

We Do Not Proceed into a Vacuum: J. H. Bavinck’s Missional Reading of Romans 1¹

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In many ways the scope of Johan Herman Bavinck’s missiology was to develop and understand a *theologia religionum* (a theology of religions) that could form the foundation for a theology of missions and missionary work. Bavinck himself saw developing a theology of religions as one of the essential missionary tasks. In his book *Introduction to the Science of Missions* he claims that “a theory of missions is incomplete unless it can properly evaluate non-Christian religions.” For Bavinck, this question took the particular form of asking about the connection between religious consciousness and the Christian faith. And it is within this question and his development of a theology of religion that Bavinck made one of his most significant contributions to the question of other religions: his exegesis of Romans 1. Commonly used within discussion concerning religion, Bavinck uses Romans 1 not only as a resource for articulating a biblical account of other religions but as *the* primary lens for a biblical-theological understanding of religion. Thus an exploration of the question of missions in the Bavinck tradition would remain incomplete without taking a thorough look at J. H. Bavinck’s reading of Romans 1. In this article we will take an in-depth look at Bavinck’s reading of Romans 1 and how it forms the basis for his theology of religion. We will do this by briefly examining Bavinck’s own missiological context in order to place his theology historically, to unpack his hermeneutical approach to scripture, and to outline

1. This essay is an adaptation of a paper delivered at the “A Missional Reading of Scripture” conference held at Calvin Theological Seminary on 19–21 November 2013.

his reading of Romans 1 and how it forms the foundation to his theology of religion. Finally, I will look at ways in which Bavinck might speak today—particularly within the context of the contemporary “missional” movement.

Bavinck In Context

Paul Visser notes that Bavinck’s theology of religion developed throughout his missiological career.² Early in Bavinck’s career he tended more towards defining religion as a universal *a priori* feeling in humans that is activated by experiences of God. This was a commonly held conception within his day, deeply influenced by the writings of Schleiermacher, Tyler, and Otto that tended to articulate the continuity between all religious experience psychologically as rooted in a human capacity. In Bavinck’s own lifetime, the theology of religion was addressed within academic circles and at the missionary conferences held in Jerusalem (1928) and Tambaram (1938). At the Jerusalem conference, a serious attempt to find the good in other religions was undertaken, but a serious theological engagement of the issue remained lacking. As Bavinck delved more deeply into the topic, he came under the influence of Hendrik Kraemer, the Dutch missiologist whose work proposed a large chasm between Christianity and other religions. Thus Bavinck began to express that seeing religion as rooted in a human capacity “seemed too impoverished to explain the confusing complexity of religious phenomena.”³ Instead, he began to investigate the question of religion through a self-consciously theological approach. It is this later approach to the question of religion—which is already present in his book *Christ and the Mysticism of the East* (1934)—that becomes so essential for his reading of Romans 1.

2. Paul Visser, “Introduction,” in *The J. H. Bavinck Reader*, ed. John Bolt, James D. Bratt, and Paul Visser, trans. George De Jong (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 42; hereafter: *JHBR*.

3. *JHBR*, 150. Regarding Kraemer’s influence on Bavinck’s thought, see Visser, “Introduction”, in *JHBR*, 35–36.

Bavinck's Theological-Biblical Approach

And it is a book that brings us to our knees and makes us tremble before the greatness of Him who holds our life and breath in His hands.⁴

Bavinck's theological orientation to the question of other religions is present in both of his in-depth studies on other religions: *Religious Consciousness and Christian Faith* and *The Church Between Temple and Mosque*. In each, Bavinck begins with the observation of the universality of religious experience in humanity, an experience that he identifies as a universal religious consciousness. He notes that there is "universal religious consciousness that remains indestructible . . . that seems to be the driving force behind all we encounter in the different religions and is what makes the religious issue so intensely interesting and difficult as well" (*JHBR*, 151). Beneath particular religions rests an indestructible—yet often vague—religious consciousness whose essential elements are open to investigation and explanation (*JHBR*, 151). Methodologically, then, Bavinck begins investigating these elements that appear in all of our experience phenomenologically as they appear outside of biblical revelation, explicitly stating, "we will limit ourselves . . . to the residue of what has grown out of religious sensitivity *outside the realm of biblical revelation*" (*JHBR*, 151; emphasis added). However, after he masterfully surveys the structure and content of religious consciousness by utilizing in-depth knowledge of the various religions, he reaches a wall in trying to identify the reason religious experience exists:

