The Bavinck Review

*The Bavinck Review* (*TBR*) is an electronic journal published annually in the spring by The Bavinck Institute at Calvin Theological Seminary.

**Editor:** John Bolt  
**Editorial Committee:**  
James P. Eglinton  
George Harinck  
Cornelis van der Kooi  
Dirk van Keulen  
Brian G. Mattson  
**Associate Editors:**  
Jordan Ballor  
Gayle Doornbos  
Jessica Joustra  
Antoine Theron (managing editor)

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Please address *TBR* communication as follows:

*Editorial Matters:* John Bolt, Editor ([bavinst@calvinseminary.edu](mailto:bavinst@calvinseminary.edu)).  
*Manuscripts and proposals for submissions:* Gayle Doornbos ([gayle.doornbos@gmail.com](mailto:gayle.doornbos@gmail.com)).  
*Notices of publications (books and articles) on Herman Bavinck or J. H. Bavinck:* Jessica Joustra ([jessjoustra@gmail.com](mailto:jessjoustra@gmail.com)).  
*General matters regarding TBR and the Bavinck Institute website:* Antoine Theron ([atheron9@calvinseminary.edu](mailto:atheron9@calvinseminary.edu)).

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Editorial

John Bolt

This eighth volume of The Bavinck Review is like an elephant in that its gestation period has been extraordinarily long. Personnel changes among the editorial staff of The Bavinck Review and the oversight of the Bavinck Institute website, along with the retirement of the editor from his faculty position at Calvin Theological Seminary, created a backlog of work and significant delays in the publication process. My thanks herewith to Jordan Ballor, Gayle Doornbos, Jessica Joustra, and Antoine Theron, whose names now grace the masthead of this digital journal as Associate Editors and Managing Editor, a thanks that hardly does justice to their many contributions to the work of the Bavinck Institute in general and this issue of The Bavinck Review in particular. And a big thank you to Laurence O’Donnell, who served with distinction in all those roles since the Bavinck Institute and The Bavinck Review came into existence.

From now on, please submit manuscripts and proposals for submissions to The Bavinck Review to Gayle Doornbos (Gayle.doornbos@gmail.com), notices of publications (books and articles) on Herman Bavinck or J. H. Bavinck to Jessica Joustra (jessjoustra@gmail.com), and general correspondence regarding The Bavinck Review along with matters involving the Bavinck Institute website to Antoine Theron (atheron9@calvinseminary.edu).

The main theme of this issue is assurance and certainty of faith and was precipitated by the publication of Henk van den Belt’s anno-
tated texts of Bavinck’s writings on the topic (see his introductory article in this issue).
At the presentation launch of this volume on December 22, 2016, Professors Cornelis van der Kooi and Gijsbert van den Brink delivered prepared remarks on Herman Bavinck which have been translated and are included in this issue of The Bavinck Review. The question of faith’s certainty and assurance of salvation was one of Bavinck’s lifelong concerns and we are including in this issue the précis of Chapter 10 in his Reformed Ethics, “Persevering in the Christian Life.” Readers of this journal can look forward reading the fullness of Bavinck’s wisdom on this subject when the first volume of the Reformed Ethics is published early next year.

We include two translations in this issue that reveal two distinct and important sides of Bavinck as a man and as a theologian: his commitment to Reformed orthodoxy and his honest wrestling with the questions of modernity and modern theology. Bavinck knew the tradition of Protestant orthodoxy well and, once his dissertation on Ulrich Zwingli’s ethics was finished in 1880, his next scholarly work involved preparing the sixth and final edition of the Leiden Synopsis Purioris Theologiae, now being made available for the first time in side-by-side Latin/English translation. The editor of the second volume in this latest production, Henk van den Belt, prepared Bavinck’s Preface to the sixth edition for publication and we are honored to publish it. The second translation reflects Bavinck’s principled but friendly relationship with the decidedly modern stream of thought known in the Netherlands as “de ethische theologie.” This term, which translates literally as “the ethical theology,” does not refer to narrower moral concerns but to what might better be called “existential” interests, the concern that theology reflect a “living” faith, a personal faith in Jesus. Along with Daniel Chantepie de la

Sausaye (1818–1874), who was the subject of Bavinck’s next major work of theological scholarship, \(^2\) Johannes Hermanus Gunning (1848–1940) was a key theological inspiration for this ethical theology. Quite aware of the significant theological gulf between them, Gunning and Bavinck nonetheless had a high regard for each other and engaged in significant correspondence. We are pleased to provide translations of Gunning’s epistolary review of the first and second volumes of Bavinck’s *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*. Prof. Leo Mietus, a Gunning scholar who has recently prepared and published a three-volume set of Gunning’s collected works, \(^3\) has also written a helpful introduction.

In view of our history with *The Bavinck Review* volume 8, it may seem risky to venture into our plans for future issues, but here we go. Volume 9 (2018) will be a “special” issue and feature only one contribution, a translation of Herman Bavinck’s *Foundations of Psychology* (1897; revised, 1923). This was translated, along with introduction and evaluation, by Dr. Jack Vanden Born as his thesis for the Master of Christian Studies degree at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan in 1981. An edited version is being prepared by your editor and our goal is to have this completed and published by the end of this year. We are gathering material for the tenth volume (2019) and hope to get back on our regular annual cycle by 2020. We invite proposals for future essays.

We are not done with Bavinck’s psychology after this issue. Readers may or may not be aware that my teacher Anthony Hoekema wrote *two* Th.D. dissertations at Princeton Theological Seminary.

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\(^2\) Herman Bavinck, *De theologie van Prof. Dr. Daniel Chantepie de la Sausaye* (Leiden: Donner, 1884).

His 1953 dissertation on “Herman Bavinck’s Doctrine of the Covenant” is generally known to people familiar with Bavinck scholarship, but this was his second thesis. The first, submitted on February 28, 1948, was titled “The Centrality of the Heart: A Study in Christian Anthropology with Special Reference to the Psychology of Herman Bavinck.” With permission from the Hoekema family, we will be publishing the complete dissertation in another special issue of The Bavinck Review along with an introduction by the editor. We trust that these efforts will stimulate further interest in Bavinck’s psychology which definitely deserves renewed attention from scholars. It is the heart of our mission at the Bavinck Institute to encourage young scholars at all levels to contribute to a better understanding of this great Reformed catholic Christian thinker and inspire others to follow his example.
Why a Bavinck Institute?  
Why at Calvin Seminary?

John Bolt

This is an adaptation\(^1\) and expansion (with references) of remarks given at the opening launch of the Bavinck Institute Special Collection, held in the Calvin Theological Seminary auditorium, May 2, 2017, 7:30 PM. The description of this collection is stated in the Bavinck Institute’s by-laws, revised January 20, 2017:

A permanent repository of books and articles by and about Herman and J. H. Bavinck, the sources of their thought, Dutch neo-Calvinism (including Abraham Kuyper) and its legacy in The Netherlands and around the world. As time and resources permit, this collection will include important material in the history of the Christian Reformed Church’s appropriation of the neo-Calvinist tradition.

\(^1\) Most (but not all) specific comments associated only with the evening’s presentation, including asides with audience involvement, have been removed from this written essay. For example, my comment that the lecture was “not intended to be academic” is no longer accurate for this published work which includes footnote references. I have, however, retained some of the lecture’s “occasional” and oral character. This adaptation also appeared in the Calvin Theological Journal 52/2 (2017): 251–63. A vimeo of the evening can be seen at https://bavinckinstitute.org/2017/06/bavinck-special-collection-grand-opening-presentation/.
Additional note: This non-circulating collection of more than 1700 books is being housed in the Rare Book Room, Heritage Hall, Hekman Library of Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary.

Thank you all for coming here this evening. This evening is about embodiment because the Bavinck Institute is being transformed from a cyber reality to concrete, physical space, complete with books and filing cabinets. This was always my vision for the Bavinck Institute, having it metamorphize from a web-based means of connecting and communicating to becoming a place, a location for Bavinck studies, a small, toddler little sister of the Meeter Center, with a library of books, articles, easy access to important internet material, and so forth. It was a vision that came from the fact that the tradition of which Bavinck was the premier theologian
WHY A BAVINCK INSTITUTE? WHY AT CALVIN SEMINARY?

profoundly influenced Calvin College and Seminary and from the conviction that this tradition was still relevant today.²

Since the BI was established in 2009 it has been predominantly a cyber reality; we have a web-site (24,000 visits from 9 countries, including 336 from China; that’s about 3500 per year or just under 10 per day); publish an electronic journal, The Bavinck Review; set up a database for Bavinck scholarship; and facilitate communication on an international level for those interested in the Bavinck tradition.³ The Bavinck Society has 133 members from 12 different countries, including Nepal.⁴ Our website has announced the publication of new books, conferences, lectures, featured interviews with authors, and the like, primarily through Facebook where we have just under 1500 followers. Our own Twitter hashtag—#Bavinck—has the same amount of followers and there are two independent “Herman Bavinck” Twitter profiles dedicated to posting Bavinck quotes”: https://twitter.com/HermanBavinck and https://twitter.com/Herman__Bavinck. Between the two, there are 1497 Tweets (quotes) and a total of 7110 followers. And then, there are also online-facilitated discussion groups. The Bavinck cyber space is alive and well.

There are only two important exceptions to the overwhelming cyber character of the BI: 1. The BI coordinated the translation, editing and publication of the J. H. Bavinck Reader, a collection of essays by Herman Bavinck’s missiologist nephew.⁵ 2. The translation

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² My thanks therefore to the following people who were essential instruments for helping to bring this about: From Calvin Seminary, Jul Medenblik, President; Jinny De Jong, CFOO; and Ronald Feenstra, Academic Dean; David Malone, Dean of the Hekman Library; Karin Maag, Director of the H. Henry Meeter Center for Calvin Studies; Richard Harms, Curator of the Archives, Heritage Hall; and Paul Fields, Theological Librarian and Curator of the Meeter Center.

³ These statistics were true as of May 2, 2017.

⁴ These statistics were true as of February 1, 2018.

and editing of Herman Bavinck’s *Reformed Ethics*, an 1100-page handwritten manuscript, consisting of Bavinck’s own lecture notes prepared for his students at the Theological School in Kampen, from 1883/84 through the fall of 1902.

*Hand-written manuscript — Herman Bavinck’s Gereformeerde Ethiek*

This work languished in the Bavinck Archives at the Historical Documentation Center for Dutch Protestantism (1800 to present) at the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, from the time of Bavinck’s death in 1921 until it was discovered by Dirk Van Keulen in 2008.6 Never published, the work has been digitally transcribed, is being translated into English, and will become a three-volume work,

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published by Baker. Volume 1 is scheduled for publication in the fall of 2018.

The Bavinck Institute collection comprises material not in the Hekman Library including copies of archival material, and important rare books, and it will continue to collect such material. Nonetheless, where there is duplication with Hekman Library holdings, the BI is like the Meeter Center in being a non-circulating, library-use only collection, always accessible to students and scholars only in the space dedicated to it. Tonight, we inaugurate that collection which will be housed in the Rare Book Room, Heritage Hall. The Bavinck Institute is doing the reverse of “going viral,” it is entering real time and space and operating with a Director and Advisory Board.7

I can’t help but reflect on the wonderful irony here. Setting all modesty aside, and paraphrasing Louis XIV, it is fair to say, that up to this point, at least the general perception was that I could confidently say, “L’institut Bavinck, c’est moi!” If it was not fully true before tonight, the independence of the collection means that after tonight it is definitely no longer true. But here’s the thing: I am not a participant in all that cyber activity I just pointed to. Like in the parable of the seed growing secretly, it happened without any active involvement on my part. And now, as it becomes more embodied, the BI acquires full ontological status completely apart and independent from me. This is an irony in which I rejoice. “Exceedingly!”

**Why a Bavinck Institute?**

Let’s now move on to what you really came here for tonight, WHY? Why Bavinck? Why at CTS? For the first question, I have three reasons, one weaker and two strong.

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7 Director: John Bolt; Advisory Board: Dr. Jordan Ballor, Dr. James D. Bratt, Rev. Timothy Blackmon, Dr. James A. De Jong, Dr. James P. Eglinton, Dr. George Harinck, Dr. Richard A. Muller, Dr. Adriaan Neele, Mr. Doug Vande Griend.
The Popularity of Bavinck

The weaker reason is the appeal to popularity. I have already provided some of the data and now let me add a few items. The sales of the four volumes of Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics* in English are in the neighborhood of 15,000 sets. Quite remarkable for a serious work of Reformed theology that is 100 years old! Furthermore, since it came out in English, the *Reformed Dogmatics* has been translated into Korean (including the one-volume abridgement), Indonesian, and Portuguese, and is being translated into Mandarin.

I should add here that this popularity is not limited to the “usual suspects”: CRC, RCA, Protestant Reformed, Free Reformed, Netherlands Reformed, and Canadian Reformed folk. Over the years I have received appreciative notes from United Church of Christ and Methodist pastors as well as Reformed and Presbyterian ones. And they are not just from conservative sources. I recently received a wonderful email from a mainline Presbyterian theologian, Donald McKim. He wrote:

> I want you to know how deep is my continuing appreciation for the Bavinck *Reformed Dogmatics* volumes. I literally keep your one volume abridgement “at my right hand” on my desk. Whenever I can, I add Bavinck quotations to what I write. Every time I dip into Bavinck I find understanding and nourishment for faith—that makes my heart glad. I was grateful to be an endorser of the project which I continue to regard as a very great treasure!8

McKim also noted that he included Bavinck material in a PC(USA) adult curriculum he wrote on the Apostles’ Creed. This is something I could not have imagined in my wildest dreams and for which I am profoundly grateful.

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8 Personal email from Donald McKim to author, April 21, 2017.
So then, Bavinck is popular; in fact, he has become an icon of pop culture. If you Google “Herman Bavinck shirts” you will find Herman Bavinck short sleeve T-shirts, long sleeve Tees, Crewneck Sweaters, Ladies’ Tees, and even Hoodies.\footnote{At \url{https://www.missionalwear.com/products/?filter=Herman%20Bavinck}.}
The same site offers Herman Bavinck Laser Etched Moleskine Journals in five different colors.

*Herman Bavinck Laser Etched Moleskine Journal (also available in Black, Navy, Forest, and Espresso)*

I also found a “Keep Calm and Herman Bavinck” coffee mug on the Internet.\(^\text{10}\)

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\(^{10}\) Although I purchased this mug in April 2017, on February 1, 2018 I am only able to find numerous images of the slogan; simply type “Keep Calm and Herman Bavinck” into your search engine.
The slogan also seems to have generated similar posters such as this one:

![Poster](image.png)

And to top it off, a Herman Bavinck tattoo!¹¹

![Tattoo](image2.png)

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¹¹ Just type “Herman Bavinck, tattoo” in a Google search box.
Popular culture is not my forté; this is also “something I could not have imagined in my wildest dreams” and still astounds me. Lest we lose ourselves in the “world,” let’s recall what we are asking: “WHY? Why Bavinck? Why at CTS?” Let me now move to the stronger reasons.

Today’s Theological Priorities
Different eras during the church’s 2000-year history have each had their own distinct pressure points and challenges requiring theologians to be nimble as they speak to their own age without accommodating to it. What are the challenges to the gospel, to the church and Christian theology today? Very quickly, five come to mind: An erosion of biblical authority; the denial that we can truly know God; exaltation of human autonomy; the fact and claim of religious pluralism; and a degree of evangelical indifference to church confession and tradition. A brief word on each.

1. *Erosion of biblical authority.* As the church today in the west is losing its anchor in Scripture and the accumulated wisdom gained over two millennia, the Bible is treated as “just another book.” Therefore, a credible and effective theologian today must be committed to Scripture’s authority and to interpreting it in the light of the history of the church’s reading of the Bible. Retrieval, recovery, and renewal are the first task of theology today. Our colleague Todd Billings, who holds the Gordon H. Girod Research Professor of Reformed Theology chair at Western Theological Seminary, has said this well:

In a time when churches are pressured to become pragmatic and self-centered in the face of many challenges, Christian theology can mediate
a rich theological heritage that is deep enough to nourish the church and
dynamic enough to be open to God’s ongoing work.  

2. Denial that we can truly know God. At the same time the Bible
was being brought “down to earth,” God was being removed from this
world. Philosophers said that we can’t KNOW God because
knowledge comes from our senses and deals with facts; true
knowledge is empirical and scientific. Faith, then, is not about
knowledge but about something else, either “feeling” or “morality.”
Today’s theologians must say a loud and definite NEIN! to this and
insist that we don’t just “feel” the truth of Easter (“he lives within my
heart”), we KNOW “He is Risen” as certainly as we know that $2\text{H}_2 + \text{O}_2 \rightarrow 2 \text{H}_2\text{O}$. The Bible does not just address our souls but the
totality of our experience, including our minds. And, therefore, what
the Bible teaches has to be connected with the rest of our knowledge.
Bavinck himself put forward a case for a philosophy of revelation that
“seeks to correlate the wisdom which it finds in revelation with that
which is furnished by the world at large.” He protests against
theologians who have “with more or less hesitation abandoned the
entire world to modern science, provided only somewhere, in the
person of Christ, or in the inner soul of man, a place . . . reserved for
divine revelation.” He calls this a retreat of “weakness” and
concludes:

Revelation, while having its centre in the Person of Christ, in its
periphery extends to the uttermost ends of creation. It does not stand
isolated in nature and history, does not resemble an island in the ocean,
nor a drop of oil upon water. With the whole of nature, with the whole

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12 Taken from Western Theological Seminary website
https://www.westernsem.edu/faculty/j-todd-billings/.

13 As a Calvin College chemistry major I try to never miss a chance to use a
chemistry example I can still handle.
of history, with the whole of humanity, with the family and society, with science and art it is intimately connected.”

3. Exaltation of human autonomy. A passion for human autonomy accompanies all this; to be modern is to reject all heteronomy; we submit ourselves to no one and to nothing. We think we are our own boss!

4. Awareness of religious pluralism. And then, we are also challenged by our improved awareness and knowledge of the world’s religions. Followers of the world’s religions are no longer limited to “Greenland’s icy mountains” or “India’s coral strand”; they are our neighbors. Embarrassed about colonialism and imperialism, we are instinctively drawn to a kinder, gentler pluralistic view. Therefore, credible and effective theologians today must acknowledge the modern inclination to individual autonomy and religious pluralism and provide arguments for our dependence upon God and the finality of Jesus Christ as God’s revelation. They need to incorporate critical knowledge of the world’s non-Christian religions in each topic of theology.

5. Evangelical indifference to church confession and tradition. Theologians who do all this will then be able to contend with the general indifference (sometimes outright hostility) to church confession and tradition among fellow evangelicals by challenging the church’s temptation to be “relevant” and instead urging her to go deeper. They will also be working from a missional perspective which I understand as theology that “assists the church in effectively fulfilling the Great Commission in our day.” Reformed theology is superbly suited for this because in Reformed understanding:

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• God is present to all people and reveals himself to them (general revelation)
• The world’s religions are a response to this general revelation (idolatry).
• To communicate the gospel, the special revelation of God’s saving work in Israel and definitively in Jesus Christ must be connected to what people already know and believe about God and the world.

A good missional theology, therefore, must relate the knowledge of God that is given in Scripture to the rest of our knowledge and relate biblical truth to universal human experience.

It will not surprise you that I have just given you a rather precise portrait of Herman Bavinck. It is true of course that I am indebted to Bavinck for this profile of a credible and effective theologian. However, Bavinck’s own profile matches that of claims made by contemporary theologians about today’s important theological priorities.¹⁵ It is this match or correlation between need and person that is my point here. It also helps to explain why Bavinck has become so popular.

**Why at Calvin Seminary?**

And now to our second question: Why should there be a Bavinck Institute at Calvin Seminary? I have two basic points: 1. He’s OUR guy. 2. The BI is one way for CTS to bless the world-wide church, especially the younger churches in Asia, Latin America, and Africa.

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¹⁵ This is exactly the point driven home by Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain in their manifesto, *Reformed Catholicity: The Promise of Retrieval for Theology and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), and reinforced in their *Christian Dogmatics: Reformed Theology for the Church Catholic* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016).
I. Bavinck is Our Guy

Calvin Seminary can say of Bavinck that he is our guy! Now comes a surprise. Bavinck’s initial impact on the CRC community broadly and Calvin College and Seminary more particularly did not come through his *Reformed Dogmatics* and theology but by way of his work as a thinker about psychology, education and pedagogy. Former Calvin education professor Peter De Boer pointed to this in a booklet on Christian education: “Among many of the older leaders of the Christian school movement in America there was an acquaintance with the work of the eminent Dutch theologian and philosopher Herman Bavinck, including his *Pedagogical Principles* (1904) . . . To keep that tradition alive in the wake of Americanization, several members of the Calvin faculty (including W. Harry Jellema) translated the book, *Distinctive Features of the Christian School* by T. Van der Kooy.”16 In addition, three years later, two members of the Calvin College faculty also translated J. Brederveld, *Christian Education: A summary and Critical Discussion of Bavinck’s Pedagogical Principles*.17 For the first half of the twentieth century, Herman Bavinck was the primary shaper of Reformed Christian education philosophy in North America.

I don’t have the time to provide the full story; let me summarize things by giving two names: Cornelius Jaarsma (1897–1966) and Jan Waterink (1890–1966).


17 J. Brederveld, *Christian Education: A Summary and Critical Discussion of Bavinck’s Pedagogical Principles*, translated by Two Members of the Faculty of Calvin College (Grand Rapids: Smitter Book Company, 1928). Neither in this volume nor in the Van der Kooy volume mentioned in the previous note are the translators named.
In the 1930’s, as Cornelius Jaarsma wrestled with the need to provide a Christian alternative to what he called the “pragmatic and experimental philosophy” of people like John Dewey and Charles Hubbard Judd, he “found the works of Bavinck very enlightening.” He then took on this task: “Both to crystallize his own thinking in the philosophy of education and to give others [notably those who could not read Dutch] an opportunity to profit from Bavinck’s contribution to the field of education, the author set himself the task of giving an exposition of the educational philosophy of Herman Bavinck and a
brief evaluation of it in the light of modern thought.”18 The result was a New York University doctoral dissertation, *The Educational Philosophy of Herman Bavinck*, about which a contemporary blogger focused on Calvinist day school education says: “This is one of my more prized pieces in my library, not only because of its content, but also because of its rarity. If you happen to come across this book, I would highly recommend purchasing it . . . they are hard to find!”19

Professor Jaarsma came from Wheaton College to Calvin’s education department in 194720 and was an influential leader in what usually gets referred to as the “progressive” stream in Reformed Christian education in North America.21 In the volume by T. Van der Kooy, this theme is summarized as follows:

> [It is] the fashioning of the whole man . . . Heart, intellect and will, with an eye to the whole of a man’s life. Education is concerned with more than mere knowledge; the heart, too has its rights . . . the ultimate purpose in all education must be true piety. But this piety must not remain isolated . . . but be bound up with wisdom, with genuine and thorough knowledge of affairs.22

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20 This was also the year that philosophy professor W. Harry Jellema returned to Calvin from Indiana University (De Boer, *Shifts*, 9).


Here I need to introduce Jan Waterink.

Waterink was extraordinary professor of pedagogy in the humanities faculty and extraordinary professor of catechesis in the theology faculty at the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam.

Waterink picked up the torch passed on by Bavinck, in particular developing the psychological study of children being educated. Waterink was very influential in the Dutch Reformed community (its Dr. Spock), but he also came to Calvin College in the school year 1953–54, and delivered the Calvin Foundation Lecture for 1954, *Basic Concepts in Pedagogy*, which was used in North American Christian school circles for a number of years. The key Bavinckian element here is once again the emphasis on the “whole child.”

