

# Herman Bavinck on Natural Law and Two Kingdoms: Some Further Reflections<sup>1</sup>

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Dr. David VanDrunen, Robert B. Strimple Professor of Systematic Theology and Christian Ethics at Westminster Seminary, California, has become well known in recent years for his work to rehabilitate the importance of natural law and the two kingdoms doctrine for Reformed ethics.<sup>2</sup> The rehabilitation has not been un-

1. This article is a revision of my earlier “Discussion Guide” to “The VanDrunen-Kloosterman Debate on Natural Law and Two Kingdoms in the Theology of Herman Bavinck” that was posted on the Bavinck Society website (<http://goo.gl/4qAzA>, June 2010). It also may be read as a companion piece to my “The Imitation of Christ as Illumination for the Two Kingdoms Debate,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 48, no. 1 (2013): 6–34. This revision provides a less extensive summary than did my earlier “Discussion Guide,” and I have incorporated more Bavinck scholarship including two important dissertations published after June 2010: Brian G. Mattson, *Restored to Our Destiny: Eschatology & the Image of God in Herman Bavinck’s Reformed Dogmatics*, Studies in Reformed Theology 21 (Leiden: Brill, 2011); James Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism: Towards a New Reading of Herman Bavinck’s Organic Motif*, T&T Clark Studies in Systematic Theology 17 (London: T&T Clark, 2012).

2. In addition to the “Discussion Guide” referenced in note 1, see also David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010); VanDrunen, “The Two Kingdoms and the *Ordo Salutis*: Life Beyond Judgment and the Question of a Dual Ethic,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 70, no. 2 (2008): 207–24; VanDrunen, “The Two Kingdoms Doctrine and the Relationship of Church and State in the Early Reformed Tradition,” *Journal of Church and State* 49, no. 4 (2007): 743–63; VanDrunen, “Abraham Kuyper and the Reformed Natural Law and Two Kingdoms Traditions,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 42, no. 2 (2007): 283–307; VanDrunen, “The Two Kingdoms: A Reassessment of the Transformationist Calvin,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 40, no. 2 (2005): 248–66; VanDrunen, “The Context of Natural Law: John Calvin’s Doctrine of the Two

eventful or uncontroversial. Some of us are grateful for the recovery that has taken place, while others wish the patient had died. Admittedly, my choice of metaphors here probably tips my hand, but in this essay I do not enter fully into the fray and attempt to survey the entire range of objections and counter claims that have entered into the marketplace of Reformed theological-ethical debate; rather, I restrict myself to a brief summary of VanDrunen's case with respect to Herman Bavinck and Nelson Kloosterman's response. My assessment which follows will incorporate a number of the new insights into Bavinck's theology from the two recent Bavinck dissertations by Brian Mattson and James Eglinton.<sup>3</sup>

## VanDrunen's Proposal

VanDrunen acknowledges that reading Herman Bavinck as a proponent of natural law and the two kingdoms is not the first thing that comes to mind. Ever since the pioneering work in Bavinck scholarship by Eugene Heideman and Jan Veenhof, there arose a scholarly consensus that "grace restores nature" was the defining motif in his theology.<sup>4</sup> With that framework in place, natural law and the two kingdoms "appear to intrude like uninvited guests, archaic remnants of a dualistic past."<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, VanDrunen argues that "Bavinck, adopting categories of historic Reformed orthodoxy, indeed taught doctrines of natural law and the two kingdoms." Furthermore, "Bavinck's defense of these doctrines was neither incidental nor a mindless repetition of his theological inheritance. Grace-restoring-nature and the kingdom-as-a-leaven are certainly themes in his theology, but expounding these themes in his thought

Kingdoms," *Journal of Church and State* 46, no. 3 (2004): 503–25.

3. See note 1.

4. E.P. Heideman, *The Relation of Revelation and Reason in E. Brunner and H. Bavinck* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1959). J. Veenhof, *Revelatie en Inspiratie: De Openbarings- en Schriftbeschouwing van Herman Bavinck in Vergelijking met die der Ethische Theologie* (Amsterdam: Buijten en Schipperheijn, 1968).

5. David VanDrunen, "'The Kingship of Christ is Twofold': Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms in the Thought of Herman Bavinck," *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (April 2010): 147; hereafter referenced in text.

without accounting for the natural law and two kingdoms categories will produce a distorted picture of Bavinck” (147–48).

VanDrunen’s first point is that natural law and the two kingdoms are not simply “Roman Catholic and Lutheran [notions], respectively,” but common categories of Reformed theology from its earliest days. “In a nutshell, the traditional Reformed doctrine of the two kingdoms teaches that God rules all things in his Son, yet does so in two fundamentally different ways. As the creator and sustainer, through his Son as the eternal Logos, he rules over all human beings in the *civil* kingdom. This civil kingdom consists of a range of non-ecclesiastical cultural endeavors and institutions, among which the state has particular prominence. As redeemer, through his Son as the incarnate God-Man, God rules the other kingdom, sometimes referred to as the *spiritual* kingdom. This spiritual kingdom is essentially heavenly and eschatological, but has broken into history and is now expressed institutionally in the church. Both kingdoms are good, God-ordained, and regulated by divine law, and believers participate in both kingdoms during the present age. From this distinction between a twofold kingship of the Son of God and the consequent distinction between two kingdoms by which he rules the world, Reformed orthodox theology derived a series of distinctions between political and ecclesiastical authority. The civil kingdom is provisional, temporary, and of this world. The spiritual kingdom is everlasting, eschatological, and not of this world” (148–49).

The two kingdoms doctrine has natural law as its “natural” correlate. Reformers like Calvin understood natural law to be “the moral law of God as it is written upon the heart and witnessed to by every person’s conscience, as described in Romans 2:14–15, a favorite proof text for the doctrine” (149). This too is based on “the doctrine that the Son of God has a twofold mediatorship and consequently a twofold kingship; . . . the Son is mediator of both creation and recreation (or redemption).” The Son as Logos is the “firstborn of every creature” and the Son as incarnate redeemer is the “first born of the dead.” Thus, “through natural revelation, Christ as *Logos* issues to all human beings the call of the law, which compels them to organize as families, societies, and states (in distinction from the call of the gospel that comes not from the Logos but from Christ, through special revelation). The order of creation is thus the basis for culture.” “In classic Reformed theology, this twofold medi-

atorship—over creation as Logos and over redemption as Christ—corresponded to a twofold kingship. Bavinck followed this lead. In his own words, ‘The kingship of Christ is twofold.’ On the one hand Christ holds the ‘kingship of power’ by which he has authority over all things in heaven and on earth. On the other hand Christ exercises his ‘kingship of grace’ by which he acts ‘to gather, protect, and lead his church to eternal salvation.’ In this latter role, ‘Christ is not the head of all human beings, not the prophet, priest, and king of everyone, for he is the head of the church and has been anointed king over Zion.’ Christ’s kingship of grace, according to Bavinck, ‘is totally different from that of the kings of the earth.’ It operates without violence through the ministry of word and sacrament” (150–51).

