theology has too often been framed as an aporetic dilemma: divine presence as the foundation of creation *or* divine presence as the *telos* of creation; knowledge of God as a solid fixture within the self *or* knowledge of God as a lighting bolt of illumination from on high; God-language coming from creation involving ascent, *or* God-language coming from redemption involving descent. In other

words, a choice between Schleiermacher's feeling of absolute dependence *or* Barth's resolute "Nein!" So the story is told.¹

A Problematic Dichotomy

There are a number of problems with this dichotomy. In the first place, Bruce McCormick's recent research suggests that a profound resonance attains between Schleiermacher's and Barth's views of revelation.² On McCormick's reading of *Der Christliche Glaube*, Schleiermacher never posited a static "original revelation" that the human subject could master. McCormick states:

"What Schleiermacher has done is to place the God-to-human relation (and the redemptive power that can be released in and through it) at a critical distance from all self-reflective human activity, such that the control of that relation always remains, at every moment, the prerogative of the divine. Ultimately, the critical difference between divine action and human action that first announces itself in Schleiermacher's distinction between immediate and sensible self-consciousness performs the same function in his theology that Barth's distinction between the Word of God and human words performs in his."³

McCormick suggests that Schleiermacher's formulation of internal revelation entails an *encounter* from the eternal to the temporal and that the necessity of this encounter involves real limits on the human capacity for knowing and experiencing God. Moreover, according to McCormick, Schleiermacher knows nothing of blind

1. As D. Lyle Dabney describes the dilemma: "either we begin with the human, or we begin with the divine; either we pursue an anthropological 'theology of ascent,' or a strictly theological 'theology of descent'; either we assume talk about God to be grounded in creation, or we declare such speech to belong solely to the realm of redemption; whether we claim there exists a demonstrable continuity between the creature and the Creator, or we proclaim absolute discontinuity between God and world in the name of the one who is 'Wholly Other.'" "Otherwise Engaged in the Spirit: A First Theology for a Twenty-First Century," in *The Future of Theology: Essays in Honor of Jürgen Moltmann* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 157.

2. See Bruce McCormick, "What has Basel to do with Berlin? Continuities in the Theologies of Barth and Schleiermacher," *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 23, no. 2 (2002): 146–73.

3. *Ibid.*, 157.

“thematizing.” On the contrary, McCormick states that Schleiermacher’s theology was a forerunner of Barth’s *church dogmatics*—a communal experience of believers bringing order into the fragmentary and chaotic collection of propositions through consulting Scripture and tradition in light of their mutual encounter with absolute dependence. Theology for Schleiermacher was about working the life of the encounter into the spoken proposition, as difficult as that could be. And with this difficulty one recognizes echoes of Barth’s own uncomfortable relationship with propositional revelation.⁴ As we shall see below, it is also valuable to note both thinkers’ quest for “a single divine decree” which focuses on the predestining God and corporate humanity rather than upon ecclesiology. Both support doctrines of corporate anthropological election: Schleiermacher believed that God’s one decree was to elect all of humanity, and Barth believed that election of all of humanity was found in the one God-man, Jesus Christ.⁵ Given their mutual premises, is it really a surprise that Barth responded to

4. Philip Stoltzfus writes, “This is precisely the weakness of Barth’s theological program: the desire to explicate in definite and coherent language what (one wants to say) can never actually be represented in such a fashion. Theology is conceived, as with Schleiermacher, in terms of correlation between one ordinary state of being and another wholly different and extraordinary state.” “Barth on Music as Timelessly Valid Form,” in *Theology as Performance: Music, Aesthetics, and God in Western Thought* (New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 166.

5. Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, trans. and ed. H.R. Mackintosh and O.S. Steward (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 722. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, eds. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2004), II/2; hereafter referenced as *CD*. A more recent contribution to this development echoes in Matthias Gockel’s work. He has argued persuasively that Barth drew heavily on Schleiermacher’s doctrine of election and thereby inherits the same universalist tendencies. *Barth and Schleiermacher on the Doctrine of Election* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); see also Jason A. Goroncy, “That God May Have Mercy Upon All: A Review-Essay of Matthias Gockel’s Barth and Schleiermacher on the Doctrine of Election,” *Journal of Reformed Theology* 2 (2008), 113–30. Oliver Crisp argues that, although Barth may have never wanted to solve the universalist question, his doctrine of election does require a universalist conclusion. “On Karl Barth’s Denial of Universalism,” in *Retrieving Doctrine: Essays in Reformed Thought* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011).

Schleiermacher's speaking about man in a loud voice by speaking about the God-man in a louder voice—that Barth answered Schleiermacher's turn to the subject through *Christomorphism* (Niebuhr's phrase) with a turn to the divine subject through *Christomonism* (Berkouwer's phrase)?⁶

In the second place, this long-standing “dilemma” has required characterizations that ignore the nuances, contexts, and unique contributions of both thinkers. On the one hand, Schleiermacher is put forward as Barth's alter ego (something that Schleiermacher would be surprised to discover) who offered a Kantian-inspired turn to the feeling subject and whose relativism erases propositional revelation. However, such a caricaturization of Schleiermacher's hermeneutic flattens the impulses and insights behind his apologetic works *On Religion* and *Christmas Eve Dialogue*. When he is stripped of his historical context and labeled the “father of modern theology,” we no longer recognize that he is merely harkening to the Augustinian tradition by pointing his cultured despisers to the inescapably religious orientation of their romantic pursuits. Likewise, when he is dismissed as making all language about God to be equivocal under the guise of mere feeling, we can no longer see his resonance with Jonathan Edwards, namely, his Puritan-like spirited defense of the foundational role of pious affections in the face of the deadening moralism and rationalism that were characteristic of the early nineteenth-century German intellectual landscape. And we no longer recognize—as Brian Gerrish is quick to point out—that seeking to place the pre-theoretical at the core of our humanity as the noetic ground of all inquiry is not only Schleiermachian but also part of the heritage of Reformed theology and epistemology.⁷

On the other hand, there are problems on the Barth side of this equation as well. A serious examination of Barth's mature doctrine

6. See Richard R. Niebuhr, *Schleiermacher on Christ and Religion: A New Introduction* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), 212; G. C. Berkouwer, *General Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1955), 132–33.

7. *A Prince of the Church: Schleiermacher and the Beginnings of Modern Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 21–22.

of revelation calls into question a flimsy portrait of an undulating, God-abandoned, epistemic wasteland that is home to the occasional lighting bolt of revelation. On the contrary, Barth's mature development of the Light and lights in his *Church Dogmatics* reveals the genius of a theologian laboring to maintain a transcendent and free source of revelation without removing the integrity of a compatible creation (CD IV/3.1). As Paul Louis Metzger argues, Barth's doctrine of revelation scrupulously navigates between deification and secularization.⁸ In his dialectical prose, Barth painstakingly guides his readers on an ever-alternating journey between "a mere assertion of the difference" of the Light/lights (and Words/words) and seeing "two sides, aspects or parts of one and the same truth" (CD IV/3.1, 151–52).

