

Herman Bavinck's Lectures on the Certainty of Faith (1891)

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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.¹ 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]).² 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

¹ 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.

² 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]).

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.³ 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.⁴

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

³ “Twee versies van het manuscript ‘De zekerheid des geloofs’ als lezing uitgesproken in Bedum, Arnhem, Amsterdam en Appingedam in 1891,” *Archief-H. Bavinck*, Historisch Documentatiecentrum voor het Nederlands Protestantisme (1800–heden), Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (HDC), collectienummer 346, inventarisnummer 341.

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. -."

⁶ "Dagboekjes 1871–1891," *Archief-H. Bavinck*, HDC, collectienummer 346, inventarisnummer 16.

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.”⁸

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 jewellery 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.⁹

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

⁸ “De lezing van dr. Bavinck,” *Bijvoegsel behoorende 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.

⁹ “Dagboekjes 1871–1891,” *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, *Geloofs zekerheid*, 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.”¹¹ Some detailed descriptions of pietistic spirituality from the lectures are absent in the booklet.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.

¹¹ Bavinck, *Geloofszekerheid*, 166–167. In *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.

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, *Geloofszekerheid*, 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])¹³

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.”¹⁴ 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 1901.¹⁵ 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

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

¹⁶ Herman Bavinck, *De Katholiciteit van Christendom en Kerk: Rede bij de overdracht van het rectoraat aan de Theologische School te Kampen* (Kampen: Kok, 1888), 45. For the translation, see Herman Bavinck, "The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church," trans. John Bolt, *Calvin Theological Journal* 27/2 (1992), 220–251.

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.

¹⁸ Bavinck, *Geloofszekerheid*, 174.

¹⁹ Bavinck, *Geloofszekerheid*, 171, 180.

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.²⁰ 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."²¹ Bavinck elaborates on this by the practical remark that

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, *Geloofszerheid*, 186, 187.

²¹ Bavinck, *Geloofszerheid*, 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.”²²

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.”²³ 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

²² Bavinck, *Geloofs zekerheid*, 192, cf. 197 for the similar thought in the second version.

²³ Bavinck, *Geloofs zekerheid*, 200.

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.”²⁴

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.²⁵

²⁴ Herman Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* (Kampen: Kok, 1930) [henceforth Bavinck, *GD*], 3:541–43 and Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vol., ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003–2008) [henceforth Bavinck, *RD*], 3:542–44.

²⁵ The reference is to 1 John 5:4, one of Bavinck's favorite texts. The only sermon published by him is on this text. Herman Bavinck, *De wereldverwinnende kracht des geloofs: Leerrede over 1 Joh. 5:4b, uitgesproken in de Burgwalkerk te Kampen den 30sten Juni 1901* (Kampen: Kok, 1901). For the English translation see “The World-Conquering Power of Faith,” trans. John Bolt in John Bolt, *Bavinck and The Christian Life: Following Jesus in Faithful Service* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 237–54.

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.²⁶ 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.”²⁷ 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.²⁸

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.”²⁹ 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

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

²⁹ Bavinck, *Geloofszekeerheid*, 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, *Geloofszerkerheid*, 195.

³¹ Bavinck, *Geloofszerkerheid*, 195.

³² Bavinck, *Geloofszerkerheid*, 197.

³³ Bavinck, *Geloofszerkerheid*, 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

³⁷ Bavinck, *Geloofs zekerheid*, 193.

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]).³⁸

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

³⁸ Cf. N.L. Von Zinzendorf, “Eine Rede von dem klaren und unumstößlichen Beweise der Evangelischen Predigt,” and “Anhang,” in N. L. von Zinzendorf, *Hauptschriften: in sechs Bänden*, ed. E. Beyreuther and G. Meyer, vol. 4 (Hildesheim: Olms, 1963), 15–28, 17–18. “Es gibt keine andere demonstrationem evangelicam, die man an führen kan, es gibt keinen andern beweis der bibel-wahrheit als: mein herz sagt mirs, das ist der evangelische beweis.” Cf. O. Uttendörfer, *Zinzendorfs Weltbetrachtung* (Berlin: [n.p.], [1929]), 233–4.

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?’”³⁹

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.⁴⁰ 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,

³⁹ Bavinck, *GD*, 1:469. Cf. Bavinck, *RD*, 1:503.

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

⁴¹ Bavinck, *GD*, 1:523. Cf. Bavinck, *RD*, 1:551.

⁴² Bavinck, *GD*, 1:546-547. Cf. Bavinck, *RD*, 1:577-78.

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.

⁴³ Bavinck, *GD*, 1:547. Cf. Bavinck, *RD*, 1:578.

⁴⁴ Bavinck, *GD*, 1:532. Cf. Bavinck, *RD*, 1:564.

⁴⁵ B.B. Warfield, “A Review of H. Bavinck, *De Zekerheid des Geloofs*,” in B. B. Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings*, ed. J.E. Meeter, vol. 2 (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), 106–123, 117. This review originally appeared in *Princeton Theological Review* (1903), 138–48. See my dissertation, Henk van den Belt, *The Authority of Scripture in Reformed Theology: Truth and Trust*, Studies in Reformed Theology, vol. 17 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 232–5 and also the article by Gijsbert van den Brink, “On Certainty in Faith and Science: The Bavinck-Warfield Exchange” in this issue of *The Bavinck Review*.

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.

⁴⁷ Bavinck, *Geloofszekeerheid*, 81; Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, 74–75. Bavinck also adds some words on the importance of the sacraments. Bavinck, *Geloofszekeerheid*, 92; Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, 89.

⁴⁸ Bavinck, *Geloofszekeerheid*, 84–85; Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, 79.

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 *Afgescheidenen* 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.