In this twofold kingship Bavinck follows the tradition in attributing a priority to the kingship of grace. “Christ does not ‘concretely govern all things,’ but if he is to gather his church then all must be ‘under his control, subject to him, and will one day, be it unwillingly, recognize and honor him as Lord.’ In this sense the kingship of power is ‘subordinate to, and a means for, his kingship of grace.’ Based upon Christ’s perfect obedience, his Father exalted him and granted him the right to protect his people and to subdue their enemies. Thus the obedient, exalted God-Man now exercises both the kingships of power and of grace. At the end of history Christ’s mediatorial work will be finished and he will hand over the kingship to his Father, who ‘himself will then be king forever.’ Through all eternity Christ will remain the ‘head of the church,’ but his ‘mediatorship of reconciliation, and to that extent also the prophetic, priestly, and royal office . . . will end” (151).<sup>6</sup>

Christians participate in both kingdoms, but their submission to Christ’s kingly rule is not identical in each one. With respect to the church, unlike the Lutherans, the Reformed did not “constrict the ‘kingdom of the right hand’ to the church’s spiritual ministry of word and sacraments and to view external church government as a matter for the ‘kingdom of the left hand,’ thus often handing over

6. In this paragraph VanDrunen references the following passages: Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols., ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003–2008), 3:375, 471, 479–80; 4:371–72, 436; hereafter referenced as *RD*. Cf. Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation* (New York: Green, and Co., 1909), 267.

church government to the civil magistrate. The Reformed, conversely, insisted that Christ's kingship over his church includes an interest in its government, and thus they defended the church's right to exercise discipline and to administer its own affairs. On this matter Bavinck again followed his Reformed forebears, stating that Christ himself instituted church offices and that ecclesiastical government is a gift from God that must remain distinct from civil government. Thereby Christ alone remains king in his church" (151–52).<sup>7</sup>

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

7. VanDrunen refers to Bavinck, *RD*, 4:297–98, 329–30, 340, 359, 371, 379, 381–82, 394, 409–10, 413–14.

dured opposition from his contemporaries for breaking with the ideal of a state church” (152–53).<sup>8</sup>

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

Bavinck also reflects the classic Reformed tradition in linking the doctrines of natural law and the two kingdoms. “While they emphasized that Scripture is the only conscience-binding standard in the church, they ascribed a broad importance to natural law in the state and in other cultural arenas.” With the Reformed tradition, Bavinck also believed “that the source of natural revelation generally and of the natural, moral revelation of God’s law in particular is the Son of God *as Logos*, who now bestows this revelation through common grace. Thus the topic of natural law follows appropriately from that of the two kingdoms. There is a ‘general reve-

8. VanDrunen refers to Bavinck, *RD*, 4:370, 373, 377, 386, 395, 398, 408, 411–12, 414–17.

lation' (in the sense of being accessible and known to all people) that is given primarily by natural revelation, that is, God's revealing himself 'in nature all around us' and 'in the heart and conscience of every individual.' Since Bavinck viewed general revelation as the gift of the Son as Logos rather than as Christ, he predictably distinguished general revelation from special revelation chiefly in that only the latter reveals special grace and salvation. General revelation is insufficient in various respects, yet it remains extraordinarily useful, providing a point of contact with non-Christians as well as knowledge to support all sorts of cultural activities. He explained: 'It is not the study of Scripture but careful investigation of what God teaches us in his creation and providence that equips us for these tasks'" (155–56).

Bavinck also "believed that Scripture teaches natural moral revelation" because "all human beings have the requirements of God's law written on their hearts, and also possess a 'sense of divinity' and a 'seed of religion,' precisely because they all bear God's image" (156–57). The content of this "natural law is simply *law*; it is not *gospel*. Nature impresses upon people what God requires them to do, but Bavinck emphasized that nature knows nothing about forgiveness and hence that natural law is insufficient for salvation." The doctrine of the covenant works is crucial here and the foundation for the covenant of works is "the moral law, known to man by nature." Therefore, the content of natural law, even after the Fall, "was to be identified with the moral law revealed in a different form in Scripture, specifically as summarized in the Decalogue." "The purpose of this natural moral law remaining in effect even after the fall into sin is twofold: (1) It renders all people accountable in the final judgment, and (2) it provides the key foundation for civil justice and civil law" (157–58). All this is standard fare for traditional Reformed theology.

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

1. Bavinck's appropriation of the two kingdoms and natural law doctrines from classical Reformed theology dispels the misconception that these two doctrines exalt human autonomous reason, underestimate the effects of sin, and dualistically turn the cultural realm into something neutral that leads to Christian disengagement

and social conservatism. If Herman Bavinck saw no conflict between these classic doctrines on the one hand and active Christian engagement in cultural endeavors on the other hand, then we should be wary about assuming that there is such a conflict.

2. While active Christian engagement in cultural endeavors is placed in a positive light, it also portrays nature as we know it and natural institutions as temporary and provisional. Culture is a good gift from God. Nevertheless, we ought to have sober expectations about what can be accomplished in this life, and we ought to set our hearts not upon the things of earth but upon the things of heaven. It is here that we are given a check on the implications that are sometimes evoked by Bavinck's grace-restoring-nature and kingdom-as-a-leaven themes. Taken together, they lend credence to a Christian optimism about what can be accomplished now through cultural endeavors, the effects of which carry over even into the age to come. VanDrunen concludes that "Bavinck's embrace of historic natural law and two kingdoms categories" properly cautions us against reading too much of an eschatologically-charged cultural optimism into many of his familiar themes." Though he spoke "of the kingdom as a leaven, such that the preaching of the gospel and the Christian's cultural work has a reforming effect in every area of life, he also reminded his readers that the kingdom is a leaven only *secondarily*. The kingdom is first and foremost a pearl that demands readiness to sacrifice everything in this life for its sake" (162).

3. VanDrunen "is not convinced that Bavinck has left us with an entirely coherent portrait of Christians' basic relationship to this world and of the fundamental nature of their cultural endeavors." He finds both a world-denying emphasis on suffering and an occasional world-affirming cultural optimism in Bavinck. Noting that Bavinck himself even acknowledged that some tensions between world-denial and world-affirmation are inevitable in this life, VanDrunen writes that "some statements and discussions in Bavinck's corpus defy easy reconciliation with a two kingdoms doctrine and a concept of the Christian life as nothing but a suffering pilgrimage under the cross" (163).

