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REVIEW



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Bavinck Review

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Contents

Editorial

JOHN BOLT	1
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Articles

Kuyper and Bavinck on Natural Theology RICHARD A. MULLER	5
Nicolaus Steffens on Christianity as a Remedial Scheme GEORGE HARINCK	37

Translations

Herman Bavinck's Foreword to <i>Unbelief and Revolution</i> ANDREW KLOES AND HARRY VAN DYKE	75
W. B. Kristensen's "On Herman Bavinck's Scientific Work" LAURENCE O'DONNELL	85
Herman Bavinck's Notebook on Calvin's Doctrine of Sin GREGORY W. PARKER JR.	101

Pearls and Leaven

JOHN BOLT	109
-----------------	-----

Book Review	115
-------------------	-----

Bavinck Bibliography 2018–2019

JESSICA JOUSTRA	123
-----------------------	-----

Contributors	127
--------------------	-----

Editorial

John Bolt

This volume is the tenth anniversary edition of the *Bavinck Review*. I find myself a bit awestruck by this and can think of no better way to express this than by repeating what I wrote in the opening of my editorial in Volume 1:

The coming into being of this online journal, the *Bavinck Review* . . . is the result of a providential confluence of events beyond Herman Bavinck's wildest dreams. For starters, take the computer and the internet. Add to these the facts that he wrote his *Reformed Dogmatics* from within the church and for the church with the hope that it would "stimulate further study"¹ and that his modesty would have prevented him from thinking that after a half-century of dormancy, a pioneering group of Bavinck scholars—Heideman, Bremmer, Veenhof—would help bring about a renaissance of Bavinck studies in his own country that has yet to cease, and the present resurgence of interest in Bavinck's theology becomes amazing. He might have hoped for it, but he never would have expected it.

Much has happened since 2010: First, the appearance of new translations and editions of Bavinck's works, such as *Philosophy of Revelation* (see the review in this issue), *Saved by Grace: The Holy Spirit's Work in Calling and Regeneration*, *The Christian Family*, *Herman Bavinck on Preaching and Preachers*, and more recently *The Sacrifice of Praise* and *Christian Worldview*. In addition, the *Reformed Dogmatics* has been translated into the Korean, Indonesian, and Portuguese languages and is being translated into Mandarin. A glance at the annual bibliographies in the *Bavinck Review* reveals the explosion of Bavinck scholarship that is now international in scope and outreach.

¹Herman Bavinck, trans. John Bolt, "Herman Bavinck, Foreword to the First Edition (Volume 1) of the *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*," *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, no.1 (2010): 10.

I want to saunter through the ten volumes of the *Bavinck Review* and highlight what I take to be some of its major contributions. The most significant article in the first volume was Dirk van Keulen’s “Herman Bavinck’s *Reformed Ethics*: Some Remarks about Unpublished Manuscripts in the Libraries of Amsterdam and Kampen” (*Bavinck Review* 1 [2010]: 25–56) because it led to the transcription, translation, and publication of Bavinck’s lectures on Reformed ethics. For the full story of this discovery’s significance, see my preface to the first volume of *Reformed Ethics*.²

Volume 2 featured articles by young scholars (Robert S. Covolo, Timothy Shaun Price, Laurence O’Donnell, Michael S. Chen, Travis Ryan Pickell) on topics as diverse as Bavinck’s theological ethics, and comparisons between Bavinck and: Abraham Kuyper (on education), Cornelius Van Til (apologetics), and Augustine (epistemology and the incomprehensibility of evil). We also introduced two research projects: Wolter Huttinga on Bavinck, *Radical Orthodoxy*, and participation; and Aart Goedvree on Bavinck’s concept of regeneration.

Volume 3 had a missiology emphasis with three essays on the topic of general revelation, a comparison between Bavinck and Lesslie Newbigin on mission activity in the workplace, and an application of J. H. Bavinck’s missiology to a specific question about how to translate the biblical name for God into the Korean language.

The broad area of general revelation, religion, natural law, and the doctrine of the two kingdoms (and whether or not there are “two Bavincks”) has given rise to lively scholarly debates about Bavinck, and Volume 4 laid bare some areas of disagreement among “friends of Bavinck.” While these may sound like abstract, academic issues, they practically affect such things

² John Bolt, preface to *Reformed Ethics*, by Herman Bavinck, vol. 1, *Created, Fallen, and Converted Humanity*, ed. John Bolt, with Jessica Joustra, Nelson D. Kloosterman, Antoine Theron, and Dirk van Keulen (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), ix–xvi.

as our understanding of Islam as a religion and how we put our Christian public discipleship into practice.

Volume 5 repeated the missiological theme of Volume 3 with a look at Abraham Kuypers's visit to the Holy Land and two essays on J. H. Bavinck's missiology. Volume 6 included the first of two essays comparing Bavinck's epistemology/psychology and understanding of knowledge with that of Thomas Aquinas, along with a *Bavinck Review* first, a visual reproduction of a painting by Dutch artist Piet Mondrian (a son of the Reformed church) as an aid in showing how Bavinck's Reformed theology helps us to understand Mondrian's art. The second essay comparing the epistemologies of Bavinck and Aquinas appeared in Volume 7. Volume 8 celebrated the publication of a new, annotated edition of Bavinck's *De Zekerheid des Geloofs* (*The Certainty of Faith*) with three essays prepared for the book's launch on December 22, 2016. Volume 9 was a unique issue of *Bavinck Review* with a single item as its content: an English translation of Herman Bavinck's *Foundations of Psychology* (*Beginselen der Psychologie*).