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24 References to Professor Waterink were not uncommon in my childhood home and community; to the extent that any “expert” played a role in my own upbringing, it would have been Waterink.
According to Professor De Boer, “It was, in part, this Reformed Christian tradition—begun with the Dutch schoolmasters [Van der Kooy and Brederveld] on through Waterink—that Cornelius Jaarsma attempted to revive in the 1950s.”

Jaarsma was concerned about the trend in “secular educational theory and practice to launch out independent of both theology and philosophy,” pointing to John Dewey as the prime example and architect of this trend. As someone who did take psychology seriously, Bavinck provided a meaning and modern antidote to this trend:

It was Herman Bavinck who recognized that Christian education “could not remain indifferent to . . . the contributions of psychological research to education.” Consequently, wrote Jaarsma, Bavinck, near the end of his life, “set himself . . . to give the maturing science (of education) the guidance . . . it needed.” Jan Waterink built on the foundation of Bavinck, suggested Jaarsma, bringing Christian education to the point where “it is a field of research and practice which must be allowed the privilege of maturity if it is going to do for our Christian schools what needs to be done.”

Bavinck’s pedagogy has not been the focus of my own research but every Sunday morning in church my wife and I sit in front of two retired teachers, one of whom reminds me frequently of the role that Bavinck’s pedagogy played in his training and continuing education. In conclusion, Herman Bavinck was the single most significant shaper, in the first half of the twentieth century, of educational philosophy and pedagogy in the Christian education circles associated with the CRC (Calvin College education department, National Union of Christian Schools, now Christian Schools

International). And Bavinck is still being taken seriously as an educational thinker.\textsuperscript{27}

Bavinck is also “our guy” when it comes to theology, but this influence is more indirect. At least initially. There are three phases to this influence which I will summarize using the names of three CTS professors of systematic theology: Louis Berkhof, Anthony A. Hoekema, and John Bolt.

\textbf{Professor Louis Berkhof}
\textit{(1873–1957)}

Phase 1:

There was an effort to translate Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics* into English in the 1930’s. William Hendriksen translated the *Doctrine of God* section but did not get it published until 1951. Nonetheless, CTS students were *indirectly* introduced to Bavinck’s dogmatic work through the work of Louis Berkhof. Berkhof’s *Systematic Theology* has, after its first publication in 1932, also been translated into Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, and Portuguese. It remains one of the most influential textbooks on Reformed theology ever produced and served CTS students and CRC pastors for some three generations. Berkhof, however, did not present his own original theology; it was for the most part, in structure and content, the theology of Herman Bavinck, as my own teacher and colleague Henry Zwaanstra has observed.28 Therefore, for me and many other CTS graduates, our first introduction to Herman Bavinck

was indirect, mediated through Louis Berkhof’s *Systematic Theology*.

**Phase 2:**

Speaking of my teachers, the second phase of Bavinck’s indirect appearance at Calvin Seminary, came through my professor in systematic theology, Anthony A. Hoekema, who taught at CTS from 1955 to 1978.

Professor Hoekema, like his theological mentor, was deeply interested in psychology, earning a Master’s Degree in the field from the University of Michigan. He regularly referred to Bavinck in the classroom, even providing us with his own translation of a section on the wideness of God’s mercy from Bavinck’s eschatology. No wonder. Professor Hoekema completed TWO dissertations on Bavinck’s theology for his Th.D. Degree from Princeton Seminary,
the first on the centrality of the heart in Bavinck, and the second on Bavinck’s doctrine of the covenant for which he was awarded his doctorate. If you are in doubt about Bavinck’s importance for Hoekema, check out his post-retirement works and the footnotes to Bavinck.

Phase 3:
I am not going to spend any time tonight on the third phase which is more direct. It is the phase in which I am directly involved as the editor of the Reformed Dogmatics that helped make Bavinck available to all English-speaking students, including those at CTS. Bavinck can now be used by those who cannot read Dutch but do have facility in English.

It is easy to make the case that Bavinck has been and remains a significant player in the development of Calvin College and Seminary. He’s our guy!

II. A Way for CTS to Bless the World-wide Church
In conclusion, I want to say a few words about my second answer to the question: “Why at Calvin Seminary?” The Bavinck Institute is one way for CTS to bless the world-wide church (especially the younger churches in Asia, Latin America, and Africa). For starters, the project of translating and using Bavinck has already lived at Calvin Seminary for more than twenty years; it is therefore in keeping with CTS’s own tradition and identity that its library and

29 Anthony A. Hoekema, “The Centrality of the Heart: A Study in Christian Anthropology, with Special Reference to the Psychology of Herman Bavinck,” a thesis submitted to the faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Theology, February 18, 1948. This dissertation was submitted but not defended; it will be published as a special edition of The Bavinck Review in 2018/19. The second dissertation, successfully defended in 1953 was, “Herman Bavinck’s Doctrine of the Covenant.”

30 The Bible and the Future (Eerdmans, 1979); Created in God’s Image (Eerdmans, 1986); Saved by Grace (Eerdmans, 1989).
Heritage Hall host a space known as the Bavinck Institute that serves as a working station for research by CTS graduate students and potential visiting scholars.

For Bavinck is popular among CTS graduate students, especially our international students. In the years that I have taught one of the two Bavinck seminars, a total of [hold your breath; this is a mystical number] 144 students have been enrolled. This includes students from Western Theological Seminary, the Protestant Reformed Theological School, and Puritan Reformed Seminary.

Let me tell you about the dedication of our international students, most of whom are Korean. It was persistent requests from our Korean students that got the project of translating the *Reformed Dogmatics* underway in the early 1990s. And today I am so encouraged by their work. Remember, English is their second language! And every semester I have Korean students who compare the English translation with the original Dutch and raise questions/challenges to my editorial work. This goes far beyond the requirements for the course and I love it; in addition, *most* of the time they are right. And these students raise such fascinating questions, like: is there any evidence Bavinck was good at arithmetic? Answer: Yes; we have evidence that he was very careful with money.

Twenty-five of these students have done additional independent studies, major research paper, or Th.M. thesis on Bavinck. There is one completed Ph.D. CTS dissertation that deals with Bavinck, another in progress, and four potential ones pending. Our doctoral program began in the 1990s with a particular vision and mission to develop Reformed leadership for the younger churches around the world. It’s already happening.
I rest my case: “Why Herman Bavinck? Why at CTS?” Because Bavinck’s theology, in its content but perhaps even more importantly in its method, remains relevant for today. That is my testimony to which I could add that of thousands more. He’s our guy and one of our most valuable resources for CTS to bless the worldwide church. He is already doing it.
Herman Bavinck’s Lectures on the Certainty of Faith (1891)

Henk van den Belt

Abstract

This article introduces two recently published manuscripts of lectures by Herman Bavinck from 1891 about “The Certainty of Faith” on which his later booklet The Certainty of Faith (De zekerheid des geloofs, 1901) is based. These manuscripts reveal a more critical attitude to pietism in the early writings of Bavinck than is common in his later works. This attitude is possibly due to his desire to promote the agenda of reunification of the churches from the Afscheiding with those of the Doleantie. A comparison between the two different manuscripts also reveals Bavinck’s struggle to articulate the foundation of the certainty of faith. Furthermore, compared with De zekerheid des geloofs, Bavinck’s 1891 manuscripts reveal his early reliance on “ethical theology” as he emphasizes that the certainty of faith is a result of the moral appeal of the gospel to the human conscience, which is answered through regeneration.
Introduction

The Certainty of Faith (De zekerheid des geloofs, 1901) holds a special place in Bavinck’s oeuvre.\footnote{The booklet was first published as an issue of the Tijdschrift voor gereformeerde theologie in December 1901 and simultaneously as a separate booklet with exactly the same layout as Herman Bavinck, De zekerheid des geloofs (Kampen: Kok, 1901). Bavinck reedited the booklet two years later. Herman Bavinck, De zekerheid des geloofs (Kampen: Kok, 1903) and the third was only very slightly revised (Kampen: Kok, 1918). Posthumous editions—the fourth in 1932, and a fifth without a date—follow the text of the third edition. This final text was translated into English as Herman Bavinck, The Certainty of Faith, trans. Harry Der Nederlanden (St. Catharines, Ont.: Paideia Press, 1980) and republished as Herman Bavinck, The Certainty of Faith (Potchefstroom: Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir Christelike Hoër Onderwys, 1998). The text of the first edition was reprinted in Herman Bavinck, Gereformeerde katholiciteit (1888–1918), ingeleid door Kees van der Kooi (Barneveld: Nederlands Dagblad, 2008), 65–131. The most recent and annotated publication, which compares the first and second editions, is Herman Bavinck, Geloofszekerheid, texts introduced and annotated by Henk van den Belt (Soesterberg: Aspekt, 2016), 13–98.} Pastoral in tone, it focuses on questions that are related to the life of faith. Bavinck answers these questions with an eye toward his contemporary culture, characterized by fundamental doubt, which Bavinck calls “the soul-sickness of the nineteenth century” (22 [8]).\footnote{Bavinck, Geloofszekerheid, 22, Bavinck, The Certainty of Faith, 8. In the rest of this paper the page numbers refer to Geloofszekerheid and to the English translation like this: (22 [8]).} Before analyzing and comparing the two lecture-manuscripts (1891), the main themes present in the lectures and the subsequent booklet will be outlined by presenting a summary of The Certainty of Faith. In his lectures and later booklet, Bavinck seeks to show how the certainty of faith can be defined, how it has been sought, and in which way it can be found (24 [10]).

Bavinck begins The Certainty of Faith with historical understandings of certainty which he contrasts to notions of scientific certainty. According to Bavinck the deepest religious need of our souls is to know that God exists and that he is our God. The human race has
always sought for certainty, and every religion is born from and carried by a desire for eternal salvation. Science cannot satisfy our hunger for certainty; it is the task of theology to deal with the mystery of ultimate certainty and to prove its worth in life’s practice (30 [17]).

Certainty is not the same as truth. Bavinck defines truth as the correspondence of thought and reality, a relationship between the content of our consciousness and the object of our knowledge. Certainty is not a relationship but a state of the knowing subject, a complete resting of the spirit in the object of its knowledge (32 [20]). The certainty of faith is different from all forms of scientific certainty because our deepest conviction cannot result from proofs and evidences.

For Bavinck, the roots of the certainty of faith are very deep. Our consciousness as children is joined with the religious ideas in which we are brought up. Thus, the certainty of faith is generally born in childhood (35 [23]). This kind of certainty is weaker than scientific certainty in the objective sense. Scientific certainty rests on rational grounds; the certainty of faith rests on revelation and authority and is the fruit of faith. The subjective power of the certainty of faith, however, is much stronger than that of scientific certainty. Religious convictions are the deepest and most intimate of all convictions because they are rooted in the heart. The certainty of faith provides a perfect rest, the highest liberty of the spirit (41 [30]).

The second part of the booklet offers a historical survey of different answers that have been given to the question of how certainty of faith can be gained. Bavinck discusses certainty in the non-Christian religions, Roman Catholicism, the Reformation, Protestant Orthodoxy and Pietism, Methodism, and the Moravian Brethren. According to Bavinck the diversity of approaches resulted in great uncertainty because the life of faith was driven in different directions. Fur-
thermore, the certainty of faith was also influenced by modern philosophy by the claim that human beings cannot gain certain knowledge of invisible and eternal things (59 [49]).

In the third part of the booklet, Bavinck grapples with which way leads to true certainty. He states that in religion and faith one can only rest in divine revelation, to which all religions appeal. This fact raises the more difficult question of where to find true divine authority. It is impossible to solve this problem in an abstract way, because no one is neutral in matters of faith (64 [55]). Although many have turned their backs on Christianity, Bavinck argues that Christianity’s religious and moral makeup is superior to all other religions.

In answer to the question of how the truth of Christianity can be convincingly demonstrated, he discusses and rejects the two alternatives: objective demonstration and subjective retreat into religious feeling. Although Bavinck does not think it is wrong for Christians to demonstrate what can be said in support of faith, he sees proofs as having a limited value because they are insufficient to move anyone to believe (68 [59]). But, the method that starts from experience cannot lead people to the certainty of faith either. It is true that God’s revelation has a religious-ethical content and that the Christian faith evokes many emotions in the heart, but all these experiences presuppose faith and therefore cannot be its ground. For Bavinck, one cannot draw a conclusion from religious emotions to the truth. The experiential method makes the content of revelation depend on experience and risks losing all objective truth (79 [73]).

Finally, Bavinck concludes by presenting his alternative. He starts from the fact that the gospel is preached and calls human beings to faith and repentance. That fact depends on a decree of God (81 [74]). In addition, the gospel appeals to the heart in a moral way and addresses itself to the whole person. It assumes only that human beings are sinners, and it promises salvation in the way of faith and repentance. The gospel corresponds to the perfect idea of religion in
two ways. On the one hand, the gospel is nothing but the good news of grace. On the other hand, it confronts human beings with the moral choice to accept the gift of God’s grace (83 [77]). Christianity teaches us that the highest good is found in fellowship with God and faith reties the soul to God. All believers ascribe their faith and salvation to God alone but its origins remain mysterious. Faith is an act of the highest spiritual power and therefore God’s work and gift par excellence.

From this center the believer is bound to the whole truth as it is revealed in the witness of the apostles and the prophets in Scripture. This bond has a mystical character (86 [81]). Scripture is more than a narrative of past events; it is the testimony of God calling us to faith and repentance. In the one act of faith the believer embraces both Christ and Scripture’s witness of him. Faith recognizes the objective, self-subsistent truth and does not construct it. God’s Word is the rock on which faith stands.

Bavinck ends The Certainty of Faith with a description of the fruits of faith. Certainty and assurance are essential for the fruits of thankfulness. Experiences and good works can never prove the truth of faith beforehand; if faith does not come first, no genuine experience and no true good works can follow. Through faith in the promises of God the believer receives the Spirit of adoption (94 [92]). We should not place faith and assurance at the end, but at the beginning of the way of salvation. Assured of being a child of God on the basis of the promises, the Christian can freely look around and enjoy all the good gifts that descend from the Father. All the Christian’s thoughts and acts proceed from the core of the religious life in the fellowship with Christ. Spiritual life includes family and social life, business and politics, art and science. Faith gives the strength to faithfully fulfill one’s earthly calling as service to God. Reconciled with God, the Christian is reconciled with all things. A Christian is a human being in the full, true sense, a man of God, perfectly equipped
for every good work (96 [96–97]). For him to live is Christ and to die is gain.

**The Two Lecture Manuscripts on “De Zekerheid des Geloofs”**

While *The Certainty of Faith* was first published in 1901, the material for the booklet was written ten years earlier in 1891. The Bavinck archive contains two versions of a lecture titled “De zekerheid des geloofs” written in 1891 by Bavinck in two small notebooks of fifty-five pages each. The first version (about 14,150 words) is a little longer than the second one (about 13,180 words), and the second manuscript most closely resembles the subsequent booklet *The Certainty of Faith* in form and content. The slight variations between the two versions and the differences between the lecture manuscripts and the 1901 booklet offer insight into the early thought of the Kampen professor, especially given the scant amount of published works from his early career.

Bavinck’s journals and a note on the cover of the second manuscript indicate that he delivered the lecture “De zekerheid des geloofs” four times in different locations from January to March of 1891. The first manuscript was only used for the first lecture, given

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4 In 1891 Bavinck had not yet started publishing his *Reformed Dogmatics* (1895–1901). In addition to his dissertation on Ulrich Zwingli’s ethics (1880), the Latin edition of the *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae* (1881), and the booklet on the theology of Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye (1884), only two of his addresses were in print: “The Science of Sacred Theology” (1883) and “The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church” (1888). His two lecture manuscripts on certainty therefore add something to our knowledge of Bavinck’s development on the foundation and certainty of the Christian faith, a subject that was very important to him.
on Thursday, January 29, 1891, in the Christian Reformed Church in Bedum, in the province of Groningen. Between January 29, 1891, and February 13, 1891, Bavinck rewrote his lecture manuscript and apparently used it three times.5

Not only do the lecture manuscripts give an insight into the early thought of Bavinck but the four occasions during which Bavinck used the manuscripts give an insight into his busy life in 1891. As previously noted, the first version of the lecture was held on Thursday, January 29, 1891, in the Christian Reformed Church in Bedum, in the province of Groningen. It is not clear why Bavinck was invited to speak on this theme, but the meeting seems to have had the character of a semi-church service, starting and closing with psalm-singing.

Bavinck wrote in his diary: “Thursday, January 29: to Bedum. In the evening, I held a lecture in the church about The Certainty of Faith.”6 It was a busy week. On Friday he traveled to Wolvega to give a lecture on Christian education at the opening ceremony of a school, and in the evening, he took the last train to Kampen. Sunday night he preached in Kampen from the Heidelberg Catechism on the communion of saints.

The next time he gave the lecture, he used the second manuscript. This was at a meeting in Arnhem on February 13, 1891. An advertisement promoting the lecture notes that this was the second in a series of “Lectures on Different Subjects” held by a variety of scholars.7 The attendants had to pay an entrance fee of one guilder. In the second

5 As indicated by a note on the cover, which reads: “The Certainty of Faith / held at Arnhem, 13 Feb. 1891 / Amsterdam. (H.d.C.), 20 Feb. - / Appingedam, 18 Mar. -.”


7 Two other lectures in the series were by Hendrik Pierson (1834–1923) on “Homer’s Odyssey” and by Leendert Burgersdijk (1828–1900), the translator of Shakespeare, on women characters in his plays. Bavinck himself had spoken in Arnhem one year earlier on “The Psalms.”
manuscript, Bavinck included a newspaper report from his lecture in Arnhem. This report shows that the attendance was good, or at least more than average for the lectures in this series. The reporter wrote that Bavinck indeed had something to say and that he spoke “in ordinary human language, decorated with some oratorical curls.” That he did not agree with Bavinck is evident when he notes after some summarizing sentences: “Where the professor put on his dark glasses, was when he shared his opinion (not so expressly but clear enough to be recognized) that regeneration can only take place in the manner described in the Heidelberg Catechism.”

The lecture in Arnhem was on Friday; the next week on Wednesday, Bavinck traveled from Kampen via a meeting of the “Council for the Schools with the Bible” to his fiancé Johanna Adriana Schippers (1868–1942), who was thirteen years younger than he. His colleague and friend Maarten Noordtzij (1840–1915) accompanied him. Bavinck noted in his journal:

> In the evening to Vlaardingen. Noordtzij joined me.
> 19 Feb. Johanna became 23 years old. I gave her a jewellry box. Pleasant day. Noordtzij went to Kampen in the evening.
> 20th Feb. Johanna took me to Schiedam in the afternoon. I took the train to Amsterdam. My brothers were well. [...] In the evening, Hendrik de Cock celebrated its lustrum [fifth anniversary]. I had [a] lot of fun. I read a part of my lecture about the certainty of faith.

The second time Bavinck held the second version of the lecture was in Amsterdam, while he was on his way back from Johanna to Kampen. Bavinck’s note on the cover of the second manuscript “Amsterdam. (H.d.C.), 20 Feb.” refers to a meeting of “Hendrik de Cock,” an association of students from the Christian Reformed Churches in

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8 “De lezing van dr. Bavinck,” *Bijvoegsel behorende bij Gelria*, 18 februari 1891. Bavinck put this article, published in an attachment to the “Gelria” newspaper in the first version of the manuscript, *Archief-H. Bavinck*, HDC.

Amsterdam. The association consisted of two local societies, the other of which met in Leiden. Both groups would eventually develop into the “Societas Studiosorum Reformatorum (S.S.R.)” in 1905. The association had started in 1886 and Bavinck had been an honorary member since 1888. It was on the occasion of the fifth anniversary that Bavinck partially shared his lecture on the certainty of faith.

The group in Amsterdam had started in 1889. There were twelve members who met alternately on Saturday and Sunday evenings in the home of one of the members, among whom were Herman Bavinck’s two youngest brothers, Dinus and Johan. Not only his brothers but all the students called the professor of theology by his first name “Herman.”10 The third and final place mentioned on the cover of the second lecture is Appingedam, not far from Bedum.

It is not certain why Bavinck decided to rewrite his manuscript. The suggestion that he possibly did not want to repeat exactly what he had said before in a place so close to Bedum is countered by the fact that he rewrote the lecture right after the first time and not just before he had to go to Appingedam. Perhaps the different audiences in Arnhem and Amsterdam played a role. In Bedum he was speaking in a church, while in Arnhem to a potentially broader audience and in Amsterdam to a student audience requiring a shorter lecture. Most probably Bavinck was not completely happy with the lecture in its first form anyway as the specific differences between the two manuscripts might indicate.

10 “I remember as the day of yesterday how our late prof. H. Bavinck became our honorary member. He already came to visit us when we were still very small and had about twelve members. He noticed how we all used each other’s first name, how in fact this was a principle, and he suggested that we call him Herman. This typified him in his simplicity and at that time already we viewed him as a giant.” Teun van den Hoorn, “In ’t verleden” in Harmen van der Leek et. al., Gedenkboek uitgegeven ter gelegenheid van het vijftig-jarig bestaan der Societas Studiosorum Reformatorum (Amsterdam: [s.n.], 1936), 116–118. Cf. Bavinck, Geloofszekerheid, 104 note 20.
Bavinck’s Criticism of Pietism

The two versions of the lecture have a three-fold structure, just like the later booklet. Bavinck begins by articulating a definition of the certainty of faith, then explains ways of searching for it, and finally describes the way by which it can be obtained. The biggest differences between the manuscripts and his subsequent booklet published ten years later are Bavinck’s position regarding two issues: his view of pietism and his answer to how certainty can be found.

In both the booklet and the lecture Bavinck is critical of pietism, but his tone is less radical in the booklet. For instance, in the lecture, Bavinck claims that the Reformers are no pietists “who only keep an eye on the religious life and abandon the moral life.”\textsuperscript{11} Some detailed descriptions of pietistic spirituality from the lectures are absent in the booklet.\textsuperscript{12}

Without abandoning his critical approach altogether, in the booklet Bavinck adds nuance to his position on pietism by stressing its positive side. For instance, he uses the pietist’s emphasis on their relationship with God (often to the detriment of engagement with contemporary life of which Bavinck remains critical) as a mirror for his readers, who should not banish the question of personal faith and conversion:

> While these nineteenth century Christians forgot the world for themselves, we run the danger of losing ourselves in the world. Nowadays we are out to convert the whole world, to conquer all areas of life for Christ.

\textsuperscript{11} Bavinck, \textit{Geloofszekezerheid}, 166–167. In \textit{The Certainty of Faith} he only says that “they were not pietists with only an eye and heart for the religious life” (49 [39]), without claiming that pietists abandoned the moral life.

\textsuperscript{12} In the lectures, for instance, he refutes the doctrine of the marks of grace. “Fear that one lacks grace, has now become an evidence of grace. The complaint about an unrepentant heart has become a mark of repentance.” Bavinck, \textit{Geloofszekezerheid}, 170.
But we often neglect to ask whether we ourselves are truly converted and whether we belong to Christ in life and in death. (95–96 [94])

This type of nuanced approach to pietism is absent in the lecture manuscripts that formed the source material for the booklet. In the second lecture, however, Bavinck places a remark between the lines when he writes that the pietists restrict the meaning of Christianity to the salvation of individual souls. The remark says: “There is much truth in this; nowadays superficial.” This remark was probably inserted in the process of the preparation of the booklet and expanded in the above quotation. This is likely as there were some other marginal additions in the second manuscript that refer to literature published after 1891 and just before 1901. Bavinck, in the 1901 booklet, not only criticizes the pietist approach but also adds the critical point that the truth of the pietist approach lies in the necessity of a living faith that is too often neglected.