The Schleiermacher-vs.-Barth way of framing general revelation has proved unfruitful in Reformed theology precisely because it has mistaken two sides of the same coin as antinomies. This sharp binary impasse diminishes with closer inspection. The residual tension remaining is—ironically—in part the result of these two thinkers' proximity. This being the case, it is time to ask afresh: How can Reformed theology incorporate the benefits of both these thinkers while moving beyond revelation arising from *within* man as *Gefühl*-encounter or from *above* man as Word-encounter? What does it look like to work out a theology of revelation more consistent with ecclesiological election rather than election of corporate-humanity? Where can the Reformed tradition turn to draw fresh inspiration and adequate theological resources that will inspire engagement with the complexity of the Biblical testimony regarding the asymmetrical and multivalent ways that God reveals himself? In short, where do we go from here?

Possible Solutions

At this point it might be tempting to look to Jürgen Moltmann's theology as the solution. Moltmann, a world-class theologian

8. *The Word of Christ and the Word of Culture: Sacred and Secular through the Theology of Karl Barth* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 59–82.

emerging from the Reformed tradition, seems to have internalized Barth's claim that what was needed to solve his deep disagreement with Schleiermacher was "a theology of the Holy Spirit, a theology of which Schleiermacher was scarcely conscious, but which might actually have been the legitimate concern dominating even his theological activity."⁹ Regarding the dilemma, Moltmann writes in *Spirit of Life*:

The theology of Barth, Brunner, Bultmann and Gogarten led to an alternative which today is proving to be unfruitful. The dialectical theologians began by reproaching nineteenth-century liberal and pietistic theology with starting from human consciousness of God, not from the divine Word to men and women; this, they said, was theology 'from below', not theology 'from above'. . . . I do not myself see this question as a problem, because I cannot see that there is any fundamental alternative between God's revelation to human beings, and human experience of God.¹⁰

In developing his both-and, Moltmann provides some valuable clues for moving beyond the Schleiermacher-Barth divide, particularly in regard to the Spirit's work. I will return to this later, but for now I wish to note the key facets in Moltmann's theology that make his project on the whole problematic for the Reformed tradition. First and foremost is Moltmann's explicit pantheism. He clearly believes that God's Spirit is *in* creation in a way that blurs the boundaries between where God starts and where creation ends. For example, he states:

God loves his creation. God is bound to every one of his creatures in passionate affirmation. God loves with creative love. That is why he himself dwells emphatically in every created being, feeling himself into them by virtue of his love. The love draws himself out of himself, so to speak, carrying him wholly into the created beings whom he loves. Because he is "the lover of life," his eternal Spirit is "in all things" as their vital force. In the self-distinction and the self-giving of love, God is present in all his creatures and is himself their innermost mystery.¹¹

9. Karl Barth, "Concluding Unscientific Postscript on Schleiermacher," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 7, no. 2 (Spring 1978): 134.

10. *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992), 5.

11. *Spirit*, 50. For a critique of Moltmann's appropriation of Calvin's cosmic pneumatology, see John Bolt, "Spiritus Creator: The Use and Abuse of Calvin's

Although he attempts to avoid ontological language by appeals to a more “relational” view, it is clear that he solves the divide between a theology “from above” and a theology “from below” by rewriting the Creator-creation boundary markers and thereby enmeshes the two in a “perichoretic” emanationism.¹²

Further, Moltmann’s “immanent-transcendence” proceeds on the assumption that we identify the *life* of the Spirit with the *life* of the world. The danger of this assumption becomes clear when Moltmann’s politically correct assertions predicate the work of the Spirit. Once the Spirit is defined in virtue of what we experience as life giving, it is fair to wonder how we hear the Spirit’s voice rise above our own. Epistemologically speaking, Moltmann’s Creator-creation collapse continues by erasing the distinction between the revelational work of the Spirit in creation and the revelational work of the Spirit in redemption. His solution to what he perceives as the restrictiveness of Barth’s “Word” and Schleiermacher’s “Feeling” becomes a univocity of the Spirit’s revelation. Lastly, and almost predictably, in a move a hair’s breath from theological ventriloquism, Moltmann defends his universalism by appealing to Barth’s doctrine of a supralapsarian electing of corporate humanity.¹³ For these reasons and others, Moltmann’s solution won’t do for us.¹⁴

We could go on to other possibilities; however, I wish to argue that the way forward for a Reformed doctrine of general revelation

Cosmic Pneumatology,” in *Calvin and the Holy Spirit: papers and responses presented at the sixth Colloquium on Calvin & Calvin Studies sponsored by the Calvin Studies Society held at Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan, on May 6 and 7, 1987*, ed. Peter De Klerk (Grand Rapids: Calvin Studies Society, 1989).

12. “The personhood of God and the Holy Spirit is the loving, self-communicating, and *out-fanning and out-pouring presence* of the eternal divine life of the triune God.” Moltmann, *Spirit*, 289 (emphasis added).

13. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), 246–49.

14. Nor was Barth himself tempted by Moltmann’s solution. For Barth’s response to Moltmann’s theology, see Karl Barth, *Letters 1961–1968*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), 174–76.

involves reclaiming the Bavinckian consensus, namely, that the Schleiermacher-vs.-Barth divide needs to be exchanged for the Herman Bavinck and J. H. Bavinck accord. In the remainder of my essay, I will unpack this thesis in three moves: first, I will briefly sketch these two theologian's respective views of general revelation, noting their considerable consensus; second, I will explore the both-and benefits of their consensus; and third, I will consider the promise of a Bavinckian approach by sketching a possible avenue for future research.

Herman Bavinck on General Revelation

Herman Bavinck (1854–1921; hereafter HB) was the professor of dogmatics at both Kampen (*Theologische Universiteit Kampen voor de Gereformeerde Kerken*) and, later, the Free University of Amsterdam. His unique contribution to the doctrine of revelation attempts to maintain a Reformed catholicity in the midst of the challenges of modernity.¹⁵ He believed that confusion regarding revelation was central to the crisis of theology in the modern period. For him, revelation is not one of many doctrines but an architectonic one; for, all knowledge of God is contingent on divine revelation.¹⁶ HB's theology of revelation is trinitarian in form: in

15. This lifelong focus on the nature of revelation came not only from principle, but was driven by the pressing issue of the transition of theology departments to religious studies departments in the contemporary academy. For a discussion of the context behind the unique emphasis on revelation in HB's theology see James Perman Eglington, "Herman Bavinck's Doctrine of Revelation in Context," in "Trinity and Organism: Towards a New Reading of Herman Bavinck's Organic Motif," PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 2010, ch. 5. The debate between theology vs. religious studies is still alive and well in the contemporary academy; see Reid B. Locklin and Hugh Nicholson, "The Return of Comparative Theology," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 78, no. 2 (June 2010), 477–514.

16. HB argued that each theology stood or fell on its doctrine of revelation. Jan Veenhof, "Revelation and Grace in Herman Bavinck," in *The Kuyper Center Review, Volume 2: Revelation and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 4. The centrality of revelation for HB is exhibited in his choice of this topic for his Stone Lectures: Herman Bavinck, *The Philosophy of*

freedom, God reveals knowledge *of himself through himself* to perform his purposes.¹⁷ This threefold pattern corresponds with the work of the Father, Son, and Spirit *per appropriationem*.