4. "The next generation of Reformed thinkers should reappropriate the two kingdoms and natural law doctrines. These doctrines not only ground us in our rich heritage but also promise to help us to capture many of Bavinck's chief concerns without falling prey to



certain temptations that we ought to avoid. They require us to honor the created goodness of family, science, art, and state. They place all of life under the moral reign of the one true God. They encourage Christians to participate in cultural activities and to engage them both critically and appreciatively. Yet they also teach us that these cultural activities do not belong to the redemptive kingdom of Christ and thus they remind us that these activities are not only good but also temporary, provisional, and destined to pass away. They check our this-worldly dreams, focus our attention upon the church, remind us that we participate in cultural endeavors as pilgrims rather than as conquerors, and draw our eyes toward the things that are above, where Christ is seated at his Father's right hand and from where he is coming again to bring the end of the world as we know it" (163).

VanDrunen concludes: "This, I believe, is a biblically faithful perspective on the Christian life that Reformed Christians would do well to recover and to cultivate" (163).

## **Response by Nelson B. Kloosterman**

And now to Professor Kloosterman's response.<sup>9</sup> He begins by indicating significant points of agreement with VanDrunen and then proceeds to denote his reservations and to sketch an "alternative unified approach to natural law and the kingdom of God." He says that he shares "VanDrunen's concerns regarding the apparent triumphalism among some neo-Calvinist heirs of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck," though he wonders "whether in this case the error of the disciples can properly be attributed to the masters." And, rightly, in my judgment, he calls attention to the way in which "in the 1960s and later, the neo-Calvinist project became misdirected to the extent that it embraced the transformational Calvinism of H. Richard Niebuhr" (165–66).<sup>10</sup> Where he wishes "modestly to de-

9. Nelson D. Kloosterman, "A Response to 'The Kingship of Christ is Twofold': Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms in the Thought of Herman Bavinck by David VanDrunen," *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (April 2010): 165–176; hereafter referenced in text.

10. I have made a similar claim in my essay, "In Theo's Memory: A Narrative of H. Richard Niebuhr and the Transformation of Christian Education," in Jason Zuidema, ed., *Reformational Thought in Canada: Essays in Honour of*

mur” is with the heart of VanDrunen’s allegation that there are two threads in Bavinck that are in tension and result in an inconsistent and incoherent stance (i.e., VanDrunen’s third point above). “That there were tensions, even polarities, in Bavinck’s life and thought is incontrovertible, but in my judgment these need not be elevated to the level of incoherent inconsistencies or irreconcilable themes” (166).

Kloosterman agrees with VanDrunen that the Reformers and Bavinck both have a doctrine of natural law but insists that “the Reformers’ doctrine of natural law needs to be coordinated with their robust acknowledgement of the radical seriousness of the fall, of the pervasive depravity of human reason, and of the necessity of Holy Scripture as the spectacles for correctly interpreting all of general revelation.” He adds, “the Reformers never used their doctrine of natural law as the basis for a twofold ethics, one derived from nature, the other from grace, the one governed by human reason, the other by the Christian faith. Instead of speaking of “nature” and “natural law,” Kloosterman points out that “it is God, not nature, that explains all the external moral righteousness we see around us.” The continuing existence of natural, creation structures like marriage and the family are thanks to God’s providential rule. “In God’s daily government of the universe we may recognize constants that serve to restrain human beings who would otherwise live out their rebellion unto total destruction.” This emphasis on God’s personal and active governance of creation “prevents natural law from becoming, as it so often has throughout the history of the concept, a handmaiden to secularization” (167). In fact, although the Gentiles have the “work of the law” inscribed on their hearts by God, we recognize it as such thanks to revealed law. Kloosterman concludes that “there is a providential correspondence between the content of the Decalogue and the law embedded within the give and take of human living in God’s universe” (167–68). The *lex scripturae* must be the hermeneutical key for the *lex naturae*, not the other way around (168).

Kloosterman does not deny that Bavinck holds to a version of the two kingdoms doctrine, even granting that “the state is an agent not of grace but of the law,” but he insists, with Bavinck, that the

state does have “the ability and the calling to work in service to the kingdom of God” (169).<sup>11</sup> The kingdom of God points to the rule of Christ beyond the organized, institutional church. “For that reason,” says Bavinck, 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.”<sup>12</sup> “With a clarity that astonishes twenty-first century ears,” Kloosterman observes, “Bavinck insisted that even the state finds its goal and destiny in the kingdom of heaven.” While the state “neither establishes the kingdom of God nor brings about redemption,” by fulfilling its divine calling to pursue justice and to uphold the moral order . . . the state can become a *paidagogos* or tutor (Bavinck uses the Dutch word *tuchtmeester*; he is alluding to Gal. 3:24) unto Christ. In that sense the state has the ability and the calling to work in service to the kingdom of God” (169). Just like individuals “must not seek the Kingdom of God outside of but in their earthly vocations, 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 penetrate its people and nation. Only in this way can the Kingdom of God come into existence.”<sup>13</sup>

Bavinck comes to a similar conclusion about the relationship between the kingdom of God and culture. Human culture is not the fruit of redemptive grace but a given of creation. “Culture exists because God bestowed on us the power to exercise rule over the earth.”<sup>14</sup> Because “knowledge is power” and modern culture uses its power to “emancipate itself more and more from Christianity,” our culture is becoming increasingly debased and debauched. This will bring God’s judgment upon it. All this shows that “culture can find

11. Kloosterman cites Bavinck’s essay, “Het rijk Gods, het hoogste goed,” in *Kennis en leven. Opstellen en artikelen uit vroegere jaren* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1922), 28–56. This essay was a lecture given to the theological students at Kampen on February 3, 1881. ET: “The Kingdom of God, The Highest Good,” translated by Nelson D. Kloosterman, *The Bavinck Review* 2 (2011): 133–79.

12. “The Kingdom of God,” 161.

13. Bavinck, “The Kingdom of God,” 160.

14. Bavinck, “The Kingdom of God,” 161.

its purpose and reason for existence only in the Kingdom of God.” Bavinck concludes: “Cult and culture ought then to be sisters, independent to be sure, but still sisters bound together in love.”<sup>15</sup>

Kloosterman’s concern in his rehearsal of Bavinck’s understanding of the Kingdom of God is an appeal to the two kingdoms doctrine that sets aside the basic unity of Bavinck’s thought. “[T]hough Bavinck recognized the twofold kingship of Christ, this never functioned in his theology as the warrant either for a dual ethic or for a duality-of-independence between religion and cultural life in the world, including politics” (170). Kloosterman proposes a christological framework for the two kingdoms doctrine that provides greater integration and unity. “In contrast to positing a continuing duality between the Logos and the Incarnate One, Bavinck saw Jesus Christ as revealing himself progressively in human history through his unitary and unitive mediatorial activity. Although, before his incarnation, the Second Person of the Trinity was indeed the *Logos Asarkos*, after his incarnation he remains the *Logos Ensarkos*. The profound significance of the incarnation is precisely that Christ’s work in the creation is taken up within and made serviceable to his work of redemption” (170). Kloosterman cites a long passage from Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics* as evidence:

Christ—even now—is prophet, priest, and king; and by his Word and Spirit he persuasively impacts the entire world. Because of him there radiates from everyone who believes in him a renewing and sanctifying influence upon the family, society, state, occupation, business, art, science, and so forth. The spiritual life is meant to refashion the natural and moral life in its full depth and scope according to the laws of God. Along this organic path Christian truth and the Christian life are introduced into all the circles of the natural life. (4:437)

Kloosterman concludes: “For Bavinck, church and world, grace and nature, faith and reason, though *distinguishable*, are best understood as *integrated* in Christ Jesus” (171).