One reason for the difference between the lecture manuscripts and the booklet may be the different historical situations of the audiences. Bedum, where Bavinck gave the first lecture, is located near Ulrum in the heartland of the Afscheiding. In 1891 the Christian Reformed Churches of the Afscheiding (1834) had not yet merged with the Reformed Churches of Abraham Kuyper’s Doleantie (1886), although both denominations were in a process of unification that was completed in 1892. Thus, the audience might have had some sympathy for the historical pietists from their region as well as been worried

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13 The neo-Calvinist ideal to conquer all areas of life for Christ, mildly criticized here by Bavinck, finds its most famous expression in the phrase of Abraham Kuyper: “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: ‘Mine!’” Abraham Kuyper, Souvereiniteit in eigen kring: rede ter inwijding van de Vrije Universiteit (Amsterdam: J. H. Kruyt, 1880), 35. For the translation, see James D. Bratt, ed., Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 488.

14 Bavinck, Geloofszekerheid, 211.

15 Bavinck, Geloofszekerheid, 114, 149.
about certain aspects of Abraham Kuyper’s neo-Calvinistic theology. This is supported by the fact that the pastor of the Afgescheiden congregation in Bedum, Thomas Bos (1846–1916), had raised objections to Kuyper’s theology at the Synod of 1896.

It is noteworthy that Bavinck turns so sharply against pietism in this context, though his attitude might be explained from his enthusiasm for Kuyper and his advocacy of the union of the churches from the Afscheiding and from the Doleantie. In other writings from that period, Bavinck is also critical of the pietistic trends in the churches from his own denomination. In his oration on catholicity, he says:

Satisfied with the ability to worship God in their own houses of worship, or to engage in evangelism, many left nation, state and society, art and science to their own devices. Many withdrew completely from life, literally separated themselves from everything, and, in some cases, what was even worse, shipped off to America, abandoning the Fatherland as lost to unbelief.16

In the first version of the lecture Bavinck does acknowledge that there is a rich treasure of spiritual psychology in the practical writers. He writes, “In knowledge of the human heart, study of all situations of the soul and discernment of experiences they surpass our superficial preaching very much.”17 But that short acknowledgment is only the introduction to a long philippic against the doctrine of the marks of saving grace that promoted uncertainty and fostered doubt. To show this Bavinck deals at length with seventeenth- and eighteenth-century pietism, concluding that in the eighteenth century the life of faith in the best and most pious people had turned into an anxious

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17 Bavinck, Geloofszekerheid, 172.
and shy withdrawal from the world. He mentions some theologians from the so-called Dutch Further Reformation, refuting especially the concept of the “marks of regeneration” from which the sincerity of one’s faith could be derived. This concept led to an insecure and shaky life of faith.

He is also very negative about so-called “Experiential Theology” of some of the eighteenth-century pietists like Johannes Eswijler (1633–1719), Johannes Verschuir (1680–1737), and Wilhelmus Schortinghuis (1700–1750). In the circle of the Christian Reformed Churches of the Afscheiding these old writers enjoyed a considerable popularity, especially in the province of Groningen where Verschuir and Schortinghuis had been pastors.

Most remarkable in this lecture manuscript is how he addresses the audience in the present tense, as if the pietists are sitting right in front of him. This is partly the result of the genre of the lecture, but it also seems to imply that Bavinck was dealing not only with historical pietism, but with contemporary trends as well. He sometimes even quotes the pietists as saying things like: “Oh, knowledge is not enough. Everything must be experienced and lived through.”\(^{18}\) He also uses derogative terms like *fijnen* (precisians) and *wereldschuw* (world shy).\(^{19}\)

In the second version of the lecture, Bavinck is less detailed about pietism and does not mention names. Perhaps he was not happy with the sharp tone and the specific examples of the first lecture. But, the change may also have been caused by the fact that the audiences in Arnhem and at the anniversary celebration of the students in Amsterdam were different than in Bedum. In any case, the critical tone of the lectures is further nuanced in the booklet.

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The Appeal to the Conscience

While Bavinck’s treatment of pietism is slightly different in the first and second manuscripts, the biggest structural and content difference between the two lies in the different answers Herman Bavinck gives to the way in which the certainty of faith can be obtained. It is likely that Bavinck rewrote that section of the lecture because he was unsatisfied with his articulation of it in the first version.

The paragraphs in both manuscripts are numbered. Though both manuscripts are of about the same length, the first version consists of 30 paragraphs and the second of 21 paragraphs. The question of how certainty can be obtained is answered in both versions after a short break. In the first version paragraphs 22 to 30 (about 4,850 words) deal with the topic, and in the second version paragraphs 17 to 21 (about 4,200 words) address the topic.

In the first version, Bavinck states that the certainty that is sought must be infallible. The object of faith is truth, and this must be something divine. Faith can only rest on a promise, on revelation. All religions, however, appeal to true or feigned revelation. In religion divine authority is the most important thing even though the appeal to this authority has been awfully misused.

The real question is thus where true divine revelation can be found. For Bavinck, this question cannot be answered in the abstract excluding the presuppositions of Christianity. There simply are no people who are a tabula rasa or neutral. But everyone has a conscience: “The only particular religion that can be the true one (for you and me), is the one that leaves me guilty in my conscience before God.” Bavinck elaborates on this by the practical remark that

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20 In the first version it is announced that Psalm 42, verses 1 and 5, from the Dutch metrical Psalms (1773) would be sung during the break. Bavinck, Geloofszekerheid, 186, 187.

21 Bavinck, Geloofszekerheid, 192, cf. 195 for the similar thought in the second version.
preaching is authoritative because everyone deep in his heart agrees with the gospel. Importantly, for Bavinck, the conscience is an ally of the gospel.

Thus, the gospel meets the requirements that are set for divine revelation. Scripture and the church are only instruments, not final objects, of faith. The true object is Christ in the promise of the gospel. Referring to Galatians 1:11, Bavinck states that the gospel “is not of human origin” and does not meet human expectations, but in the end everyone has to agree with Christ: “There is a power in him, a voice of God, a voice of the Spirit which now and then, at solemn moments, in loneliness, on the sick bed, suppresses a person’s own voice and bears witness for the gospel and against the self.”

Therefore, the gospel has to be universal. It does not demand anything or require anything. The gospel is not a law; it is the opposite of every law. There is no condition: the gospel is a matter of pure grace. The Christian tradition has too often not dared to proclaim this unconditional gospel. It reversed the order of faith and works or faith and experience. Nonetheless, the gospel asks only for trust, faith, nothing else. True religion rests on revelation, and trust is its only requirement: “The atonement has taken place in Christ. Forgiveness has been accomplished by him. Therefore, there is nothing left for us, except embracing that by faith and resting on it for time and eternity.” Because faith grasps the grace of God immediately, certainty flows from faith spontaneously. In the believer there can be all kinds of doubt and temptation, but if this spiritual struggle is healthy it does not foster itself, whereas unhealthy introspection looks like an imagined disease with which one is pleased.

In the final three paragraphs, 28–30, Bavinck explains that faith always produces fruits of thankfulness and the faith that focuses on

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God’s grace in Christ is accompanied by a renewal of the whole person. Regeneration is a mystery that one can never fully understand because our deepest convictions lie behind our intellect and will and are one with our existence. Even according to the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) and Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860), a kind of regeneration is necessary. In his manuscript Bavinck does not give references to his sources, but in his Reformed Dogmatics he elaborates on the thoughts of both philosophers with regard to “a kind or rebirth.”

The sincerity of faith is demonstrated by its fruits. In hindsight, works and experiences prove the truth of the gospel in our consciousness and its influence on our will and feeling. Over against the pietistic reversal that understands certainty as the goal, Christians should not strive after certainty but live out of a sure faith. Adopted by God through his word, they are also heirs of the world. Grace does not destroy but restores nature. Faith is the victory that overcomes the world.

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The Necessity of Regeneration

In the second version of the lecture, Bavinck significantly augments his conclusion by stressing the notion of regeneration, which was mentioned only loosely at the end of the first version. According to Bavinck, the object of faith must be absolutely trustworthy, infallible, divine truth. Faith can rest only on revelation. All religions appeal to revelation and claim to originate in it. In the second version of the lecture he unpacks more precisely the link between faith, regeneration, and divine revelation.

How can divine authority be found? This question cannot be answered in an abstract way. Bavinck adds in the margin that the problem at present is especially that Christianity is history and therefore open to historical criticism. The evidences for Christianity are sufficient to leave everyone without excuse, but with a reference to Blaise Pascal, Bavinck states that there is enough reason in the evidences both to believe and to doubt. Bavinck continues by arguing that no one is neutral. He writes that God “brings everyone forth in a certain circle and environment, in which they are formed and molded in various ways.” These sentences are deleted in the manuscript by lining them through with a pen.

It is not clear when the text was edited in this way, but the deleted lines probably were part of the original lecture. They do not appear in The Certainty of Faith even though many of the remarks in the margin did end up in the text of the booklet, and, as we have seen,

26 This probably refers to Pascal’s statement that “there is enough light for those who only desire to see and enough darkness for those of a contrary disposition. There is enough clarity to illumine the elect and enough darkness to humble them. There is enough darkness to render the reprobate sightless and enough clarity to condemn them and to render them inexcusable.” Blaise Pascal, Oeuvres (Paris: Hachette, 1869), 1:345. See also Bavinck, GD, 1:560, Bavinck, RD, 1:590.

27 Bavinck, Geloofszekerheid, 193.
were probably added in the process of editing the booklet. In the second version of the lecture Bavinck continues by arguing:

The truth of a religion cannot be argued to anyone by reasoning and proof. The way in which we are assured of the divine authority of the religion, can only be the ethical one, the way of conversion and regeneration. Who is not born again from water and Spirit, does not see the kingdom of heaven. Only the pure of heart will see God. In Kant and Schopenhauer, philosophy even arose to testify to this word of Holy Scripture and to argue (express) the necessity of a kind of rebirth. Our deepest beliefs lie behind our minds and our will. The mind and deeds follow the essence. In order to think and to act as we should, we first again have to be the ones we should be.  

As in the first version, Bavinck makes an ethical appeal, but, unlike the first version, Bavinck moves the reference to Kant and Schopenhauer to the fore and elaborates on the necessity of regeneration as a condition for accepting the moral appeal of the gospel. Change, a renewal, a rebirth of our self is primary. This, according to Bavinck, is why Jesus preached that one must repent and believe the gospel. This gospel is absolutely universal; the only thing the gospel presupposes is that human beings are sinners and thus the only thing it requires is a confession of their guilt and misery. In the margin Bavinck notes: “Therefore the gospel immediately demands an ethical choice: Pharisee righteous, publican sinner.” The cryptic description seems to imply that the gospel places us before a choice between maintaining our self-righteousness as the Pharisee in Jesus’ parable or accepting our sinfulness.

The only presupposition of the gospel is one that is universally human. “The most human thing in human beings is their awareness

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28 Bavinck, Geloofszekerheid, 193. For similar thoughts in the first draft, see 206.

29 Bavinck, Geloofszekerheid, 195.
of guilt, their misery, and their need for reconciliation.” 30 To those who acknowledge this most human thing, the gospel testifies of its truth. For Bavinck, the only religion that is true is the one that leaves me guilty in my conscience before God and “to which I already consent in the most hidden parts of my heart, even against the reasonings of my mind.” 31 A remarkable detail here is that Bavinck deletes the more subjective phrase that the gospel is true “(for you and me)” but adds: “I don’t believe there is anyone in Christian society, to whom this gospel doesn’t appeal in his conscience, in whom it doesn’t find a resonance in the depth of the soul, who in rejecting it doesn’t feel guilty in his conscience before God.” 32 It is here that Bavinck refers to Galatians 1:11 and notes that although the gospel does not have a human origin, nonetheless, every human being in the end admits that Jesus is right. There is a “voice of God, a voice of the Holy Spirit, that now and then in grave moments . . . suppresses the voice of my sinful heart.” 33 God binds us in our consciences, and the preacher of the gospel has an ally against sin and falsehood in the conscience of everyone.

But it is not enough to be assured of the truth of God’s promise. Faith must also be assured of itself. Only then will the soul find rest and share in the liberty of the children of God. It is a characteristic of knowledge that it is not only certain of its object but also of itself. This is the same with faith; true faith takes its own certainty along. When the object of faith places itself before the eyes of our soul, it also places faith itself in the clearest and most unquestionable light. This certainty is indeed always a certainty of faith, yet that does not make it less but even more indubitable, because it does not rest on a

30 Bavinck, Geloofszekekerheid, 195.
31 Bavinck, Geloofszekekerheid, 195.
32 Bavinck, Geloofszekekerheid, 197.
33 Bavinck, Geloofszekekerheid, 197.
human argument but on a divine word. The Christian Church has too often not dared to proclaim the rich and free gospel and has required works and experiences as conditions.

The two final paragraphs of the second lecture manuscript run mostly parallel to the last three paragraphs of the first version except that the remark about Kant and Schopenhauer has been moved to the earlier part of the argument and that the text is somewhat shorter. In sum, Bavinck concludes both lectures by affirming that faith always produces fruit and results in the renewal of the whole person. This fruit shows the sincerity of faith in hindsight. Certainty is not a goal as with the pietists but the starting point of a life of faith as a child of God. Grace does not destroy nature but restores it.

In both versions of the lecture, Bavinck seeks to answer the question of how certainty of faith can be obtained in reference to the human conscience to which the moral appeal of the gospel is directed. In both versions he acknowledges the necessity of regeneration, but, probably unhappy with the emphasis in the first version, he brings this element to the fore in the second version. He wants to avoid the impression that the human conscience of itself will respond to the moral appeal of the gospel without the renewal of the heart. He writes: “Therefore what is necessary is a change, a renewal, a rebirth of our self, of our being, of the center of our essence, in order to understand the truth with our mind and to exert it with our will.”34 In the first version, Bavinck does not even use the word “regeneration,” except in the context of the fruits of faith with a reference to Kant and Schopenhauer, where he explains that faith in the gospel is so contrary to our former convictions and such a deep and strong new conviction “that it can be only planted and maintained in our consciousness by the Holy Spirit.”35

34 Bavinck, Geloofszekerheid, 195.
35 Bavinck, Geloofszekerheid, 206.
Apparently, Bavinck felt uneasy with the lack of emphasis on the work of the Spirit in regeneration in the first version in which he stuck closer to the question of how the certainty of faith could be obtained by the moral appeal of the gospel resounding in the human conscience. It would be wrong to interpret this new emphasis as a criticism of the position of “ethical theology” because some belonging to this school, like Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye (1818–74) and Johannes Hermanus Gunning Jr. (1829–1905), also stressed regeneration. Though this issue is too complicated to elaborate on here, when Bavinck depicts this theological movement he says “that the truth of Christianity as to its religious-moral nature could not be demonstrated scientifically but recognized only along lines of regeneration and conversion through heart and conscience.”36 It is this position that Bavinck rejects because of its subjectivist leanings and at the same time sometimes approaches even as he refuses to derive the content of the Christian faith from experience and defines regeneration in a more supernatural way.

Both versions of the lecture taken together shed light on Bavinck’s view of the foundation of the certainty of faith and of his understanding of regeneration. Faith and regeneration are inseparable. The gospel perfectly fits the human need for salvation and certainty of salvation. The gospel morally appeals to the conscience with a divine authority, necessary for true certainty. The sinful human rejection of the gospel, however, can only be overcome by the renewal of the

36 Herman Bavinck, Mental, Religious and Social Forces in the Netherlands: A General View of the Netherlands (The Hague: Commercial Department of the Netherlands Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce, 1915). Cf. his much earlier summary of “the ethical way, which means that man knows and understands the truth not by reason and intellect, but by his soul, his heart, his conscience, in his capacity as a true man, a moral being. To express the same in scriptural language: He alone that is born again of water and of the Spirit, can see the kingdom of heaven.” Herman Bavinck, “Recent Dogmatic Thought in the Netherlands,” The Presbyterian and Reformed Review 3 (1892): 209–228.
whole heart. Even philosophers admit that we need a kind of regeneration, the hidden work of the Holy Spirit.

Later Developments

Comparing Bavinck’s position in the second lecture manuscript closely with the published version ten years later reveals more development concerning his position on how certainty can be obtained. *The Certainty of Faith* also starts the answer to the question of how the certainty of faith can be obtained with a reference to divine revelation. “The human soul can find complete rest only in God; it is fully satisfied only by an infallible authority... If this is so, it raises a more important and more difficult question: Where and how can that divine authority be found which properly demands our recognition and obedience?” (62 [53]).

Before giving his own answer, however, Bavinck inserts a lengthy discussion of two ways in which the question cannot be answered. This is new material compared to the lectures. The two alternative methods start either with evidence or with experience. The additional material is already indicated in the margins of the second lecture manuscript, where he writes in telegram style: “How then certainty? History and dogma. Proof or experience?”37 It is likely that he added these remarks when he was preparing to publish *The Certainty of Faith*.

In *The Certainty of Faith*, Bavinck discusses both methods critically. He ultimately rejects both an objective demonstration and a subjective retreat into religious feeling. Although Bavinck does not think that it is wrong for Christians to show what can be said in support of faith, he claims that all proofs are insufficient and have only a limited value. Yet, starting from experience cannot lead to certainty either. God’s revelation has a religious-ethical content, and the

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Christian faith evokes many emotions in the heart. However, all these experiences presuppose faith. Thus they cannot be its ground. We cannot draw a conclusion from religious feeling to truth. We need an objective standard, otherwise everyone could say with Nicolas Ludwig Von Zinzendorf (1700–1760): “It is so to me, my heart tells me so” (78 [72]).

In other words, Bavinck is now much more critical of the ethical approach than he was in 1891. He now carefully objects to both objective apologetics and a subjective appeal to religious feeling, before carefully stating his own position. However, this leaves the reader of The Certainty of Faith with some ambiguity about Bavinck’s precise answer about how to obtain certainty: There is a tension in the text between the rejection of the approach that starts with the moral appeal of the gospel and its effect on the conscience, as found in “ethical theology,” and Bavinck’s own view that emphasizes a similar approach. For Bavinck, the gospel does make a moral appeal to the conscience, but its content is not derived from religious feeling. In sum, in The Certainty of Faith Bavinck acknowledges the truth of the approach of “ethical theology,” but he also emphasizes the independent objective content of the gospel.

While the matter is left somewhat unclear in The Certainty of Faith, Bavinck’s rejection of the two approaches is spelled out more clearly in his Reformed Dogmatics, which was published in the years between the lectures and his book on the certainty of faith. In the last part of his first volume Prolegomena, published in 1895, Bavinck

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searches for the final and deepest ground of faith and he acknowledges that questions of theological epistemology are more difficult than the questions of philosophical epistemology. “The question ‘How and why do I know?’ is so difficult that all our philosophical powers have not yet succeeded in answering it. Even more difficult, however, is the question ‘How and why do I believe?’”

Bavinck responds to this question by discussing three methods used to explain the foundation of the Christian faith. The first is the historical-apologetic method, of the theological school of Utrecht, in which Jacobus Isaac Doedes (1817–1897) and Jan Jacob van Oosterzee (1817–1882) defended biblical revelation against the attacks of naturalism and modernism. Although apologetics have a place in Christian theology to demonstrate the plausibility of the revelation, according to Bavinck, human reason can never be the ground of faith. Apologetics do not precede faith but presuppose it. Second, he discusses the speculative method in the school of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), who derived the dogmas of Christian faith such as the Trinity and the incarnation from philosophy. The theology of Bavinck’s former Leiden teacher Jan Hendrik Scholten (1811–1885) was an example of this speculative method. Bavinck’s main objection is that objective reality always comes before the subjective knowledge of reality. Third, he discusses the moral-psychological method. It resembles the second method with a subjective starting point, although the emphasis is more on the conscience,


40 Bavinck, *GD*, 1:496. Cf. Bavinck, *RD*, 1:528. In the first edition of *Reformed Dogmatics* Bavinck discusses the religious-empirical method of Lutheran theologians such as Franz Hermann Reinhold Frank (1827–1894) as part of the speculative method, but in the later editions he deals with it separately as the “religious-empirical method” that derives the whole system of faith from regeneration. Bavinck values the starting point within the Christian faith positively, but objects against its subjectivism with regard to the content of the Christian faith. Still his own position comes close to that of Frank. Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* (Kampen: Bos, 1895), 1:439–44.
based on Immanuel Kant’s three postulates of morality: liberty, the immortality of the soul, and God.

This summary shows why Bavinck, when he writes *The Certainty of Faith*, is critical of his own previous answers given in the lectures. He wants to avoid the possible subjectivist implications of an appeal to the conscience and to regeneration for the content of faith. Nevertheless, Bavinck does not change the main line of his argument after adding this extensive disclaimer. The gospel is preached, it appeals to the heart in a moral way and addresses itself to the whole person. It assumes nothing in us other than sin and promises salvation in the way of faith and repentance. The gospel thus corresponds to the perfect idea of religion: our highest good lies in communion with God. All believers ascribe their faith and salvation to God alone although its origins remain mysterious. Faith is an act of the highest spiritual power and therefore God’s work and gift par excellence. From the center of trust in Christ, the believer is “bound to the whole truth, to the full, rich witness of the apostles and the prophets, to the entire Holy Scriptures as the Word of God” (86 [81]).

This mature answer resembles the way in which Bavinck discusses theological epistemology in his *Reformed Dogmatics*. There Bavinck admits that he prefers the approach from religious experience more than the one from intellectual apologetics.\(^ {41}\) Bavinck’s own answer is an extensive discussion of faith as the *principium internum* of theology. Faith has a certainty of its own kind; it is different from the scientific certainty that rests on observation, argumentation, and self-evidence. The certainty of faith is stronger than the certainty of knowledge; martyrs are willing to die for their faith, not for a scientific thesis.\(^ {42}\) Faith, however, cannot be its own final ground; it does not prove the truth of that what is believed. “There is


a great difference between subjective certainty and objective truth. In the case of faith everything depends on the grounds on which it rests.” 43 Although Christian theology necessarily takes its starting point in the human subject, the accusation of subjectivity is unwarranted, because an internal principle which corresponds to the external reality is necessary for any kind of knowledge. “All of theology has become ethical in the sense that it takes seriously the thesis that only the regenerate ‘see the kingdom of God.’” 44

It would go beyond the scope of this article to discuss the differences between the first and the second edition of The Certainty of Faith (1903), which were influenced by a friendly but critical review by Benjamin B. Warfield (1851-1921) who was surprised that Bavinck made so little of apologetics. 45 In addition to his responses to Warfield, Bavinck also adds some paragraphs because he had received questions regarding the relationship between faith and assurance. 46

The revision of the booklet thus leaves us with four different texts on the certainty of faith: two slightly different manuscripts of the lecture (1891) and two editions of the booklet (1901 and 1903). With regards to the core of his argument on the foundation of Christian certainty, Bavinck adds two elements to the final part of his booklet.

46 See Bavinck, Geloofszekerheid, 88–90, Bavinck, The Certainty of Faith, 85–86. In 1902 Bavinck wrote an article on this issue which he summarized in this addition. Herman Bavinck, “Geloofszekerheid,” De Bazuin 50/6 (7 december 1902); see also Bavinck, Geloofszekerheid, 257–64.
To the fact that the gospel is proclaimed, he adds the witness of the confession of the universal church—notwithstanding all diversity—“as the pillar and bulwark of the truth, maintains the mystery of godliness: God is revealed in the flesh.”47 Secondly, after stressing that the Christian religion teaches that our highest good lies in fellowship with God and that faith is a personal matter, Bavinck emphasizes the necessity of regeneration, without using the term:

Another power is necessary to move man to faith than the moral influence proceeding from the gospel. In order to believe, freely, willingly and with one’s whole mind, one needs a new heart and a changed will . . . Just as knowledge only occurs when the known object and the knowing subject agree, so true knowledge of God is possible only through faith, which God himself quickens in our hearts.48

Thus, in a certain sense, he makes a move similar to the one from the first to the second version of his lecture in 1891. To avoid the misunderstanding that the moral appeal of the gospel to the heart of the sinner in itself causes faith, Bavinck emphasizes regeneration as the explanation of the inexplicable origin of faith.