HB argued that the work of creation through the Word and Spirit formed “the beginning and foundation of all subsequent revelation.”¹⁸ In other words, creation is not just one locus of revelation but the context and pattern for all subsequent revelations.¹⁹ Because revelation is *within* the context of creation, it employs the *mediations* of creation.²⁰ This implies that humans as *creatures*—perceiving subjects in creation—do not rely on a particular *Anknüpfungspunkt* (point of contact), since all of creation is expedient. HB was a realist: these mediations did not cease as a result of sin,²¹ even though sin jeopardized (but did not

Revelation: The Stone Lectures for 1908–1909, Princeton Theological Seminary (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1908).

17. Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith: A Survey of Christian Doctrine*, trans. Henry Zylstra (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956), 34–35.

18. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003–2008), 1:307; hereafter referenced as *RD*.

19. “In creating the world by his word and making it come alive by his Spirit, God already delineated the basic contours of all subsequent revelation.” *RD*, 1:307.

20. “He reveals himself in nature and all around us, displays in it his eternal power and divinity, and in blessings and judgments alternately shows this goodness and wrath (Job 36:37; Ps 29; 33:5; 65: 67:7; 90; 104; 107; 145; 147; Isa. 59:17–19; Matt. 5:45; Rom 1:18; Acts 14:16–17). He reveals himself in the history of nations and persons (Deut. 32:8; Ps. 33:10; 67:4; 115:16; Prov. 8:15, 16; Acts 17:26; Rom. 13:1). He also discloses himself in the heart and conscience of every individual (Job. 32:8; 33:4; Prov. 20:27; John 1:3–5, 9, 10; Rom. 2:14, 15; 8:16). This revelation of God is general, perceptible as such, and intelligible to every human. Nature and history are the books of God’s omnipotence and wisdom, his goodness and justice. All peoples have to a certain extent recognized this revelation.” *RD*, 1:310.

21. “Now it is remarkable that sin, which entered the world by the first human beings, brings about no change in the fact of revelation itself. God continues to reveal himself; he does not withdraw himself.” *RD*, 1:310. Contrast this with Johann H. Bavinck’s claim that, “One can hear God’s voice in nature; everything speaks of Him; but one cannot deduce His image from this whimsical,

eradicate) the perception of these mediations.²² Yet through God's ongoing providential work in history, humanity continues to have a liminal sense of the presence of God. By God's grace, people continue to be haunted by a pre-critical awareness of these revelations. And because these revelations comprise everything and are available for all, they can be considered *general* revelation. In HB's words,

The world itself rests on revelation; revelation is the presupposition, the foundation, and the secret of all that exists in all its forms. The deeper science pushes its investigations, the more clearly will it discover that revelation underlies all created being. In every moment of time beats the pulse of eternity; every point in space is filled with the omnipresence of God; the finite is supported by the infinite, all becoming is rooted in being.²³

Although HB emphasizes the supernatural, broad, and robust nature of general revelation, he also highlights that catholicity requires recognizing the insufficiency of general revelation (*RD*, 1:312). He does this even as he concedes that some theologians have mitigated this insufficiency by adding the necessity of a special work of God's Spirit to illuminate general revelation (*RD*, 1:311–12). He counters this assertion by claiming that general revelation provides inadequate knowledge for salvation because of its generic content.²⁴ Existing within cultural contexts that dilute general

abnormal world. To be sure, this world is His creation, but in some mysterious way there rests a curse upon it." *The Church Between Mosque and Temple: A Study of the Relationship Between the Christian Faith and Other Religions* (1966; repr. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), 131.

22. HB sees all revelation as an act of grace. *RD*, 1:310.

23. *Philosophy*, 27. HB's claim that science would eventually disclose how "revelation underlies all created being" and that space is filled with the omnipresence of God seems to be prescient of Wolfhart Pannenberg's distillation of the ecstatic nature of all organisms within a force or field which he identifies as the Spirit. *Towards a Theology of Nature* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1993).

24. HB is certainly right that renderings of the experience of *general* revelation are marked by a generic element. They are variously described as a "feeling of ultimate concern" (Tillich), a "feeling of absolute dependence" (Schleiermacher), a "*mysterium tremendum*" or "*mysterium fascinans*" (Otto), a "supernatural existential" or "the one and total, universal and definitive meaning

revelation's witness further compromises its revelational potential. Therefore, for HB, general revelation must be matched with the narrative content of the Gospel since the former is *intrinsically* part of a greater whole (1 Cor. 15:3–5).²⁵ In other words, the answers of special revelation cannot be properly understood without the reality of creation itself. These creational realities are not merely external factors but inform questions native to the humanity. That said, HB is careful to argue that the content of scripture and the person of Christ, “who alone is the way to the Father,” must be present for an actual change of something in existence. When placed together, the revelations of creation and redemption mutually confirm each other; for, the gospel addresses authentically *human* questions. Thus Christ as the living and written Word continues to exist as the “organic center” of all revelation. Without Christ, general revelation is inept, unable to bring the life-giving results (*RD*, 1:313). Here, HB's Christological center comes closest to resembling Barth's Christocentric theology—his “Nee” resembles Barth's “Nein”.²⁶

of the whole of human existence” (Rahner), “the basic trust” (Moltmann), “self-transcendence” (Pannenberg), the “I-Thou” (Buber), a “Bright Shadow” or simply “Joy” (C.S. Lewis), “supernatural shudders” (Ingmar Bergman), the “Alps Experience” (J.B. Metz), or the “Chernobyl Experience” (Elizabeth Johnson).

25. James Eglington shows how HB drives this point home by virtue of the disappearance and reappearance of his organic motif. In his section on general revelation in the *RD*, HB ceases to use the “organic” metaphor. But when speaking about how general revelation is joined with special, HB resumes the organic motif. General revelation is part of a larger whole that is joined in Christ. See Eglington, “The Disappearance and Reappearance of the Organic Motif,” in “Trinity,” 168–70.

26. Eglington, “Trinity,” 157–58. The proximity is no accident. Barth not only read HB's *RD* several times and used it for a classroom text before writing his *Church Dogmatics*, but also he drew from a number of elements in HB's doctrine, the most important of which being HB's *Dues dixit*. See John A. Vissers, “Karl Barth's Appreciative use of Herman Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatics,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (2010): 79–86; Andrew Esqueda, “Karl Barth and Herman Bavinck on the *Deus dixit*,” *Die Evangelischen Theologen*, published 28 September 2010, <http://derevth.blogspot.com/2010/09/2010-kbbc-week-1-day-2.html>. HB's influence is illustrated most clearly in Barth's example of the circle (*CD* III/1, 122–23). Barth's illustration here appears to be amending HB's idea that “Revelation, while having its center in the Person

However, this resemblance quickly disappears when placed alongside HB's predominant emphases that all revelation is trinitarian in nature, special revelation is irreversibly a work of the triune God, and general revelation itself is faintly marked by what classical theology has called the *vestigia trinitatis*.²⁷

What is more, Bavinck not only views general revelation as dependent on special, but also he believes that special revelation is dependent upon general. This is, again, because the two are part of an irreducible whole:

General revelation leads to special, special revelation points back to general. The one calls for the other, and without it remains imperfect and unintelligible. Together they proclaim the manifold wisdom that God has displayed in creation and redemption.²⁸

Here, HB's motif of unity in diversity is the basis for his denial of the interchangeability of the two revelations. For although general revelation—by virtue of its antecedent position objectively—makes possible special revelation; special revelation—by virtue of its antecedent position from the lens of subjective perception—is necessary to capture the whole of general revelation (*RD*, 1:321). In other words, to account for the *whole* of God's engagement with the world: ontologically, the revelational mode established at creation must come before the revelational mode of the written and living Word; yet, epistemologically, the revelation of redemption must precede the revelation of creation in order for humanity to perceive

of Christ, in its periphery extends to the uttermost ends of creation." *Philosophy*, 27.