Volume 10 returns to the regular format and includes a translation of a November 1921 eulogy of Bavinck religion by the renowned scholar of world religions W. B. Kristensen, delivered to the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW). We also introduce to our readers an important leader in the American Reformed world, Dr. Nicholas (or Nicolaus) Martin Steffens. Steffens was a contemporary of Bavinck; he came from the same (German) Reformed ecclesiastical world, and, as George Harinck's introduction shows, shared a great deal of Bavinck's path of life, as well as his thought. In fact, Harinck tells us: "Bavinck's wife noted, 'Herman finds him the only scholar, thus far, with whom he agrees.'" Steffens's inaugural address, which we republish in this issue, demonstrates how truly Bavinckian his thought was.

One of the main contributions of *Bavinck Review* has been to add to the treasury of English translations of important Bavinck essays. Here, in order of their appearance, are the translated texts: "John Calvin: A Lecture on the Occasion of his 400th Birthday, July 10, 1509–1909" (*Bavinck*

Review 1 [2010]: 57–85); “The Kingdom of God, The Highest Good” (*Bavinck Review 2* [2011]: 133–70); “The Theology of Albrecht Ritschl” (*Bavinck Review 3* [2012]: 123–63); “Preface to the Life and Works of Ralph and Ebenezer Erskine” (*Bavinck Review 3* [2012]: 164–77); “Letters to a Dying Student: Bavinck’s Letters to Johan van Haselen” (*Bavinck Review 4* [2013]: 94–102); “The Pros and Cons of a Dogmatic System” (*Bavinck Review 5* [2014]: 90–103); “Conscience” (*Bavinck Review 6* [2015]: 113–26); “Herman Bavinck’s *Modernisme en Orthodoxie*: A Translation” (*Bavinck Review 7* [2016]: 63–114); “Herman Bavinck’s Preface to the *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae*” (*Bavinck Review 8* [2017]: 101–114); *Foundations of Psychology* (*Bavinck Review 9* [2018]: 1–244); and “Collision of Duties” (*Bavinck Review 10* [2019]: 109–113).

My final observation, highlighted in my rereading of the nine previous issues of *Bavinck Review*, is a confirmation of Bavinck as a pastor-theologian. Though it is evident in many places, in Bavinck’s own writing as well as the scholarship about him, if you would like to see this most clearly in action, take a look at his letters to the dying Kampen student, Johan van Haselen, in *Bavinck Review 4*.

Kuyper and Bavinck on Natural Theology

Richard A. Muller

Introduction

Recent scholarship on the theologies of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck has reminded us that the Dutch Reformed tradition, as it emerged into the twentieth century, provided extensive theological analyses of revelation,¹ theological epistemology,² and the relationship of theology to philosophy³ that offer significantly different understandings of these issues from what can be elicited from the trajectories of Ritschlian and neo-orthodox theology.⁴ An issue that remains to be examined in further detail is the stance of Kuyper and Bavinck on natural theology, if only

¹ See James Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism: Towards a New Reading of Herman Bavinck's Organic Motif* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2012), 131–54; Jan Veenhof, “Revelation and Grace in Herman Bavinck,” in *The Kuyper Center Review*, vol. 2, *Revelation and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 3–13; and Robert S. Covolo, “Beyond the Schleiermacher-Barth Dilemma: General Revelation, Bavinckian Consensus, and the Future of Reformed Theology,” *Bavinck Review* 3 (2012): 30–59; Henk van den Belt, “Religion as Revelation? The Development of Herman Bavinck's View from a Reformed Orthodox to a Neo-Calvinist Approach,” *Bavinck Review* 4 (2013): 9–31; also note the analysis of Bavinck's approach to natural knowledge in Steven J. Duby, “Working with the Grain of Nature: Epistemic Underpinnings for Christian Witness in the Theology of Herman Bavinck,” *Bavinck Review* 2 (2012): 60–84. My thanks to David Sytsma for his careful reading and helpful suggestions.

² Arvin Vos, “Knowledge According to Bavinck and Aquinas,” 2 parts, *Bavinck Review* 6 (2015): 9–36; *Bavinck Review* 7 (2016): 8–62; and David S. Sytsma, “Herman Bavinck's Thomistic Epistemology: The Argument and Sources of his *Principia* of Science,” in *Five Studies in the Thought of Herman Bavinck, a Creator of Modern Dutch Theology*, ed. John Bolt (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2011), 1–56.

³ Cf. Sytsma, “Herman Bavinck's Thomistic Epistemology,” 6–16; with Vos, “Knowledge According to Bavinck and Aquinas,” part 1, 11–15, 31–36.

⁴ Note that Barth stands quite clearly in a Ritschlian trajectory. Wilhelm Pauck, *Karl Barth: Prophet of a New Christianity?* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1931), 42, identified Barth's early theological approach as “Ritschlian of Herrmann's type.”

because the scholarly verdicts are so diverse. One writer notes that “Kuyper reflected critically on what he perceived as an increasing emphasis on natural theology through the early centuries of the Reformed tradition,”⁵ while another indicates that Kuyper’s views on common grace opened up a place for natural theology.⁶ One study of Bavinck’s views on natural theology critiques his negative assessment of Thomist understandings of nature and natural theology as “foundationalist rationalism” from an ecumenical Roman Catholic perspective.⁷ Another study finds a significantly positive appreciation of Thomism in Bavinck’s thought.⁸ Bavinck is also declared to be a precursor of Cornelius Van Til, despite Van Til’s rather pointed criticisms of Bavinck.⁹ And yet another essay indicates that Bavinck’s reception of Aristotle, Reformed orthodoxy, and neo-Thomism remains to be assessed.¹⁰

A more detailed analysis of Kuyper’s and Bavinck’s views on natural theology with a closer examination of their backgrounds, sources, receptions, and critiques can lead to some resolution of these rather diverse readings of their thought. When the relationship of Kuyper and Bavinck to the Reformed tradition is examined, a significant divergence appears

⁵David VanDrunen, “Abraham Kuyper and the Reformed Natural Law and Two Kingdoms Traditions,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 42 (2007): 283–307, here 285.