Concluding Remarks

The published manuscripts of the 1891 lectures reveal that the early Bavinck was rather critical of pietism. Furthermore, they need to be understood in the context of the unification of the churches of the Afscheiding with those of the Doleantie, a unification that Bavinck advocated. In his criticisms of pietism, he was, in fact, objecting to certain trends in his own Afgescheiden circle. Although he remained critical of some tendencies in pietism throughout his life, his criticism became milder and he sometimes used pietism as a mirror to correct the over-enthusiastic and optimistic attitude of neo-Calvinism to conquer the whole world for Christ.

The issue of the certainty of faith, in relation to the role of apologetics and the questions of theological and philosophical epistemology, remained a point of interest for Bavinck to the end of his life.49 The manuscripts of the 1891 lectures also show how Bavinck struggled with this issue at an early stage of his development as a theologian.

In both versions of the lecture, Bavinck’s approach is quite similar to that of the so-called “ethical theology” that—notwithstanding some diversity—chose its logical starting point in the moral appeal of the gospel to the conscience. The truth is ethical. In Bavinck’s view this appeal is inextricably linked to the liberating message of the gospel for sinners. Jesus’ message is: repent and believe the gospel. The

49 This interest, for instance, appears in the manuscript with notes on the authority of Scripture; George Harinck, Cornelis van der Kooi, and Jasper Vree, eds., “Als Bavinck maar eens kleur bekende,” aantekeningen van H. Bavinck over de zaak-Netelenbos, het Schriftgezag en de situatie van de Gereformeerde Kerken (november 1919) (Amsterdam: VU, 1994). Also, Bavinck’s Stone lectures at Princeton can be seen as a further development of his thoughts on apologetics and a contribution to the discussion with Benjamin B. Warfield. See Henk van den Belt, “An Alternative Approach to Apologetics,” in The Kuyper Center Review, Vol.2: Revelation and Common Grace, ed. John Bowlin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 43–60.
gospel is universal, a good tiding for every human being, though it assumes that human beings are sinners and begs for the acknowledgment of sin. The gospel faces all who hear it with the ethical or moral choice to respond either as the Pharisee or as the publican. Certainty of faith results when the sinner admits to being a sinner and believes in God's forgiving grace on account of the promise of the gospel. That faith brings its own assurance along with it and faith also bears fruit in a Christian life that appears to be the true and full human life.

A comparison between both versions of the lecture manuscripts and the booklet *The Certainty of Faith* reveals that his ongoing systematic theological reflection in lecturing dogmatics in Kampen and writing the *Reformed Dogmatics* made Bavinck more aware of the subjective tendencies of his previous position. In hindsight, he found that position too close to the approaches from religious experience, which he criticized in the *Reformed Dogmatics* as the “religious-empirical” and “ethical-psychological” methods. Without abandoning this approach altogether, Bavinck stressed that the truth of the Christian faith could never depend on the appeal of the gospel to the human conscience, not even on the conscience of regenerate Christians. The logical priority of the divine revelation in Jesus Christ and in Scripture remained the antidote against a latent subjective leaning in the foundations of Bavinck’s theology.
On Certainty in Faith and Science: The Bavinck-Warfield Exchange

Gijsbert van den Brink

Professor Henk van den Belt has done a great favor to Dutch Bavinck enthusiasts by making available, for the first time, both the first (1901) and second (1903) editions of Herman Bavinck’s *De zekerheid des geloofs* (*The Certainty of Faith*) in one volume, in such a way that the reader can easily spot the differences between both editions.¹ In addition, van den Belt included two preparatory lectures of Bavinck on the same topic, as well as two reactions to the first edition of *De zekerheid des geloofs* that Bavinck took very seriously.² Van den Belt completed the volume by contextualizing and evaluating these edited Bavinck writings in his own forty-page essay.³ With all these features, Bavinck’s famous booklet can now be used not only for personal spiritual edification (as it always could) but also for theological and genealogical analysis.⁴

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¹ Herman Bavinck and Henk van den Belt, ed., *Geloofszeke rheid. Teksten ingeleid en geannoteerd door Henk van den Belt* (*The Certainty of Faith, introduced and annotated by Henk van den Belt*), ed. Henk van den Belt (Soesterberg: Aspekt, 2016), 13–98.
⁴ Bavinck’s *De zekerheid des geloofs* was translated into English as Herman Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, trans. Harrie der Nederlanden (St. Catharines, Ont.: Paideia Press, 1980). As far as I can see, this is a translation of the third edition of the Dutch volume, which closely resembles the second one. See also van den
One of the two responses to the first edition of *Zekerheid des geloofs* included in van den Belt’s volume is a review by Bavinck’s Princetonian colleague, Reformed professor of dogmatics Benjamin B. Warfield. Although we don’t know how Warfield learned to read and understand Dutch, he did so with remarkable proficiency and precision. In translating Warfield’s review and including it in this book, Van den Belt, as far as I know, is the first person to make available a publication of Warfield in the Dutch language. In this paper, I will first examine the nature of Warfield’s response, focusing in particular on the objections he raises to Bavinck’s view of the certainty of the Christian’s faith. Next, I will analyze the changes Bavinck incorporated in the second edition of his book that seem to have been prompted by Warfield’s criticism. Finally, I will evaluate the exchange between Bavinck and Warfield from a wider perspective: To what extent is there an abiding difference between both theologians on this issue, and how should this difference be interpreted?

**Warfield’s Review**

Warfield’s extensive review of Bavinck’s *Zekerheid des geloofs* is couched in a polite and friendly style. Warfield writes of a “delightful booklet” in which Bavinck offers “a popular discussion of the whole matter of certitude with reference to Christianity.” He then outlines Belt’s contribution “Herman Bavinck’s Lectures on the Certainty of Faith (1891)” to this current volume of *The Bavinck Review*.

5 This is demonstrated in that he not only reviewed books by Bavinck and other Dutch theologians but also translated and summarized some portions of *The Certainty of Faith* for the readers of this particular review. In personal communication, neither James D. Bratt nor George Harinck (two of our greatest specialists in Dutch-American neo-Calvinist ties) could tell how and when exactly Warfield had learned Dutch; presumably, he was an autodidact.

the thrust of Bavinck’s argument, praising Bavinck’s survey of the history of thought on the certainty of faith in the church as “illuminating,” and seconding his criticism of pietistic and evangelistic streams in Christianity for their undervaluing the earthly sphere (e.g., art and science, literature and politics, the economy—in one word, culture). Warfield fully shares the “wide-minded conception of the mission of Christianity in the world” that radiates from Bavinck’s exposition. He adds to that, however—and here is a first instance of mild criticism—that this conception can be adequately grounded only in an organic view of redemption. By “organic” Warfield means something like “encompassing” or “all-embracing” here: “For it is only as we realize that God is saving the world and not merely one individual here and there out of the world, that the profound significance of the earthly life to the Christian can be properly apprehended” (140). By missing this point, the uninformed reader “may fail to catch the ground” of the earthly life’s profound significance to the Christian. So here is a first point of difference between Warfield and Bavinck, even though it may be due only to Bavinck’s oversight. At any rate, we will call this “Criticism #1.”

Warfield then sketches how Bavinck, in determining how certainty of faith is attained, navigates his way through the most popular answers to this question—namely, the apologetic one and the experiential one. According to Bavinck, we can reach certitude neither by a process of reasoning and demonstrating the truth of the Christian faith, for in that case our certainty will never be absolute, nor by falling back on our individual experiences, for heartfelt experiences are

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7 Warfield, “Review,” 140.

8 Warfield, “Review,” 140; Warfield contrasts this organic view with the “individualistic and atomistic” perspective of “the Pietist, Moravian, and Methodist.” Warfield, “Review,” 140.
wrought by the teachings of every religion. Instead, certainty is the fruit of faith itself—faith being the personal act by means of which the believer’s whole being is directed “in loving trust” to the object presented to it. Thus, “certainty flows to us immediately and directly out of faith itself” (142). The best way for people to receive certainty and to grow in strength of faith is therefore to focus the eyes of their heart not on their faith, as such, but on its object, the promises of God as conveyed in the gospel: “It is this object that works through faith on our nature and produces certainty” (142). In this way Warfield provides a sharp summary of Bavinck’s main point and then states that he agrees with it.

Yet Warfield has a problem with Bavinck’s exposition. In pointing out the nature of this problem, Warfield politely suggests the possibility that the problem may reflect his own limited capacity for comprehension. From the way in which he develops his point, however, it is clear that Warfield attributes the source of his confusion to Bavinck. In contrast to Bavinck, Warfield argues that we should distinguish between “certainty of the truth of the Christian religion,” on the one hand, and “assurance of faith” as one’s own participation in the benefits of Christ’s salvific work, on the other hand. Bavinck conflates these two, suggesting that in both cases certitude is attained by and large in the same way and even through the same act of faith. In Warfield’s wording of Bavinck’s view: “It is only by the direct act of faith, laying hold of Christ as redeemer” that we acquire both certainty about the truth of Christianity and assurance of our personal salvation. In response, Warfield first makes a purely conceptual point: “It will conduce to clearness if we endeavor to keep separate the two” (142). Let us call this conceptual point “Criticism #2.” It turns out, however, that there is a material issue lurking behind this formal distinction. To be sure, Warfield feels no need to contradict

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Bavinck directly on this issue. Bavinck’s position, though, “seems to involve certain assumptions that stand in some need of explication”—which is, of course, a wonderfully charming way to express one’s reservations.

Warfield then focuses in particular on one of these assumptions, devoting only a few words at the end of his review to a second one: Bavinck’s assumption “of the invariable or normal implication of ‘assurance of salvation’ in the direct act of faith,” which seemed to leave no room for the possibility of a person being a sincere believer but lacking certainty about the salvific character of his or her faith. Since this criticism comes at the end of Bavinck’s review, let us call it “Criticism # 5.” But Bavinck’s main assumption, which “stand[s] in some need of explication” (i.e., which Warfield presumably considered to be wrong), concerns something else—namely, the relationship between belief in the truth of the Christian gospel, on the one hand, and belief in one’s personal salvation, on the other hand. First, Bavinck seems to “reverse the natural order” here by stipulating that “saving faith underlies and is the prerequisite of certitude of the truth of the Christian religion” (142). How did Warfield come to ascribe this position to Bavinck? Here is the critical passage that Warfield quotes in support and that indeed confirms his conclusion:

> When we from the heart believe the promises of God revealed in the gospel, say, for example, the forgiveness of sins, we believe at the same time that we are ourselves personally by grace sharers in the blessing of forgiveness; the former is impossible without the latter. Certitude as to

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10 Warfield, “Review,” 148. In response, Warfield points to the classical distinction between the *actus directus* and the *actus reflectus* of faith, suggesting that salvation may in some sense be connected to the former but certitude to the latter. Interestingly, as van den Belt shows (*Geloofszekerheid*, 228), in the Dutch context the same criticism was prompted by the first edition of Bavinck’s booklet and led Bavinck to incorporate some further changes (apart from those elicited by Warfield’s main point) in the second edition. In what follows, I will pass over this second issue and concentrate on the first one, which Warfield discusses much more extensively.
the truth of the gospel is never to be attained except along the path of personal, saving faith.11

In contrast to this view, Warfield suggests that our conviction of the truth of the Christian religion *logically precedes* our self-commitment to Christ as redeemer. And though there may be “a point in which the two do coalesce” (142), the reasons or grounds we have for the first conviction do not necessarily coincide with those we have for the second one, that is, the belief that we are personally “in Christ.” Let us call this Warfield’s “Criticism # 3.”

Following this, Warfield tightly connects certitude about the truth of the Christian religion to the availability of *evidences* for this truth. Here, another critique of Bavinck emerges— “Criticism # 4”: Warfield is much more positive than Bavinck about the role and significance of apologetics as the discipline that provides and analyzes such evidences. Indeed, “it is . . . characteristic of the school of thought of which Dr. Bavinck is a shining ornament to estimate the value of Apologetics somewhat lightly” (143). According to Bavinck, we cannot reach certitude of faith by appealing to rational proofs or historical evidences, “proving first of all on rational grounds that God exists . . . and then that the apostles are trustworthy witnesses of the truth . . . that Jesus really lived and worked and taught as He is represented to have done; and the like” (141). Here Warfield disagrees, having a much higher opinion of the role and significance of the “evidences.”12 This is not to say that in Warfield’s view “entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven can be had only through the lofty gateway of Science” (143). A person definitely need not be a learned apologist in order to become a Christian; for clearly, there are other evidences

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11 Warfield, “Review,” 141. These words are presumably Warfield’s translation of a passage that occurs only in the first edition of *Certainty of Faith*. See van den Belt, ed., *Geloofszekerheid*, 90.
12 Indeed, Warfield clearly prefers the word “evidence(s)” to “proof(s).”
than philosophical and historical ones—evidences we may not be capable of analyzing but that can still ground our faith. Warfield uses some examples from common sense and universal human experience to illustrate his point: there is no need for us to study astronomy in order to know for sure, and on reasonable grounds, that the sun exists. Nor do we need to be able to analyze the grounds for concluding that a certain handwriting sample belongs to our good friend in order to believe so for good reasons. Similarly, “we believe in Christ because it is rational to believe in Him, not though it be irrational” (143). If asked, we can give grounds for our believing in Christ. More in general, Warfield holds that every act of faith we can think of is grounded in evidence (142).

Warfield acknowledges that Bavinck does not discard the role of evidences and apologetics altogether. Still, in his eyes Bavinck unduly downplays their significance. The evidences are definitely important to Bavinck “to stop the mouth of opponents and to repel their assaults” (143). The believer does not need them, however, since it is not through the evidences that he comes to faith. Something else is needed here: the work of the Holy Spirit. In brief, apologetics “is the fruit, not the root of faith,” and the evidences or proofs are insufficient “to place the truth of Christianity beyond doubt” (143). Warfield readily agrees that the evidences cannot produce faith, but in his view Bavinck is proposing a false dilemma here: that the evidences cannot produce faith is hardly remarkable, since even the proclamation of the gospel cannot do so. The point is that the Holy Spirit makes use of both means to convince those whose hearts are prepared for the truth of the gospel. Thus, the Spirit does not work in the heart of believers a blind or unreasonable faith, nor new grounds not known before; rather, the Spirit works “a new power in the heart to respond to the grounds of faith, sufficient in themselves, already present to the mind” (143). In line with Reformed scholastic theologians, Warfield distinguishes between the reason, or argument, because of which I
believe (argumentum propter quod credo) and the principle, or efficient cause, through which I am induced to believe (principium seu causa efficiens a qua ad credendum adducor). He even suggests that we can have the former without the latter, in which case we possess a so-called “historical faith,” which is not (or not yet) complemented by a personal act of salvific faith as worked by the Spirit. Even in that case, this historical faith is not entirely useless. As Bavinck himself had acknowledged, it bears important fruits in the realm of common grace.

Thus, Warfield distinguishes between certainty about the objective truth of the gospel that is based on evidences, and certainty of one’s personal faith and participation in Christ, which, while based on the same grounds, can be worked only by the Holy Spirit. Since the fall into sin, humans still naturally and intuitively believe in God—like even the devils do (James 2:19)—and we know that we are dependent on Him; but we can no longer have faith in God in the deeper sense of trusting Him. In other words, whereas we continue to believe in God in the intellectual sense, we can no longer exercise faith in God in the fiducial sense (144). Both the intellectual and fiducial forms of belief, however, rest on proper grounds. And here Warfield once again utters his astonishment that not only Bavinck but also Kuyper made so little of apologetics as the discipline in which these grounds are put forward and elucidated: “It is a standing matter of surprise to us that the school which Bavinck so brilliantly represents, should be tempted to make so little of Apologetics” (144). For clearly, apologetics can contribute to “the Christianizing of the world” (146). The part that it has to play is not subsidiary and just

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defensive, but primary and conquering. For the individual “does re-
quire that sort and amount of evidence which is requisite to convince
him before he can really be convinced” (146). And this sort and
amount of evidence is provided by the discipline of apologetics.

After a somewhat longer digression into Kuyper’s work (see
“Evaluation” below), Warfield finally returns to Bavinck in order to
again express his gratitude for Bavinck’s booklet. He does not want
to give the impression of “arraying ourselves polemically against his
teaching” (148). It is just the “inherent interest and comparative nov-
elty of the subject” that brought him to such extended remarks (148).
More in general, Bavinck has given us the most valuable treatise on
dogmatics written during the last quarter of a century—a thoroughly
wrought-out treatise which we never consult without the keenest and
abundant profit. And the lectures and brochures he from time to time
presents an eager public are worthy of the best traditions of Re-
formed thought and Reformed eloquence. Not least among them we
esteem this excellent booklet on “the certitude of faith” (148).

**Bavinck’s Response**

How did Bavinck respond to Warfield’s criticisms? Warfield himself
had surmised at the end of his review that Bavinck might “give a
hearty assent to all—or most—of what we have urged.”14 The only
way to find out whether this is true is to compare the first and second
editions of *The Certainty of Faith*. In a short new preface dated No-
vember 1903, Bavinck points out that in the second edition various
thoughts have been elaborated and explained more clearly in order
to answer the questions and comments of some readers. “In particu-
lar has been taken notice of the friendly and instructive assessment

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14 Warfield, “Review,” 148. As far as I can see, Warfield is sincere here and not
patronizing (as if Bavinck just hadn’t thought through the issues far enough and
would readily agree with him once he had done so).
which prof. Warfield from Princeton has given of my treatise.”¹⁵ Due to van den Belt’s editorial work, we can now easily spot the changes that Bavinck has made in the second edition of his treatise, and by comparing these to Warfield’s review, we are able to determine with some probability Warfield’s influence on Bavinck on the topics at hand.¹⁶

There are no fewer than sixteen places where Bavinck has added one or more sentences to the text of his first edition and changed or omitted lines from it. Two of these are to be found in part 1, an introductory chapter titled “What Is Certainty in Science and Religion?” In part 2, “The Search for Certainty Outside and Within Christianity,” no changes have been made. Thus, all remaining changes (fourteen total) are located in part 3, “The Way to Certainty According to Holy Scripture.”¹⁷ If we number these changes, it seems to me that no connection with Warfield’s review can be found in changes 2 (one explicating sentence), 6, 9 (a purely formal point), 10, 11, 12, and 15. Change 14 is a revision and further explication of Bavinck’s second assumption as distinguished and questioned by Warfield. Here Bavinck constructively picks up Warfield’s “Criticism # 5” by nuancing his position. While Warfield had only mentioned this issue in passing at the end of his review, in the Netherlands it had sparked more debate. Bavinck had already elaborated on it in a short article

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¹⁵ Van den Belt, ed., Geloofszekerheid, 20, my translation (the preface is not included in Der Nederlanden’s translation; cf. note 4, above).

¹⁶ We will never know for sure, though. Bavinck intentionally uses the plural in his preface (speaking of “some” whose questions and remarks he had taken into account when preparing the second edition), and it is possible that some of Warfield’s comments coincided with those of others, as was the case with regard to Criticism 5.

¹⁷ The third edition, which was the basis of the English translation, has four parts instead of three, since the first pages of the booklet have been given a heading as well (“1 The Loss of Certainty”). Parts 1, 2, and 3, as mentioned above, correspond to parts 2, 3, and 4 in the English translation. Page numbers between parentheses in this section refer to this translation.
written in response to a question by someone who had read the first edition of *The Certainty of Faith*, and by means of change 14 he incorporates the tenor of this article in his second edition.\(^1\) So for our purposes we are left with changes 1, 3–5, 7, 8, 13, and 16. To sum up: exactly 50 percent of the changes—eight of sixteen—seem to have been inspired (as far as we can see) by Warfield’s review. Let us have a closer look at each of these changes in turn.

Change 1 is a quite lengthy addition, comprising pages 25–28 in the English translation. Whereas in the preceding passage Bavinck had strongly differentiated between scientific certainty and the certitude of faith, “which does not depend on fallible human insight but on unshakeable divine authority” (25), in these additional paragraphs he emphasizes the similarities between both, pointing out that “a large part of our knowledge rests upon the testimony of others and can, therefore, only be obtained by way of faith” (25). Therefore, since testimony and trust play a role in all sciences, the problem with theology is not that it refers to a divine testimony that “deserves our faith and trust.” The problem, rather, is that humankind is “endlessly divided” as to “where this divine authority is to be found and how it can be recognized” (27). This problem of religious pluralism should instill in us a deep sense of humility because of our apparent blindness in religious matters, but it should not keep us from sincerely seeking the truth. It is at this point that Bavinck admits that the question of the certitude of faith is twofold: “It can be addressed to the truth of the religion we ought to follow, or to our personal share in the salvation promised by this religion” (28). Though these two questions are closely connected to each other, they should nevertheless not be confused but distinguished: “The act of faith by which I recognize the truth differs from the one by which I am assurred of my own

\(^1\) See van den Belt, ed., *Geloofszekerheid*, 249–64. Apparently the question of this “kind reader” (257) was posed in private correspondence with Bavinck; we have only Bavinck’s rendering of it (257–58).
salvation” (28). Here, it seems to me, Bavinck fully concedes that Warfield was right when bringing up his second point of criticism distinguished above: the conceptual point that the *fides quae* and *fides qua* should be distinguished from each other, since the certainty question looks different in both cases.

Similarly, in change 16—a new paragraph inserted just before the final sentences of his book—Bavinck adopts the point Warfield had made in “Criticism # 1.” Quoting some biblical texts that highlight the universal scope of salvation as brought about by Christ (John 3:16–17; Col. 1:18–20), Bavinck embeds the significance of earthly life and culture in the wider panorama of God’s saving purposes for the entire world: “The history of all things proceeds . . . toward the redemption of the church as the new humanity, toward the liberation of the world in an organic sense, toward a new heaven and a new earth” (96). Note that Bavinck even literally adopts Warfield’s term “organic” here. So it seems Bavinck has granted and incorporated both Warfield’s first and second criticisms, as well as the fifth and final one, which coincided with the issue raised by a Dutch reader. How about the remaining points of critique—that is, the order in which certainty of the gospel and certainty about one’s personal share in its promises are acquired (“Criticism # 3”) and the role of evidences with regard to the Christian faith (“Criticism # 4”)? Clearly these two points are inextricably linked with to each other: if indeed certainty about the truth of the gospel precedes certainty about one’s personal salvation, evidences presumably play a much more important role than when all depends on one’s personal act of faith commitment.

Let us start with the role of the evidences, since most of the remaining textual changes brought about by Bavinck pertain to this issue. First, both in change 3 and in change 8 Bavinck slightly alters the wording of one sentence in such a way as to make clear that although the evidences or proofs may not be insufficient to support the
truth of the gospel—something he had claimed in the first edition—they are insufficient to move someone to accept this truth. Although Bavinck does not say why this is so, we can infer from the context that this is caused by what is today called the noetic effects of sin: humanity’s sinful blindness and unwillingness to accept God’s revelation for what it is. In any case, Bavinck implicitly grants Warfield’s point that the grounds of faith, as they present themselves to the mind, are “sufficient in themselves,” the only problem being that we humans are reluctant to accept them—until the Holy Spirit gives us the power of the heart and the faith to do so. Thus, according to Warfield, the faith that God gives—both in the sense of a conviction of the truth of the gospel and in the sense of certainty about one’s personal salvation—is grounded in the evidences, and by subtly changing a couple of sentences Bavinck admits that, after all, Warfield may be right here. Similarly, in change 7—a rewriting of a couple of sentences—Bavinck leaves out his earlier claim at this place that the truth of the Christian religion cannot be demonstrated in advance to the so-called unbiased scholar. Thus, he grants that, objectively speaking, the truth of the gospel and of the Christian faith can be established by the evidences that speak in favor of them.

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20 On p. 59 of *Certainty of Faith*, Bavinck changes the phrase “Although the proofs are insufficient to disclose the truth of Christianity” into “Although the proofs may be insufficient to move someone to believe in the truth of Christianity” (change 3). And on p. 74 he changes the sentence “If the gospel could be established beforehand by scientific arguments, it would not gain but lose force” into “If man could be compelled to accept God’s Word through scientific reasoning, the gospel would not gain but lose force” (change 8).