27. For a discussion on HB's uniquely modern approach to the *vestigia trinitatis*, see Eglinton, "Trinity," 96–100. For HB's view of the *vestigia trinitatis* in relation to the transcendentals, see Robert S. Covolo, "Herman Bavinck's Theological Aesthetics: A Synchronic and Diachronic Analysis," *The Bavinck Review* 2 (2011): 53–55. Oliver Davies' take on the *vestigia trinitatis* in "Christian semiotics" offers an interesting comparison to HB's organic account of "unity in diversity." *Creativity of God: World, Eucharist, Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 97. Johan H. Bavinck also appeals to Augustine's use of the *vestigia trinitatis*. *The J. H. Bavinck Reader* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, forthcoming), 515–22.

28. *Philosophy*, 28.

the greater whole of revelation.²⁹ As qualitatively distinct revelations that were intended to fit together by virtue of Christ (the *Logos* of creation and redemption), special and general revelation form an organic, interlocking unit. This means that both revelations have a particular role and that something is profoundly lacking if either one is left out.

Scholars have noted that HB's distinction between general and special revelation is a *correlata* of special and common grace. For instance, Jan Veenhof writes, "Grace, both common and special, is the origin and content of revelation, general and special revelation respectively."³⁰ Pushing back further, these mutual graces and revelations are themselves grounded in HB's doctrine of election as limited to the church. According to him, although election is not universally aimed towards corporate humanity, the manner of the church's election has significance for the entire world. Christ has honored the human race in his incarnation by taking up the flesh and blood common to all people. It was because of his redemptive mission that Christ continued to uphold the world after the fall, giving gifts to unbelievers, illuminating everyone coming into the world (*RD*, 3:470–71). For HB, therefore, general and special revelation, like common and special grace, ultimately flow from the universal significance of the particular atonement of Christ. This split within humanity between the sheep and the goats, the lost and the found, the elect and the non-elect, has reverberations within his understanding of the irreducibly different ways God is at work in

29. HB's "one way" hermeneutic of special to general revelation provides a *via media* between an *analogia entis* and an *analogia fidei*. For HB, God always reveals himself through an act of radical immanence, but that immanence does not provide a direct pipeline of knowledge back to God by way of analogy. Thus, although *God is unlike anything else, all else is nonetheless like him*. HB's hermeneutic contrasts sharply with Moltmann's two-way *emperichoresis*—a movement by which our experiences of life become the hermeneutical template for the Spirit's. Eglington, "Trinity," 126.

30. "Revelation and Grace in Herman Bavinck," 7. Cf. Bavinck's formulation: "No creature can see or understand God as he is as he speaks in himself. Revelation therefore is always an act of grace; in it God condescends to meet his creature, a creature made in his image." *RD*, 1:310.

the world: one way towards his elect who are organically joined together in Christ and another toward the non-elect.³¹

Johann Herman Bavinck on General Revelation

Johann H. Bavinck (1895–1964; hereafter JHB) was HB’s nephew, a missionary for twenty years to Indonesia, and professor of missiology at the Free University of Amsterdam. JHB shared HB’s desire to bring Reformed thought into dialogue with the modern world from an irenic and catholic spirit. Like his uncle, he had a keen interest in the growing field of psychology.³² He traced many of HB’s larger moves on the multiform nature of general revelation, particularly with an eye to the relationship of general revelation to other religions. JHB’s writings pertinent to general revelation such as *The Church Between the Temple and Mosque* (1966), *An Introduction to The Science of Missions* (1954), *De boodschap van Christus en de niet-christelijke religies* (The message of Christ and the non-Christian religions, 1940), *Religieuze besef en christelijk geloof* (Religious consciousness and Christian faith, 1949), and *Christus en de mystiek van het Oosten* (Christ and Eastern mysticism, 1934) are written in common prose and filled with quotes and references from various philosophers (Plato, Kierkegaard, Spinoza, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche), theologians (Tertullian, Augustine, Schleiermacher, Barth, Troeltsch, Brunner), social scientists (Freud, Durkheim, Jaspers), writers (Kafka, T.S. Eliot), religion scholars (James, Lehmann, Tylor) and religious

31. As we see here, a theological system’s doctrine of election has implications for its doctrine of general revelation. I was first alerted to this correlation by Richard J. Mouw who demonstrates this link by tracing the trajectories of Bavinck’s and Barth’s respective theologies of creation and election. *He Shines in All That’s Fair: Culture and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 63–68.

32. On HB’s interest in psychology, see “Psychology of Religion,” “Trends in Psychology,” and “The Unconscious,” in *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, ed. John Bolt, trans. Harry Boonstra and Gerrit Sheeres (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008).

traditions (Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, etc.).³³ Although there are many commendable features of his scholarship, he shines brightest when writing in lucid and compelling language about the phenomenology of religious experience found in both formal religions as well as the experiences of everyday life in modern culture.

JHB's understanding of general revelation and the religions is given lengthy treatment in both *Religieus besef en christelijk geloof* and *The Church Between Mosque and Temple*. In general agreement with Hendrik Kraemer that a universal religious consciousness exists, JHB argues that this consciousness is neither reducible to any one phenomenon nor related to a particular faculty in man. Instead, he traces the empirical data of religious geography to support what he considers to be five "magnetic points" of all religious experience: a sense of totality, a norm, a connection to a higher power, a need for deliverance, and a sense of a reality behind reality.

To see the charm of JHB's five magnetic points requires some explanation. First, he recognizes that each religion has its own thematized content by which these various points are refracted in greater or lesser degrees. Moreover, these five points share unique internal relations with each other. The heart of religious consciousness is expressed through a chiasmic structure of the five which results in the intersection of two lines: the external experience of totality corresponds with the issue of fate (magnetic points 1 and 5), and the internal norm corresponds with the need for deliverance (magnetic points 2 and 4). These two lines, roughly paralleling creation and redemption, converge on the third magnetic point: connection to a higher power. This third point

33. Johan Herman Bavinck, *Inleiding in de Zendingswetenschap* (Kampen: Kok, 1954); translated by David H. Freeman as *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* (Philadelphia, PA: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1960). Bavinck, *De boodschap van Christus en de niet-christelijke religies: Een analyse en beoordeeling van het boek van Dr. Kraemer: The Christian message in a non-Christian world* (Kampen, Kok, 1940). Bavinck, *Christus en de mystiek van het Oosten* (Kampen, Kok, 1934).

therefore is in a unique relationship with the other four, being “the heart of religious consciousness” and “the essence of all religion.” Because this sense of connection with a higher power is at the core of our religions condition, the ensuing secularism in our cultures (which assumes that there is no higher power to connect to) is all the more existentially troubling. “What is really lacking in our modern culture is that one aspect that we have designated as the core of religious consciousness, namely the awareness of being connected to a higher power.”³⁴ Moreover, since these magnetic points of religious experience arise from within the consciousness of the individual, they can be expressed in Martin Buber’s I-Thou forms.³⁵

Having developed in great detail the empirical evidence for these religious impulses, JHB moves on to explore how they are related to God. He writes that general revelation constitutes God’s “voiceless speech” according to which all human talk about God (i.e., all religion) is to be understood as an answer and a response.³⁶ JHB is not optimistic about these “stammers,” and rather than seeing in them fledgling faith that simply needs to be redirected or matured,³⁷ he turns to his development of psychological categories such as repression and exchange.³⁸ These categories come from his

34. *Reader*, 103.