We have . . . definitely reached a boundary here. . . . [N]ow we can go no further; now we have hit a wall. We have seen religious consciousness as it unmistakably exists and as it has always existed. . . . But now we have reached a boundary. Where does religious consciousness originate? . . . To repeat: we have hit a wall here. The human eye cannot see over it; human thought cannot penetrate it. Here we can only speak from the vantage point of faith; here we can only talk theologically. (*JHBR*, 231–32)

Upon reaching the limits of phenomenological investigation, he turns to theology for an answer to his central question (i.e., what religious consciousness has to do with God and his revelation) by ask-

4. J. H. Bavinck, *The Church Between Temple and Mosque* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 193.

ing: how does God's biblical revelation explain religious consciousness?

And it is Scripture, then, to which he primarily turns as the lens through which to articulate religious consciousness.

Here Bavinck follows Calvin's famous metaphor of Scripture as the lens through which we see the world, and he endorses Kraemer's understanding that a biblical-theological approach is just as valid—if not more so for a Christian—as the approach of Otto and others who sought to articulate religion through the lens of history and the phenomenology of religion. Even though historical investigation of the Christian tradition offers insight for Bavinck, it is scripture alone that grounds and forms a theological understanding of the other religions. This becomes particularly clear in *Religious Consciousness and the Christian Faith* when Bavinck frames his exploration of the tradition with an investigation of scripture in order to analyze and critique the tradition via scripture. For Bavinck a *biblical*-theological approach becomes the only proper method for developing an account of religious consciousness, and it is within this approach that Romans 1 becomes essential.

Beyond the Wall: Bavinck's Reading of Romans 1:18–32

As Bavinck investigates the primary question of his missiological project—the relationship between “religious consciousness” and the Christian faith—he notes: “far and away the most important passage for [his] purposes is” Romans 1:18–32 (*JHBR*, 241). Romans 1, for Bavinck, is of determinative significance for understanding religion when he hits the wall of phenomenological investigation into the content of what he observes in experience as universal religious consciousness. It both moves us beyond the wall and transforms how we perceive all that we articulated before we ran up against the wall. Thus, we will now turn to seeing how Bavinck uses and reads Romans 1.

I want to highlight four important aspects that we can extrapolate from Bavinck's reading.

1. General Revelation and Religious Consciousness

First, for Bavinck Romans 1:18–32 undeniably teaches general revelation, and this revelation in some way reaches and is involved with “every nation” and “every person.” Contra Barth, whose early dialectical theology and exegesis of Romans 1 left it nearly impossible to talk about the content and impact of general revelation, Bavinck affirms its reality. And in affirming this reality, he also proposes two essential and dynamic relationships in general revelation that are present in Romans 1: (a) the relationship between God and humans and (b) the dynamic between reception and response within human beings. Within the context of these two relationships, argues Bavinck, religious consciousness is formed within humanity.

Bavinck establishes the divine-human relationship in general revelation by unpacking Romans 1 as a primarily describing two dynamic relationships in the dialogue between God and humanity. He moves from the broad affirmation of general revelation to defining this dialogue as initiated by as “God’s voiceless speech” present in in creation, human consciousness, and in the history of peoples and individuals. He develops this definition by analyzing verse 19. Bavinck notes that the common Pauline term ἀποκολύπτω—to reveal, make known, remove a curtain/veil—is absent in verse 19 as it describes God’s actions; instead Paul uses φανερώω: “to make manifest.” This “making manifest” Bavinck takes to mean the powerful “voiceless speech” of God. In this voiceless speech Bavinck sees God as making known eternal power and divinity (Rom. 1:20). As this speech goes out humans are unable to shake it off, as evidenced particularly in verses 20, 21, and 32. “In this revelation God is speaking to every individual, every people in the world.”⁵

So then as God initiates this voiceless speech, human beings stand within the relationship as receivers who must respond. As humans respond to the divine voiceless speech, they become, as Bavinck sees Paul describing human beings—particularly in verses 20–21—“knowing receivers.”