22 Van den Belt points out that in later editions of his *Reformed Dogmatics*, Bavinck indeed inserted some more positive remarks on the role of evidences and apologetics in this regard. Van den Belt, ed., *Geloofsziekerheid*, 223.
Bavinck further explains his position on the role of evidences in change 4, which is a somewhat lengthier addition shortly after change 3, and which, presumably, elucidates the reason behind change 3 (as well as changes 7 and 8). Bavinck does two things here in two separate paragraphs. First, he specifies the particular role of proofs and evidences vis-à-vis the testimony of Holy Scripture. Bavinck maintains his view that this role is *not* to provide a scientific underpinning to the Christian faith, but to defend it against its opponents. As such, however, Bavinck thinks very highly of the scientific arguments that have been put forward in favor of the Bible’s genuineness and reliability. They are even successful to such an extent that if the Scriptures contained general or universal history rather than a religious appeal, the proofs “would generally be regarded as sufficient” (60). Second, however, Bavinck argues that “because of the subjective inclination of the human heart” (i.e., our sinful unwillingness to obey God), the proofs are unable to turn humans into believers. Bavinck admits that even “the word of the Gospel” lacks the power to do this, thus acknowledging a perceptive point that Warfield had made. He goes on, however, to belittle the significance of proofs for believers by pointing out that “they are usually of a more or less scientific nature and . . . usually known and understood only by the higher educated.” Biblical revelation, by contrast, is not only for the learned but also for “the common man” (60). That is why from a religious point of view, as opposed to the scientific point of view, proofs are of little value, since nobody’s religious life is based on or nurtured by them.

From a rhetorical point of view, this may have been a masterful twist of Bavinck, since there is no doubt that Bavinck’s readers (most of whom belonged to the so-called *kleine luyden*, i.e., largely uneducated people) would have readily agreed with him. As a response to Warfield, however, Bavinck’s added words missed the point, since Warfield had made it crystal clear that he was *not* speaking about
scientific proofs only. As we saw above, he had made his case by offering some examples from common sense; for example, there is no need for us to study astronomy in order to know for sure, and on reasonable grounds, that the sun exists. Evidences for belief in God may be of the same nature: though most of us will be unable to fully analyze them, they can still function as proper grounds for faith. So Bavinck wins an easy victory here by simply ignoring the full scope of Warfield’s point. The only nuance he inserts in his discourse in response to Warfield is that he now, once again, no longer blames the inefficacy of proofs on their inadequacy, but on our human stubbornness. For their practical value, however, this makes no difference: they do not serve as preliminary stepping-stones toward the faith but only as sound defenses against its opponents. Or in Bavinck’s earlier words, which he retained in the second edition, the believer “must seek grounds, not for his own faith, but to make it more acceptable to the outsider, to silence criticism” (22).

Bavinck’s two remaining alterations to the text of the first edition of *Certainty of Faith*, changes 5 and 13, pertain to Warfield’s third criticism as distinguished in the section “Warfield’s Review” above. Recall that Warfield had insisted here that our conviction of the truth of the Christian religion *logically precedes* our commitment to Christ as redeemer rather than, as Bavinck had it, following it. We have seen already that Bavinck omitted from his text the crudest words in which he had expressed his views. The sentences asserting that belief in the truth of the gospel is impossible without the belief that one personally shares in the blessing of forgiveness, and that “certitude as to the truth of the gospel is never to be attained except along the path of personal, saving faith” did not make it into the second edition. Instead, Bavinck now grants that the certainty inherent in the faith “first of all” accepts the objective truth of the promises given in

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23 See note 11 above. The striking of these sentences in the second edition was part of change 14.
the gospel “but also” includes certitude “that by grace we too share in these promises” (85). So he seems to be conceding Warfield’s point on the right order of objective and subjective certainty.

This is not to say, however, that Bavinck ceded all of Warfield’s points. For, as Bavinck now more emphatically highlights by means of changes 5 and 13, he is opposed to splitting up the realm of faith in a historical part (which can be established by arguments and evidences) and a salvific part (which is brought about by supernatural grace). Bavinck attributes this view to the Roman Catholic Church, but along with that he may very well have had Warfield in mind. For, as we saw, Warfield had made a similar distinction between a historical faith that could be supported by proofs and an additional act of personal faith as worked by the Holy Spirit.

In contrast with this two-tier model of faith, in Bavinck’s fifth change he insists that the Reformation considered God’s revelation in the Bible not first of all as a narrative about historical events to be believed, but as a word of God toward us (63): “Therefore, faith wasn’t just assent to the truth of historical reports but a heartfelt trust in the good news of salvation” (63–64). In change 13 Bavinck makes even clearer what he has in mind by explicitly rejecting any sequential order that could be construed here:

From its very inception and as the Reformation returning to Scripture again clarified it, faith has a religious character. It is not first a historical knowledge which later is supplemented and completed by trust or love. From the very beginning it is a religious state, a practical knowing, a

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24 The original Dutch is even more pronounced here, ordering both forms of certainty along clear temporal lines through the use of “allereerst” (first of all) and “vervolgens” (next, subsequently). Van den Belt, ed., *Geloofszekerheid*, 89.


26 The distinction is similar, not identical; Warfield held that the historical faith should be complemented by an act of personal faith, not by acts of love as in the Roman Catholic confession (cf. the notion of *fides caritate formata*). In both cases, however, historical faith is preparatory to “the real thing.”
knowledge that applies to myself, an appropriation of the promises God made to me. (82)

So whoever accepts Scripture’s testimony “confirms that God is truthful” (83)—and thus personally puts his or her trust in God. Here Bavinck makes it quite clear that, in the end, he refuses to go in the material direction that Warfield had pointed out by distinguishing between two sorts of faith. Instead, he maintains that in essence there is only one act of faith, by means of which we obtain certitude both of the objective truth of God’s promises and of our subjective, personal share in these.

**Evaluation**

In the preceding section we saw that Bavinck, despite yielding to Warfield on a couple of secondary issues, stood his ground with regard to Warfield’s main criticisms of his booklet; he did not give in to Warfield’s desire to ascribe a more prominent role to philosophical, historical, or commonsensical evidences for the Christian faith, and neither did he adopt Warfield’s two-tier view of faith as consisting of a historical part complemented by a salvific one. We may safely assume that these differences between both Reformed theologians were real and sincere; after having read Warfield’s review, Bavinck must have seriously considered to what extent he could and should adopt the critical points Warfield had advanced. On the one hand, both Bavinck and Warfield downplayed the significance of their disagreements, being well aware that such differences of opinion did not at all threaten the bond of Christian fellowship between them; in that sense, their exchange is a fine example of how Reformed Christians can disagree with each other on theological matters while they at the same time realize that their differences fall within the scope of Christian freedom. On the other hand, however, both were presumably aware that their differences of opinion were not entirely insignificant.
since they touched the very heart of what the Christian faith is all about.

How can we explain that despite their friendly relationship and their strong spiritual and theological like-mindedness, Bavinck and Warfield consistently deviated on these issues? How should we frame their exchange—from what historical, theological, or philosophical perspective can it most helpfully be interpreted? In the secondary literature various options have been suggested here. One of these connects the theological differences between Bavinck and Warfield to the debate about post-Reformation Reformed scholasticism as compared to the theology of the Reformers. When viewed in this light, it could be assumed that Bavinck belongs to what came to be called the “old school,” whereas Warfield somehow preceded the “new school.” That is, Bavinck was critical of what he saw as subtle theological changes occurring in the transition from Calvin and other Reformers toward post-Reformation Reformed orthodox theology. In this process, the concept of faith came to be seen as “an assemblage, which like a machine is put together from different parts”; and evidences became more and more important as rational underpinnings of the Christian scheme. Warfield, however, was not convinced that Reformed orthodox theologians had deviated in such

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lamentable ways from the Reformers; he would probably have subscribed to the “continuity thesis,” as forcefully advanced and elaborated today by Richard Muller and his school.\textsuperscript{29} Indeed, it is interesting to see how at critical junctures Warfield appeals to “our Reformed fathers,” meaning by this (as van den Belt helpfully annotates) Reformed orthodox theologians such as Francis Turretin, whereas Bavinck rather invokes “the Reformation,” no doubt having in mind the theology of Reformers like Luther and Calvin.\textsuperscript{30} Despite such differences, commentators are divided on the issue of whether the views of Bavinck and Warfield on faith, reason, and Scripture can indeed be adequately interpreted along such lines.\textsuperscript{31}

Alternatively, we can interpret the Bavinck-Warfield exchange in philosophical rather than historico-theological categories. One way to do so would be to suggest that whereas Warfield operated along the lines of classical foundationalism, Bavinck, inspired as he was by John Calvin, broke away from this scheme and became a predecessor of Reformed epistemology.\textsuperscript{32} That is, Warfield portrayed the Christian faith as a house built on a foundation of infallible proofs and indubitable evidences, whereas Bavinck denied that faith was in need of proofs and evidences at all. In his view, Christians may be perfectly

\textsuperscript{29} Cf., e.g., Richard A. Muller, \textit{Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics}, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003).

\textsuperscript{30} Warfield, “Review,” 143; cf. van den Belt, ed., \textit{Geloofszekerheid}, 237–38. Bavinck, \textit{Certainty of Faith}, 63–64; Bavinck can also refer to “our fathers” (85, meaning here certain Reformed scholastic theologians), but then in order to qualify their point.

\textsuperscript{31} See note 27.

entitled to their Christian beliefs even though they cannot demonstrate their truth because they are “properly basic” to them; their beliefs come to them spontaneously and immediately, but nevertheless they are epistemically justified, or warranted.\(^{33}\) As we have seen above, there is a kernel of truth in such a categorization. Nicholas Wolterstorff has rightly pointed out, however, that it would be anachronistic to uncritically apply such technical categories from late-twentieth-century philosophical debates to the much earlier and much less philosophically robust work of Bavinck (and, by extension, Warfield).\(^{34}\) Moreover, it is not clear that Warfield could be called a classical foundationalist. The examples he gave of what may count as convincing evidence (e.g., for knowing that the sun exists) were not of a scientific nature, but suggested that we may have sound reasons for believing in God that come to us spontaneously instead of having been logically inferred from indubitable foundations.

Therefore, without altogether denying that applying these later frameworks to the Bavinck-Warfield exchange may make some sense, I would like to suggest a more contemporaneous intellectual framework that might help us interpret and contextualize the differences between Bavinck and Warfield. When wondering about Bavinck’s low opinion of apologetics, Warfield proposes that this might be explained by the influence of Abraham Kuyper’s antithetical thinking in terms of “two kinds of science”: that of natural man under the power of sin and that of born-again man under the


\(^{34}\) Wolterstorff, “Bavinck—Proto Reformed Epistemologist,” 145–46; the reason why Wolterstorff nevertheless labels Bavinck a “proto Reformed epistemologist” is that “basic themes of Reformed epistemology were already present in Bavinck a hundred years ago” (146).
power of *palingenesis* (regeneration, rebirth). Indeed, in his Stone Lectures on Calvinism, Kuyper had argued that “not faith and science . . . but two scientific systems or if you choose, two scientific elaborations, are opposed to each other, each having its own faith.”

Thus, according to Kuyper (and Bavinck followed him on this), there is little common ground between Christians and others when carrying out scientific research. Both are working on the erection of separate buildings, Kuyper says elsewhere. In such a climate, it does not make much sense to refer to evidences for the Christian faith since they won’t be convincing to those who don’t take its principles as their point of departure.

In contrast to this view, Warfield holds that there is a relevant amount of common ground between Christian believers and “other sinful men” (145). Given the noetic effects of sin, the science of sinful people will, by definition, be imperfect, since at all points of the process there are “deflecting influences.” That is why doing science is often toilsome and comes with many mistakes. What, then, happens when we become regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit? Here Warfield is much more modest than Kuyper:

> Regeneration . . . is not in the first instance the removal of sin; the regenerated man remains a sinner . . . No new faculties have been inserted into him by regeneration; and the old faculties common to man in all his states have been only measurably restored to their proper functioning. He is in no position therefore to produce a science different in kind from that produced by sinful man: the science of *palingenesis* is only a part of the science of sinful humanity, though no doubt its best part. (145)

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35 Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 133 (italics original); cf. 132: “This, and no other, is the principal antithesis, which separates the thinking minds in the domain of Science into two opposite battle-arrays.”

What we see here is a very different view on the nature of science vis-à-vis the Christian faith—one which allows for much more common ground between Christians and others. In science, we all have to struggle with our limitations, so that we can attain our goal “only in part and by slow accretions and through many partial and erroneous constructions.” But humans “work side by side” at this common task (145).37

Behind Warfield’s considerations we may surmise the influence of Thomas Reid and other Scottish common sense philosophers. There was a strong Scottish influence at Princeton both in Warfield’s days and before (for example, one of Warfield’s most admired professors at Princeton, the philosopher James McCosh, had immigrated from Scotland and went back and forth several times). Whereas Continental theologians—including Kuyper and especially Bavinck38—had been deeply influenced by the Kantian idea that when it comes to belief in God, arguments and evidences don’t work since from our human perspective we can’t gain any knowledge of God, their Anglo-Saxon counterparts were far less exacting here. And rightly so, it seems to me. As Nicholas Wolterstorff—who is as much of a Reidian as of a Kuyperian philosopher—has shown, it is both desirable and possible that theologians should “recover from Kant.”39

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37 My account here differs from the “Kuyperian” reading of such passages in Warfield offered by Paul Kjoss Helseth, e.g., in his “A Rather ’Bald Rationalist’? The Appeal to Right Reason,” in B. B. Warfield: Essays on His Life and Thought, ed. Gary L. W. Johnson (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 54–75 (esp. 73–74). Acknowledging common ground between Christians and others does not necessarily turn one into a “bald rationalist.”

38 It is remarkable that Bavinck did not respond to Warfield’s analysis of the background of their differences—neither in the second edition of Certainty of Faith nor, as far as I know, elsewhere.

And perhaps Reid offers the best antidote here. In any case, we can now see how Reid’s emphasis on the epistemic value of testimony, historical evidence, and common sense returns in the apologetics of Warfield. It is my estimation that we should not blame Warfield for this, as has been done from time to time. Warfield was not an Enlightenment rationalist who had an almost “Pelagian confidence” in the epistemic capacities of unregenerate human beings. Rather, he had a sober and humble Calvinistic view of the epistemic powers of regenerate Christians, acknowledging that the noetic effects of sin had by no means entirely disappeared from their minds. He differed from Kuyper and Bavinck in rejecting the idea that one’s basic principles or presuppositions were all-decisive. Instead, he was convinced that Christians could well support their position by using the same sort of reasons and arguments as their opponents. It testifies of his intellectual stature that, conversely, he was able to adopt “unwelcome” scientific conclusions drawn by secular scientists when he found their arguments convincing, as was the case during parts of his life with regard to Darwinian evolution.


41 The extent to which Warfield stood in the tradition and under the influence of Scottish common sense realism is debated, but that he did so, especially in his apologetic methodology, is beyond doubt. Cf., e.g., George M. Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 110–16. Fred Zaspel, The Theology of B. B. Warfield: A Systematic Summary (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 30, 64, 550, unhelpfully downplays Warfield’s indebtedness to this philosophical school because this connection has often been used to criticize Warfield as succumbing to rationalist assumptions of Enlightenment philosophy. More instructive is Kim Riddlebarger, The Lion of Princeton: B. B. Warfield as Apologist and Theologian (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), chapter 2.

42 Rogers and McKim, Authority and Interpretation of the Bible, 290.

43 Cf., e.g., Gijsbert van den Brink, En de aarde bracht voort. Christelijk geloof en evolutie (Utrecht: Boekencentrum, 2017), 96–98; David N. Livingstone, Dealing with Darwin (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 185–191.
It can be argued that this Reidian view of Warfield and his contemporaries has had a positive influence on the vitality of American Christianity, perhaps more so than Kuyperian (and Van Tillian) presuppositionalism, which isolated the Christian community from the wider intellectual debate. The appeal to common sense and to generally available evidences for the Christian faith fostered a climate in which discussion between believers, atheists, and seekers became possible and sensible. In that climate, Christianity continued to make its claim to rationality and reasonability, from Warfield all the way down to Plantinga, thus not losing its intellectual credibility as much as on the European continent. It is therefore comprehensible that scholars have considered this heritage of Scottish common sense philosophy as a partial explanation of how, during the twentieth century, the United States could withstand the forces of secularization more effectively than most Western European countries.⁴⁴

The Abiding Significance of Herman Bavinck’s Theology*

Cornelis (Kees) van der Kooi

What is the continuing and even abiding significance of the theology of Herman Bavinck? An answer to this question could be to point to the great effect that the English translation of Bavinck’s Reformed Dogmatics has had in the English-speaking world. This four-volume work has launched a sudden and delightful interest in the theology of Herman Bavinck and more broadly in neo-Calvinism as well.

Another sign of this renewed interest is the translation project of the works of Abraham Kuyper. However, I immediately have to note a difference between the name and fame of these two giants in the Netherlands where Kuyper still has a very ambivalent reputation. Of course, Kuyper is the creative genius who was the leader of the neo-Calvinist movement, which initially was regarded as a renewal movement, being almost revolutionary and thus hated by the ruling classes. Nevertheless, his name and fame remain ambivalent, whereas Bavinck almost seems to go beyond the ecclesial and political borders and is acceptable to many more people.

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*This contribution is based on a presentation at the occasion of the opening of the Herman Bavinck Center for Reformed and Evangelical Theology (HBCRET) at the Vrije Universiteit (Free University), Amsterdam, on June 17, 2016. It was repeated in a revised form at the presentation of the republication of Bavinck’s book on certainty of faith: Herman Bavinck, Geloofsziekerheid, ed. Henk van den Belt (Soesterberg: Aspekt, 2016), on December 22, 2016.
In view of new releases of Bavinck’s works such as one on assurance of faith titled *Geloofszekerheid*, edited by Henk van den Belt, I will take the opportunity to give a few statements why Bavinck particularly fits as an identification figure in the Netherlands and abroad.

1. Bavinck’s theological work is characterized by the programmatic connection between the classical and the modern, or, rather, between the older Reformed theology and contemporary and new challenges. Bavinck did not hesitate to deal with new questions that were brought to the table of theology. At times this fact, together with his openness in doing so, made him suspect in his own circles. For that reason, the name Bavinck must not be identified with restorationism. From a programmatic perspective his name stands for a theology that wants to be loyal to the Reformed tradition, combined with his willingness to look at new questions and developments, and his wish to think for himself. This has significance for contemporary theologians in the church as well as in society. We live today and must do it in our own way, and like earlier generations we must sometimes enter new territory. Later, I will have to say more about those new questions and challenges.

2. The name Bavinck represents what a theology has to offer that wants to be inspired by the *broad Reformed tradition*. That tradition is not something that has come to a definitive close. It is not a tradition that is associated with just one “founding father,” nor a tradition that takes one teaching as its central doctrine or reduces faith to a number of propositions. It is, rather, an attitude, a “stance,” which continues to ask questions in its search *for what must be said in our present context, in our dialogue with the Bible, the traditions, and our contemporary society,*
in the realization that God has not stopped speaking but still speaks. He has spoken—*deus dixit*—and through the Holy Spirit his words are continuously actualized and new. Anyone who wants to speak about God must do so in three words: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These names represent the diverse ways in which God makes himself known. This means that we do not propose that nothing can be said about God; we are not agnostics with regard to the metaphysical. We can say something. In the end we are concerned about what has significance, what serves life and is true. I know that for many the very word “truth” causes alarm bells to ring, but any university that is worthy of that name must be focused on nothing less than what is true and serves humankind.

3. Can the adjective “evangelical” be attributed to Bavinck? To answer this question a short clarification about the meaning of this word in the Dutch context is needed. In the Dutch context, the word “evangelical” has associations different from those in North America. “Evangelical” in Dutch culture has long been identified with renewal movements that exist apart from the bigger Protestant churches and that definitely do not have a solid Reformed profile. Therefore, using the adjective “evangelical”—as we do with the Herman Bavinck Center for Reformed and Evangelical Theology at the Vrije Universiteit—is quite uncommon and it may evoke some mixed feeling, but it is high time to see a change in that attitude. Evangelical spirituality has a widespread influence, and many students who arrive at the university have been affected by it. Are we sufficiently open to this? Do the academic programs and the teachers have an antenna for this reality?
4. For too long church and theology in the Netherlands have sought to protect themselves against the influence of Methodism, Pietism, holiness movements, and evangelicalism on large segments of Dutch Protestantism. This has impaired our pastoral training, since the students hear very little or nothing about the background—both the past and the present—of evangelical spirituality and theology along with the same from the charismatic movement. It should therefore not surprise us that pastors and church boards are extremely concerned and become nervous when they are confronted with these groups, with their rather emotional expressions of their faith and their sometimes poor theology. This influence does not only take place at the intellectual level, but especially in the domain of religious practices, song culture, events, personal piety, and concepts of holiness. What is needed is a “testing” of the spirits, first of all by taking a critical look at ourselves and then also at what we encounter. Many people who have found their place in the church had a formative experience in the evangelical movement. Rather than erecting a barrier, we need places where study can be given to these practices, this way of living one’s faith, the content of the songs, and the form of Jesus-piety. We should do this through a critical approach, but also with an open heart. I would like to add that this element of religious formation, of spirituality, should receive more attention in study programs, however challenging it might be to actually realize this. The connection with a basic attitude of faith is one of the reasons to link a theological center with Bavinck’s name. So, is it possible to attribute the concept of “evangelical” to Bavinck? Was Bavinck, in fact, an evangelical? Not in the way
historian David Bebbington has characterized evangelicalism,¹ but definitely in another way: Bavinck connected theological reflection with spirituality, with spiritual experience. “Doing” theology and faith go together and are connected. This connection is clearly visible, for instance, with John Owen and Jonathan Edwards. And in this affinity of a spiritually rich theology belongs also Herman Bavinck.

Another element I want to mention is that doing theology in line with Bavinck involves a keen interest in the practices of faith and the communities of faith. Theologians should be dealing with the actual practice of faith, with how our faith is lived and given shape. It is often thought that theology is predominantly a matter of concepts and abstract theories. I remember a statement made by Bavinck, about the assurance of faith, that the quality of our theology becomes manifest at the bed of a patient. What are we able to say when we are faced with the inevitable, when we are at the limits of our human possibilities and, especially, of our impossibilities, our human shortcomings and failings? Here he points to pastoral care.²

But the practices that require theological reflection go beyond this. What we need in our time is institutional space and time for reflection on new practices with a religious dimension, such as the song and music culture, film, and ecology, as well as what happens in the multifaceted world of evangelical movements,

¹ See David W. Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 2–3, where Bebbington identifies four distinct emphases in evangelicalism: “Conversionism, the belief that lives need to be changed; activism, the expression of the gospel in effort; biblicism, a particular regard for the Bible; and what may be called crucicentrism, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.”

² Bavinck, Geloofszekerheid, 31–32.
new churches, and charismatic initiatives, that will always refuse to be institutionalized, but that theologians, nonetheless, should enthusiastically invite to be an occasional partner in dialogue. There is a wide range of free groups, movements, and initiatives that I might refer to as an evangelical subculture. The official theology should not treat this with disdain, even though I put question marks—at times many of them—behind some groups and their implicit theology. However, my theology informs me that God’s Spirit does not want to be constrained by a clearly defined theology, be it of a conservative or a liberal kind.