⁶Arie L. Molendijk, “Neo-Calvinist Culture Protestantism: Abraham Kuyper’s *Stone Lectures*,” *Church History and Religious Culture* 88, no. 2 (2008): 235–50, here 240.

⁷Eduardo J. Echeverria, “The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology: A Catholic Response to Herman Bavinck,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (2010): 87–116.

⁸Sytsma, “Herman Bavinck’s Thomistic Epistemology,” 45–47.

⁹Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, “From Antithesis to Synthesis: A Neo-Calvinistic Theological Strategy in Herman Bavinck and Cornelius Van Til,” *Journal of Reformed Theology* 9 (2015): 348–74; Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, “Neo-Calvinism on General Revelation: A Dogmatic Sketch,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 20, no. 4 (2018): 495–516; and Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, “Organic Knowing: The Theological Epistemology of Herman Bavinck” (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 2017).

¹⁰Henk van den Belt, *The Authority of Scripture in Reformed Theology: Truth and Trust* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2008), 238; cf. Sytsma, “Herman Bavinck’s Thomistic Epistemology,” 5, 47.

within the Dutch Reformed tradition itself, given the direction taken philosophically by Herman Dooyeweerd and D. H. Th. Vollenhoven and theologically by Cornelius Van Til, a direction strenuously opposed to Bavinck's recourse to the older scholasticism in general and Aquinas in particular.¹¹ There is also a similar difference between the Reformed theologies of Kuyper and Bavinck and the neo-orthodox reading as found, notably, in the works of Karl Barth and Otto Weber.¹² Those differences and divergences are traceable to at least four sources—a more positive immersion, particularly in the case of Bavinck, in the early modern Reformed orthodoxy; a substantively different epistemology, evidenced in the “organic” emphases found in both Kuyper and Bavinck, but also related to the older Reformed tradition and, significantly, to the thought of Thomas Aquinas; their more traditional understanding of principia;¹³ and the rejection, most evident in Bavinck, of specific aspects of the Ritschlian theologies, notably of their

¹¹ See Cornelius Van Til, “Bavinck the Theologian—A Review Article,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 24, no. 1 (1961): 48–64; Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 94–95; note the analysis of Van Til's critique in K. Scott Oliphint, “Bavinck's Realism, the Logos Principle, and *Sola Scriptura*,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 72, no. 2 (2010): 359–90; and note K. Scott Oliphint, “Is There a Reformed Objection to Natural Theology?” *Westminster Theological Journal* 74, no. 1 (2012): 169–203. For a reading more critical of Van Til's assessment of Bavinck, see Brian G. Mattson, “Van Til on Bavinck: An Assessment,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 70, no. 1 (2008): 111–27; Sytsma, “Herman Bavinck's Thomistic Epistemology,” 2–4; and Laurence R. O'Donnell, “Neither ‘Copernican’ nor ‘Van Tilian’: Re-Reading Cornelius Van Til's Reformed Apologetics in Light of Herman Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatics,” *Bavinck Review* 2 (2011): 71–95.

¹² Karl Barth, “No! Answer to Emil Brunner,” in *Natural Theology: Comprising “Nature and Grace” by Professor Dr. Emil Brunner and the Reply “No!” by Dr. Karl Barth*, trans. Peter Fraenkel, introduction by John Baillie (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1946), 65–128; and Otto Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics*, 2 vols., trans. Darrell L. Guder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981–1982), 1:206–18.

¹³ On the issue of principia, see Sytsma, “Herman Bavinck's Thomistic Epistemology,” 2–4, 18, 43; and Laurence O'Donnell, “‘Bavinck's Bug’ or ‘Van Tilian’ Hypochondria?: An Analysis of Prof. Oliphint's Assertion That Cognitive Realism and Reformed Theology Are Incompatible,” in *For the Healing of the Nations: Essays on Creation, Redemption, and Neo-Calvinism*, ed. W. Bradford Littlejohn and Peter Escalante, 2nd ed. (Moscow, ID: Davenant Trust, 2018), 133–66.

anti-metaphysical cast and the related repudiation of “Greek” intrusion into the thought of the early and medieval church.

In addition to the set of issues just noted as distinguishing Kuyper’s and Bavinck’s thought from other Protestant approaches to natural theology, their critiques of deism and modernism provide a clue to the basis of their interest in the thought of Aquinas and the rise of neo-Thomism but also explain the negative reception of Roman Catholic thought on natural theology found in both thinkers. Neo-Thomism, or Third Thomism as it is sometimes called, prospered in Roman Catholic circles after the publication of Leo XIII’s encyclical *Aeterni Patris* as the philosophical response to the challenges of modernist philosophy.¹⁴ Suffice it to say for the moment that Kuyper’s and Bavinck’s thought—most notably Bavinck’s—evidences three sources of their reading of Aquinas, namely, through a reading of Aquinas’s own writings, by way of the Reformed orthodox reception of Aquinas, and via contemporary neo-Thomism, with the two former accounting for much of their positive reception and the last accounting in large part for the negative.