According to Kloosterman, a passion for unity of thought is a hallmark of Bavinck’s wrestling with the numerous questions of faith and reason that have arisen in the modern world. He cites the following conclusion of George Harinck about Bavinck’s spirituality:

15. “The Kingdom of God,” 162.

All his theological work can be regarded as a refutation of the duality of faith and culture, which was, given his secessionist background, so familiar to him and for which a meeting with modern theology offered such an opportunity. This rejection of duality, which he knew from the Secession and from Leiden, was a decisive step in Bavinck's spiritual development and became characteristic of his Reformed spirituality. (171)<sup>16</sup>

In fact, "Harinck describes Bavinck's emphasis on the unity between faith and scholarship as 'the *Leitmotiv* of Bavinck's life.' Such unity between Christianity and culture was rooted in the Christian confession of the one God, one Creator of all things and the one Redeemer." What Kloosterman finds missing in VanDrunen's portrait of Bavinck is the latter's strong emphasis on the cosmic scope of God's work in Jesus Christ and the consequent catholicity and integration of the Christian faith and life. Catholicity for Bavinck is not just geographical nor even only ecclesiastical, it is, in Bavinck's own words, "a joyful proclamation, not only for the individual person but also for humanity in general, for family, and society, and state, for art and science, for the entire cosmos, for the whole groaning creation" (172). It is this catholicity, according to Bavinck, that sets Calvin apart from Luther. "Luther's mistake here is that he restricts the Gospel and limits the grace of God. The Gospel only changes the inward man, the conscience, the heart; the remainder stays the same until the final judgment. As a result, dualism is not completely overcome; a true and full catholicity is not achieved."<sup>17</sup>

Kloosterman concludes with some reflections on how to integrate the themes of a Christian's spiritual pilgrimage with that of cultural participation. He agrees with VanDrunen that it is important to "warn us of the toxin of triumphalism arising from an over-realized eschatology that sees our efforts as establishing and ushering in the Kingdom of God." At the same time he also warns against an "equally toxic danger, namely, ingratitude arising from an *under-realized eschatology that refuses to extend the Third Use of the Law beyond personal ethics into social-cultural relationships*, an ingratitude that quarantines the active rule of King Jesus, and com-

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

17. Herman Bavinck, "The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church," translated by John Bolt, *Calvin Theological Journal* 27, no. 2 (1992): 237.

munal principled response to it, to the church parking lot.” Pilgrimage is not “an *alternative* to Christian cultural engagement, but rather the *mode* of Christian cultural engagement.” In summary: “Everything we do—all our eating, drinking, buying, selling, marrying, childrearing, educating, entertaining, burying—must be directed to the glory of God. Our orientation toward the future need not paralyze our responsible cultivating of creation in the present” (173).

Kloosterman adds two helpful addenda to his essay: (1) Were there really “two Bavincks?” And (2) what about Christian schools and Christian art? Let me take each in turn.

1. Kloosterman takes issue with an “annoying acknowledgment” that I suggested in a previously published article “that there is not just *one* but rather *two* Bavincks.”<sup>18</sup> The duality refers to Bavinck as “a son of the Secession, loyal to the piety and orthodoxy of the church of his youth, yet critical of its cultural asceticism,” while the “other” Bavinck “was a restless student of modernity, enamored of the problematics that had surfaced in contemporary philosophy and theology, yet critical of their answers.” This tension was recognized by his contemporaries as well as more recent Bavinck scholars, though none of them “(including Bolt) elevates these as VanDrunen does, to the level of two inconsistent and incoherent Bavincks” (174).

Kloosterman then does the cause of Bavinck scholarship a great service (though at the cost of some embarrassment to yours truly) by correcting my translation of G. C. Berkouwer’s claim that “Bavinck’s theology contains so many *onweersprekelijke* motieven,” which I erroneously rendered as “*irreconcilable* themes” rather than as “*undeniable* themes.” Kloosterman is quite correct in observing that Berkouwer is not speaking of people “*with opposing views* appealing to Bavinck, but rather about the danger that *Berkouwer himself* faced” in appealing to Bavinck for one’s own agenda. Berkouwer continues by saying that it was possible to overcome any such danger because there are *undeniable* (not *irreconcilable*) themes in Bavinck that are clearly visible. It is worth citing Kloost-

18. John Bolt, “Grand Rapids Between Kampen and Amsterdam: Herman Bavinck’s Reception and Influence in North America,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 38, no. 2 (2003): 264–65.

erman's corrected translation here in full: "The danger present in describing and evaluating Bavinck's life-work is that one might annex him for one's own insights. *It is, however, not impossible to escape that annexation danger, since various undeniable themes become manifest in Bavinck's work*" (175, italics and underline added). Kloosterman wants a more nuanced treatment of any "tensions" in Bavinck's thought and dissents from VanDrunen's conclusion that Bavinck's position might not be "entirely coherent" because they "defy easy reconciliation with a two kingdoms doctrine and a concept of the Christian life as nothing but a suffering pilgrimage under the cross" (162–63). For Kloosterman, there is greater unity than this.

2. Kloosterman's second addendum raises questions about whether the adjective "Christian" should ever be used with respect to human cultural activities and products that are rooted in creation. For example, he challenges VanDrunen's assertion that Bavinck "confuses categories" when he speaks about "Christian society" or a "Christian government."<sup>19</sup> If so, asks Kloosterman, "one may validly infer from VanDrunen's argument that the same confusion attends the language of Bavinck and Kuyper with respect to 'Christian education' and 'Christian art' and 'Christian science.'" Kloosterman is concerned that this conclusion might in fact be the "payoff" for contemporary Reformed advocates of the two kingdoms doctrine." He concludes with a challenge to such advocates to clarify "their disagreement with the worldview undergirding the establishment and support of Christian schools around the world—a Reformed Christian world-and-life-view that for more than a century has been nourished precisely by this allegedly confusing language of Kuyper and Bavinck" (176).