But what does this mean? This question moves us to the second important dynamic relationship Bavinck unpacks in Romans 1: the

5. J. H. Bavinck, “Human Religion in God's Eyes: A Study of Romans 1:18–32,” *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 12 (March, 1994): 45.

relationship within humans between receiving and responding to God's voiceless speech.

As human beings receive general revelation, they respond to it through the dual act of "suppressing/repressing and exchanging." As the knowledge of God's divinity and eternal power (Rom. 1:20) are made manifest, humans "push it down, repress it, suppress it" (*JHBR*, 285). According to Bavinck, this "occurs with the mysterious always unstated, often also entirely unconscious motive of moral opposition to God" (*JHBR*, 285). Morally opposed then humans suppress the truth of God, and exchange enters and fills the "cavity or empty space that occurs as a result of suppressing that needs to be filled" (*JHBR*, 288).

Here Bavinck takes a distinctly psychological approach to interpreting Paul by drawing on the contemporary psychological categories of his day, particularly those of Carl Jung. Bavinck describes the "suppressing/repressing and exchanging" process as something that occurs in humanity unconsciously. This is essential for Bavinck because he was incredibly wary of the power of rationalism and natural religion throughout his writings. He did not want the reception of knowledge and the dual process of suppression and exchange to be primarily seated in the intellect as an untapped human capacity or knowledge innate within us, as if someone could think really hard about God and come to know what was already innate within; namely, that God is both Lord and saviour. Instead, the truth always comes from the outside, and it exists within the human only through constant and continual dialogue with God. Where exactly this whole process of reception is seated is somewhere within the cognitive powers that run throughout the entire structure of a human being and, particularly, it seems in the heart. But the exact nature of this is unclear in Bavinck's writings. He only begins to articulate an anthropology within the context of his exposition of Romans 1.

However, what is important to highlight here is that this notion of dialogue and the truth coming from the outside is the way that Bavinck connects general and special revelation. They are both God-initiated dialogues wherein the truth comes from the outside. Humans are beings to whom God speaks; they exist in dialogue with him. The proclamation of the gospel brings light and rips open

(in the sense of ἀποκολύπτω) the process of repression and suppression. Through special revelation

people gain an entirely new vision of the world in which they live and to which they are tied with every fibre of their being. This is not to say that the gospel of Jesus Christ is entirely different from what general revelation has been saying . . . for a long time . . . but it can happen that God causes their hearts to submit. Then all engines of resistance are switched off and people listen. (*JHBR*, 291)

Special revelation transforms the listener so that the process of suppression and exchange is ripped open and the human is again able to hear God.

However, within the realm of general revelation, the results are different: suppression and exchange makes humans who are “receivers in dialogue” as those who “know” but do not know. They have received the truth, suppressed it, and exchanged it. From God’s perspective as the initiator of the dialogue, their legal standing is that of someone who knows and who understands; that is to say, of “someone who knows in the depths of his or her being that he or she is accountable to the ‘just demands of God’” but do not themselves know God and the promise of his Gospel. Thus, as Paul writes in Romans 1 God’s qualities have been made clear so that people are without excuse. Bavinck takes this to mean that human receptors and responders to general revelation are positioned in a negative juridical stance before God, one that is rooted in their own moral opposition to God. Without the gospel humans are culpable of the act of suppression, repression, and exchange.

For Bavinck the experience from the human side of things is best described with the metaphor of living in a dream. Within a dream there are influences from the outside that are intuited but are not consciously brought to cognition. Furthermore, these influences are often distorted and made into something entirely different than what they are. With this metaphor he argues that general revelation

impinges on them and compels them to listen, but it is at the same time pushed down and repressed. And the only aspects of it that remain connected to human consciousness, even while torn from their original context, become the seeds of entirely different sequence ideas around which they crystallize. (*JHBR*, 290)

The ideas that begin to crystalize at the intersection of this divine-human dialogue wherein humanity represses and exchanges the

truth of God's revelation are the expression of religious consciousness. For Bavinck, then, religion, which is rooted in a universal religious consciousness, rests on revelation. Religious consciousness rests deeper than religion as it is the formation of ideas during the process of suppression and exchange, ideas that everyone must wrestle with.