35. These are, “I and the cosmos,” “I and the norm,” “I and the riddle of my existence,” “I and salvation,” and “I and the Supreme Power.” See JHB, “Religious Consciousness and Christian Faith,” in *Reader*, 93–95, and JHB, *The Church*, 32–33. “Religion is the way in which man experiences the deepest existential relations and gives expression to this experience.” JHB, *The Church*, 112.

36. JHB, “Religious Consciousness,” 318; JHB, *The Church*, 125.

37. JHB does not see a place for “anonymous Christians” in other religions. Although he acknowledges “there are a few places in the Bible that seem to indicate a somewhat different direction” he states that, by far, the general situation is portrayed in the OT as other nations being outside the domain of special revelation and therefore in a condition of “ignorance refusal, and foolishness.” *Reader*, 321–25.

38. JHB believed that religions always contained elements of the “mysterious process of repression.” *The Church*, 125. He writes elsewhere:

interpretation of Romans 1 and the role of the subconscious in psychology.³⁹

Citing the story of Cyrus as an example (Isa. 45:4, 5), JHB acknowledges that his strong view of suppression and exchange does not match everything found in scripture and experience on the mission field. And like HB, JHB also spoke of the positive elements that general revelation engenders such as its role in conscience, a strong social drive that fosters community, mutual responsibility, and a deeper encounter with the biblical text after conversion. Moreover, he acknowledges that general revelation is not responded to in a monolithic way—that we must be careful not to “paint all pagans with the same brush.”⁴⁰ For, as he goes on to say, God’s presence is stronger with some, and therefore general revelation is not so easily pushed aside, thereby creating individuals who are overwhelmed and in a state of constant unrest. Here he references Calvin’s statement that “scarcely one man in a hundred is met who fosters it, once received, in his heart. . . .”⁴¹ JHB reads

“People are always more than as people they actually are. They are people with a wound that cannot be closed—they suppress. But in the most critical moments of their existence, they feel assailed by what they have with such determined certainty attempted to push away. They are people who have assaulted God, who do so every day anew, and who have some sense of what they are doing—however vague that sense may be. They can never entirely rid themselves of the truth about God that they have suppressed, held back, pushed away, sublimated, or crucified. This is what they fear; it is their tragedy.” In the same passage, when speaking of the inconsistency of pagans who in rare moments of existential fear forget their gods and call out to the Supreme Being, he notes, “At such times, it is as though that repressed and maligned truth begins stirring once more, as though the foundations of the house begin shaking, as though the joists begin creaking, and as though all certainties cave in. Is that the moment that the gears of the engine of repression seize up, and when Another, stronger than individual people, discloses himself in his everlasting power and divinity?” *Reader*, 267.

39. True to his Reformed heritage, JHB emphasizes the role of Romans 1:18–30 as critical for understanding other biblical texts dealing with general revelation. *Reader*, 320–22.

40. *Reader*, 264.

41. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religions*, ed. John T. McNeil, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols., The Library of Christian Classics 20 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1960) 1.4.1 (p. 1:47).

Calvin's statement phenomenologically: "it seems to me that with this 'one in a hundred' he is thinking of those for whom suppressing only takes place accompanied by a great deal of unsettledness."⁴² He interprets this exception as the mark of the Spirit's unusually strong presence by which mankind's default position of repression and exchange is undone.⁴³

Bavinckian Consensus

From this brief sketch it becomes apparent that HB and JHB were working from a similar theological framework within different disciplines, emphases, time periods (HB was JHB's senior by forty years), and theological milieus.⁴⁴ However, there were also some differences between the two. One example of this is their respective ways of speaking of other religions. Although HB held an antithesis regarding the religions, he does so largely within a metaphor of fulfillment in light of the revelation of nature and history (*RD*, 1:318–19). In distinction, when JHB speaks of other religions, he is more likely to draw from antithetical images of suppression, exchange, and idolatry.⁴⁵ Paul Visser, noted JHB scholar, speaks of

42. *Reader*, 266.

43. "We can say that natural man is ever busy repressing or exchanging. But does he always succeed to the same degree? That depends on the strength with which God approaches him. God can at times, as it were, stop the noiseless engines of repression and exchange and overwhelm man to such an extent that he is powerless for the moment. There is also, always the silent activity of the Holy Spirit inside man, even if he resists Him constantly." *The Church*, 125.

44. Paul Visser sees a move in JHB's thought away from adopting HB's categories toward shifting them within the distinct influences of existentialism and Barthianism. HB died a year before Barth's 1922 edition of *Romerbrief* was published, and he never felt a need to address Barth's theology. In contrast, JHB's life (1895–1964) was encompassed by Barth's (1886–1968).

45. Whereas JHB appealed more to Hendrik Kraemer, HB's view of the religions is closer to Paul Althaus's idea of "original revelation." For a comparison of the two, see Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions: Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Perspectives* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 181–90.

a trajectory in which JHB developed his own position on general revelation, one that had more capacity and tendency for a strong antithetical read than HB's. According to Visser, this was in no small part due to the growing influence of Karl Barth and Hendrik Kraemer.⁴⁶ Additionally, JHB's draw to existentialism invited him into a dialectic motif between the two sources of revelation. In contrast, HB's organic motif implied more of a sense of continuity between general revelation and special revelation and therefore emphasized resonance between the two.

These differences show there is wiggle room in being Bavinckian. Nevertheless, there remains a strong consensus between these two theologians regarding general revelation:

1. Both argue that, in spite of the fall, God continually reveals himself to people in the world through nature and history within mankind (*internum principium*). Additionally, in a special and irreplaceable way, God has revealed himself in the written and living Word. Both of these revelations are a work of grace through the Spirit based on the merits of Christ.

2. Both hold that the forms of revelation share the same *efficient* cause (the work of the Spirit and Word) but are distinct in

46. I would add G.C. Berkouwer as well. Paul J. Visser writes, "Investigation of JHB's understanding of the *principium internum* reveals a lengthy, gradual development in his thought. During the period in which he interpreted religious consciousness from a largely psychological point of view, he placed strong emphasis—following Schleiermacher and especially Otto—on the *principium internum* as a yearning after God. After coming into contact with Kraemer's radically biblical approach, however, in particular his understanding of the anthropological consequences of the fall of man, JHB gradually abandoned this psychologically inspired concept of the *principium internum* . . . From this time on, JHB spoke cautiously about the internal principle and placed the full accent on revelation. . . ."