## Response and Evaluation

This is a very important discussion not only for Bavinck interpretation but also, more importantly, for the life of Christian discipleship. Let me begin by highlighting agreements, and then I'll address the tensions and differences. There is no disagreement that Christians are called by God to honor Jesus Christ as Lord in their

19. See VanDrunen, 153n28, where he cites Bavinck, *RD*, 4:370.

vocations in the world. Furthermore, there must be a basic unity in our lives so that we do not separate Christ the Lord of our worship on Sunday from Christ the Lord of the other days of the week. I also believe that all three of us agree with a strong accent on the pilgrim character of the Christian life. As I see it, the key question is how to describe that which is common to our life as believers in the community of faith and our life in the world while distinguishing without separating that which is different. For example, as an elder in the church I have a pastoral responsibility to a fellow church member who is in jail for some offense. But what if I am also the arresting officer at the scene of the accident which he caused by being intoxicated? Christ's rule over my life is seamless, but the application to the same circumstance from two different roles and relationships does differ. How do I navigate these differences? Let me now address several issues that arise from the two essays.

The first comment I need to make is the most formal one. It has to do with Bavinck scholarship. To the extent that my translation error contributed to exaggerating tensions in Bavinck's thought (i.e., "two Bavincks") I am truly (if embarrassedly) grateful to Dr. Kloosterman for pointing that out. I also agree with him that while there are tensions in Bavinck's thought, there is an underlying unity in his thought. Nonetheless, I do dissent from his description of the ground of that unity—at least I want to qualify it considerably. Kloosterman believes "that Bavinck places more detailed emphasis on the Christological unity and integration of the so-called two kingdoms than VanDrunen lets on." He concludes: "This unity and integration are rooted particularly in the person and work of Christ Jesus. In contrast to positing a continuing duality between the Logos and the Incarnate One, Bavinck saw Jesus Christ as revealing himself progressively in human history through his unitary and unitive mediatorial activity" (170). Kloosterman then cites this lengthy passage from the *Reformed Dogmatics*:

Accordingly, the relationship that has to exist between the church and the world is in the first place organic, moral, and spiritual in character. Christ—even now—is prophet, priest, and king; and by his Word and Spirit he persuasively impacts the entire world. Because of him there radiates from everyone who believes in him a renewing and sanctifying influence upon the family, society, state, occupation, business, art, science, and so forth. The spiritual life is meant to refashion the natural and moral life in its full depth and scope according to the laws of God. Along this organic path Christian truth and the Christian life are introduced



into all the circles of the natural life, so that life in the household and the extended family is restored to honor, the wife (woman) is again viewed as the equal of the husband (man), the sciences and arts are Christianized, the level of the moral life is elevated, society and state are reformed, laws and institutions, morals and customs are made Christian. (4:437)

While there is some truth to positing a Christological unity for Bavinck's thought, it fails to penetrate deeply enough into Bavinck's theology, and it potentially opens the door to the very misunderstandings to which Kloosterman is also very sensitive. Final unity for Bavinck is something profoundly metaphysical. It is found in the very *trinitarian* being of God himself. Noting that all creation is a work of the triune God, Bavinck comments: "Certainly, all God's works *ad extra* are undivided and common to all three persons. Prominent in these works, therefore, is the oneness of God rather than the distinction of persons."<sup>20</sup> The divine unity in diversity comes to expression in the creation itself. "Just as God is one in essence and distinct in persons, so also the work of creation is one and undivided, while in its unity it is still rich in diversity."<sup>21</sup> That means that the Christian worldview must be a trinitarian worldview: "The Divine Being is one: there is but one Being that is God and that may be called God. In creation and redemption, in nature and grace, in church and world, in state and society, everywhere and always we are concerned with one, same, living and true God. The unity of the world, of mankind, of virtue, of justice, and of beauty depends upon the unity of God. The moment that unity of God is denied or understressed, the door is open to polytheism."<sup>22</sup> From the fundamental unity-in-diversity that exists in God and his works, Bavinck deduces three important "unities" for Christians: unity of (1) the human race, (2) truth, and (3) morality.<sup>23</sup>

To consider only the latter two, Bavinck opposes all notions of "double truth" and "double morality." He laments the modern di-

20. *RD*, 2:329–30.

21. *RD*, 2:422.

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

23. I have discussed this at some length in my PhD dissertation, *A Theological Analysis of Herman Bavinck's Two Essays on the Imitatio Christi: Between Pietism and Modernism* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2013), 203–42.

vide between ordinary experience and science, between science and the life of faith. “There is indeed no double truth. . . . Because the human spirit is one, it must strive for an *einheitliche* world-and-life-view that satisfies the heart and mind.”<sup>24</sup> Similarly, for morality, where Bavinck repudiates the Roman Catholic distinction between “precepts” and the higher “counsels of perfection,” “the Christian life cannot be atomistically split up, neither can the works be separated from the person, nor one work from another. It is one organism, arising from one principle, regulated by one norm, and reaching out to one goal. . . . [T]he final goal of moral conduct can be found only in God, who is the origin and hence also the final goal of all things, the supreme good that encompasses all goods, the Eternal One to whom all finite things return.”<sup>25</sup> In sum, “God claims all of man—mind, heart, soul, body, and all his or her energies—for his service and his love. The moral law is one for all humans in all times, and the moral ideal is the same for all people. There is no ‘lower’ or ‘higher’ righteousness, no double morality, no twofold set of duties.”<sup>26</sup> To be clear, Bavinck was committed to and strove to achieve unity of thought. Whatever tensions we might (or not) discover in his theology, they must not be used to invalidate his own commitment to unity of thought.

But this passion for unity of thought is not the whole story. Bavinck is opposed to all notions of “double truth” and “double morality,” but his repudiation is subtle and nuanced. He was also opposed to monistic efforts to develop a single scientific method that could be applied universally to all the sciences. Biology and psychology, for example, must not be reduced to chemistry and physics; all attempts to obtain mathematical-physical certainty for other disciplines, particularly the so-called “spiritual sciences,” by applying the positive scientific method were doomed to failure. Such efforts find their philosophical root in a monistic worldview. So then, fundamental metaphysical unity is properly joined with a diversity in scientific method. To repudiate a notion of “double truth” does not lead one to deny multiplicity of scientific method. Similarly, emphasizing the unity of morality does not mean that ap-

24. Herman Bavinck, *Christelijke Wetenschap* (Kampen: Kok, 1904), 91.

25. *RD*, 4:264.

26. *RD*, 2:552.

plications of moral law must be the same in all circumstances. In fact, Bavinck even allows that “there is a truth” in notions of double morality with their demands of perfection, noting that this is “a truth that in Protestantism does not come into its own.”<sup>27</sup> The one law requires a diversity of moral obligations. The same law requires different duties of parents and children, rulers and subjects. Justice and love are inseparable, flowing from the same moral law, but they are not to be confused with each other, especially when it comes to the task of the state. As Bavinck put it:

In agreement with the very special task that the government has to fulfill in the world, the law calls the government to duties that no citizen can or may carry out. The state is not the vehicle for love and mercy, but of righteousness; it is the sovereign dominion of justice.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to this Bavinck was profoundly aware of the mystery at the heart of all human knowing—it was, I believe, the basis of his genuine epistemological humility. Though we may *strive* for unity of thought, it will always elude us in the present age. “The farther a science penetrates its object, the more it approaches mystery. . . . Where comprehension ceases, however, there remains room for knowledge and wonder.”<sup>29</sup> That is why our striving for unity in truth is an *eschatological* goal that will always elude us in the present age.<sup>30</sup> The same eschatological reserve applies to our life of Christian discipleship where we experience a tension between living in God’s world, enjoying the gifts of creation, and using them as stewards for God’s glory on the one hand, and the need for world-renunciation on the other, thanks to our sin and the ongoing temptation to worldliness.