2. Religious Consciousness: Universal and Particular

What is interesting about Bavinck's reading of Romans 1:18–32 is how he grounds the universality of religious consciousness even as it comes to expression in particular contexts. As we have seen, in Bavinck's later work he refuses to root religious consciousness in an *a priori* human capacity. Instead, as he reads Romans 1, he roots religious consciousness in the universality of God's initiating a dialogue with all of humanity and humanity's subsequent response. "God speaks, and all human stammering about God is to be understood as nothing other than an answer and a response" (*JHBR*, 235).

In the dialogical relationship between God and every human being (I-Thou), human response takes place within life-relationships and is shaped historically by cultures, locations, and traditions. This repression and exchange that gives rise to various ideas "really happens" according to Bavinck's reading of Romans 1, and it happens particularly, even as God's universal revelation means it is universally inescapable. This is important for Bavinck's whole missiology. He affirms the universality of religious consciousness and the ability to abstract particular expressions of religious consciousness in various religions into overarching statements, but for Bavinck one never meets -2027406090 the universal understanding of this or that particular religion: I never meet Islam, Hinduism, or even Atheism. I meet a muslim, a hindu, an atheist who are each shaped by their own particular struggles and dialogue with God in the I-Thou relationship. While these individual dialogues are influenced of course by formative traditions within communities that have struggled with God together, they are still deeply particular even as they are rooted in the universality of religious consciousness.

So central is dialogue for Bavinck that it is the very definition of being human: that is to exist in a dialogical relationship with God,

here drawing on many of the I-Thou understandings growing in popularity in his own day. Only in and through the universal revelation of God at all times and all places can “people . . . only really exist. As soon as they let go of it, they die” (*JHBR*, 281).

The significance as Bavinck sees it of the universality of revelation is that as God makes himself manifest to all, and all repress and exchange, that religious consciousness becomes a *universal*, albeit complex, phenomenon. It stretches over all of human life. “[R]eligious consciousness,” remarks Bavinck, “can at any time take shape in various movements” (*JHBR*, 148). No one can escape the pull of God’s revelation, for his revelation by very nature requires a response.

Yet because this process is so relational—as it exists dialogically—the religious consciousness it produces is also incredibly particular. “General revelation must be seen . . . as a force that people encounter in their life-relationships” (*JHBR*, 278). Religious consciousness is not some nebulous concept that exists outside of living in the world. Instead, it is deeply rooted in being human. The act of repression and exchange described in Romans 1, as Bavinck writes, “really happens” (*JHBR*, 244). It is embodied, contextual, and often messy.

3. Religious Consciousness: A Structured Response

As religious consciousness comes to expression in humanity, Bavinck discerns its distinctive structure. This is less obvious from his reading of Romans 1, but there is an indication of how particularly embodied responses to God’s revelation can come to inhabit a particular structure.

In general revelation, as articulated through his reading of Romans 1, God communicates his eternal power and divinity. While Bavinck himself does not draw this connection immediately, one could argue that this reading of Romans 1 explains and explicates that at the center of the divine-humans dialogue lays the awareness within humans of a dialogue initiated by some power outside of themselves.

And for Bavinck this awareness stands in the center of religious consciousness. He describes religious consciousness as centering around five “magnetic points” because “they are points which demand our attention and which we cannot evade. We cannot help be-

ing confronted with them. Since they are rooted in our existence, they are stronger than ourselves, and somehow we must come to grips with them.”⁶ He defines these points as follows: (a) the experience of totality, (b) the notion of a norm, (c) the connection to a reality behind reality, (d) the need for deliverance, and (e) that the course of life is the tension between action and fate.⁷ These magnetic points not only form five centers around which humans must grapple but also organize themselves along two lines: destiny within a totality and the freedom to act and be delivered. The hub connecting the points is an awareness of a higher power (*JHBR*, 203). As communities and traditions begin to formulate responses to these magnetic points, religions and traditions of understanding develop which in turn shape the responses individuals make to God’s revelation.

While Bavinck himself leaves the question of the exact nature of the origin of this structure as slightly mysterious, by placing the awareness of a higher power or a reality beyond reality as he describes the center of religious consciousness, he roots religious consciousness back again in general revelation in his reading of Romans.

