

Editorial

This issue of *The Bavinck Review* is being sent to your electronic mailboxes more than just a few months behind schedule for which we apologize. Things have been busy in the “offices” of the Bavinck Institute this year, and getting our journal out on time was a bigger challenge than we expected. More about our busyness later; first a few words about the content of this issue.

Bavinck was above all a first-rate dogmatician. The four-volume *Reformed Dogmatics* remains his major accomplishment and contribution to the world-wide church. Nonetheless, once the second edition of the *Dogmatics* was in print, he turned his attention more and more to philosophy, psychology, pedagogy and education, and even to politics, serving as a Senator in the First Chamber of the Dutch Parliament from 1911 until his death in 1921. Our lead article, which is the first installment of a two-part examination of Bavinck’s epistemology, including the topics of sensation, perception, judgment, and mind, brings us beyond Bavinck the theologian and into his psychology and philosophy. As the title suggests, Arvin Vos’s article also adds to earlier scholarly treatments of important parallels between Bavinck and Thomas Aquinas. Vos brings to this comparison a rich background of work in the thought of Thomas Aquinas, notably his valuable revisionist work, *Aquinas, Calvin, and Contemporary Protestant Thought: A Critique of Protestant Views on the Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Eerdmans, 1985).

In the foreword to the first edition of his *Reformed Dogmatics*, Bavinck allowed that some readers might find surprises in his work: “Frequently, this study will set forth newly discovered relationships that initially may seem not to exist.”¹ Surprises may even have been in store for Bavinck himself. Could he ever have imagined that an art historian in the twenty-first century would link his understanding of justification and eschatological hope to the artistic vision of a fellow Dutchman and contemporary, the abstract modernist painter Piet Mondrian? Yet that is exactly what Joseph Maschek, Professor of Art History at Hofstra University, has done for us. Maschek proposes that neo-Calvinism is a

1. “Foreword’ to the First Edition (Volume I) of the *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 45 no. 1 (2010): 10.

more likely spiritual resource for Mondrian than the theosophy that captivated many other modernists of his day. We welcome Professor Maschek to the pages of *The Bavinck Review* and to the growing circle of Bavinck scholars. This is therefore also the opportunity for me to encourage other scholars, especially younger ones, to expand the range of surprises by exploring Bavinck's relevance for the arts more broadly as, for example, Robert Covolo has done recently with fashion. I am writing this editorial in the Thanksgiving season and so I encourage you to think of this as an expression of gratitude that would surprise Bavinck.

This issue contains not one but three translations: one of a meditation by Abraham Kuyper and two pieces from Herman Bavinck. Kuyper's work is ably translated and helpfully annotated by Harry Van Dyke. Kuyper's reflections on the natural knowledge of God (and, derivatively, natural theology) provide one more nail in the coffin of the contention that the Reformed tradition is hostile to natural theology. According to Kuyper, and here he reflects the entire Reformed tradition, our lived experience in God's creation "contributes to our sense of God." His description of this is valuable because it takes us away from a domesticated understanding that general revelation means beautiful sunsets, snow-capped mountains, the wonder of a DNA molecule, and the joy of human love, all giving rise to a romantic understanding of God's "awesomeness." Listen to Kuyper's countervailing description:

Natural theology has often been portrayed as a process whereby man calmly contemplates nature, observing its order, regularity and beauty, and from there ascends to a recognition of God's great power. Nothing is further from the truth. For ordinary man, such calm contemplation is an exception. Our constant contact with nature directly affects our life, our body, our struggle for survival. Not abstract reflection but restless, painful experience has acquainted us with the power of nature. . . .

What impresses us is not the sea viewed from the shore, the ice observed in the skating rink, the thunder storm watched from a distance, the starry heavens and the flower beds that delight the eye. No, what impresses is the sea as it looks to the survivor of a shipwreck, icebergs at the pole, lightning rods that strike, the course of the stars to a traveler through the desert, the healing herbs gathered by the sufferer from a disease—every part of nature that we come into contact with when our life or well-being is at stake. (78–79 below)

Kuyper goes on to challenge Christians to not forsake the pursuit of knowledge in the natural sciences but also not to separate this pursuit from faith in the Christ, two pieces of advice still valuable today. His section on moral order provides us with a helpful segue to the two pieces from Herman Bavinck.

Bavinck's essay on the conscience also directs us away from dogmatics, strictly speaking, and into an arena of that brings together Bavinck's interests in psychology and ethics. However, when we stop to notice that Bavinck published this essay in 1881, one year before he began his

teaching at Kampen, we realize that it is a mistake to divide Bavinck's professional life into periods of during and after dogmatics. Bavinck's interests were always broad and wide ranging; in fact, he taught Reformed ethics from the beginning of his teaching career at Kampen. And that brings me to the third translation and back to the theme of busyness at the Bavinck Institute.

Readers of this journal were introduced in our first issue to Dirk Van Keulen's discovery in the Bavinck archives at the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, of a large hand-written manuscript, *Reformed Ethics*. A small group of Bavinck scholars at the time agreed that this work should be published and translated. After Dirk Van Keulen prepared an electronic, transcribed version of the first half of the manuscript (560 pages), your editor began translating and annotating the work in 2012. I came to the realization in the winter of 2013/14 that at the pace I was going, it was going to take a lot longer than I had initially envisioned. With the help of a gift from the Dutch Reformed Translation Society and a number of generous benefactors, I was able to hire out the translation work, a section at a time. In addition, thanks to a grant from the Heritage Fund of Calvin Theological Society, an editorial team consisting of myself, Dirk Van Keulen, Nelson Kloosterman, and Ph.D. students Jessica Driesenga and Antoine Theron, spent the week of August 3–7, 2015 carefully editing already translated sections, establishing editorial protocol for the work as a whole. *Deo volente*, we will repeat this communal editorial work in the summers of 2016, 2017, and 2018. Readers of this journal who are also members of the Bavinck Society already know that the American members of the editorial team got a large surprise this summer when we learned that the Bavinck manuscript was over 1100 pages instead of the 560 total that we were working with. This also means that instead of a one-volume work, we are now projecting a three-volume work along the following lines:

- I. *Created, Fallen, and Converted Humanity*
- II. *The Duties of the Christian Life (Ten Commandments)*
- III. *The Life of the Redeemed in the World (Marriage and Family)*

We are profoundly grateful to the Baker Publishing Group for its willingness to take on the enlarged project. It is our goal to have the translated and edited Volume I in the hands of the publisher January 2017.

A final word of thanks to long-time friends Harry Van Dyke and Nelson Kloosterman for the gift of their translations that enrich this volume.

—John Bolt