27. *RD*, 4:259.

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

29. *RD*, 1:619.

30. Note, for example, what Bavinck says about theology, the object of which, ultimately, remains unfathomable: “In that sense Christian theology always has to do with mysteries that it knows and marvels at but does not comprehend and fathom.” *RD*, 1:619.

Bavinck considers this a “delicate and complicated” problem that cannot be fully resolved in this dispensation. In this life, full unity will elude us, some form of tension or “dualism” is inevitable.

[The problem] remains unresolved and . . . no one in this dispensation achieves a completely harmonious answer. Every person and every movement are guilty of a greater or lesser one-sidedness here. Life swings to and fro, again and again, between worldliness and world-flight. Head and heart painfully wrestle for supremacy. It has been said that in every human heart there dwells a bit of Jew and Greek.<sup>31</sup>

Bavinck then makes a distinction that seems tailor-made as an antidote to the “dualophobia” so characteristic of more recent North American neo-Calvinism.<sup>32</sup> “And yet it makes a great difference whether one conceives of this dualism as absolute or relative.”<sup>33</sup>

“Relative dualism”? What could this mean? It sounds like an oxymoron. Bavinck’s point here is that *because of sin* we cannot achieve unity in this life. There will always be some form of “dualism.” But, this *eschatological* tension must be clearly distinguished from *metaphysical* or *ontological* dualism. Eschatological tensions and relative dualisms are overcome by the triumph of grace and the gift of revelation, but not fully until the consummation. When it comes to Christian discipleship, for instance, this means that even a creation-affirming Calvinist should be prepared—as Calvin was!—to acknowledge that in a real sense “this world is *not* my home.” Therefore, any discussion of alleged tensions or inconsistencies in Bavinck’s thought must be sensitive to Bavinck’s own qualifications and nuances and attempt to duplicate the subtlety of his own thought. In sum, I concur with Kloosterman that there is greater unity in Bavinck’s thought than VanDrunen and others see.

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

32. I have in mind here the tendency among many “Reformational” thinkers to attack all so-called “dualism” in a general and broad sense, including the distinctions of heaven and earth, body and soul, and, importantly for our purposes, the *regnum gratiae* (kingdom of grace) and the *regnum potentiae* (kingdom of power). For a helpful critical response to this tendency, see John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987), 232–36.

33. “Common Grace,” 56.

At the same time, as I noted earlier, I want to locate the fundamental unity of Bavinck's thought in his trinitarian metaphysics rather than in his Christology as Kloosterman describes it. Here, the two recent studies on Bavinck's theology by Brian Mattson and James Eglinton provide definite proof and new insight.<sup>34</sup> Mattson's dissertation, the first doctoral-level study of Bavinck since the four volumes of Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* have been available in English, affirms what Eugene Heideman and Jan Veenhof, the two pioneers in Bavinck scholarship after the Second World War, claimed about "grace restores nature" being the interpretive key to Bavinck's theology. However, Mattson also shows that this claim needs to be qualified in two important ways. First, restoration in Christ must be understood eschatologically. The redemption Christ wins for his own is a "plus," it is more than what Adam lost in the Fall. Second, this full eschatological goal was itself a given of the original creation. It is implied in the covenant of works, and this doctrine is essential for maintaining an eschatological understanding of creation itself. Adam was created for a higher glory, and the path to that destiny was obedience. Bavinck derives this primarily from 1 Corinthians 15 where the Apostle Paul points to the contrast between the *unfallen* Adam in his "psychical, earthy" existence and the *resurrected* Christ in his "pneumatic, heavenly" existence. This is all reinforced by the Adam/Christ parallel in Romans 5.

This insight is an enormous advance in Reformed theological scholarship. The emphasis on "grace restoring nature" became so important in Dutch neo-Calvinism because it is the correct vehicle for combatting nature/grace dualism, particularly of the neo-Platonic sort. Here's how Mattson summarizes Bavinck's appropriation of the Reformation tradition:

For Bavinck, the true genius of the Reformation, especially as pioneered by Calvin, is its replacement of Rome's ontological or vertically hierarchical version of the nature/grace relationship (i.e., "higher" and "lower" realms of reality) with an *historical* or horizontal version of the nature/grace scheme, starting with the state of integrity (nature) and ending in the state of glory (grace).<sup>35</sup>

34. See note 1 above for full bibliographic information.

35. Mattson, *Restored*, 5.

This is only possible thanks to the redemptive work of Christ, but the important nuance here is that the redemptive work of Christ is itself “subordinate to a prior creational eschatology.”<sup>36</sup> That all things should come under the Lordship of Christ was intended *from the beginning* and reminds us that Reformed Christology begins with Christ as the pre-Fall mediator of *union* and not as the post-Fall mediator of *reconciliation*.

This is a crucial point because Reformed orthodoxy’s doctrine of the covenant of works is often faulted by Reformational neo-Calvinists for not being sufficiently Christological.<sup>37</sup> Behind this critique, it seems to me, is a concern that the *redemptive* work of Christ needs to play a more prominent role in Christian thought and action about culture and society. Beginning with a strong emphasis on the kingdom of God and on Jesus as Lord, it seems to follow naturally that Christian discipleship in society and culture ought to be “redeeming” these areas in some way. The logic seems impeccable: Jesus the Redeemer is Lord; we must serve his kingly rule in all areas of life; we should be agents of redemption and transformation in the world. In this way, our eschatological destiny must shape our discipleship today. Mattson’s analysis of Bavinck shows that this reverses the biblical order and pattern. Creation must inform redemption and eschatology, not the other way around.<sup>38</sup> The original creational eschatological horizon is not re-

36. Mattson, *Restored*, 103.

37. Two Dutch Reformed theologians who expressed their dislike for the covenant of works are G. C. Berkouwer (*Sin*, trans. Philip C. Holtrop [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971], 206–07) and S.G. De Graaf (*Het Ware Geloof* [Kampen: Kok, 1954], 31–32; De Graaf, “De Genade Gods en de Structuur Der Gansche Schepping,” *Philosophia Reformata* 1 (1936): 20–21). I am indebted to Cornelis P. Venema, “Recent Criticisms of the Covenant of Works in the Westminster Confession of Faith,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 9, no. 3 (1993): 165–198 for these references. It is to Gordon J. Spykman’s credit that, as a committed “Reformational” theologian, he does nonetheless affirm a “covenant of creation” (*Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992], 259–65.) He does, however, offer his own distinct version of it with his notion of the “threefold form of the Word of God.” “True religion, therefore, centers covenantally on the mediating Word of God, spoken in creation, inscriptured in the Bible, and incarnate in Jesus Christ” (263).