4. Religious Consciousness: Unearthing the Idols

Religious consciousness, then, rests on revelation and is therefore universal, has a definite structure, is embodied in particular contexts, and is shaped by communities and traditions. This is crucial for Bavinck’s whole missiology. For although he sees this whole process wherein religious commitments come to expression as moderate blessings, he is not incredibly positive about religious consciousness, especially in light of the moral impetus for repressing and exchanging and the moral results of exchange in Romans 1. “Backsliding from the living God and turning towards created idols leaves humans in a state where they desperately need the gospel” (*JHBR*, 108). And it is only by the power of the Spirit that “the gospel of Jesus Christ . . . [can] . . . break through human religious consciousness” (*JHBR*, 297). Thus while Bavinck will affirm that

6. *The Church Between Temple and Mosque*, 32.

7. See *JHBR*, ch. 3, and *The Church Between Temple and Mosque*, part 1.

God's general revelation does produce some elements of truth in a vague and general sense, he eventually draws a sharp contrast between Christianity and non-Christian religions. "The more one explores other religions, the more one becomes aware that there exists a great void between non-Christian religions and Christianity" (*JHBR*, 108).

But even though a great void exists, God's work is in and through the whole world. And this is the central and incredible point of Bavinck's missiology: the objective work of God and God's self-manifestation is the contact point for reaching all those outside of the faith. "In his missionary preaching," writes Bavinck,

Paul very definitely does not take his point of departure from human religion, but from the objective work of God and from God's self-manifestation. My own inner conviction is that this is the only truly relevant point of contact. All others are empty and useless. This point of departure is not simply a beginning for the preaching of the gospel, it is the beginning of a new chapter. "In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). We are the bearers of the "now" in this text. We stand in that momentous divine "now," the "now" of a new chapter in God's involvement with his world. All missionary proclamation only stands on solid ground when it is done in this conviction: "God has been busy with you already for a long time, but you have not understood this. Through my preaching, God is coming to you once again in order to call you to conversion." (*JHBR*, 278)

Paul in Romans 1 is describing the always, everywhere work of God. This means that, when one goes out to preach the gospel, it is not to find the place where human longing has reached a place where it has come to see God, but it is to go and see that God has already begun a dialogue with humanity and that through our living and preaching we call humanity again to conversion. The primary question then for Bavinck is: How have you been struggling with God? What have you done with him?

Yet this call to conversion is not only for those outside of the Christian faith but also for those within. "Christian faith," he writes, is the subjective response of the reborn person to the gospel. In a certain sense, it stands with religious consciousness. This is the case to the extent that it is an answer or reaction to divine speaking and acting. At the same time, this determines that Christian faith is always limited and incomplete, always subject to the gospel itself. (*JHBR*, 298)

Thus Christians must also seek transformation by the gospel as they proclaim it in the knowledge that God is always, everywhere at work. For we are all in desperate need at all times for the in-breaking of the gospel and the truth of scripture to disrupt and uncover our subjective responses to God's revelation.

J. H. Bavinck's reading of Romans 1: Within Contemporary Missional Conversations

Driven by the collapse of colonialism, the rise of the ecumenical movement, various shifts in theological methodology, and the revival of trinitarian theology, missiology in the twentieth century has undergone several significant developments methodologically, theologically, and practically. In the course of these developments the foundation, motive, and nature of missions has been reassessed and redefined. One of the most prominent shifts was to root mission in the nature of triune God himself: all mission is God's mission because the *triune* God is a missionary God.⁸ This trinitarian foundation of mission, described by the term *missio Dei* after the Willingen Conference of the International Missionary Council, has become one of *the* dominant terms to describe one's missiological paradigm in the later half of the twentieth century. This shift has ignited an exciting conversation around missions, what missions

8. John G. Flett, *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth, and the Nature of Christian Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 35; David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 389–93; Fancis Anekwe Oborji, *Concepts of Mission: The Evaluation of Contemporary Missiology* (New York: Orbis Books, 2006), 134–49; Stephen B. Bevans, Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 286–304; Seven B. Bevans, "Wisdom from the Margins: Systematic Theology and the Missiological Imagination," in *Australian eJournal of Theology* 5 (August 2005): 1–17; Ross Hastings, *Missional God, Missional Church: Hope for Re-Evangelizing the West* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012), 86–87; Timothy C. Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2010), 54–55; Charles Fensham, introduction to *Emerging from the Dark Age Ahead: The Future of the North American Church* (Toronto: Clements Academic, 2011); and Georg Vicedom, *Mission of God: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, trans. Gilbert A. Thiele and Dennis Hilgendorf (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1965), 5.

mean, and how to live out the Christian faith within contemporary contexts.

