

Book Review

Eglinton, James P., trans. and ed. *Herman Bavinck on Preaching and Preachers*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2017. 150 pages.

“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