38. It would take us too far afield to pursue this in detail, but this reversal of creation and redemption, the reading of creation through the Christological

demptive or soteriological in nature, and this means that the key to overcoming neo-Platonic forms of dualism is to recognize the “organic or historical relationship between the state of integrity and the state of glory.” As Mattson puts it, “creational *anthropology* (image of God) is here wedded, necessarily, to a creational *eschatology* (covenant of works).”<sup>39</sup>

James Eglinton builds on Mattson’s work in his exploration of the important “organic” motif in Bavinck’s work. Eglinton disputes the scholarship that located this neo-Calvinist theme in nineteenth-century Romanticism and Idealism with a longer pedigree going back to a semi-mystical Platonism that includes figures such as Jacob Böhme, Schelling and Hegel, and is further traceable back to Aristotle.<sup>40</sup> Eglinton rejects this genetic-historical explanation and shows how Bavinck’s understanding of the organic motif flows forth from and expresses his Augustinian “trinitarian appropriation of reality.” Not only is there a fundamental unity to Bavinck’s thought, it reflects a trinitarian metaphysics in which the priority is given to creation, a creation itself pregnant with eschatological promise and hope.

With that background in place, let us return to the question of the two kingdoms and the VanDrunen-Kloosterman debate. Both men share antipathy to the use of the “grace restores nature” motif as the rationale for pushing a transformational vision of socio-cultural activism. This is VanDrunen’s primary concern. Kloosterman shares the distaste for what he calls “the toxin of triumphalism arising from an over-realized eschatology that sees our efforts as establishing and ushering in the kingdom of God,” but he wants to emphasize Bavinck’s Christology as the key to a unified, integral vision of the Christian life which acknowledges Christ’s kingship in communal, social, cultural, and political ways as well as in personal

lenses of redemption and eschatology, reflects the baneful influence of Karl Barth on twentieth-century Reformed theology including such Dutch Reformed theologians as G.C. Berkouwer and S.G. De Graaf. This is also the conclusion of Cornelis Venema, “Recent Criticisms of the Covenant of Works in the Westminster Confession of Faith.”

39. Mattson, *Restored*, 239–40.

40. Eglinton, *Trinity*, 60. This pedigree is the one followed by Jan Veenhof in his massive study of Bavinck’s understanding of revelation and inspiration (*Revelatie en Inspiratie*, 250–68).

and individual discipleship. Otherwise, so he frets, enterprises such as “Christian” education become problematic. How do we speak of Christ as King outside of the church’s walls? It might be helpful to observe that there are two different concerns going on here. VanDrunen is concerned that “grace restores nature” has become a slogan for neo-Calvinists to justify what is in practice a more Anabaptist vision in which all of life must be “Christified.” Kloosterman, on the other hand, worries that Reformed people who strongly push the two kingdoms doctrine are in fact closet Lutherans who leave the natural realm to its own devices outside of Christ’s redemptive work.

I cannot say that I have no dog in this fight.<sup>41</sup> I consider both men as friends and respect them as fellow Reformed theologians. My own view is that there is a greater unity in Bavinck’s thought on this matter than VanDrunen allows. At the same time, I agree with him that there are statements in Bavinck that give ammunition to neo-Calvinist transformationalism, statements that also make me uncomfortable. VanDrunen provides a number of examples in his essay that I will not rehearse here. In particular, Bavinck made comments that—when abstracted from their fuller context!—left his readers open to confusion in the doctrine of revelation.<sup>42</sup> Some of his statements about *general* revelation have been taken to suggest that Bavinck regards science as a revelation from God in the same sense that the Bible is the Word of God. Here is one such statement: “And therefore all things are also a revelation, a word, a work of God.”<sup>43</sup> This was taken, among other Bavinck sayings, by the Study Committee on Creation and Science that reported to the Christian

41. My very first book publication, *Christian and Reformed Today* (Jordan Station, Ont.: Paideia, 1984) carried on a running critique of neo-Calvinist triumphalism and called for pilgrimage as an antidote (see especially chs. 3, 6, and 7). On top of that, I do have a vested interest in defending the honor of Herman Bavinck!

42. Jan Veenhof’s helpful discussion of nature and grace in Bavinck (*Revelatie en Inspiratie*, 345–65, trans. Al Wolters, “Nature and Grace in Herman Bavinck,” *Pro Rege* 34, no. 4 [2006]:11–31) provides plenty of illustrative material that showcases Bavinck’s elaborate (and perhaps not altogether successful) efforts to tie general and special revelation, particular and common grace, creation and incarnation, all together in a harmonious whole.

43. *RD*, 1:370.



Reformed Synod of 1991 as evidence for the Reformed tradition's affirmation of science as a "revelation." Appeal was also made to Belgic Confession, article 2, and its reference to the "two books" of Scripture and "the creation, government, and preservation of the universe." Now, Bavinck did say concerning the "facts of geology" that "these facts are just as much words of God as the content of Holy Scripture and must therefore be believingly accepted by everyone."<sup>44</sup> The context makes clear that what he has in mind are things like dinosaur bones and other fossils, the sedimentary layers of the earth's crust and the like. These are just there and have to be accepted. He continues with a reminder that the *exegesis* of these "facts" is a different matter altogether and raises objections to an old age for the earth and the long periods posited by geologists.

Even with that caution in mind, however, Bavinck here does seem to be accepting a fact-value split that he ordinarily rejects.<sup>45</sup> My own judgment is that he made an incautious statement at this point in order to impress upon his more conservative, pietist Reformed hearers the importance of taking empirical knowledge seriously. It would be an error however to over read this isolated comment and force a Unitarian thought on Bavinck that would not be true to his explicit statements. For it is clear that in Bavinck's view all revelation in creation and history is spoken of *as revelation* because it "reveals God to us." All things in creation speak of God *to the devout*. In the following lengthy citation that gives us Bavinck's position clearly, notice the important opening qualifier and the carefully worded manner in which he speaks about the relationship of our scientific knowledge of the world to God's revelation in creation:

*In a sense we can say that also all knowledge of nature and history as we acquire and apply it in our occupation and business, in commerce and industry, in the arts and sciences, is due to the revelation of God. For all*

44. *RD*, 2:501.