5. Another aspect of this colorfulness is that the name of Bavinck can easily be associated with an interdisciplinary approach. During the last phase of his active life (1910–1921) Bavinck emphasized interdisciplinarity by focusing extensively on pedagogy, psychology, and philosophy. This is not to be seen as an indication that Bavinck was disappointed and had nothing more to say in the theological realm.3 I would rather argue that this interest in other core disciplines directly results from a fundamental pillar of Reformed theology itself: the recognition of God’s universality. God created the world in such a way that parts of the truth and of reality are revealed in other domains of science. God’s Spirit uses the possibilities and structures of our human creatureliness, and this makes the natural sciences and empirical methods theologically interesting and relevant. This

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3 See Herman Bavinck, Als Bavinck nu maar een kleur bekende: Aantekeningen van H. Bavinck over de zaak-Netelenbos, het schriftgezag en de situatie van de Gereformeerde Kerken (November 1919), ed. George Harinck, Cornelis van der Kooi, and Jasper Vree (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1994). English Title: If only Bavinck would declare his color: H. Bavinck’s annotations on the Netelenbos affair, the authority of Scripture, and the Gereformeerde Kerken (November 1919).
is the basis for interdisciplinarity and cooperation with biologists, medical experts, etc.

Interdisciplinarity also impacts our views regarding the relationship between the subdisciplines of theology. Bavinck and neo-Calvinism were convinced that dogmatics is the center of theology. Biblical studies and practical theology were considered the mere helpmates of those who had to do the real work: the systematic theologians. This view is incorrect and I, in any case, no longer subscribe to it. The area of biblical studies is not an ancillary branch of scholarship. It is a close partner in the circle of theology as a whole, particularly in its study of the way the old message has traveled—from “old to new readers,” as my colleague Eep Talstra would say. Together with church historians, practical theologians, anthropologists, and (sometimes) medical scholars, theologians should focus on practices, albeit within a theological framework. And this means that the “dogma” of the atheism of method cannot be granted sole reign. Theology finds its unity in the fact that it may, or should, ask questions about God. It finds it value in its concern for truth, over against untruth.

6. A further reason why the name Bavinck is future-oriented is the breadth of the theological specter that we find with him in his Trinitarian theology. This is in line with the international new appreciation for Trinitarian theology. It is one of the reasons why his theology is being rediscovered and intensely studied by Anglophone theologians. Christian theology does not speak about God by using just one word, but by speaking with three words, in terms of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That is to say:

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4 Eep Talstra, Oude en nieuwe Lezers: Een Inleiding in de Methoden van Uitleg van het Oude Testament (Kampen: Kok, 2002).
God is involved with the breadth of life, with our creatureliness, the progress of life; God plays a role in the problems of life, the shortcoming, the failures, and trauma.

This has to do with the mission of Jesus as the Son of God and with words such as “atonement” and “redemption.” And, finally, there is the Spirit who already plays a role in all of this, but who certainly also has a place as the One who will renew all life and will complete God’s work in the world. By mentioning the Spirit, we evoke the thought of newness, of surprise, and of an unexpected change for good. To summarize this: This kind of theology cannot be played on one string, even though some try to do so. I believe we should not try to play everything on that one string of the cross, or, as happens in some evangelical groups, only on the single vibration of grace or resurrection, or on the string of the Spirit as a special experience. These are reductions that make the theological instrument too somber, too dangerous, or too optimistic. The baton must touch different strings in order to do justice to the richness and variety of the music, that is to say, the variety of the gospel in the New Testament itself.

7. This brings me to the final point: the public influence of Christian theology that is connected with the name of Herman Bavinck. This follows from the previous point. The scope that is given with the concept of the Trinity offers an openness for different themes. I will mention some. Under the theme of creation we find questions concerning the origin of the universe—a mind-boggling, long evolutionary process—together with queries related to the end and to purpose. What does this insight mean for our theology? Or is there only a blind materialistic perspective? For the sake of ourselves and of the next generation of students, we must address the questions of theology and science. The ecological issues are of the same order.
Another question that has everything to do with the public domain is that of the position of the Christian faith in our Western or, more specifically, our Dutch culture. To phrase it in theological language: how do these two orders—the order of the kingdom and that of our life in this world, or the concept of the two kingdoms—relate to each other? What do we who are here on the Continent of Europe say about this now that Christianity is no longer the culturally unifying factor in our European society? There were the lofty ideals of a re-Christianization that were cherished by previous generations. Schleiermacher, Rothe, Kuyper, Bavinck, the representatives of school of ethical theology, Chantepie de la Saussaye, J. H. Gunning, but in the Netherlands also the initiators of a new theology, and Van Ruler—they all supported in some form the ideal of re-Christianization.

The new context raises the question of mission. What is possible when the plausibility structures that for a long time made the Christian faith attractive, have disappeared? A recent publication by Stefan Paas discusses questions like those mentioned above in all their urgency from a missiological perspective.5

Another theme in the broad Trinitarian sphere is that of justice and injustice. What does it mean that our world knows so many places where the fundamental rights of people, and even of children, are violated? Does God have a lot of patience with us, or should we say that as human beings we must also have a lot of patience with the God who allows this history to continue? These questions touch on the themes of atonement and redemption, the doctrine of God, and the concrete approach to life that we choose.

5 Stefan Paas, Church Planting in the Secular West: Learning from the European Experience (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016).
These questions are not new as we already meet them in the Bible. For that reason, the Bible and biblical studies should be a strong component in contemporary theological reflection. God has chosen to meet us on the path of history. The material we have are texts, formed through the course of history and sometimes rather disjointed. In what way does the Bible have authority? These questions are broached in a fine collection of essays that were recently published under the title *Evangelicals and Sources of Authority*.

This assumption of public significance may give rise to objections. Should Christians of Protestant Reformed vintage still pretend that their words also have significance for other people? Is this not a claim that can no longer be substantiated from our contemporary culture? Are church and Christian theology not, at the most, part of an alternative culture or counterculture? Stanley Hauerwas, Bram van de Beek, and Stefan Paas are very clear in this respect. We must not overestimate this public influence. Should we not agree with Gerrit de Kruijf that Christians must “think twice” before trying to speak in the public domain? So we must think first as Christians who know the Bible, and in the second place think in the way society thinks.

I want to make two critical remarks with regard to this theory of “thinking twice,” since we may run the risk that the underlying story becomes completely invisible. The distinction can easily lead to a situation in which we speak about values in the public arena, yet these values, such as solidarity, respect, justice, and human dignity, are in

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fact left hanging in the air. These values cannot remain without their embedment, without the story that nourishes them and gives them color and content. What does it mean for the value of goodness and mercy when people in our country no longer know the story of the good Samaritan? When dignity is taken as a loose concept, it can be filled in all kinds of ways. The true sense of dignity can only become clear in the context of a story, a narrative in which Jesus’s death on the cross as *mors turpissima*, a shameful death, plays a fundamental role.

In other words, without wanting to force the story upon people, we must realize that we cannot completely forsake the biblical story in the public domain. Love, mercy, justice, dignity, and freedom are concepts that cannot without impunity be detached from their religious roots. They reach into the public domain. They are linked to things that carry these concepts and contribute to humanness.

Furthermore, on the basis of that narrative, we can learn from our encounters with others, even those in other religions. The theory of God’s general revelation is part of the repertoire of Reformed theology. I personally prefer to speak of God’s universality. The Spirit of Christ cannot be hedged in by institutions or communities and may have affected other communities in a surprising way. This will quite often lead to new insights and the discovery of new elements. There are plenty of historical examples of this, for instance, with regard to the position of women, slavery, or the question of whether social justice is a right or just a matter of charity.

The name Herman Bavinck represents a particular approach to theology. It allows us to deal with questions, in all openness, without fear or apprehension. It allows us to be grateful for all the good things that our own tradition has given us; while being open, without fear or apprehension, to the new things we may discover. A future generation of theologians and students will have to do what others did before them: they must accept accountability and meet the
challenges without being afraid of criticism, adversity, or uncertainty.
Herman Bavinck’s Preface to the
Synopsis Purioris Theologiae

Henk van den Belt and Mathilde de Vries-van Uden*

Introduction to Bavinck’s Preface

On the 10th of June 1880, one day after his promotion on the ethics of Zwingli, Herman Bavinck wrote the following in his journal: “And so everything passes by and the whole period as a student lies behind me. What’s next? What is there for me to do?”¹ There was, in fact, a lot to do. The young candidate for the ministry received two calls from Christian Reformed churches: Franeker and Broek op Langedijk. Bavinck accepted the call to Franeker.

During his pastorate in this Frisian congregation, he edited the sixth edition of the Leiden Synopsis of Purer Theology (1625). This textbook in systematic theology, consisting of 52 disputations, was composed between 1620–1624 by four professors of theology: Johannes Polyander, Andreas Rivetus, Antonius Walaeus, and

* Henk van den Belt has introduced Herman Bavinck’s Preface to the Synopsis Purioris Theologiae. Mathilde de Vries-van Uden has provided the English translation of the Latin text of Bavinck’s Preface.

¹ “En zoo gaat alles voorbij en ligt heel de studententijd achter mij. En wat nu? Wat is er voor mij te doen?” Archive of Herman Bavinck, Historical Documentation Center for Dutch Protestantism (1800–today), Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, collection 346, number 16 “Dagboekjes,” entry on June 11, 1880.
Antonius Thysius. The collection was reprinted in 1632, 1642, 1652, and 1658.\(^2\)

From the start of his pastorate in Franeker, Bavinck was engaged in the task of editing the sixth edition. On the 1\(^{st}\) of November 1880, exactly one day before he accepted the call to Franeker, he wrote in his journal: “I left for Leiden at 9.00 a.m. to discuss the publication of the *Synopsis* with D. Donner. This edition will be published under my supervision; honorarium 150 guilders and 20% of each copy from 300–500. In the afternoon back to Kampen.”\(^3\)

**Competition with Kuyper**

The publication of the *Synopsis* led to one of Bavinck’s first personal contacts with Abraham Kuyper. As Bavinck’s biographer R. H. Bremmer recounts, Bavinck wrote to Kuyper (April 14, 1881) that he had heard from Donner that Kuyper also was planning on publishing a new edition of the *Synopsis*. Bavinck wrote to Kuyper: “This news


\(^3\) ‘s morg. 9 uur naar Leiden, om met D. Donner te spreken over de uitgave der ‘Synopsis’. Deze uitgave zal verschijnen onder mijn toezicht; honorarium 150 gld. En 20% v. elk exemplaar van 300–500. ‘s middags weer naar Kampen.” Archive of Herman Bavinck, number 16 “Dagboekjes,” entry on November 1, 1880.
surprised me and affected me in a not very pleasant way.” In the letter he reported that Donner had asked him to do the same job and that he had consented in order to become a bit more acquainted with the faith and confession of the Reformed forebears. He had understood that Kuyper had abandoned the idea, at least for the time being.

Bremmer does not explain the background of this correspondence, but it is likely that the publisher and author had become aware of this intended parallel publication through the announcement of a new series of source texts titled *Bibliotheca Theologica Reformata*. An advertisement in *De Heraut* written by Dr. F. L. Rutgers in *De Standaard* (April 5, 1881) stated: “Next spring the first in a series of works from our best old Reformed theologians, mostly in Latin, will be published.” The first three titles mentioned are: The *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae*, the *Opuscula Selecta* of Franciscus Junius and the *Loci Communes* of Lucas Trelcatius Sr. And, it indicated that the first volume was to be edited by Kuyper.

It is unknown if Rutgers and Kuyper knew of the plans of Donner and Bavinck. It is understandable, however, that a little panic occurred in Leiden and Franeker about this announcement. It was not pleasant to get involved in a competition with Kuyper. Both plans probably arose simultaneously due to a lack of communication. According to a notice in *De Heraut* (May 15, 1881), the Society of

4 R. H. Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck en zijn tijdgenoten* (Kampen: Kok, 1966), 40. This is the third letter from Bavinck to Kuyper mentioned in the Kuyper-Archive. See “Inventaris van het archief van dr. A. Kuyper, zijn gezin en zijn familie (1824–1988),” 146. Historisch Documentatiecentrum voor het Nederlands Protestantisme at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Collection 154

5 “Advertentie,” *De Standaard*, April 5, 1881. The text was consulted via www.delpher.nl on January 5, 2018.

6 Donner announces the publication in *Nieuwsblad voor den boekhandel* 48/28 (1881) on April 8, 1881. The text was consulted via www.delpher.nl on January 5, 2018.
Reformed ministers, started in October 1880, had decided to republish the old classic works of the Reformed Church especially in the Netherlands.7

When he received Bavinck’s letter, Kuyper had not yet started working on the Synopsis, and he refrained from publishing a new edition of the Synopsis. On April 24, a few weeks after the first advertisement in De Heraut, Rutgers announced the series again in a new advertisement, now mentioning the Opuscula Selecta of Junius and Girolamo Zanchius, the Loci Communes of Trelcatius, the Medula of William Ames, and the Exegesis Symboli, a commentary on the Belgic Confession, by Samuel Maresius.8 Helenius de Cock, an instructor at the Theological School in Kampen, noted his satisfaction with the change in Kuyper’s plans in the periodical De Bazuin:

A reprint of this work was announced last week in the soon to be released Bibliotheca theologica reformata, just now the first part of it is published by Donner. This proves in any case that more than one person is convinced of the importance of this work, even for our time. For the sake of the publisher Donner, we are glad that the announced edition will not be published now.9

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7 “Nederland,” De Heraut, Amsterdam, April 24, 1881. The text was consulted via www.delpher.nl on January 5, 2018. The first book in the series with the title Bibliotheca Reformata was Franciscus Junius and A. Kuyper (ed.), D. Francisci Junii Opuscula Theologica Selecta [Bibliotheca Reformata, 1] (Amsterdam: Fred. Muller, 1882). Later works by Zanchius and Gisbertus Voetius in Latin and by Ames and Jeremias Bastingius in Dutch were published in this series.

8 “Advertentie,” De Heraut, April 24, 1881. The text was consulted via www.delpher.nl on January 5, 2018. The first book in the series with the title Bibliotheca Reformata was Franciscus Junius and A. Kuyper (ed.), D. Francisci Junii Opuscula Theologica Selecta [Bibliotheca Reformata, 1] (Amsterdam: Fred. Muller, 1882). Later works by Zanchius and Gisbertus Voetius in Latin and by Ames and Jeremias Bastingius in Dutch were published in this series.

9 H. de Cock, “Announcement of Synopsis purioris theologiae,” De Bazuin: Gereformeerde stemmen uit de Christelijke Afgescheiden Kerk in Nederland 29/15 (1881), April 15. The text was consulted via www.delpher.nl on January 5,
Despite the initial confusion and conflict, Bremmer reports that Kuyper was content with Bavinck’s publication, even though, for reasons unknown, he did not write a recommendation in the publication after Bavinck asked and assured Kuyper his own preface would be short. Kuyper, however, did lend Bavinck his copy of the second edition of the *Synopsis*.\(^\text{10}\) And, he wrote a clear, affirmative appraisal of Bavinck’s work in *De Heraut* once the book was finished:

Dr. Bavinck has completed his edition of the *Synopsis purioris theologiae*. The ship was launched quickly and yet well. No doubt it will be seaworthy. Nothing is more helpful to become acquainted with the theology of the sixteenth century than such a dogmatics formulated in clear theses.\(^\text{11}\)

**Influence on Bavinck**

Bavinck’s work on the *Synopsis* during his short Frisian pastorate helped him to grasp the principles of Reformed theology and to find his own way in the reception and reproduction of a contemporary Reformed systematic theology. In a letter written to his friend Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857–1936), the Orientalist and Islamologist, Bavinck reflects rather explicitly on the influence of the *Synopsis*.

Some time ago I accepted the responsibility for the sixth edition of the *Synopsis purioris theologiae* of Walaeus and his colleagues that was recently published by Donner. I did this to study Reformed theology a bit at the same time. I am better versed in it now than before. And it has had quite an influence on my own theological perspective. In my view a positive one. Perhaps you are of a different opinion. I see clearer than before that between (let me use terms that are familiar to me)

\(^{10}\) Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck*, 41.

\(^{11}\) A. Kuyper, “Announcement of *Synopsis purioris theologiae*,” *De Heraut*, December 4, 1881. The text was consulted via www.delpher.nl on January 5, 2018.
Reformation and Revolution on every domain in both principle and method, in the view of God, humankind, world, etc. every mediation (Vermittlung) or reconciliation is impossible. If I do anything, I think about this issue now. I am considering the principles (Prinzipienlehre) of theology. I have to get this somewhat settled first. Before I ever perform some publication of my own, I have to know what I want and where I stand. Previously I did not know that and I did not learn that in Leiden either. It is really time for me to realize this.¹²

Given Bavinck’s own attestation of the significance of the Synopsis, it is worthwhile to investigate its influence on Bavinck’s work by checking if and how Bavinck references it in the Reformed Dogmatics and other works. While one might expect many direct references to the Synopsis, a cursory analysis of the Reformed Dogmatics and other works reveals that Bavinck did not use or quote the Synopsis often. A quick survey of the 73 references in the Reformed Dogmatics reveals that many of these are rather general references to one or more disputations as a whole. For instance, when he writes that the Reformed confessions and theologians all express the divine authority of Scripture, his footnote refers to disputation two of the Synopsis “On the Necessity and Authority of Scripture” next to references to Ursinus, Zanchius, Junius, Polanus and Voetius.¹³

In the footnote following the one just mentioned, he does refer to Synopsis 3.7, where Antonius Thysius explains that God sometimes inspired and dictated the text of Scripture to the human writers as secretaries but at other times assisted and directed them as interpreters. In all cases, however, “the Holy Spirit was constantly leading them, as He directed and guided them to such an extent that they

¹² The quotation is from a letter from Bavinck written on March 7, 1882. J. de Bruijn and G. Harinck, eds., Een Leidse vriendschap: De briefwisseling tussen Herman Bavinck en Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, 1875–1921 (Baarn: Ten Have, 1999), 100.

¹³ Bavinck, Reformed Dogmatics 1:415, n50.
were kept from every error in thought, memory, word and pen.”\textsuperscript{14} Together with references to Rivetus and Heidegger, Bavinck uses this as an example for his view that there were some feeble attempts to develop a more organic view of Scripture because inspiration sometimes consisted in assistance and direction. The writers “used their own intellect, memory, judgment, and style but always in such a way that they were guided and kept from error by the Holy Spirit.”\textsuperscript{15} Notwithstanding this reference, it is difficult to conclude any specific influence of the \textit{Synopsis} from these references. Even in those instances in which Bavinck refers to one or more specific theses within the disputations—he does so about 50 times—the reference is often one in a series and the connection is rather loose. Bavinck hardly ever literally quotes his Reformed orthodox sources.

The citations in the \textit{Reformed Dogmatics} do reveal that Bavinck has some favorite disputations to which he refers often. The highest number of references to one disputation (6) is to disputation two on the authority of Scripture, but there are also nineteen disputations that he does not mention at all. If only the specific references to theses—and not to the disputations as a whole—are counted as explicit references, he only refers to twenty-four of the fifty-two disputations explicitly.

Bavinck is not very consistent in his annotations. Sometimes he uses a Roman numeral for the disputation and an Arabic one for the thesis, for instance “Synopsis pur. theol. XII 7. XIII 17.”, but he does not do so consistently. In some cases, he mentions the presiding professor as the author (“Polyander, Synopsis pur. theol. disp. XXX.”), but he most often refers to the \textit{Synopsis} with Arabic numerals for

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Synopsis of a Purer Theology}, 79.

\textsuperscript{15} Bavinck, \textit{Reformed Dogmatics} 1:415, n51.
both the disputation and the thesis, as “Synopsis pur. theol. disp. 2, 10 v.”

In some other publications, Bavinck refers to the *Synopsis* as an authoritative source, for instance in his advice to the synod of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands of 1905 regarding the revision of the *Belgic Confession*. The synod decided to change article 36 on the task of the civil government. It deleted the phrase that the magistrate should take care that “all idolatry and false worship may be removed and prevented, [and] the kingdom of antichrist may be destroyed.” The advice, of which Bavinck was one of the authors, refers to the *Synopsis* to illustrate that over against some Reformed theologians who ascribed the right to punish heretics by capital punishment to the government, the Leiden professors declare in their *Synopsis*, for many years the standard textbook of our theology (edition Bavinck, pp. 623–4) “that it is better to depose or relegate the heretical teachers or to restrain them in some other way than to punish them with death” while they only make an exception for those who are altogether atheists and revilers of the highest degree, who very irreverently deny God himself entirely or his providence in human affairs, who overturn the common religion of Christ’s church with their shocking revilings and who disturb the peace and harmony of the whole state out of delight in another’s misfortunes and incurable malice of soul, and who can be curbed by no other beneficial and gentler means of political coercion or remedy.  

Nevertheless, the authors of the advice also reject this milder view and appeal to the Calvinist principles of the liberty of conscience—

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which excludes all punishment of heretics—and of the mutual independence of church and state.

The real influence of Bavinck’s editing of the Synopsis on the early development of his theology reaches farther than can be traced by explicit references in his works. This becomes most clear from the ongoing correspondence with his friend Snouck Hurgronje while he was working on the edition. Without explicitly mentioning the Synopsis, Bavinck writes about his spiritual development and the growing distance between him and his friend regarding matters of faith:

To be honest I am getting and am more and more “Reformed.” I would now no longer express many premature judgments I formerly had. I have gained more respect and more piety for the faith and the labor of faith of the ages and have become more modest in my convictions and have somewhat descended from the proud position of judging everything according to my mind and my reason. More and more I learn to see what the principle of faith, that I have never renounced, contains and how it has consequences in all directions.

Although we do not know exactly how Herman Bavinck did the job of editing in practice and how much time it cost him to work on this project, we do know that the intensive study of this source helped him to become acquainted with Reformed theology. Despite the relatively few direct references to the Synopsis in his works, the references in his personal correspondence with Snouck Hurgronje suggest that together with his experience as a pastor in Franeker, reading and editing the Synopsis was instrumental for his rediscovery of

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19 The quotation is from a letter from Bavinck written on June 16, 1881. De Bruijn and Harinck, Een Leidse vriendschap, 88.
the power of the Reformed faith. In a short time, he developed from a critical and hesitant theology student into a convinced though still critical representative of and advocate for Reformed theology in his contemporary context.

We are thankful that Mathilde de Vries-van Uden has offered this fine translation of Bavinck’s Preface in English and hope that Bavinck’s enthusiasm for the *Synopsis* will stimulate others to read this sourcebook of Reformed Orthodoxy and to do further research on its reception in Bavinck’s theology.

**Translation of Bavinck’s Preface to the *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae*[^20]**

This excellent Synopsis of a Purer Theology, first edited in 1625 and afterwards reprinted four times with short intervals, doesn’t need to be praised much or to be recommended to the reader. However, I don’t think it improper at all to say some things about the writers of the book, about its design, quality, authority, and about its fate, as an introduction to the sixth edition. For this work was, in the time of its writers, for approximately fifty years very well-known among theological scholars and others, and read by nearly everyone, while nowadays it is unknown to most people.

The word “purer” itself already indicates in which time the Synopsis was written. For it surely came into being shortly after the Reformed Church and theology had triumphed over the Remonstrants after their fierce dispute. At the Synod of Dort the Reformed confession was once again examined according to the touchstone of Holy Scripture, and approved of. The Arminian and other heterodox doctrines were turned away, refuted and banished from the Reformed Church.

The Synod’s dignity and authority were especially evident those days in reforming the Academy, where Remonstrantism had come into being. For the Academy of Leiden, the chairs of which were held by different professors, who often didn’t agree with one another, acquired, on recommendation from the Synod, four professors, who had accepted the Reformed confession with all their heart. Already in 1611 Gomarus\(^{21}\) was replaced by Polyander,\(^{22}\) and in 1619 Walaeus\(^{23}\) followed. In the same year Thysius,\(^{24}\) professor in Harderwijk, inaugurated. And Rivetus,\(^{25}\) as the fourth, took his position in 1620, after he was called from France.