Although Kuyper was seventeen years older than Bavinck, the publication of their major works on theological prolegomena and principia were virtually contemporaneous. Kuyper’s theological encyclopedia, in which his major prolegomenal arguments are contained, appeared in 1894.¹⁵ The first edition of Bavinck’s *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, volume 1, appeared

¹⁴ See Bernard McGinn, *Thomas Aquinas’s Summa Theologiae: A Biography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 163–88; and Thomas F. O’Meara, *Thomas Aquinas, Theologian* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 167–73.

¹⁵ Abraham Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie der heilige Godgeleerdheid*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam: J. A. Wormser, 1894); in translation, Abraham Kuyper, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology: Its Principles*, trans. J. Hendrik De Vries, introduction by Benjamin B. Warfield (New York: Scribner, 1898); reprinted as *Principles of Sacred Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), translating volume 1, 1–53, and the entirety of volume 2 of the *Encyclopaedie*. Hereinafter cited as *Principles of Sacred Theology*.

in 1895.¹⁶ Bavinck had already published, in 1888, a major evaluation of the Ritschlian theology in which he was particularly critical of Ritschl's views on epistemology and metaphysics.¹⁷ These dates are important at very least because they place Kuyper's and Bavinck's work both in relation to the thought of Albrecht Ritschl and in close proximity to the historiographical works of Adolph von Harnack and Edwin Hatch with their views on the hellenization of Christianity—both products of what can be identified as left-wing Ritschlian theology. Bavinck, accordingly, argued pointedly against the post-Harnack Hebrew-Greek dichotomy that infected so much twentieth-century theology, including that of Van Til.¹⁸

Kuyper and the Search for a Balanced View of Natural Theology

Kuyper lamented the loss of the balanced views of the Reformers concerning the natural knowledge of God, noting that “modernists” set aside “supernatural knowledge” and identify “natural knowledge” of God as the sole true knowledge available, while the church, largely in response to the modernist argument, tended toward arguing that supernatural knowledge alone is “of vital importance.”¹⁹ By contrast, the Reformers were “not so one-sided”: they taught two means by which God can be known, first by

¹⁶ Herman Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, 4 vols. (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1895–1901; 4th ed., 1928); in translation, *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. John Vriend, ed. John Bolt, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003–2008); also note Herman Bavinck, *Magnalia Dei* (Kampen: Kok, 1909); in translation, *Our Reasonable Faith*, trans. Henry Zylstra (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956).

¹⁷ Herman Bavinck, “The Theology of Albrecht Ritschl,” trans. John Bolt, *Bavinck Review* 3 (2012): 123–63; originally published in *Theologische Studien* 6 (1888): 369–403; cf. John Bolt, “An Opportunity Lost and Regained: Herman Bavinck on Revelation and Religion,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 24 (2013): 81–96, here 85n8.

¹⁸ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:603–8.

¹⁹ Abraham Kuyper, *The Natural Knowledge of God*, trans. Harry Van Dyke, *Bavinck Review* 6 (2015): 73–112, here 73; cf. against “modernism,” Abraham Kuyper, *Calvinism*:

the creation and providential care of the world and second by Scripture. This was the teaching of Guido de Brès in the Belgic Confession, of Calvin in his *Institutes*, and of a host of subsequent Reformed writers in the era of orthodoxy.²⁰

Echoing the older orthodoxy, Kuyper adopted the distinction between archetypal theology in the mind of God and ectypal theology as embracing the various forms of finite theology that are constituted as legitimate reflections of the divine archetype and argued that theology as human beings know it is necessarily a “dependent” discipline, not only resting on the divine archetype but also determined by a correct understanding of what constitutes the knowledge of God on which theology rests.²¹ The older orthodoxy’s notion of a true, albeit ectypal theology characterized by various modes of knowing—revelation both natural and scriptural, union, and vision—assumed that not only is there true knowledge of God accessible to finite, fallible, and fallen human beings but that it is, ultimately, a unified knowledge that a Christian could know by means of the sources available to him—namely, the two forms of revelation, the “books” of nature and Scripture—and, on the basis of this knowledge construct a valid theology. Kuyper also drew from the older orthodoxy a clarification of the accommodated character of ectypal theology by using a further distinction between *theologia stadii* and *theologia patriae*—theology of the

The L. P. Stone Lectures for 1898–1899 (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1899), 3–5, 15, 16, 21–22, 46–47, et passim.

²⁰ Kuyper, *Natural Knowledge of God*, 73–74, citing Belgic Confession, art. 2; Calvin, *Institutes*, I.iii.1; I.v.1; note that Dooyeweerd saw Kuyper’s use of resources from the older Reformed tradition as a relapse into “Scholastic-Aristotelian philosophy” and inimical to what he viewed as the “reformational” task of “Calvinistic philosophy”; see Herman Dooyeweerd, “Kuyper’s Philosophy of Science,” in *On Kuyper: A Collection of Readings on the Life, Work and Legacy of Abraham Kuyper*, ed. Steve Bishop and John H. Kok (Sioux Center, IA: Dordt College Press, 2013), 153–78, here 156–57, 159–60, et passim.

²¹ Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, 242, 244, 248–56, 257, etc.

“course,” a pilgrim, viator theology suited to the present life, and theology of the heavenly homeland suited to the next life.²²

This foundational understanding of the discipline of theology together with his sense of the history of Reformed thought led Kuyper to a nuanced understanding of the problems inherent in some versions of natural theology but also of the place of natural theology, properly conceived, in the encyclopedia of Christian thought. Just as Kuyper posited “degenerations” of the knowledge of God and resultant “falsifications” and “deformations” of theology, he also argued, much in the manner of the older orthodoxy, against “false representations” of natural theology as a way of knowing utterly separate and independent from “special” or “sacred theology.”²³ The result of this separation would be a purely rational natural theology that presented the existence and attributes of God, works of God in providence and the moral law, even a view of the last judgment; and a special or sacred theology that added revealed doctrines concerning the Trinity, sin, and salvation.²⁴ This model, defective in Kuyper’s view, was not the one found in the Reformed orthodoxy of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—rather, it is a model characteristic of various eighteenth-century theologies, including some Reformed. In this division of

²² Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, 242, 244.

