

Book Reviews

***The Kuyper Center Review, Volume Two: Revelation and Common Grace*, edited by John Bowlin. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011. Pp. xii + 334. \$36.00 paper.**

The seventeen essays that comprise this large and wide-ranging second issue of *The Kuyper Center Review*—more than double the size of the first—are the fruits of two conferences sponsored by Princeton Seminary’s Abraham Kuyper Center for Public Theology: a 2009 conference in celebration of the centennial of Herman Bavinck’s Stone Lectures and a 2010 conference on neo-Calvinist formulations of common grace and contemporary interfaith dialog. The book is divided into two parts accordingly.

If there is a common thread to be found between the two sets of essays, it is this: the strength of the first—a profundity of perspective that is commensurate with a robust engagement of the subject’s primary (Dutch) sources—is the weakness of the second. Many of the Bavinck-related papers cull nuggets from the Bavinck Archives, Bavinck’s correspondence, and other non-translated primary sources; these studies thus enlighten important aspects of his thought from the perspective of a knowledgeable insider who stands, albeit critically, within Bavinck’s own tradition. However, many of the Kuyper-related papers attempt critical analyses of his formulation of common grace based upon a translation of brief passages selected from his massive, three-volume *De gemeene gratie*; thus it is difficult to avoid wondering whether the sweeping conclusions drawn in some of these studies are a bit premature. Additionally, one could raise the question of whether it is useful for anglophones to attempt to evaluate Kuyper’s formulations of common grace apart from another one of his massive, three-volume, untranslated tomes: *Pro rege*. Not all of the contributions to the second part are limited in this way, however, and not all of them are directly related to Kuyper. What follows is a short synopsis the essays with brief analyses of select points.

Jan Veenhof opens part one with the intriguing suggestion that a correlation attains between three twofold motifs in Bavinck's thought: general and special revelation, common and special grace, and nature and grace. He finds Bavinck's attempt to synthesize these dualities laudable for its day but insufficient for contemporary use, especially in light of the theological questions arising from global interfaith dialog. Therefore, he suggests that developing Bavinck's formulation of Christ as mediator of creation provides an invitation for contemporary advancement of Bavinck's thought.

Gordon Graham claims that the the brilliance of Bavinck's Stone Lectures is found in his unveiling the *reductio ad absurdum* that underlies Nietzsche's atheistic philosophy of history.

George Harinck sheds intriguing historical light upon Bavinck's Stone Lectures by explaining why the lectures are entitled *The Philosophy of Revelation* instead of *The Theology of Revelation*. He argues that Bavinck is both responding to Lodewijk W. E. Rauwenhoff's *Wijsbegeerte van den godsdienst* (1887) and building upon the work of Albertus Bruining (1846–1919), a modernist theologian who had argued that religion and science are not mutually exclusive. In this light Bavinck advances beyond neo-Calvinism's initial phase of consolidating its own position on the synthesis of Christianity and modern culture and pioneers a second phase, namely, communicating the neo-Calvinist view to others so as to unite all Christian traditions behind a common commitment to defending God's revelation as the ultimate ground of society. Harinck withholds his judgment in this essay on whether Bavinck's risky venture was a success, but his verdict can be found elsewhere (see Harinck, "The Religious Character of Modernism and the Modern Character of Religion: A Case Study of Herman Bavinck's Engagement with Modern Culture," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 29, no. 1 (2011): 60–77).

Henk van den Belt highlights an alleged difference between the epistemological commitments, and hence the apologetic methodologies, employed by Bavinck and B. B. Warfield. He makes his case by noting subtle refinements that Bavinck made to his small book *The Certainty of Faith* and to his *Dogmatiek* upon

receiving constructive criticisms from Warfield. However, it is debatable whether characterizing Bavinck's Stone Lectures as "a completely different approach to apologetics from what was common at Princeton" and as one that is undergirded by a penchant for both German idealism and Schleiermachean theology is to overstate the case (55). Nor is it likely that readers will find this short essay to be satisfactory on the large topic of the allegedly differing theological epistemologies of Old Amsterdam and Old Princeton—a topic that is treated at length by Cornelius Van Til and company. Nevertheless, van den Belt helpfully illuminates the persistence of Bavinck's and Warfield's transatlantic collegiality despite their intramural disagreements.