These four professors, excellent and very scholarly men, who have been undoubtedly very profitable for the Reformed Church, agreed with each other exceptionally well. They also complemented one another with their talents and capabilities, by moderating and correcting each other. It’s worth referring to what Walaeus’ son tells about their mutual consensus and about the intellectual gifts of each. He says that

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\text{each of them, as it tends to be, excelled the others in certain intellectual capacities. Thysius was superior in his memory, Walaeus and Rivetus excelled in their mental abilities and judgement in drawing conclusions, but Polyander in his skilfulness in explaining. In expressing himself Thysius was fervent, Walaeus full of energy, Rivetus gentler, but Polyander was calm. Polyander was good at expressing thoughts, while in voice and eloquence Rivetus and Walaeus surpassed the others. Walaeus was more schooled in philosophy, Thysius in languages: especially Hebrew, because Walaeus was more clever in Greek. In theology Thysius and Rivetus had a more extensive knowledge, Walaeus and Polyander more a solid}
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\(^{21}\) Franciscus Gomarus (1563-1641).
\(^{22}\) Johannes Polyander van Kerckhoven (1568-1646).
\(^{23}\) Antonius Walaeus (1573-1639).
\(^{24}\) Antonius Thysius (1565-1640).
\(^{25}\) Andreas Rivetus (1572-1651).
one. Thysius was more learned in church history, Rivetús in reading the Church Fathers and Walaeus in Scholastic Theology. Walaeus was kept busy by the conflicts of Socinians, Anabaptists, and Remonstrants, Rivetus by those of the Roman Catholics. Thysius taught in a detailed manner, Rivetus in a comprehensive, Walaeus in a brief and concise manner, and Polyander adapted his teachings to practice.²⁶

We, that live in a time where theologians have very different opinions on doctrine, are especially filled with admiration and joy, while seeing the unanimity and consensus about every aspect of the holy religion, that was always found among these four professors. They even, as we can read in the “Life of Walaeus,” decided and observed continually, that none of them would express their opinion on religious disputes, the church government, or a case of conscience, on their own, but only together with their colleagues.

So, this Synopsis of a Purer Theology is a very grand monument of their consensus. Each of the fifty-two disputations, of which it consists, was written by one of them alternately. The first nine disputations were written in this order: by Polyander, Walaeus, and Thysius, and the others (from the tenth up to the last one) alternately by Polyander, Rivetus, Walaeus, and Thysius, so that fourteen disputations were written by Polyander, eleven by Rivetus, fourteen by Walaeus and thirteen by Thysius. Each disputation consists of theses, mostly forty or fifty, but sometimes more or less. Sometimes corollaries or antitheses are added. This form of the disputations, taken from the academic instruction, added clarity and charm to the entire work, even where the argument is very tedious and tough.

With the Synopsis, just brought into light, the queen of Reformed doctrine seemed to be born. It was indeed an attractive and useful

²⁶ The quote is from “The Life of Walaeus” included by his son Johannes Walaeus (1604-1649) in his father’s Latin Works. Johannes Walaeus “Vita Antonii Walaei,” in Antonius Walaeus, Opera Omnia (Leiden, 1647), 1: [27].
manual for students of theology; it was brief and shed bright light on many and various matters. It showed and investigated the conflicts with the Remonstrants and Roman Catholics in a very fine, subtle and clear manner, but still without indignation or partiality, and eventually was written by four professors, who were happy to have the confidence and love of the church, and who were respected by nearly everybody, not only on account of their piety, but also of their doctrine. The Synopsis itself is a clear example and a bright mirror for us of the orthodox doctrine that was preferred at the Synod of Dort. The fact that this doctrine has ruled, and was able to rule, for half a century, won’t be a surprise to anybody who has read and thought over this Synopsis. It was not replaced by any other manual at that time, thanks to its acuteness and its subtle way of arguing, and it shines very often by its excellent insight. It is also very conscious of and versed in the truth of the Holy Scriptures and the Reformed confession, however free from dry, useless and dull scholastic discourse and hallucinations. Our excellent Sepp\footnote{In a footnote Bavinck refers to Christiaan Sepp, Het godgeleerd onderwijs in Nederland gedurende de 16e en 17e eeuw (Leiden: De Breuk en Smits, 1873), 2:23–94.} has very carefully investigated how important it has been and of what great authority in different Academies. Within a short period, it was edited five times. The first edition was in 1625, the second in 1632, the third ten years after that, in 1642, the fourth again ten years later, in 1652 and the fifth in 1658. The last two editions came when all authors had already died, because Rivetus, the last of all, died in 1651. All five editions are entirely similar, except for some varying readings of minor importance.

But times change. The long dominion of this Synopsis also faded. Another time required something different. Cocceius\footnote{Johannes Cocceius (1603–1699).} and other
theologians introduced another method, and the Synopsis was gradually forgotten.

Now, more than two hundred years after the last edition, this sixth one is being edited, in my opinion at a very favorable time. For the same principles of doctrine that have been confessed by the Seceded Reformed Church in our country for a long time, are beginning to revive outside of her too in these days. Therefore, I hope that this sixth edition of the Synopsis, which is a reliable and very trustworthy guide, put together as it were under the eyes of the Synod of Dort, will be very helpful to know these principles well, and to clearly explain them to others.

Franeker, the month of October 1881
H. Bavinck.

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29 Herman Bavinck was a pastor in the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk that consisted of congregations that had separated themselves from the Hervormde Kerk in the Secession of 1834, known as the Afscheiding.
Johannes Hermanus Gunning, Jr. (1829–1905) was one of the most influential Protestant theologians in the Netherlands in the nineteenth century. He was a representative of the so-called “ethical theology” (ethische theologie) developed by Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye (1818–1874).¹ For him theology could not be based on rationalistic grounds, whether modern or orthodox, but had to take its starting point in an experience of rebirth that was effected by Christ. Gunning met La Saussaye at the end of 1855 and became his most important pupil. During his time as a pastor in The Hague (1861–

¹ The word “ethical” as a translation of “ethische” is linguistically correct but connotatively confusing, because it leads the English reader into the field of morality. As the description that follows indicates, “ethische” has nothing to do with morals but with experiential, existential faith. The reader should think “existential” when the term “ethical theology” is used in this introduction.
(1882), Gunning developed his own ethical theology in debate with such modern and orthodox contemporaries as Allard Pierson and G. Groen van Prinsterer, who was the leader of the Dutch Antirevolutionary Party. Both were his personal friends. Later he was also a friend of A. Kuyper, but became unable to accept Kuyper’s domineering personality, and their friendship dissolved in 1878. Subsequently Gunning tried to stay in contact with other representatives of the Reformed (Gereformeerde) school of thought, such as A. F. de Savornin Lohman, Ph. J. Hoedemaker, and Herman Bavinck. In the early 1880s Bavinck was the rising star at the theological school in Kampen to which he had been appointed in 1882 at the age of twenty-seven.

In 1884, an exchange of letters between Gunning and Bavinck appeared in the magazine, De Vrije Kerk [The Free Church]. These letters constituted the beginning of a correspondence that Gunning and Bavinck would conduct until 1903, dealing with theological topics with which they were engaged. The letters published in 1884 were primarily about theological method. Bavinck believed that ethical

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3 Trans. note: The Dutch term “Gereformeerde” presents both the translator and the English reader with particular difficulties. The word means simply “Reformed,” but in the Dutch ecclesiastical context, the word sometimes refers to that branch of Reformed churches that broke away from the larger, national Dutch church. Bavinck and Kuyper were theological leaders in this church. However, at other times, the word refers to a theological perspective, one usually connected with historic Reformed theology. In that case, the word can refer to members of the larger Hervormde (also “Reformed”) church. The reader is left to sort out the particular nuance from the context.

4 See J. H. Gunning, Jr., Verzameld Werk (GVW, abbreviation of the Collected Work of Gunning) 2:153–69. The letters from Bavinck to Gunning can be found at http://www.neocalvinisme.nl. De Vrije Kerk was a journal of the Secession Christian Reformed Church (Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk), formed by a break from the national Dutch Reformed Church (Nederlands Hervormde Kerk) in 1834. The Theological School in Kampen provided training for ministers of this church.
theology was strongly influenced by F. Schleiermacher (1768–1834), whereby not Scripture but the believer’s experience had become primary. Gunning defended himself against this criticism and in the same year published the little book, *Jezus Christus, de Middelaar Gods en der menschen* [*Jesus Christ, Mediator Between God and Humanity*], as an answer to Bavinck’s volume, *De theologie van Prof. Dr. Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye* [*The Theology of Prof. Dr. Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye*], in which he had criticized ethical theology.5

In the years preceding the Doleantie (1886),6 it was primarily A. Kuyper, who fiercely battled ethical theology in his weekly newspaper, *De Heraut* [*The Herald*]. Apparently that opposition did not hinder Gunning from writing letters to Bavinck, whom he viewed as one of the most important and valued representatives of the Reformed school of thought. It is striking that Gunning wanted to engage primarily in a substantive debate about theological matters that had, through the conflicts with Kuyper, increasingly determined the theological and ecclesiastical agenda. Included were topics such as the infallibility of Scripture, which Kuyper had made the opening foray in his battle with ethical theologians; the partisan conflict that Kuyper had occasioned within the national Reformed [Hervormde] Church, and Calvin’s doctrine of election that Kuyper had extensively examined in *De Heraut*. Already in 1880, Gunning had let Kuyper know in an open letter that Calvin’s doctrine of predestination could

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5 *J. H. Gunning Jr., Jezus Christus, de Middelaar Gods en der menschen: naar aanleiding van Dr. H. Bavinck “De theologie van Prof. Dr. Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye”* (Amsterdam: Höveker, 1884); *Herman Bavinck, De theologie van Prof. Dr. Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye* (Leiden: Donner, 1884). See *GVW* 2:171–258.

6 The Doleantie, led by Abraham Kuyper, was a second secession from the national Dutch Reformed Church. Six years later, in 1892, many (but not all) congregations of the Secession Christian Reformed Church joined with Doleantie churches to form a new denomination, called Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland.
no longer simply be reiterated in the nineteenth century. The religious core of that doctrine was essential, but Calvin’s elaboration of it in terms of the doctrine of eternal election and reprobation had to be critically revised. In his pamphlet entitled *From Calvin to Rousseau*, Gunning showed how he wanted to reinterpret Calvin’s doctrine of predestination.

After 1888, Gunning was less involved with the consequences of the Doleantie and the activities of Kuyper. He did show in his brochure, *De prediking van de toekomst des Heeren* [The Preaching of the Future of the Lord], that the church struggle was partly a consequence of the fading expectation within the church of Christ’s return. Without that perspective, the struggle on behalf of one’s own group and church becomes more important, and mutual love fades.

After Gunning went to Leiden in 1889, he first taught the discipline of “philosophy of religion.” But already in 1891 he came to the conclusion that his viewpoint as a believer could not be harmonized with the “unbiased” character of the science of religion. Gunning became more and more convinced that his theology could not in fact be united with the modern scientific method employed in the comparative study of religions, and he switched disciplines with his colleague, C. P. Tiele. According to Gunning, a believing professor cannot teach about the Christian religion from a general scientific viewpoint, for then one places oneself above the faith. In 1892, he held a debate about this point with Bavinck, who believed that in 1876, in connection with the reform of the theological faculty [in public universities],

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8 J. H. Gunning Jr., *Van Calvijn tot Rousseau* (Rotterdam: Otto Petri, 1881); see *GVW* 3:450–56.
9 J. H. Gunning Jr., *De prediking van de toekomst des Heeren* (Utrecht: Breijer, 1888); see *GVW* 2:339–82.
the Dutch government had clearly made room for a philosophy of religion [to be taught] “in a positive Christian spirit.” But Gunning no longer saw any validity in the notion that the “reasonability” of the faith could be demonstrated by the discipline of philosophy of religion.

During his years in Leiden, Gunning sought occasional contact by letter with Herman Bavinck, who had still been under consideration as the successor of the deceased modernist theologian L. W. E. Rauwenhoff—Gunning’s predecessor in Leiden. So in 1895, he responded immediately to the appearance of the first volume of Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics* (*Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*). Gunning received a copy from Bavinck and was very impressed. After an initial letter, a second followed, in which Gunning articulated his praise and criticism even more extensively. The same thing happened when the second volume of the *Dogmatics* appeared in 1897.

From Gunning’s letters it seems that he chose especially those topics that were at issue between himself and the Reformed school of thought: the authority of Scripture, Calvin’s doctrine of predestination, and the problem of the divided church. These topics would also continue to occasion profound engagement in Dutch Protestant theology after Gunning had left the scene.

In addition, it is striking that Gunning explicitly esteemed Bavinck as a representative of the Reformed (Gereformeerde) trend. That this respect was mutual appears from the fact that Bavinck was present in 1899 at Gunning’s retirement as professor in Leiden.

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12 The first edition of *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* [in references hereafter: *GD*] was published by J. H. Bos in Kampen.

Gunning wrote the letters that are published below on the occasion of the appearance of the first two volumes of *Reformed Dogmatics*. In the past, these letters have been published not at all or only partially by R. H. Bremmer in his studies on Bavinck. The letters that were chosen are those in which Gunning most extensively engages Bavinck’s work after he had closely studied the volumes.\(^{14}\)

Unfortunately, virtually all the letters Bavinck wrote to Gunning are lost, because at the end of his life Gunning destroyed most of the letters he had received. In the Bavinck Archives at the Historical Documentation Centre for Dutch Protestantism (HDC) of the Free University in Amsterdam, eleven letters from Gunning to Bavinck are preserved.\(^{15}\) Another letter belonged to a private collection.\(^{16}\) One

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\(^{14}\) With respect to spelling and punctuation, the letters have not been adapted or abbreviated, though notes for clarification have been added. The letters are preserved in the Bavinck-archief, which is governed by the HDC of the Free University of Amsterdam. Gunning sent four letters to Bavinck about the *GD*: on 05/16/1895 and 08/28/1895 on the first volume; on 10/13/1897 and 12/22/1897 on the second volume. Bremmer published a portion of the letters of 1895 (see *Herman Bavinck als dogmaticus*, 104–05; however, he published nothing from the letters of 1897.

\(^{15}\) The following letters are kept in the Bavinck Archives: Correspondence, file 2: letters 09/26/1884, 10/14/1884; file 3: postcard 05/11/1892, letters 06/22/1892, 06/24/1892; file 4: letters 05/16/1895, 08/28/1895; file 5: letters 10/13/1897, 12/22/1897; file 6: letter 12/18/1902; file 7: letter 12/02/1903. For the bibliographical data, see A. de Lange, *J. H. Gunning Jr. Een leven in zelfverloochening*, vol. 1 (Kampen: Kok, 1995), 252 (correspondence, nr. 5). Portions of eight letters are published by Bremmer, *Dogmaticus*, 91–93, 99–100, 104–7. Gunning’s last letter to Bavinck is published by A. de Lange, *J. H. Gunning Jr. Brieven en brochures uit zijn Leidse tijd (1889–1899)* (Kampen: Kok, 1984), 153.

\(^{16}\) The date of this letter is 12/19/1888. It belonged to W. J. Gunning (1917–2009), who was a great-grandson of Gunning. He offered the letter to P. L. Schram in 1983, who wrote about this in a letter on 08/23/1983 to A. de Lange. This letter to Bavinck is not preserved in the Schram Archives of the HDC. A copy is preserved in the Gunning Archives, at the library of the University of Utrecht, *Gunning 38 C 50, Addenda op het archief van J. H. Gunning Jr. (1829–1905)*.
letter from Bavinck to Gunning has been preserved, which is kept in Paleis het Loo National Museum Foundation in Apeldoorn.  

**The Two Letters from J. H. Gunning, Jr.**

**I. Letter from J. H. Gunning, Jr. to H. Bavinck, Dated August 28, 1895, Regarding Volume 1 of Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics*.**

Esteemed brother!

I have become acquainted with the first volume of your *Reformed Dogmatics*, quickly reading what I knew best, and more closely reading the principled and argued portion. When one has substantive comments about a book, one generally begins with praise and follows with his objections, his “buts.” The opposite is the case with me. I read your book with great delight, agreement, and edification. Hence, I prefer to begin with my lesser and greater objections, in order then to be able to conclude with tribute and with gratitude.

In your rich section on “History of Dogmatics,” I often missed any indication in a number of places of how various schools of thought followed not only *after* each other, but also *from* each other. This is true especially in connection with the description of Schleiermacher’s subjectivism. With respect to the change from

17 Brievenalbum Gunning. Bavinck sent a letter on 05/21/1899 (Pentecost) to congratulate Gunning on his seventieth birthday.

18 See also Bremmer, *Dogmaticus*, 105, where he presents a portion of this letter.


20 *GD* 1:104–139 [*RD* 1:165–204].

21 See *GD* 1:104–05 [*RD* 1:165–66].
Theo-logy, as you describe it, to consciousness-theology or consciousness-doctrine, implemented especially in Schleiermacher, I would rather have seen its meaning described more principally, rather like Frank does in his Geschichte und Kritik der neueren Theologie.22

(A small matter: you speak repeatedly of Schleiermacher’s Glaubenslehre [The Doctrine of Faith]; this title should be his Der Christliche Glaube [The Christian Faith]—a difference that has significance for his conception of doctrine.)23

Did Schérer (131) go further than Vinet?24 I believe that, precisely in his orthodoxy, from the outset and through his decided intellectualism, he stood over against Vinet, and that in so doing, he in no sense “broke with his past,”25 but as Astié showed in “les deux théologies nouvelles,”26 he proceeded step by step, remaining what he was, to arrive through his orthodoxy to his nihilism.

You would not maintain that the Church doesn’t exist in this world (23), as you keep in view the Epistle to the Ephesians—that there is no religio naturalis—and keeping in mind your own correct

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22 Fr. H. R. von Frank, Geschichte und Kritik der neueren Theologie, insbesondere der systematischen, seit Schleiermacher (Erlangen und Leipzig: Deichert, 1894).

23 GD 1:105, 197 [RD 1:165, 265]. It bears notice that Bavinck did not correct this in the second edition of the Gereformeerde Dogmatiek; the English translation makes the correction and provides the title, The Christian Faith.

24 GD 1:131 [RD 1:194]; E. Schérer (1815–89) was a student of A. Vinet (1797–1847). Together with T. Colani (1824–1888), he represented the modernist party in the French Réveil (the so-called Strasburg theology), which wanted to recognize the historical-critical approach to the Bible.

25 Bavinck’s formulation (GD 1:131 [RD 1:194]).

indication (278) that revelation restores the original-natural, so that both assertions are, in my opinion, less felicitous formulations.  

Your arrangement of the Dogmatics, in its difference between what you are rejecting and what I readily maintain in following Calvin’s line, viz., a Trinitarian arrangement, is not clear to me. The description on pages 50–51 does not offer a distinctive arrangement: but to the extent that you indicate one, it appears to me, to my satisfaction, still indeed to be Trinitarian. When the dogmatician, as you rightly say on page 31, reproduces the thought of the Church, then there Nicea is standing as the glorious declaration that in her first general life-formulation the Church has confessed the Triune God.

I heartily agree in large part with your doctrine of Holy Scripture. But it does not quadrate with the title “Reformed” Dogmatics, because it ignores the doctrine of the scientific infallibility of Holy Scripture. It is not to be tolerated morally, now, after the conflict, which was promulgated for nearly twenty years by the school of thought that calls itself exclusively “Reformed” (“Gereformeerde”) and has as its main organs of communication the magazines known as the “Heraut” [Herald] and “Bazuin” [Trumpet], by someone who is functioning as a Reformed (Gereformeerde) [theologian], to leave this point aside. What is the case? The “Reformed” (“Gereformeerden”) not only defend that scientific infallibility (i.e., the absence of any historical mistake in Holy Scripture), but they also call

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27 GD 1:23, 278 [RD 1:84, 360]. Gunning was referring to Bavinck’s opinion that there are no universal things (universalia) such as the tree, the religion, the science, and the church. Gunning criticized the justification of the pluriformity of churches as postulated by Kuyper (see note 39 below). In Gunning’s opinion it was a misleading excuse for the guilt that Christians bear in dividing the one church.

28 Gunning used the verb “quadreeren,” which is unfamiliar in Dutch. It means “to correspond,” “to agree” like the English word “quadrate.”

29 The Heraut was the newspaper of Kuyper and his followers, the Bazuin of the Secession Christian Reformed Church, to which Bavinck belonged. This church united with Kuyper’s churches in 1892. They formed the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands).
our position, which denies that infallibility on the basis of Holy Scripture itself, immoral. Indeed, because when the Lord Jesus was speaking of “Moses” he was referring to the Pentateuch as whole, therefore the opinion that we share, e.g., with Delitzsch—that the Pentateuch as we have it is a product of the historical development of Israel until the Babylonian captivity—was [seen as] a “slap in the holy face of the Savior”—an “assault” on God’s infallible Word. In this manner, the dogmatic definition in your context has far surpassed that of pages 361 and 362. Therefore they are no longer sufficient for that context. For they are fully endorsed, e.g., by me and others who stand guilty of the attitude just mentioned (described literally in that way) vis-à-vis the Savior. To say that these accusations are not officially expressed by the Reformed churches q.t., doesn’t help, since this is merely incidental. Your denomination confesses this in reality. If I, for example, attracted by its confession of the Triune God and the Confession of our Fathers, wanted to join it, because this point of contention has shifted in the popular mind to the moral sphere, I could not and should not refrain for the sake of honesty.

For Delitzsch’s view, see GVW 2:229. Delitzsch did not belong to the modernist school of thought.

Gunning is alluding to, among other things, Kuyper’s attack on J. H. Gunning III, De kritische beschouwing van Israël’s geschiedenis (Haarlem: H. D. Tjeenk Willink, 1885). In it, Gunning’s son maintained that Moses could not be the author of the Pentateuch. Kuyper opposed this position as being an attack on the “person of the Lord Jesus” (see De Heraut [3/8/1885], no. 376). Kuyper also spoke of an “immoral tendency” on the part of Gunning III, because the latter believed that a Pentateuch that did not come from Moses was nevertheless still “God’s Word” (see De Heraut [3/29/1885], no. 379). See further De Heraut (4/12/1885), no. 381, where Kuyper copiously cites from a document from the Hague elder G. J. Thierry, who made mention of “this assault on God’s Word.” In Dutch it is usual to write the letters of the father’s name with ‘z.’ (= son) after the surname, when the son bears the same forenames as his father: J. H. Gunning J.Hz. Here we are following the English style of writing the name with a number, J. H. Gunning III.


Lat. quod testor: something to which I testify.
from disclosing that on the basis of Holy Scripture I denied the scientific infallibility of Holy Scripture. If people then admitted me as a member (which, I believe, would not happen), then they would characterize their own preeminent Ministers in fact as slanderers of their brothers and nevertheless leave them undisturbed. Certainly your church would not commit such acts of characterlessness. They would not admit me, but thereby would express their adherence to the doctrine of scientific infallibility. It really does belong to their dogmas.

Well, in that situation, honored Brother!, for a prominent dogmatician of the “Reformed” church it is just as impermissible to be content with expressions like those on pages 361 and 362 as it should have been morally impermissible for a dogmatician shortly after Nicea to withdraw behind vague expressions like those, e.g., of a person like Eusebius.34

My objections, as far as I recall, are herewith concluded. They are, however, far outweighed by my heartfelt, delighted agreement with the entirety of your book. I owe a great debt to your work, amazed as I am by your clarity and the congeniality of expression, for your enormous breadth of reading, which surpasses my own by a long way, and for the unity of scholarly precision with warmth of faith in your presentation. With sincerity I say along with you (201) that knowledge is first, because we believe God’s own revelation, and that “God said” (Lat. Deus dixit; 499) is the first principle (Lat. primum principium) of everything.35

Your discussion of the “first principles” (Lat. principia)—Rationalism, Empiricism, realism, and of the essence, seat, and origin of religion—has convinced me once again that the “philosophy of religion” within the discipline of theology is an absurdity, and that what

34 GD 1:361–62 [RD 1:445–46]; Gunning was referring to Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 263–339) who was present at the Council of Nicea.
35 GD 1:201, 499 [RD 1: 268, 590].
is true in it easily finds a place either in connection with the discus-

sion of the principia, or (as I would prefer to do) in connection with
the doctrine of God the Father.36

Supposing that I possessed the gifts required for writing a dog-
matics, and that I wanted to do it, then for me the doctrine, or better,
the expectation, of the Kingdom of God, would be placed at the fore-
front. Not in the sense that you rightly reject, as that idea emerges
with Ritschl or Van Oosterzee,37 but in the sense of Aristotle’s state-
ment that “what comes last in reality comes first in thought.”38

My discussion of your book was not intended to teach you some-
ting. For I feel—do me the honor of believing the simple uprightness
of this statement—that I am very much your inferior. Nor did I intend
that you should enter into discussions with me about these points.
You certainly have other things to do. But I wanted to give you a con-
crete indication of how highly I value your work.