"On one hand, JHB wished to maintain the notion of an internal principle in line with Reformed tradition. On the other hand, he turned more and more to the I-Thou relationship for an explanation of this phenomenon." "Religion, Mission, and Kingdom: A Comparison of Herman and Johan Herman Bavinck," *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (2010): 119–20.

terms of their *material* causes (nature, history, scripture, etc.) and *formal* cause (general grace or special grace).

3. Both believe special revelation has an epistemic priority in opening up the fullness of general revelation. General revelation, apart from special revelation, is qualitatively diminished.

The Benefits of Bavinckian Consensus

The Bavinckian consensus—which can be described as a both-and approach in contrast to the either-or Schleiermacher-Barth dilemma—offers several benefits. Take, for example, the Bavinckian view of the world. The Schleiermacher-vs.-Barth dilemma is framed as a choice between the enchanted world of Schleiermacher or the resolute alterity in Barth’s Creator-creation distinction. The Bavinckian consensus refuses this choice. On one hand, one hears in the Bavinckian tradition a strong appeal to the enchanted nature of the world, a world in which “every moment of time beats the pulse of eternity; every point in space is filled with the omnipresence of God.” Yet the Bavinckian consensus remains equally vigilant against “every hint of an essential identity between God and the world” (*RD*, 2:419).

This both-and view is critically important for the future of Reformed theology. This has become poignantly clear in the work of philosopher Charles Taylor who has demonstrated that the rise of secularism in the West has been characterized by an inability to see the world’s connection to a transcendent order.⁴⁷ In spite of all of

47. “Now this Scripture-derived framework also sustained a certain kind of understanding of the world, interwoven with those underlying the cosmos ideas. The understanding of things as signs, and as signs addressed to us by God, entrenches the fixity of the cosmos in its short time scale. The world around us is God’s speech act, and in the context of the Bible story this seemed to leave no room for any other story but the standard one, that the world as we see it issued in the beginning from the hand of God. Beyond the indices of change, of bewildering difference, must lie the limits laid down in the original creation. But this whole understanding, defined by this sense of limits, has been swept away. Our sense of the universe now is precisely defined by the vast and unfathomable: vastness in space, and above all in time; unfathomability in the long chain of

his efforts to find a way forward in the Age of Reason, Schleiermacher imbibed much from his Enlightenment context.⁴⁸ And there are equally strong critics of Barth who likewise see his self-referential “lights” and “words” as endorsing an implicit secularism.⁴⁹ Taylor’s account of the rise of the “buffered self” in our secular age sounds strikingly similar to Barth’s attempt to disconnect the anthropological from the divine. In contrast, the Bavinckian tradition supported a more enchanted world, replete with manifestations of God’s ubiquitous glory and activity. Yet it does this with a strong vigilance for protecting the Creator-creation distinction. As such, the Bavinckian consensus represents a way forward for holding both together in the modern world.⁵⁰

changes out of which present forms evolve.” Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007), 325.

48. Schleiermacher’s Enlightenment concerns are apparent in his methodology (e.g., his quest for a single, unified source of revelation) as well as his anti-supernatural conclusions. Regarding the latter, he writes in his section on angels in the *The Christian Faith*: “This conception is indigenous to the Old Testament and has passed over into the New. It contains in itself nothing impossible and does not conflict with the basis of the religious consciousness in general. But at the same time it never enters into the sphere of Christian doctrine proper. It can, therefore, continue to have its place in Christian language without laying on us the duty of arriving at any conclusions with regard to its truth.” Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 2nd ed., eds. H.R. Mackintosh and J.S. Stewart (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 156.

49. One of the best-known critics of Barth on this count is Langdon Gilkey. According to him, it is only a short step to move from God’s otherness to God’s absence. *Naming the Whirlwind: The Renewal of God-Language* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), 55. Paul Louis Metzger acknowledges that Barth spoke approvingly of Feuerbach’s critique of religion and appealed to Strauss’s philosophy for those who would ground religion in history. Yet Metzger sees Barth’s secularism as the only alternative between a theology which puts “perfect symmetry” between Christ and Culture. He states, “In the end, one must choose between a theology of engagement symbolized by an ellipse with two foci as Schleiermacher and these other theologians of mediation maintain, and that alternative which emphasizes the sovereignty of God in his Word, signifying an irreversible relation between God and the world.” *The Word of Christ*, 80.

50. HB was not afraid to speak the language of participation. He writes, “Granted, the Scholastics wrote repeatedly about an emanation or procession of all existence from a universal cause and also occasionally of the creature’s

Another benefit of the Bavinckian consensus is seen in the dilemma of commonness and ecclesiological space. On the one hand, the Bavinckian consensus on general revelation provides a basis for commonness with broader humanity, including people of other religions.⁵¹ Both Believers and unbelievers experience JHB's "magnetic points" such as the sense of cosmic relationship or the pangs of conscience derived from a sense of norm. On this count, the Bavinckian consensus goes with Schleiermacher, claiming that unbelievers are not merely outsiders, for they already have an ongoing (even if pre-cognitive) dialogue with the voiceless speech of God through general revelation.⁵² Therefore, the Bavinckian tradition is not cut off from its "cultured despisers," for general revelation connects the believer's faith to their broader existence and relationships with those in the world. For instance, HB argues quite extensively that non-Christian religions find their origin in

participation in the being and life of God. But in saying this they did not mean "emanation" in the strict sense, as if God's own being flowed out into his creatures and so unfolded in them, like the genus in its species. They only meant to say that God is a self-subsistent necessary being (*ens per essentiam*), but the creature is existent by participation (*ens per participationem*). Creatures indeed have a being of their own, but this being has its efficient and exemplary cause in the being of God." *RD*, 2:419. This is one of the reasons contemporary scholars influenced by the Dutch tradition are deeply interested in understanding and parsing the Radical Orthodox movement's attempt to reclaim a sense of creation participating in the divine. See Jamie Smith and James H. Olthuis, *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition: Creation, Covenant, and Participation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005).

51. This is one implication of HB's view that the whole human person images the whole triune God. See Cory Wilson, "Simul Humanitas et Peccator: The Talmud's Contribution to a Dutch Reformed Notion of the Imago Dei," in *The Kuyper Center Review, Volume 2: Revelation and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 264.