²³ E.g., Francis Turretin, *Institutio theologiae elencticae, in qua status controversiae perspicue exponitur, praecipua orthodoxorum argumenta proponuntur, & vindicantur, & fontes solutionum aperiuntur*, 3 vols. (Geneva: Samuel de Tournes, 1679–1685), I.iii.10.

²⁴ Note that this separation of the doctrine of God into a natural theology exposition of essence and attributes and a sacred theology exposition of the Trinity is characteristic of the more rationalistic eighteenth-century Reformed theologies; note, e.g., Salomon Van Til, *Theologiae utriusque compendium cum naturalis tum revelatae* (Leiden: Jordan Luchtmans, 1704); Jacob Christoph Beck, *Synopsis institutionum universae theologiae naturalis et revelatae, dogmaticae, polemicae et practicae: praemittitur Encyclopaedia theologiae breviter delineata* (Basel: Imhof, 1765); Jacob Vernet, *Instruction chrétienne: divisée en cinq volumes*, 3rd ed. (Lausanne: Jean Pierre Heubach, 1771); Samuel Secretan, *La théologie chrétienne*, 3 vols. (Lausanne: Société Typographique, 1774); Alexander Gerard, *A Compendious View of the Evidences of Natural and Revealed Religion; Being the Substance of Lectures Read in the University and King’s College of Aberdeen*, ed. William Gerard (London: C. & J. Rivington, 1828).

theology into two separate disciplines, the greater portion of theology would be assigned to natural theology, and special theology would be left to discuss the mysteries of the faith, having “abandoned the foundation of all knowledge of God, and therefore the heart of the matter, to its twin sister,” natural theology.²⁵

This warning concerning a false understanding of the relationship of natural and special, or sacred, theology has some affinity with the neo-orthodox critique, which saw natural theology as purely rational and set over against sacred theology. But Kuyper, by contrast, saw this separation of the disciplines not as a condemnation of natural theology per se, but as a condemnation of the separation. Kuyper concludes, rather pointedly,

It is, therefore, of the greatest importance, to see clearly, that *special* theology may not be considered a moment without *natural* theology, and that on the other hand natural theology of itself is unable to supply *any* pure knowledge of God. That special revelation (*revelatio specialis*) is not conceivable without the hypothesis of natural theology, is simply because *grace* never creates one single new reality.²⁶

Importantly, Kuyper’s point is not to argue in a rationalistic fashion that natural knowledge provides a foundation on which supernatural theology can be built; his point is precisely the opposite, rejecting the view characteristic of eighteenth-century rationalistic theologies and returning to a view akin to that of the Reformed orthodox—albeit based on a different, namely, “organic”—philosophical perspective. There is but a single true knowledge of God that must not be divided into separate species of knowing, one purely rational, the other purely scriptural.²⁷

²⁵ Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, 372–73.

²⁶ Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, 373 (italics original).

²⁷ On this issue and on the transition to the more rationalistic models in the older orthodoxy, see Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 1:300–8.

Kuyper similarly insisted that the whole of theology “must not only be construed abstractly *logically*, but also *theologically*,” a point that he viewed as “defended” by Aquinas and maintained by “all earlier Reformed theologians.”²⁸ He praises Aquinas for his identification of *theologia* with *sacra doctrina*.²⁹ Kuyper’s reception of Aquinas was mixed. He could, as just noted, see important continuities between Aquinas’s thought on certain issues and the thought of the Reformers and their successors—and he was quite ready to state categorically that “he who refuses to consult with Thomas Aquinas weakens himself as a theologian.”³⁰ But he also took Aquinas to task for assuming that a pinnacle of theology had been reached in the positive use of ancient Greek philosophy, a point that he summarized in the comment that Aquinas had “too closely identified” theology and philosophy, thereby placing reason in judgment over theology,³¹ perhaps reading Aquinas through the eyes of neo-Thomism.³²

What might be called the ontological point of Kuyper’s argument is that grace redeems an “existing reality”—it does not bring about new existences. Human nature and the cosmos as a whole, albeit in need of redemption and renewal, are not replaced by another human nature and another cosmos. Kuyper even argues that, inasmuch as faith itself belongs to the original created nature of human beings, even faith is not an utterly new capacity. His conclusion is that grace should not be viewed as having “produced a knowledge of God of its own, which as competitor runs by the side of natural theology”—this is, he argues, “unthinkable.”³³

²⁸ Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, 236 (italics original); cf. *ibid.*, 238, 323, where Kuyper speaks of Calvin as building on Augustine and Aquinas.

²⁹ Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, 238.

³⁰ Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, 657.

³¹ Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, 657.

³² Cf. the critical comments in O’Meara, *Thomas Aquinas*, 170–72.

³³ Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, 374.

When Calvin and the Reformed confessions assume a “seed of religion” in all human beings and state that “we know God by two means, Nature and Scripture,” this must not be understood as it was viewed by “the later rational supernaturalists”—and here Kuyper is thinking specifically of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century rational theologians—rather Calvin and the confessions should be understood as “one simple confession, that *without the basis of natural* theology there is no *special* theology.”³⁴ Kuyper draws on Calvin’s statement that Scripture collects the “confused” conceptions of God that reside in the human mind, collects them and dispels their darkness in order to provide true knowledge of God.