May our God strengthen you in body and soul to complete this
work, and further to perform all that your weighty vocation demands
of you.

Believe me with warm honor and affection,
Your fellow brother J. H. Gunning.
Grossgmain near Reichenhall (Austria), August 28, 189539

N.B. What I mentioned in this letter on page 5, viz., that I would
prefer to move much of what you present in this first volume to the

36 The postscript at the end of the letter picks up these comments.

37 For Gunning’s criticism of Ritschl’s depreciation of the Christian expectation
of the future see GVW 2:581 n 16. For his criticism of the notion of a “Kingdom
theology” advocated by J. J. van Oosterzee, see GVW 1, 566 n 4.

38 See GVW 2:586. The text comes from Aristotle’s Physica II, 360 (261a, l. 13f.)

39 Every summer during the 1890s, Gunning stayed at the estate “Gnadenheim”
of Helene Alsche at Grossgmain in Bavaria (Germany). He performed physical
work there (see J. H. Gunning III, Herinneringen uit mijn leven, 2nd ed.
[Amsterdam: H. J. Spruyt, 1941], 191.
Dogmatics itself, is also the opinion of a recent Dogmatics that I found was not mentioned in your historical overview, viz., in *Etude sur l’oeuvre de la redemption*, by Jules Bovon, professor of the Free Church of Canton de Vaud (Lausanne).40 This book rests on Vinet’s individualistic viewpoint, but has many beautiful portions. I own it; if you would like to become acquainted with it, I will gladly make it available to you.

II. Letter of J. H. Gunning, Jr. to H. Bavinck, Dated December 22, 1897, Regarding the Second Volume of Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics*

Honorable and esteemed colleague!

During the Christmas break I have been able to read the second volume of *Reformed Dogmatics*. It was enjoyable for me, often edifying, almost everywhere a rich education. I am astonished by the breadth of your reading, which is at least ten times broader than mine; and I heartily rejoice that the remarkable series of writings coming from the Reformed context has been expanded by you in such an honorable fashion. May our God place his immense blessing upon this truly beautiful book!

Pages like 68–70 possess a radiance (Fr. *rayonnement*), as does your discussion of the will of God (202ff.).41 I read with profound agreement your entire perspective of the holy Trinity, “the mystery of Christianity, the heart of religion,”42 especially your instruction about the personality and divinity of the Holy Spirit.43

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40 The first volume of this work of J. Bovon appeared in 1893 with Bridel at Lausanne. On Bovon, see Bremmer, *Dogmaticus*, 101.
Your arrangement of the divine attributes (136–37) appears to me to be too clever, too abstract, not sufficiently one inclusive whole.\(^{44}\) In connection with this discussion, no matter how elegant it is, I watched you cross the boundaries, or repeatedly discuss the same attribute. But how could this be otherwise? Also the arrangement that I follow—(1.) those attributes of God that relate him to created reality in general; 2. those involving his relationship to the entire world of humanity; and 3. those indicating his relationship to the sinful and redeemed world of humanity—that arrangement also appeared to me, in connection with this discussion, to suffer the same shortcoming, although it appears to me simpler and more organically integrated than yours. All of this means that I actually have no objection to following the lack of order in Article 1 of our Confession.\(^{45}\) Your discussion of God’s simplicity is, I think, fruitful and beautiful.\(^{46}\)

I heartily agree with your view regarding the counsel of God, with regard to the general perspectives and the predestination that leads to salvation.\(^{47}\) I cannot do the same with the logical corollary, the doctrine of reprobation in its Calvinistic meaning. This is not at all because I would not in fact believe this reprobation with trembling, in accordance with God’s Word. But because that same Word forbids me to complete my “system” prior to the complete factual victory over sin. According to God’s Word, I think, for God’s children the light alone is light and the darkness is dark to them.\(^{48}\) The Word is a lamp for my feet, a light upon my path, both are sufficiently illuminated by this lantern that I am carrying, but not the shrubbery and ditches on the side of that path; I see only that I must avoid them, but I do not fathom, measure, or probe them. On page 360 you say:

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\(^{45}\) Here Gunning is referring to the Belgic Confession of 1562.


\(^{47}\) Bavinck discussed the counsel of God in *GD* 2:313–85 [*RD* 2:341–405].

\(^{48}\) For the same expression, see *GVW* 3:456 (*Van Calvijn tot Rousseau*).
“Faith and good works, we know, are not the cause of election; . . .” and I say “Amen.” Yet you continue, “. . . but neither is sin the cause of reprobation, . . . .”49 This “but neither” is unimpeachably logical, but I deem this logic to be forbidden for me because it is not found in the sphere of the eu-angelion. I certainly know that people say: “sin is not the efficient but the sufficient cause of reprobation but nonetheless the cause of this reprobation lies only in God’s sovereign good pleasure.” However, this “but nonetheless” appears to me not to be a conclusion arising from humility that bows to the mystery (although it presents itself in good faith as such), but to be a violent forcing of the series of thoughts to a conclusion, because one will not resign oneself to live with an inconclusive series [of thoughts]. In my opinion Calvin is to be excused (relatively speaking) for this, but we are not. Calvin, to be sure, for he was the head of a group. The pluri-formity of the Church is a sin, is against the Lord’s will, even if it is historically necessary as a result of sin.50 Whoever takes the lead in the formation of such organizations needs sharp and firm lines, clear boundaries for the people and for his own sound understanding. Without a short, concise, crystal clear answer to every objection he cannot govern. The rich variety of viewpoints in Holy Scripture would give a foothold to various troublesome liberties among the followers; thus the head must provide solid lines to the left and the right. This was Calvin’s view: “Yet I shall be content to have provided godly minds with a sort of index to what they should particularly look for in Scripture concerning God, and to direct their search to a sure goal.”51 Consequently, “if there is eternal election, then there is

49 Bavinck, GD 2:360 [RD 2:385].
50 Gunning rejected, e.g., Kuyper’s justification of ecclesiastical pluriformity. See GVW 2:566, 604.
51 “At ego velut indicans propo suisse contentus, ero, quo monitae piae mentis quid potissimum in Scripturis de Deo investigandem sit, norint, et ad certum ejus inquisitionis seopum dirigantur (Institutes 1.10.1; trans. Battles; emphasis in Gunning).
also eternal reprobation, both prior to and independent of the faith and the unbelief of human beings”—that is logical, a child can grasp it; with that the people of God can be clearly, quickly, and unarguably separated from heretics with whom to debate would make the governance of the church impossible. I do not say that this is a conscious action; no, but the instinct of the church ruler presses in that direction. Still what is to be excused with him (presuming the sinful condition of pluriformity has been accepted) is not the case with us. We should acknowledge that in Holy Scripture two series of expressions exist, whose sacred connection indubitably exists, but which is beyond our logic. Namely A: the person believes and is saved because in free, sovereign grace God has elected him. B: the sinner is lost not because God has so destined him, but because of his unbelief. God clearly destined and acted so that one’s unbelief by virtue of hardening would attain its paroxysm (Pharaoh, etc.) now that it once existed, but except for Satan’s temptation (whose fall itself was in turn also not explained), there is no reason given for that unbelief other than the misuse of human freedom.

For Calvin’s bilateral dogma it would be necessary that both groups of humans be presented in Scripture as personae nudae, without quality, but that happens nowhere. Those whom God will look upon are qualified as pure in heart, as those who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness who will be satisfied, etc. Not because of that hunger, not because of the faith (the praevisa fides of the Remonstrants was rightly rejected at Dordt), but that hunger and thirst are present (these do not arise afterward) in a connection that is too great for me to understand: it is grace. Also in connection with the reprobate, e.g., in the series of texts that you supply, the wicked

52 Paroxysm: greatest intensity, e.g., of an illness.
53 See the Canons of Dordt 1.9.
54 In GD 2:379, lines 4–5 from bottom [RD 2:401, lines 7–8 from top].
quality is in the same way present \textit{along with}, still here a causal connection is clear for every unbiased reader, namely, that reprobation is not the cause but the consequence of evil. I stop at this point, without seeking to obtain in this lifetime a logical connection. In fact, I am in good company. There is One other, who, by virtue of his illogical juxtaposition of two contradictory terms, would also have to be called a “half” if one but \textit{dared} (Matt. 18:7).55

Elsewhere,56 should not the word “emanation” be replaced with the phrase “the \textit{truth} of what is indicated by emanation”? Generation is not emanation, not even with Origen, let alone in Holy Scripture.

In connection with the existence of angels, when you mentioned “especially the Reformed,”57 I thought of Calvin who personally expressed himself frequently about the angels. In his letters he often admonishes confessors in difficult circumstances to be aware of the presence of angels, and on his deathbed he says once more to the Genevan authorities, “I testify to you before God and his holy angels,” etc. I seem to remember that Stähelin notes this in his biography.58

Nevertheless, these are but a few small matters, noted in passing. I must in conclusion thank you for the beautiful development of the doctrine of the covenant of works. My earlier, unwise rejection of that truth had already been dispelled by Dr. Kuyper. You have not only confirmed me in that, but you have clarified the full truth for me. Certain theosophical speculations, e.g., about the original sexless-

55 Based on the passage, Gunning was referring to Jesus. Gunning and his fellow theologians were called “halves” by Kuyper.
56 GD 2:401, 14 lines from bottom [RD 2:420, 10 lines from top].
57 GD 2:429 [RD 2:450, “Especially the Reformed tended in this connection to sin more by defect than by excess.”] Here Bavinck made some critical remarks about the worship of angels. He appreciated the Calvinist sobriety on this point.
ness of Adam, I had already abandoned as something not in agreement with biblical sobriety. 59 But you have made me aware of a deeper motive for countering this error with regard to the God-given destiny of natural life. 60 (I remain a vegetarian out of firm conviction, but on other grounds that have nothing to do with asceticism or the devaluation of the natural; but this is not relevant.) 61

I laid the book down with gratitude, with increased esteem for the author, and with deep longing for the next volume. But I imagine that I will often pick this volume up again. Until now when my students have asked me for suitable manuals for dogmatic studies, I have recommended to them Calvin’s Institutes, the edition of Scholten’s Dogmatics by La Saussaye Sr., and the Dogmatics of J. T. Beck. The first two remain, but the last one I think I will replace with your book when I have to offer advice to young people. 62

With all my heart I wish you the Lord’s blessing for the completion of this work and of all the other labor that rests upon you. I have written these comments because I deem it my duty, in connection with such a highly valuable gift, to give the writer at least a glimpse that someone has read his work attentively. Although whatever comes from your hand will be accepted with pleasure by

59 Gunning had been an advocate of the doctrine of the androgyny of Adam in Blikken III, 232–35.

60 GD 2:559–61 [RD 2:575–76].

61 As a result of typhus, to which Gunning nearly succumbed in 1875, he suffered a chronic wound in his leg. The ailment was lessened by a diet of vegetables, to which Gunning strictly held since 1879. See the diary of M. J. van Lennep, 1879, 55:4403 (September), 888 (available at http://vanlennep.nl/dagboeken/).

62 Gunning indicates D. Chantepie de la Saussaye, Beoordeeling van het werk van Dr. J.H. Scholten over de leer der Hervormde Kerk (Utrecht: Kemink, 1885). A preface for this edition was prepared by J. J. P. Valeton, Jr. For the dogmatics mentioned by Gunning, see J. T. Beck, Vorlesungen über christliche Glaubenslehre, herausgegeben von J. Lindenmeijer, 2 vol. ( Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1886, 1887).
me, you need not reply; however, I will not interpret your possible silence as discourtesy or the like.

So it is with friendly greetings that I remain
Gratefully yours, J. H. Gunning
Leiden, December 22, 1897
[intentionally blank page]
Pearls and Leaven

John Bolt

Précis of Herman Bavinck’s “Persevering in the Christian Life”

Introduction

The present issue of the Bavinck Review deals with certainty of faith and assurance of salvation. In keeping with this theme, Pearls and Leaven here provides advance copy of the précis prepared for chapter 10 in the forthcoming first volume of Herman Bavinck’s Reformed Ethics, i.e. Reformed Ethics: Created, Fallen, and Converted Humanity.¹ This précis, prepared by the editor, reveals Bavinck’s pastoral heart and his use church history to answer perennial questions.

Bavinck on “Persevering in the Christian Life”

If I believe today, can I be sure I will still believe tomorrow? Next year? On my deathbed? If I say that God preserves his elect, can I be confident that I am among the elect? On the other hand, can those who are truly converted ever fall away?

These questions have troubled Christians from the time of the apostles and received theological exposure by Augustine in his conflicts with the Pelagians. Since then, believers have struggled to

find assurance of their salvation, often oscillating between being overly anxious and finding no security on the one hand, and the casual consolation of cheap grace on the other.

After Augustine, the church became Pelagian. Roman Catholic scholastic theology taught that apart from special revelation no assurance is possible. The Remonstrants and Lutherans also fail to provide full certainty. Starting with Zwingli, however, and then especially after Calvin, the Reformed tradition taught a full, confident assurance in the perseverance of the saints, one that nonetheless did not exclude all experiences of doubt and anxiety. This assurance does not derive from some private revelation beyond or outside the Word but from faith in the promises of God, from the testimony of the Holy Spirit that we are God’s children, and from a serious and holy pursuit of a clear conscience and good works. Although our faith derives its stability from God’s promise, it can nonetheless be strengthened by considering such “good works” as “testimonies of God dwelling in us.” Any valid use of the “practical syllogism” starts with faith. But believers may not rely on good works or begin with them; this results only in uncertainty.

In the early days of the Reformation, in a time of revived, powerful faith manifested in powerful deeds, people were assured of their election; this is the assurance that the Reformed confessions refer to as “reward.” Over time, however, more and more people who believed still lacked assurance and a fatal distinction was made between faith and the assurance of faith, between “refuge-taking” faith and “refuge-seeking” faith. To console anxious believers, spiritual writers tried to point out that much of what anxious people experienced within was not from themselves and was not experienced by unbelievers. In fact, their experiences of uncertainty were similar to those of all or many true children of God—namely, that faith could be very weak and still be present. Not satisfied with this, some began to seek immediate assurance, a direct illumination
from God. This was contrary to Reformed theology, which teaches that though the testimony and sealing by the Holy Spirit are supernatural, they are tethered to the Word: this testimony is in and through faith and consists of the Holy Spirit testifying with our spirit.

The question of assurance is an ancient philosophical question and includes assurance about ourselves and that which is external to us. We want to know if we can be sure of what we know. Faith is essential to all human knowing, not only the assurance of our salvation. The latter depends on and is drawn from the assurance of present grace; our election is tested by faith, not the other way around. We are assured by faith—in the promises of God, by the testimony of the Spirit. This faith is an agreement in mind and trust in the heart that God’s promises are true for me; I am conscious of my own faith as a gift sealed by the Holy Spirit, also through my own works as its fruit. We can be absolutely and infallibly sure of our salvation; our past election and future glory are assurances drawn from the present experience of grace, in which we realize our adoption as God’s children. The same Spirit who makes us conscious of our adoption is also the pledge and guarantee of our future glory and confirms and seals it until the final day. This sealing is objective and subjective; it is our sanctification and our awareness of our renewal as image bearers of God. Assurance of faith is a direct act of faith based on God’s promises; the feeling of assurance is a reflexive act of faith that rests upon the reality of Christ in us. The Holy Spirit adopts, leads, and seals believers.

Contrary to what some pious people think, sealing and assurance are not a special, extraordinary revelation but a testimony of the Holy Spirit mediated by the Word (text), our faith, and the leading of the Spirit in doing good works. Sealing, however, is not identical with conversion, the infusion of faith, regeneration, but a moment of development (worked by the Holy Spirit) in the spiritual life distinguished from those other moments. This does not happen at
the same time in all persons; ignorance of the Word, unbelief, lack of good works may stand in the way.

When the initial joy and confidence of Reformation faith waned, people turned to self-examination using “marks” of grace. This did lead to extremes of easy and false assurance leading to indifference, on the one hand, and hyper-scrupulousness leading to anxiety and doubt, on the other. A healthy approach reminds believers not to be fooled by appearances of piety in “almost Christians” and seeks to help believers avoid becoming overwhelmed and discouraged by believing that only heroic faith can save. True faith includes trust and assurance and comes from the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit and from a serious and holy pursuit of a clear conscience and good works.
Book Review


“Preaching is, at present, out of touch with the time and does not meet its needs” (63). These words, penned by Bavinck in 1883, sound right at home in our present context. In *Herman Bavinck on Preaching and Preachers*, James P. Eglinton, Meldrum Lecturer of Reformed Theology at the University of Edinburgh and author of the groundbreaking study *Trinity and Organism* (Bloomsbury, 2012), introduces readers to a different side of Bavinck, one unknown to most English-speaking students of Bavinck: Bavinck as preacher. As in the dogmatic works of Bavinck, more familiar to English speakers, Bavinck reveals himself to be a thinker whose voice is remarkably well-suited to guide and instruct readers today. The wisdom, nuance, critiques, and instruction that Bavinck gives to preachers in this short volume is a gift to Bavinck scholarship and practitioners seeking to teach and preach faithfully in our own age.

*Herman Bavinck on Preaching and Preachers* contains Bavinck’s key texts on preaching. As Eglinton details in the introduction to this work, Bavinck has become increasingly prominent in North American Reformed theology. His dogmatic theology has become a key resource, but little has been known about other areas of his speaking and writing, including his work as an ethicist and as a preacher. This is, as Eglinton describes, a “curious gap” (1) in Bavinck scholarship. Theologians and preachers who read Bavinck in the present day know very little about Bavinck as a preacher,
although he preached quite regularly. Many English-speaking pastors have benefitted from the teaching of Bavinck, which is rooted in Scripture, thoroughly Trinitarian, with Christ at the center, but the sermons of Bavinck, and his teaching on preaching have been, until now, difficult—if not impossible, for those who do not speak or read Dutch—to access. Eglinton’s new volume, beautifully translated and edited, helpfully fills this gap. Eglinton opens an important window into Bavinck’s thought on preaching (“The Sermon and the Service” and “On Preaching in America”), methods of formation for preaching (“Eloquence”), and his own preaching (“The World-Conquering Power of Faith,” Bavinck’s only published sermon; another translation of this sermon, by John Bolt, can be found in Herman Bavinck on the Christian Life: Following Jesus in Faithful Service [Crossway, 2015]).

Reflecting on the content of this volume, Eglinton writes that should the reader “engage with Bavinck the preacher, you will likely acquire a more richly textured grasp of his theology” (3). Readers of this volume will certainly find this to be the case. As yet another translated work of Bavinck’s, alongside many new and upcoming translations and re-translations of Bavinck’s works in theology, philosophy, and ethics, Herman Bavinck on Preaching and Preachers is of significant benefit to the English-speaking world. This translation is also of particular benefit for practice. As Eglinton describes, this work “aims to stimulate preachers who read [Bavinck’s] Reformed Dogmatics in their own reflective practice” (3). Herman Bavinck on Preaching and Preachers is a rich resource for preachers, teachers, and other students of Bavinck, engendering insight, application, and deep piety as it displays the thoughts of a man deeply saturated in the Word of God, articulating his insights and wisdom as he expresses the glorious “deeds that God has done” (Reformed Dogmatics, vol. 1, 58), in preached form.
Eglinton helpfully situates Bavinck’s writings on preaching and preachers in an introduction to the work which contains a brief biography of Herman Bavinck. Readers less familiar with Bavinck will find this introduction to be a helpful overview of Bavinck’s life, thought, and historical context; those more familiar with Bavinck will also be aided in this introduction to Bavinck as preacher, especially through Eglinton’s selections of key, poignant excerpts from Bavinck’s letters and diaries.

The content of this volume is rich. In “Eloquence,” a lecture delivered in Kampen (1889), Bavinck gives an extended theological reflection on the task of preaching and the person of the preacher. In the foreword to the published lecture, Bavinck writes, “the gospel of Christ does not need our decorations, our energetic words of human wisdom; it is true and beautiful and rich in and of itself. But in order to present it in all of its glory, to speak it in a demonstration of the spirit and of power, constant practice, persistent effort, and loving dedication are demanded” (19). In “Eloquence,” drawing upon Scripture, poetry, sophistry, song, philosophy, and theology, Bavinck reflects on the “heavy responsibility of the ministry of the Word” (43), how to preach and how to be a preacher. The second lecture of Bavinck on preaching, “The Sermon and the Service,” also betrays the perennial nature of contemporary issues. Bavinck reflects on challenges to church attendance, including church as a “waste of time,” competition with the “grandiose activity” of the day which “hastens and turns and pushes everything forward” such that the “still life of faith is moved to the background and fades away” (58). He writes of the “impatient and cultured generation” that rejects a sermon without the “attractiveness of novelty” (59). Bavinck’s insights to these challenges show themselves to be strikingly relevant. Alongside his teaching on preaching, in “The World-Conquering Power of Faith,” Bavinck shows the reader how to preach. Finally, perhaps of special interest to the North American reader, this volume
includes “On Preaching in America,” a selection of Bavinck’s reflections on his journey to America (the full translation of “Mijne reis naar Amerika” has also been published by Eglinton, in Dutch Crossing, 2017.)

While the applications of this volume to preaching are obvious and important, Bavinck’s insights extend far beyond preaching. He writes, “the advent of Christianity opened up a world of thought, teeming with life and thrilling in its beauty . . . everything in every area of art and science, whether in us or our adversaries, that is true, good, lovely, and harmonious is Christlike” (55). Bavinck repeatedly displays his characteristic nuance, emphasis on grace restoring nature, affirmation of God’s ongoing work within creation, the centrality of Scripture, and his Trinitarian and Christ-centered thought.

Eglinton has done readers a tremendous service by making these works accessible to English speakers. May all who read this volume be edified!

—JESSICA JOUSTRA
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Jessica Joustra

Herman Bavinck

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**J. H. Bavinck**

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Contributors

John Bolt (bltj@calvinseminary.edu) is the Jean and Kenneth Baker Professor of Systematic Theology emeritus at Calvin Theological Seminary.

Mathilde de Vries-Van Uden (mathildevanuden@gmail.com) studied Classics at the University of Leiden.

Allan J. Janssen (aljanssen@hotmail.com) is Affiliate Professor of Theological Studies, New Brunswick Theological Seminary, retired; and General Synod Professor emeritus, Reformed Church in America.

Jessica Joustra (jessjoustra@gmail.com) is a PhD Candidate in Christian Ethics at Fuller Theological Seminary.

Leo Mietus (lmietus@pthu.nl) is Lecturer at the Seminary of the Alliance of Free Evangelical Churches in the Netherlands, which is an associated partner of the Protestant Theological University (PThU) in Amsterdam.

Henk van den Belt (h.van.den.belt@rug.nl) is Professor of Reformed Theology at the University of Groningen.
GIJSBERT VAN DEN BRINK (g.vanden.brink@vu.nl) is Professor of Theology and Science at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

CORNELIUS (KEES) VAN DER KOOI (c.vander.kooi@vu.nl) is Professor of Systematic Theology at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.