Yet as the discussion has entered into popular literature—particularly in evangelical protestant spheres through pop theology books and blogs—the question of religion and how to regard those outside of the Christian faith has begun to disappear. As missional conversations commonly take place within secular contexts, the question of why people respond to and live in the world as they do is no longer primary. The world is what Christians go to, live in, and the ground for missional encounters. Although not ignored as a category, the world is often left described as an unexplored vacuum, leaving the readers of missional readings of scripture left thinking that the world is a vacuum of God's activity. The relationship between gospel and culture is explored, the use of culture for mission is explored, and yet the rational behind these expressions and connections is ignored.

How can Bavinck enter into this conversation today? Bavinck's focus was primarily on other religions—a *theologica religionum*—not on the analysis of culture and or secular worldviews. Nor was he primarily focused on questions concerning hermeneutics or readings of scripture. But this voice from, what in modern missiology is from the ancient past, can serve to enter into the conversation along four helpful lines.

1. Bavinck provides a *universal framework* rooted in God's universal revelation to understand and articulate what lies at the root of cultural commitments and worldviews. The analysis, for him, runs deeper; it runs to the very heart of how God's work in the world is received by human beings caught in the grip of sin. Thus even as Bavinck describes the modern world using T.S. Elliot's quip, "men have left God not for other gods, they say, but for no God: and this has never happened before" (*JHBR*, 108), if we may update this sentiment a bit for the postmodern world, Bavinck's framework for understanding the contemporary world remains relevant. All humans stand in the grip of God whether or not their answer to his revelation, particularly in recognizing a higher power, is an incredibly resound "no!" Furthermore, this framework can also bring us to see something that Bavinck was always so keen to recognize: modernity has in many ways left the west in spiritually ungroundedness. Thus when Christians engage the world, formed and shaped

by scripture, they do not proceed into a vacuum of divine activity. Rather, God is already there, already at work; we do not bring him, we proclaim him again to those who are trapped within a cycle of repression and suppression. God's initiating dialogue is the point of contact. Thus there is everywhere today a resurgence of spirituality and a search for deeper connections that were forsaken in modernity.

2. *There is no vacuum!* God is already in the world, already at work. Bavinck gives Christians engaged in mission a framework to understand the existential quest and soul of those whom Christians desire to reach with the gospel; it is a structured response within which God is already at work. With an incredibly masterful eye Bavinck shows what Christians must do when they look out at their communities and neighbourhoods: they first must ask, "What have you done with God?" And whatever answer is given, while containing certain vague elements of God's truth, is never the sole ground for engagement. Human achievement is always within the context of God's great dialogue; it is grounded in God's initiative. The church goes out in humility in the boldness of Christ and his gospel which alone has the power to uproot, unearth, and renew.

3. *A Shared Humanity.* Bavinck's biblical-theological approach to religion, rooted in Romans 1, articulates a particular anthropology. He places all humanity within the same original group: humans who subjectively respond to the God. This means that even as Christians receive the gospel, idolatry creeps in. It is the power of the gospel alone for Bavinck that breaks through all of this idolatry.

4. *God beyond Mission.* Bavinck reminds his readers not only that God is at work both in the church and in the world but also that God exists in and for his own glory. God is not just the God of mission. God is not just on a mission for us. He is out for his own glory, his own renown. Manifesting God's glory is a primary function of the church. If we only see God as missional, we can miss this. God is worthy of glory, praise, honour, for and in his own sake. He is more than mission, and as we work to plant and renew, doxology is the song that we sing. If mission becomes our only song, we have missed something key, something essential, something primary.

In sum, Bavinck's exegesis of Romans 1 stands at the center of his own biblical-theological approach to religion. As he develops his *theologia religionum* he not only contributes to the discussion in

his own day but also grants a helpful framework for those wishing to discuss mission and missional theology today. It is a framework for understanding that places God and his work in creation at the center. Even if questions remain concerning his slight tendency towards psychologizing repression, whether he removes too much of some innate desire placed within human beings for God himself, and how to fully bring his understanding of religious consciousness to bear within postmodernity, Bavinck nevertheless serves as an excellent missiologist within the Bavinck tradition.