Both the knowledge of God identified as natural and what is identified as supernatural rest on divine revelation: what philosophers view as a human capacity to know God is recognized by the church as the impression of God on the human heart and mind. Kuyper denies that there are atheists who absolutely lack an “internal impression of God’s majesty,” and he insists that “were it not for sin, the natural knowledge of God would have led man to true knowledge of God.”³⁵ Kuyper does not, then, dissolve one principium into the other, nor does he assume that “without the Scripture as revelation there is no revelation.”³⁶ Rather, Kuyper insists that without the reception of Scripture as revelation, human beings are thrown back on the natural principium, which, given the sinful condition, cannot yield an unconfused knowledge of God. But he also insists that the scriptural revelation exists for sinful humanity and will no

³⁴ Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, 374 (italics original), citing Calvin, *Institutes*, I.iii.1; I.vi.1; and Belgic Confession, art. 2.

³⁵ Kuyper, *Natural Knowledge of God*, 75.

³⁶ Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969), 232, partially quoting Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, 362; and note 370–71 contra Van Til’s reading. It is Van Til who dissolves all principia into a so-called *principium unicum*, namely, Scripture, as the cognitive foundation of both theology and philosophy; see Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 94–95.

longer be needed in the eschaton when the natural powers of humanity will be restored.³⁷

In accord with his view of faith as an inherent human capacity belonging to the *imago Dei*, when characterizing the inward foundation, or principium, of knowledge of God, Kuyper even denies that natural and special theology can have principia that remain radically separate. There is a natural principium that is an “inborn” power in human beings, and there is an “ingrafted new principium” that draws the incomplete and corrupted knowledge of God toward the true knowledge: “The new principium joins itself to the vital powers of our nature, with its natural principium.”³⁸ It is the “seed of religion” in human beings that renders them “susceptible to special revelation.”³⁹

The language of principia that Kuyper deploys here is somewhat different from that of the older Reformed orthodoxy inasmuch as he posits two pairs of principia, an external objective pair consisting in the sources of the knowledge of God, nature and Scripture; and an internal subjective pair, consisting in the inborn natural capacity of human beings to know the things of God and in the graciously ingrafted capacity to know and believe special revelation as a transformative knowledge that renews and redeems the natural capacity and its knowledge. The older orthodoxy did not typically identify inward principia, except to view reason as the principium of natural theology or to note the importance of the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit in relation to the scriptural principium, largely

³⁷ Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, 369; cf. Van Til, *Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 233, who rightly sees the parallel on this point between Kuyper and Aquinas but misreads Aquinas as holding that “nature is inherently defective” because “it partakes of the nature of non-being,” thereby exaggerating the difference between Kuyper and Aquinas. Van Til is also, arguably, mistaken (230) in his view that Kuyper tends to equate “general, non-soteriological revelation” with natural theology; rather, for Kuyper, as for the older Reformed tradition, the former is the basis for the latter.

³⁸ Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, 375.

³⁹ Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, 376.

because reason has access to foundational self-evident *notiones, axiomata,* or *principia* that are either ingrafted or immediately recognized to be true.

The difference arises, certainly, from Kuyper's nineteenth-century Romantic sense of an organic unity of the human being that parallels and reflects a sense of the organic unity of knowledge.⁴⁰ In this assumption of "organic oneness" of knowledge and therefore also of the "encyclopedia" of theological knowledge, taken largely from nineteenth-century German idealism,⁴¹ it was Kuyper's intent to overcome the "dualism" of the modern distinction between the natural and the supernatural. This idealist approach results in a view of the unity of natural and special theology in the regenerate that presses the theoretical issue further than can be immediately gathered either from Calvin or from Reformed orthodoxy, where the distinctions between natural and scriptural revelation and between rationally known principia and the truths learned from special revelation in Scripture remain more strictly drawn.⁴²

Given his assumption of the unity of principia and of knowledge of God, the conclusion to this portion of Kuyper's argument is a mirror image

⁴⁰ On Kuyper's Romanticism and its roots in Schelling, F. J. Stahl, and Groen van Prinsterer, see Jacob Klapwijk, "Abraham Kuyper on Science, Theology, and University," *Philosophia Reformata* 78 (2013): 221–45, here 222–23; also note Harry Van Dyke, "Groen van Prinsterer: Godfather of Bavinck and Kuyper," *Calvin Theological Journal* 47, no. 1 (2012): 72–97. William Young, *The Development of a Protestant Philosophy in Dutch Calvinistic Thought Since the Time of Abraham Kuyper* (Grand Rapids: Piet Hein Publishers, 1952), analyzes Kuyper's philosophy largely from the perspective of Herman Dooyeweerd, "Kuyper's Wetenschapsleer," *Philosophia Reformata*, vol. 4 (Kampen: Kok, 1939), without examining philosophical antecedents. Dooyeweerd's essay is available in translation as "Kuyper's Philosophy of Science," cited in note 20 above.

⁴¹ Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, 19–20, citing Fichte; and cf. Abraham Kuyper, *The Antithesis between Symbolism and Revelation: Lecture Delivered Before the Historical Presbyterian Society in Philadelphia, PA* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1899), 12, referencing "the new German *philosophy*, from Kant to Schelling" with "its splendid enthusiasm for organic oneness and systematic conception" (italics original).