45. See, e.g., his essay, "The Theology of Albrecht Ritschl," trans. John Bolt, *The Bavinck Review* 3 (2012): 123–63. In his analysis of Ritschl Bavinck fiercely resisted the dualism of Immanuel Kant as he evinces in this passage where he describes the end result of such dualism: "Faith, therefore, occupies a free zone; our imaginative capacity can fill this unknown world to our hearts content and [philosophical] idealism can find complete satisfaction. Faith and knowledge—separated for good—can live happily together" (126).

these elements of culture exist only because God has implanted in his creation thoughts and forces that human beings gradually learn to understand under his guidance. . . . But since creation's existence is distinct from God, and nature and history can also be studied by themselves and for their own sake, *knowledge of God and knowledge of his creatures do not coincide, and in the latter case we usually do not speak of revelation as the source of knowledge.*"<sup>46</sup>

Bavinck does *not* say that the data of science are a revelation of God paralleling Scripture. Rather, all knowledge of the world, including our scientific knowledge, is *due to* the revelation of God. Our minds are created by the same divine *Logos* who gave order and structure to the cosmos. Creation reveals God to us. Comparing and contrasting scientific knowledge with Scripture is apples and oranges. The two are quite different realities.<sup>47</sup> And the most important conclusion? "Knowledge of God and knowledge of his creatures do not coincide, and in the latter case we usually do not speak of revelation as the source of knowledge."<sup>48</sup>

What does this commentary on general and special revelation have to do with our discussion about the two kingdoms? Was this a sideline or an excursus? No. It goes to the heart of the matter. Yes, we can discern a unity of thought in Bavinck that is Christological in nature and which links the *Logos* by whom all things are created and upheld with the *Logos* who became incarnate, died, and was raised for our salvation. Yes, all knowledge, including the knowledge and wisdom that is taught in Christian schools, celebrated by Christian artists, and worked for by Christian social activists, all of this must be tied to Christ. On this Kloosterman's cautions are appropriate. Nonetheless—and this is the crucial point—Bavinck does not identify scientific knowledge of the universe with general revelation as such because the point of talking about general or creation revelation is to *talk about God* and not first of all to describe or celebrate science.

46. *RD*, 2:341 (emphasis added).

47. I have discussed this at much greater length in my "Getting the 'Two Books' Straight: With a Little Help from Herman Bavinck and John Calvin," *Calvin Theological Journal* 46, no. 2 (2011): 315–32.

48. *RD*, 2:341.

The relevance of this to the differences between VanDrunen and Kloosterman is that the most robust defense of Christian education, for example, rooted in the conviction that a disciple of Jesus must yield *everything*, including our thoughts and concepts, to our Lord, still requires of us the need to build up the *content of our knowledge about the cosmos* through the fully human and natural means of gaining knowledge. Kuyper's emphasis on "two kinds of people, two kinds of science" has all too often served to set up an absolute epistemological divide between Christian believers and others and has resulted in an extreme form of "perspectivalism" that insists on distinctly Christian ways of doing penmanship, spelling, and multiplication tables.<sup>49</sup> At a more sophisticated level this yields an Anabaptist understanding of socio-political life with the broader human community, including the state, seen through the lens of the Christ-community and needing to be governed by the Sermon on the Mount rather than natural law. Bavinck regularly and firmly resisted this conclusion.<sup>50</sup> When considered from this angle, Bavinck's Reformed and integrally Christological position is clearly in the natural law/two kingdoms camp. We need to exercise some caution when using the adjective "Christian" to speak of important cultural arenas or products lest we be understood as advocating a theocratic vision which is not Reformed (Rushdoony and his followers to the contrary!). At best we might consider language that speaks of a particular social order or cultural activity as "consistent with" a Christian worldview, particularly a biblical anthropology that includes such elements as the dignity and worth of every individual image bearer of God, liberty of conscience, liberty of religious expression and association, and a constitutionally-fixed rule of law to which those who govern as well as the governed are equally subject, and so forth.

Let me add one additional point in response to the oft-heard complaint that this emphasis on two-kingdoms is more Lutheran than Reformed. It is true that the Lutheran tradition differs signifi-

49. For a further elaboration of this point, see my "The Imitation of Christ as Illumination for the Two Kingdoms Debate," especially pp. 32–34.

50. See "Christian Principles and Social Relationships" and "On Inequality," in Bavinck, *Essays*, chs. 7–8. Cf. Bavinck, "Appendix B: The Imitation of Christ II," in Bolt, *A Theological Analysis*, 402–40.

cantly from both the Reformed and Roman Catholic traditions by tying philosophy to law and making the notion of a *Christian* philosophy seem like an oxymoron. In this view philosophy has to do with creation and law which are accessible to and approached by human reason.<sup>51</sup> The Bible is about salvation or gospel which is special, privileged to those to whom the Holy Spirit has been given. These are two realms, and it is a matter of great confusion to blur the differences between them as the Anabaptists do, for example, when they try to build a civil order on the basis of the gospel. We must grant that the Lutheran objection has the merit of warning us against any facile uses of the word “Christian” applied to natural or creational realities. It seems absurd to speak of a Christian bridge (in contrast with a pagan bridge), or a Christian beer, or a Christian pickup truck. The adjective is just inappropriate. However, the matter becomes more complicated when we speak of human institutions. Families and schools are creational, natural realities, realities shared by believer and unbeliever alike. Yet, we do not hesitate to speak of a Christian family or marriage nor of a Christian school. Why? Because in the case of institutions, even though they are based on creation-order givens, the role of human cultural shaping and formation in the actual character of the institution is so important. A “Christian bridge” might be one that is built to cross “troubled waters,” but whether it is a good or bad bridge depends on basic engineering and construction facts. All the prayer in the world

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

will not keep a bridge with a major engineering design flaw operational. Christian marriages do need and use prayer as a key ingredient of their wholeness and wellness and pay attention to Scriptural teaching on marriage. Though unbelievers may have good marriages when they obey God's norms for marriage such as fidelity, mutual love, caring, and so forth, what distinguishes a Christian marriage is that it is self-consciously patterned after the relationship between the bridegroom Jesus Christ and his bride the church. Much the same can be said about systems of thought and ideas. Of course, the truth of any Christian philosophy or sociology or psychology will depend on the correspondence that exists between reality and the account of that reality by the philosopher, sociologist, or psychologist. Yet, not only does the Christian thinker have the advantage of special revelation when it comes to, let's say, human nature, an advantage that helps prevent foolish claims being made in the name of science (e.g., there is no difference between boys and girls; gender is entirely a social construct, a product of nurture), but also it provides constructive insights into useful research projects and incentives to honor human dignity as image bearers of God.<sup>52</sup> Thanks to the first commandment—"Have no other gods before me"—the Christian faith also puts up serious roadblocks against ideologies, against a set of ideas becoming a blueprint for a utopian social order.

## Concluding Propositions

Let me summarize, conclude, and open the door for further discussion by way of five propositions:

1. Bavinck fully affirms the natural law/two kingdoms tradition that was an integral part of Reformed theology from John Calvin onward.
2. Christian discipleship requires a robust sense that Christ is Lord and King and a robust sense of responsibility to bring every thought and action captive to Christ.

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

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

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

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