52. "See then, whether you wish it or not, the goal of your highest endeavors is just the resurrection of religion . . . I celebrate you as, however unintentionally, the rescuers and cherishers of religion." Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches To It's Cultured Despisers*, trans. John Oman (London: Keagan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., LTD, 1893), 141. Barth countered Schleiermacher by claiming that religion was not based in an original revelation, but unbelief (*CD* I/2, 297–325).

general revelation and that therefore there is always a point of contact, even if that point is refracted through the vagaries of a religion's development (*RD*, 1:314–20). Moreover, he views the “holy pagans” of the OT as echoing the original state of the world prior to Abraham whereas “[t]he distinction between what has come to be called general and special revelation does not begin until the call of Abraham; before that the two intermingle, and so far have become the property of all peoples and nations.”⁵³ Critical of the inadequacy of his own Reformed tradition on the religions, HB writes that the

Reformed only spoke of natural religion, innate and acquired, but the connection between this natural religion and the [pagan] religions was not developed. The religions were traced to deception or demonic influences. However, an operation of God's Spirit and of his common grace is discernible not only in science and art, morality and law, but also in the religions. Calvin rightly spoke of a “seed of religion,” a “sense of divinity.” Founders of religion, after all, were not impostors or agents of Satan but men who, being religiously inclined, had to fulfill a mission to their time and people, and often exerted a beneficial influence on the life of peoples. The various religions, however mixed with error they may have been, to some extent met people's religious needs and brought consolation amidst the pain and sorrow of life. What comes to us from the pagan world are not just cries of despair but also expressions of confidence, hope, resignation, peace, submission, patience. etc. (*RD*, 1:319)

On the other hand, because of the unique status of special revelation—Bavinck's *Deus dixit*—the church has an epistemic basis for ecclesiological space. When starting with special revelation and thereby viewing general revelation, the world qualitatively opens up a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. This gives the Church an *epistemic* basis for her own voice. Here, Barth's insistence on a distinct ecclesiological epistemology takes form in the Bavinckian tradition, one in which the church's encounter with

53. *Philosophy*, 188. For further development of HB's view of the religions, see 1. Robert S. Covolo, “Advancing a Neo-Calvinist Pneumatology of Religions: The Role of Recent Yongian Contributions,” in *The Kuyper Center Review, Volume 2: Revelation and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 315–34.

the Word/Light enables her to demonstrably name the words/lights within culture/creation.⁵⁴ The Bavinckian tradition maintained not only a basis for commonness (Schleiermacher), but also a basis for being a new creation, something radically different from non-Christians and other religions (Barth).⁵⁵ And again, however the Bavinckian tradition fares in its details, the future of the church will require her to obtain the ambidextrous ability to speak with broader humanity by virtue of a shared epistemology and yet have her own “eyes to see” and “ears to hear” by virtue of the Spirit of redemption working through the written and living Word.

Finally, the Bavinckian consensus opens up the way for both apologetic and kerygmatic theology. On the one hand, because God is already at work in the frameworks of creation and culture, Christian theology can speak *within* the grammars of various cultural texts. Here the post-liberal assumption that Christianity can remain within her own coherent language-system is challenged, for the entire world is the place where God speaks.⁵⁶ Bavinckian

54. “The more seriously and joyfully we believe in Him, the more we shall see such signs in the worldly sphere, and the more we shall be able to receive true words from it.” Barth, *CD IV/3.1*, 122.

55. It is within the context of HB’s discussion of Christian discipleship that he accents the metaphor of Calvin’s spectacles and hence the mutual irreplaceable nature of these two revelations for a Christian’s view of the world. True to the emphasis of the *Institutes*, HB sees Calvin’s spectacles as essential for Christian discipleship: the Christian from within the context of the written and living word brings into focus the supernatural and revelational nature of the world. Therefore the Christian has something the world does not have and sees something that the world cannot see. For Calvin’s use of “spectacles” see John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Battles, ed. John McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), I. vi. 1 (p. 70).

56. While I am sympathetic to George Lindbeck’s fear that (as with liberalism) the language of the world absorb the language of the text, I agree with Miroslav Volf that “we need more complex ways of relating the ‘world’ and the ‘text’ than the dichotomy between conforming the text to the world and conforming the world to the text.” “Theology, Meaning and Power,” in *The Nature of Confession: Evangelicals & Postliberals in Conversations*, eds. Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 47. In fact, the idea that Christian speech is “sealed off” from other languages is problematic. As others have noted, Lindbeck’s appeal to the way

belief in *all of creation* as a source of the revelation of God means the written and living Word speaks in voiceless words *in creation and history*. Indeed, given the work of revelation by the Spirit in the world, the church should be about answering the questions of non-Christians. In truth, all theology is attempting to answer cultural questions whether it likes it or not. There really is no escape. In spite of Barth's theological polemic against the conditionality of apologetic theology as irreducibly tied to Schleiermacher's *Kulturprotestantismus*, his own theology was itself produced in the context of the idealism, aestheticism, and pedagogy of *Kultur*. Would Barth's Mozart still be Mozart if he were working with the banjo, washbasin, and nose harp? Mozart was playing music (a voiceless language) with instruments created in the musical tradition of Barth's *Kultur*, and it is difficult to imagine how Mozart's "timelessly valid form" could exist apart from its existence within its cultural particularity.

On the other hand, because the living and written Word is a unique revelation to the church and not interchangeable with

theological language works is itself relying on so-called "religiously neutral" (i.e., non-textual) cultural-linguistic theories of religion. Graham Ward has argued compellingly that there is no such thing as "pure texts" or even theological language that appears on the scene *ex nihilo*. In doing so, he refers specifically to Barth's theology which evolved by appropriating a particular philosophical (Kierkegaard, Heidegger) and theological (Herrmann, Stephen, etc.) context within a distinct *habitus*. See Graham Ward, *Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 16–60. Also pertinent here is Philip Stoltzfus's development of cultural practice on all theology. Again, using Barth as an example, Stoltzfus claims, "Barth must not be excused from the necessity of naming and locating himself in his theological performance." See Philip Stoltzfus, *Theology as Performance: Music, Aesthetics, and God in Western Thought* (New York: T & T Clark, 2006). William Dyrness concurs: "Christians have no special cultural space, or, to put it more accurately 'our own proper territory has always already been inhabited by others.' This means further that Christians exist in an important solidarity with their unbelieving neighbors . . . what we Christians are as cultural beings with our neighbors—our language, our holidays, our workspace as well as our being fallen and being loved and sought by God—is in some ways more important than what separates us." See William Dyrness, *The Earth is the God's: A Theology of American Culture* (New York: Orbis, 1997), 82.

general revelation, the church has a strong basis for kerygmatic proclamation. The church has been entrusted with a special revelation and charged with the distinct role of proclaiming *this* revelation to a world that has no access apart from *her* stewardship (Mt. 10:27; Rom. 10:14). Apologetic and kerygmatic theologies are implicit within the Bavinckian consensus's refusal to make general and special revelation interchangeable. The Bavinckian consensus refuses to choose between proclamation (Lk. 4:18) and being ready to give an answer to every man (1 Pt. 3:15); both are necessary for the church to speak in the world with her own voice.

Perhaps the Bavinckian consensus is guilty of wanting to have its cake and eat it too. On the other hand, is this not simply a desire to be *in* the world, yet not *of* it; to speak about God's work in the world as ambidextrous rather than uniform; to seek both enchantment and Creator-creation distinction; to live in the already-not yet of both antithesis and commonness; to proclaim its own truth boldly in a language it has yet to learn from "the uttermost parts of the world?" Arguably, one recognizes in this refusal to be backed into an either-or a distinctly catholic impulse within the Bavinckian consensus.

Moving Forward: Reclaiming a Bavinckian Spirit

If indeed the Bavinckian consensus is the best way forward, how might we proceed? Before concluding, I would like to suggest one possible route.