⁴² Note the critique of Kuyper's interest in Reformed orthodoxy in Dooyeweerd, "Kuyper's Philosophy of Science," 155–56, where any relationship to the older scholastic tradition is seen as a rejection of true "Christian philosophy."

of the previous argument that there can be no special theology without natural theology: although there are two sources of the knowledge of God, nature and Scripture, there is only one knowledge of God. Given this single true knowledge of God, it is just as true that “the *natural* knowledge of God, without enrichment by the *special*” can never “effect a satisfying result.”⁴³ The problem of natural theology, then, is that it can become and in fact had become separated from special or sacred theology and, in its initial separation after the Fall, led humanity into “idolatry . . . false philosophies and equally false morals.”⁴⁴

Although he has developed a more organic view of the principia of theology and has argued their inward unity, Kuyper nonetheless retains their distinction as well as the traditional understanding of what constitutes a way of knowing as principal when he comes to the question that has bedeviled Christian reception of natural theology since the Enlightenment: “Is the *Natural* Principium able to summon that *Special* Principium before its Tribunal?”⁴⁵ Part of Kuyper’s response rests on his effort to overcome the perceived “dualism” of two principia. To borrow a standard scholastic phrase, he has argued that the natural and special principia are distinct but not separate. Still, given their distinction and given, moreover, the stance of rationalist philosophy and rational supernaturalist theology, the issue of the relation and identity of the principia remains, as does the claim of philosophical and theological rationalists that one must “demonstrate the reality and reliability of the *special* principium at the bar of human reason.”⁴⁶

Kuyper indicates that the rationalist demand is not entirely unfair or implausible given what he calls the tendency of “Methodism” and of other “dualistic” tendencies to view special revelation as setting aside and utterly

⁴³ Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, 377 (italics original).

⁴⁴ Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, 377.

⁴⁵ Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, 380 (italics original).

⁴⁶ Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, 381 (italics original).

superseding both natural revelation and the natural principium. From his organic perspective, the special does not supersede or exclude the natural, inasmuch as what was “originally given in the Creation, is the substratum of our real existence.”⁴⁷ This remaining foundational character of the natural does not, however, give it rights over the gracious or special principium, inasmuch as the natural principium was disturbed and disrupted by sin and, accordingly, “lost its competency to judge.” To argue the opposite, that the natural can judge the special, is to declare that the natural is competent and, in effect, to remove “all *sufficient reason* for a special revelation.”⁴⁸

The argument here indicates an awareness of the shift that occurred in natural theology under the impact of early modern natural philosophy and in particular of deism. On one hand, the deist argumentation rested on the assumption of the utter competence of reason to develop a natural theology sufficient to human needs, not only capable of critiquing but also of replacing, even abolishing, revealed or sacred theology. On the other hand, the anti-deist argumentation of many late orthodox writers led to rationalistic arguments intended to justify the reliability of Scripture and the necessity of building a supernatural theology on the foundation of natural theology. Kuyper saw both approaches as missing the true relationship of natural and special, or “supernatural,” theology—largely because of their dualistic posing of nature against supernature, which itself is, arguably, a problem brought on by early modern rationalist philosophies, particularly as they developed in the eighteenth century and led to rational supernaturalism in theology.

But Kuyper also added a second argument against the use of natural principia to judge the adequacy of special principia. In this argument, he stood more directly on the grounds specifically set forth by the older Reformed orthodoxy—indeed, by the older philosophical tradition in general. Simple consideration of the “character of a principium” demonstrates

⁴⁷ Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, 381.

⁴⁸ Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, 381 (italics original).

the problem of setting natural reason in judgment over the special principium. Echoing the understanding of principia extending back through the Reformed orthodox, to the medieval scholastics, to ancient meditation on principia, whether in Aristotle, Euclid, or the Stoics, Kuyper notes that “a principium in its own sphere is exclusive.”⁴⁹ As the Reformed apologist of the early orthodox era Philippe du Plessis Mornay remarked, “Every Science [has] its Principles, which it is not lawfull to remove, be it never so little.”⁵⁰ As “autonomous and sufficient unto its self,”⁵¹ or, as the older tradition observed, as self-evident and specific to their own mode of knowing, principia belonging to one mode of knowing cannot be dislodged by the principia of another mode of knowing.

Finding the Balance: Bavinck’s Reception and Formulation of Reformed Thought on Natural Theology

Herman Bavinck did not devote a separate section of his dogmatics to natural theology but rather subsumed it under the more fundamental issue of innate or implanted and acquired ideas of God in human beings. This point of organization gives a significantly different—indeed, a more traditionary—accent to his views on natural theology from what we have noted in Kuyper. Accordingly, Bavinck’s remarks on the subjects of natural revelation and natural theology indicate both his acquaintance with the place of natural theology in the older Reformed tradition and his general agreement with Kuyper’s antidualist approach.

But there are also significant differences with Kuyper. Although also influenced by the Romantic “organic” perspective of nineteenth-century German philosophy and by the ethical theology of Daniel Chantepie

⁴⁹ Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, 382.

⁵⁰ Philippe du Plessis Mornay, *A Worke concerning the Trunesse of the Christian Religion . . . Against Atheists, Epicures, Paynims, Iewes, Mahumetists, and other Infidels*, trans. Philip Sidney and Arthur Golding (London: George Potter, 1604), I.i (p. 2).

