

# 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?"<sup>1</sup> 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

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\* 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.

<sup>1</sup> "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.<sup>2</sup>

From the start of his pastorate in Franeker, Bavinck was engaged in the task of editing the sixth edition. On the 1<sup>st</sup> 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.”<sup>3</sup>

### Competition with Kuypers

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

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<sup>2</sup> Johannes Polyander, Andreas Rivetus, Antonius Walaëus, and Antonius Thysius, *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae, Disputationibus quinquaginta duabus comprehensa ... Editio sexta, curavit et praefatus est Dr. H. Bavinck* (Leiden: Donner, 1881). The first edition was Johannes Polyander, Andreas Rivetus, Antonius Walaëus, and Antonius Thysius, *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae, Disputationibus quinquaginta duabus comprehensa* (Leiden: Elzevier, 1625). For more information see the recent critical edition, Dolf te Velde, ed., Riemer Faber, trans., *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae/Synopsis of a Purer Theology: Latin Text and English Translation*, Volume 1, Disputations 1–23 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2014) and Volume 2, Disputations 24–42, ed. Henk van den Belt, trans. Riemer Faber (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2016). For the historical background of the cycle and the first edition, see Donald Sinnema and Henk van den Belt, “The *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae* (1625) as a Disputation Cycle,” in *Church History and Religious Culture* 92.4 (2012): 505–537.

<sup>3</sup> “’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.”<sup>4</sup> 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.”<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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

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<sup>4</sup> 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

<sup>5</sup> “Advertentie,” *De Standaard*, April 5, 1881. The text was consulted via [www.delpher.nl](http://www.delpher.nl) on January 5, 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Donner announces the publication in *Nieuwsblad voor den boekhandel* 48/28 (1881) on April 8, 1881. The text was consulted via [www.delpher.nl](http://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.<sup>7</sup>

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.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> "Nederland," *De Heraut*, Amsterdam, April 24, 1881. The text was consulted via [www.delpher.nl](http://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.

<sup>8</sup> "Advertentie," *De Heraut*, April 24, 1881. The text was consulted via [www.delpher.nl](http://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.

<sup>9</sup> H. de Cock, "Announcement of *Synopsis purioris theologiae*," *De Bazuin: Gereformeerde stemmen uit de Christelijke Afscheidene Kerk in Nederland* 29/15 (1881), April 15. The text was consulted via [www.delpher.nl](http://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*.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup>

### **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)

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2018. The book was published in a few parts and could be bound by the owner afterwards, a rather common procedure at that time.

<sup>10</sup> Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck*, 41.

<sup>11</sup> A. Kuyper, "Announcement of *Synopsis purioris theologiae*," *De Heraut*, December 4, 1881. The text was consulted via [www.delpher.nl](http://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.<sup>12</sup>

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.<sup>13</sup>

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

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<sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>13</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* 1:415, n50.

were kept from every error in thought, memory, word and pen.”<sup>14</sup> 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.”<sup>15</sup> Notwithstanding this reference, it is difficult to conclude any specific influence of the *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 *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 *Synopsis* with Arabic numerals for

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<sup>14</sup> *Synopsis of a Purer Theology*, 79.

<sup>15</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* 1:415, n51.

both the disputation and the thesis, as “Synopsis pur. theol. disp. 2, 10 v.”<sup>16</sup>

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.<sup>17</sup>

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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<sup>16</sup> The references are from Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* (4<sup>th</sup> edition) 2:422 n6, 4:56 n1, and 1:479 n2. Compare Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* 2:461 n79, 4:80, n104, and 1:513 n18. The English edition in general follows the annotation in the original.

<sup>17</sup> Herman Bavinck et al., *Advies inzake het Gravamen tegen Artikel XXXVI der Belijdenis* (Amsterdam: Höveker en Wormser, 1905), 21.

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.<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup>

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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<sup>18</sup> More detailed research might reveal some interesting aspects of that influence; see, for instance, my article on Bavinck's concept of the *vocatio*. Henk van den Belt, "Herman Bavinck and His Reformed Sources on the Call to Grace: A Shift in Emphasis towards the Internal Work of the Spirit," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 29.1 (2011): 41–59.

<sup>19</sup> 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*<sup>20</sup>**

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.

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<sup>20</sup> Polyander, Revetus, Walaeus, and Thysius, *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae*, iii–vii.

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<sup>21</sup> was replaced by Polyander,<sup>22</sup> and in 1619 Walaeus<sup>23</sup> followed. In the same year Thysius,<sup>24</sup> professor in Harderwijk, inaugurated. And Rivetus,<sup>25</sup> 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

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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<sup>21</sup> Franciscus Gomarus (1563-1641).

<sup>22</sup> Johannes Polyander van Kerckhoven (1568-1646).

<sup>23</sup> Antonius Walaeus (1573-1639).

<sup>24</sup> Antonius Thysius (1565-1640).

<sup>25</sup> Andreas Rivetus (1572-1651).

one. Thysius was more learned in church history, Rivetus in reading the Church Fathers and Walaesus in Scholastic Theology. Walaesus 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, Walaesus in a brief and concise manner, and Polyander adapted his teachings to practice.<sup>26</sup>

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 Walaesus,” 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, Walaesus, and Thysius, and the others (from the tenth up to the last one) alternately by Polyander, Rivetus, Walaesus, and Thysius, so that fourteen disputations were written by Polyander, eleven by Rivetus, fourteen by Walaesus 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

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<sup>26</sup> The quote is from “The Life of Walaesus” included by his son Johannes Walaesus (1604-1649) in his father’s Latin *Works*. Johannes Walaesus “Vita Antonii Walaei,” in Antonius Walaesus, *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<sup>27</sup> 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. Coccejus<sup>28</sup> and other

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<sup>27</sup> In a footnote Bavinck refers to Christiaan Sepp, *Het godgeleerd onderwijs in Nederland gedurende de 16<sup>e</sup> en 17<sup>e</sup> eeuw* (Leiden: De Breuk en Smits, 1873), 2:23–94.

<sup>28</sup> Johannes Coccejus (1603–1699).

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,<sup>29</sup> 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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<sup>29</sup> 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*.