The Barth-vs.-Schleiermacher era of Reformed theology has remained stuck in discussions surrounding two possible relationships of the sources of revelation. While some have emphasized the difference of these revelations, others have attempted to reclaim the continuity of the two by collapsing them into one. The resulting volley has vacillated between those that hold to a greater-vs.-lesser or stronger-vs.-weaker two-source approach, and those who favor abandoning the language of "general" and "special" altogether (Barth, Lindbeck, et al.). But are these two options as different as they sound? Ernst Conradie has insightfully

noted that both those who contrast these two types of revelation and those that favor abandoning a two-source approach assume general revelation is a distinctly independent source.⁵⁷ In contrast, the Bavinckian consensus refused to hold these revelations apart in a clear-cut static manner. JHB moved away from religious consciousness in terms of a faculty or the result of a single phenomenon to a more dynamic I-Thou *presence* which is empirically documented rather than anthropologically assumed. Additionally, HB was noted for arguing that the two revelations were organically connected in an asymmetrical, multivalent way such that, while one can recognize difference, it is questionable where one type of revelation leaves off and another one begins.⁵⁸ After all, he remarks, these two revelations remain the work of the one Logos.⁵⁹

Given these claims, a Bavinckian reframing of Moltmann's imperiled attempt to ground the unified nature of revelation in the work of the life-giving Spirit provides a promising way forward. In following the Bavincks, one finds tremendous help in D. L. Dabney's essay "Otherwise Engaged in the Spirit." In this essay, Dabney retrieves Moltmann's starting point of the Spirit's presence without recourse to panentheism. For Dabney, the Spirit is not only active in the preaching of the word, but also it "haunts our dreams and disturbs our sloth, the source of our every broken intimation of

57. "In my view, the distinction between special and general revelation becomes problematic the moment it is compartmentalized as two distinct sources for reflecting on God's self-revelation (e.g., the 'book of nature' and the 'book of scripture'). Then questions on the relationship between these two sources immediately arise. . . . it cannot be portrayed in terms of two separate sources. The locus of special revelation forms part of the locus of general revelation." *Creation and Salvation: Dialogue in Abraham Kuyper's Legacy for Contemporary Ecotheology* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 80–81.

58. The revelation of Christ is neither "an island" that stands starkly out on the sea of general revelation nor a "drop of water" that is dissolved into general revelation. *Philosophy*, 27.

59. "[T]he foundations of creation and redemption are the same: The Logos who became flesh is the same by whom all things were made." *Ibid.*

an o/Other.”⁶⁰ By reclaiming presence as the starting point without appealing to a static faculty or immediately turning to ontological structure, Dabney has shifted from starting with the mediums of the Spirit’s work to the presence (I-Thou) of the Spirit.⁶¹

Equally auspicious for a Bavinckian pneumatology of general revelation is Arnold van Ruler’s work.⁶² His insistence on the unique structure of pneumatology offers fresh ways to conceive of the Spirit’s distinct work in general revelation.⁶³ Following the example of Vincent Bacote’s transposition of Van Ruler’s redemptive pneumatology for creation and common grace,⁶⁴ we might consider how Van Ruler’s pneumatology informs a Bavinckian doctrine of general revelation. In place of either the Barthian approach, which speaks of the radical freedom of the Word/Light to *assume* in an *ad hoc* fashion a word/light, or those that see the structures of creation and history as static revelational constants, how might Van Ruler’s economy of the Spirit inform JHB’s existential thrust and HB’s enchanted view of the interrelation of general and special? Here Van Ruler’s contrast between Christological structure (i.e., taking up the human into the divine) and pneumatological structure (i.e., taking form in a plurality of particular human beings) proves helpful. As he explains,

60. Dabney, “Otherwise Engaged in the Spirit,” 160. Note how this language echoes JHB’s existential description.

61. For a discussion on the promise of Dabney’s work for adopting “something like general revelation” in light of post-liberal theology, see Richard Crane, “Postliberals, Truth, *Ad Hoc* Apologetics, and (Something Like) General Revelation,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 30, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 29–53.

62. For a distillation of Van Ruler’s logic of pneumatology in light of the issue of a Reformed theology of cosmic pneumatology, see John Bolt, “The Ecumenical Shift to Cosmic Pneumatology,” *Reformed Review* 51, no. 3 (1998): 255–70.

63. Arnold van Ruler, “Structural Differences Between Christological and Pneumatological Perspectives” and “Grammar of a Pneumatology,” in *Calvinist Trinitarianism and Theocentric Politics*, trans. John Bolt (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989).

64. Vincent Bacote, *The Spirit in Public Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 118–33.

the Spirit works with a unique sensitivity to the specifics of the human situation.⁶⁵ Transposed to general revelation, this implies the work of the Spirit in general revelation involves an ongoing liminal presence (I-Thou) through a variety of mediations to a host of individuals. The Spirit uniquely haunts different human subjects *within* the particularities of their contextual nature and history to form the requisite premonition. Thus, by starting with a pneumatic presence, the problem of focusing on a permanent anthropological structure or simply appealing to the mediations as static and inescapable points of contact is removed.

While not intended to be comprehensive, this sketch serves as an example of how the Bavinckian consensus resources a Reformed theology of general revelation after the Barth-Schleiermacher dilemma.

Conclusion

My broad assessment of the Schleiermacher-Barth dilemma has led to a programmatic suggestion for how the Bavinckian consensus can guide the future of Reformed theology as she articulates how God reveals himself, namely, by working *within* the antinomies that the church must pursue: enchantment *and* Creator-creation distinction, commonness *and* antithesis, apologetics *and* kerygma. Admittedly, it is no small task to hold together a theology that is both from within and without, from above and below, and I am certain this general overview can sound to those trained in the Scylla and Charybdis of the Schleiermacher-Barth dilemma like

65. "The accent on the human person in the work of the Holy Spirit implies that, in thinking through and speaking about salvation and the relationship between God and us, one must take individuality very seriously. At issue is my personal participation in salvation. It is my heart, my life, my knowing, and willing that are affected. What happens in me displays a kind of unrepeatableness and once-for-all-ness similar to what happened in Christ. This does not mean that everything affected by salvation is exclusively centered on human individuality. On the contrary. Individualization is coupled with multiplicity." "Structural Differences," 33.

talking out of both sides of one's mouth.⁶⁶ But Christianity has always moved forward by holding together tensions: Christ is human and divine. The Trinity is one, yet three. Might it be that the Bavinckian consensus displays her catholicity through both voices? Even better, do not these antinomies reflect the unified witness of scripture?

Undoubtedly, some will feel that we shouldn't look to a theology that was birthed *before* a dilemma as a solution to life *after* it. Yet this charge assumes that the conditions that generated the divide remain. Clearly, the philosophical and theological voices that formed the background of Barth's theology and the Enlightenment context of Schleiermacher's nineteenth-century romanticism no longer hold. In light of the divisions in modern Reformed theology, the Bavinckian consensus calls for a greater catholicity. In the hopes of reclaiming the thrust of a both-and view of revelation, it challenges modern theology to reclaim critical insights from both Barth and Schleiermacher. And by refusing to dissect revelation on the table of modernity, it has called us to trade our scalpels for Calvin's spectacles.

66. This has caused some scholars to speak as if there were two Herman Bavincks. See 1. James Eglinton, "How Many Herman Bavincks? *De Gemeene Genade* and the 'Two Bavincks' Hypothesis," in *The Kuyper Center Review Volume 2: Revelation and Common Grace*, ed. John Bowlin (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 279–301.