Jeffrey Hocking avers that Bavinck's eschatologically-astute theological methodology is a true *tertium quid* beyond dogmatism and relativism and that it thus deserves a neologistic moniker: "certitudinal discourse." Strangely, however, Bavinck's own terminology for eschatologically-astute theological discourse that he inherited from Reformed orthodoxy is wholly omitted from Hocking's assessment, namely, *theologia unionis, visionis, and viatorum*. In terms of clarity, style, and historical continuity, a "theology of pilgrims on the way" is much to be preferred over Hocking's proposal.

Jon Stanley appropriates Syd Hielema's analysis of the nature-grace relationship in Bavinck's thought for the purpose of asserting a way forward in contemporary neo-Calvinism, namely, to emphasize not only that grace *restores* nature (the traditional Kuyperian line) but also that it *renews* nature (the distinctly Bavinckian contribution). He offers several suggestions of where Bavinck's dual emphasis can shed light on contemporary neo-Calvinist thought such as rethinking its standard criticisms of Roman Catholic elevation dualism. These are interesting and welcome suggestions. The essay omits, however, the key theological formulation through which Bavinck treats glorification and renewal: federal theology, especially the *foedus operum*. Thus the way forward that Stanley suggests cannot be limited to Reformational philosophy but also must take into account the insights of Reformed dogmatics.

James Eglinton presents a dialogue between Hegel, Bavinck, and Barth on the ontology of God, Christ incarnate, and human beings. He finds in Bavinck an overlooked conversation partner for current debates on divine mutability and ontology.

Brian Mattson tours the twentieth century in light of Bavinck's final Stone Lecture and finds much evidence to confirm the prophetic nature of Bavinck's instincts regarding the impending dangers lurking behind Hegelian monism. He views Bavinck's lecture as an adumbration of Eric Voegelin's warning against "immanentizing the eschaton."

Beginning part two, Leora Batnitzky suggests, after looking at Kuyper's formulation of common grace, that Judaism and Calvinism do not differ in their theology but only in their anthropology. However, this proposal faces the difficulty of Cambria Janae Kaltwasser's essay which highlights the christological foundation of Kuyper's formulation via a sharp Barthian criticism of his thought.

Anver Emon argues that *A Common Word* (ACW) is too generic and that it fails to face the hard question for Islam: who is my neighbor? He pursues a concrete answer by analyzing how contemporary reformists are employing the principle of Maqasid al-Sharia to broaden Islam's tolerance for other religions. He concludes that the way forward may not be as easy as ACW implies.

Beginning with Kuyper and Bavinck, Dirk van Keulen carefully and illuminatingly surveys how several leading theologians in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands have viewed Islam over the past hundred years.

Emily Dumler-Winckler suggests that Kuyper's and Bavinck's formulation of common grace, upon subtracting Kuyper's unnecessary identification of European culture and Christian social progress, provides a Christian theological basis for heeding ACW's call to love one's Jewish or Muslim neighbor and to learn from Jewish and Muslim revelations of God.

Cory Willson initiates a trialog with Bavinck, Berkouwer, and the Talmud to demonstrate that Jewish theology can enlighten the Reformed notion of the *imago Dei* taken in its broad sense.

James Eglinton's singular essay on the so-called "two Bavincks" hypothesis gently lays to rest a fifty-year-old annoyance in Bavinck studies, namely, the bi-polar Bavinck. He culls an abundance of evidence from Bavinck's rectorial addresses, his personal correspondence about his student days at Leiden, and the incipient reassessment of the hypothesis evident in several secondary sources to demonstrate that the schizophrenic reading of Bavinck's thought that continues to beset Bavinck scholarship is subjective (it leads to "theological apartheid"), ironic (it levels against Bavinck the same polemic he leveled against neo-Thomism), and untenable (it flies in the face of the clear commitment to an organic, trinitarian synthesis of Christianity and culture, theology and science, faith and life that pervades Bavinck's thought and life). This is a welcome and firm step forward for Bavinck (note the singular!) studies.

Andrew Harmon argues that a Kuyperian formulation of tolerance is possible if it includes a natural law component along the lines of Nicholas Wolterstorff's "deliberative democracy."

Robert Covolo proposes that classic neo-Calvinist formulations of the Holy Spirit's role in non-Christian religions such as Kuyper's and Bavinck's can be helpfully advanced by appropriating certain emphases from Amos Young's recent work on the pneumatology of religions.

— Laurence R. O'Donnell III