⁵¹ Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, 382.

de la Saussaye, which had argued that the rational faculties were capable of discerning the work of the Logos in the world,⁵² Bavinck also sought a solution to what he viewed as the “one-sidedness” of modern thought, whether of Kant, Schleiermacher, or the German idealists,⁵³ looking to do justice to both external reality and the inward life of the human subject without falling into some form of dualism.⁵⁴ He identified primary aspects of this solution prior to the rise of modern philosophy in the epistemological approaches of an older philosophical tradition including the thought of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, and the seventeenth-century Reformed orthodox.⁵⁵

With Kuyper, Bavinck opposed the philosophical and theological “modernism” of his time as a movement that rendered divine revelation superfluous.⁵⁶ This opposition drew him to examine neo-Thomism,

⁵² Cf. Herman Bavinck, *De Theologie van Prof. Dr. Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye: Bijdrage tot de kennis der Ethische Theologie* (Leiden: Donner, 1884); and Bavinck’s critical assessment of De la Saussaye in “Recent Dogmatic Thought in the Netherlands,” *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 3 (1892): 208–28, here 221–23; and cf. Van den Belt, “Religion as Revelation?,” 10.

⁵³ Herman Bavinck, “Philosophy of Religion (Faith),” in *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, ed. John Bolt, trans. Harry Boonstra and Gerrit Sheeres (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 25–31, here 28–30.

⁵⁴ Herman Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1909), 83–84, 208, 211–12; on which see Bolt, “An Opportunity Lost and Regained,” 82–84.

⁵⁵ On the sources of Bavinck’s understanding of the “organic,” see Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 65–78. Cf. Sytsma, “Herman Bavinck’s Thomistic Epistemology,” 18–19, 22–45; with Echeverria, “The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology,” 87, 95–97, 103; and Vos, “Knowledge According to Bavinck and Aquinas,” part 2, 10–12, where Vos finds an Augustinian theory of illumination in Bavinck that stands in some distinction from Aquinas—and that, incidentally, parallels the idealist conception that we have seen Bavinck draw from Chantepie de la Saussaye. On Bavinck’s reliance on Augustine, see Michael S. Chen, “Herman Bavinck and Augustine on Epistemology,” *Bavinck Review* 2 (2011): 96–106, esp. 98–99.

⁵⁶ See Herman Bavinck, “Herman Bavinck’s *Modernisme en Orthodoxie*: A Translation,” trans. Bruce R. Pass, with an introduction by John Bolt, *Bavinck Review* 7 (2016): 63–114; and cf. John Bolt, “An Opportunity Lost and Regained,” 82–83.

itself a philosophy posed against modernism, and to the conclusion that neo-Thomism was a form of rationalism embodying a defective understanding of natural theology.⁵⁷ Here again, Bavinck would return to the older tradition, notably Reformed orthodoxy, for a solution—and here also, arguably, he would find an alternative reception of Aquinas.

Similarly, Bavinck's traditionary rootage points toward a view of the relationship between Christian theology and philosophy quite opposed to the historical conclusions of Ritschlianism in the writings of Harnack and Hatch⁵⁸ and also to the views of Dooyeweerd and Van Til, which arguably arise out of a similar post-Harnackian approach to the historical narrative as well as out of a neo-Hegelian epistemology.⁵⁹ Bavinck indicated that theology is not in need of any particular philosophy but rather ought to draw eclectically on "philosophy in general," a view that he shared with the Reformed orthodox and that stands over against the Dooyeweerdian and Van Tilian insistence on establishing a fully alternative Christian philosophy. With regard to the older Christian tradition, Bavinck averred that

neither Plato's nor Aristotle's philosophy has been held to be the true one by any theologian. That theologians nevertheless preferred these two philosophical systems was due to the fact that these systems best lent themselves to the development and defense of the truth. Present also was the idea that the Greeks and Romans had been accorded a special calling and gift for the life of culture.⁶⁰

Specifically countering Harnack, Bavinck indicated that the patristic use of philosophy arose out of the need both to formulate and to defend

⁵⁷ Herman Bavinck, "Common Grace," trans. Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, *Calvin Theological Journal* 27 (1992): 35–65, here 45–46, 48, 57–58; cf. Van den Belt, *Authority of Scripture*, 238; Sytsma, "Herman Bavinck's Thomistic Epistemology," 5, 47.

⁵⁸ Sytsma, "Herman Bavinck's Thomistic Epistemology," 6–7.

⁵⁹ Van Til's neo-Hegelian backgrounds are well documented in Timothy I. McConnel, "Historical Origins of the Presuppositional Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til" (PhD diss., Marquette University, 1999).

⁶⁰ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:608.

Christian doctrine, that this use was not uncritical, and that it recognized philosophy as a means and a servant.⁶¹ So too, the theologians of the Reformation, after an initial hostility toward scholasticism and philosophy, turned back to these tools for the sake of theological formulation.⁶²

Bavinck argued an epistemology based on the assumption that God, by means of the Word, has created both external reality and the laws of thought in the mind, yielding an intimate connection between the external world and true knowledge, between the object known and the knowing subject: “Just as knowledge within us is the imprint of things upon our souls,” Bavinck writes, “so, in turn, forms do not exist except by a kind of imprint of the divine knowledge in things.”⁶³ As Bavinck readily acknowledged, this more traditional Reformed epistemology followed Aquinas in its assumption that “the mind does not know things apart from sense perception” and followed the older tradition generally in the grounding of all knowledge on “common notions”—namely, basic apprehensions of truth accessible to all human beings.⁶⁴

It is certainly mistaken to read this statement as a “commingling of Aristotelian and Christian principles” that fails to do justice to God as the

⁶¹ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:607–8; cf. 603, 604, 606; note that Bavinck favorably cites (607n16) the critique of Harnack in Otto Pfeleiderer, *The Development of Theology in Germany since Kant, and Its Progress in Great Britain since 1825*, trans. J. Frederick Smith (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1890), 298–99.

⁶² Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:608.

⁶³ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:233; cf. Van den Belt, “Religion as Revelation?,” 10–11.

⁶⁴ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:226; and note 224, 232, 241–42, citing Calvin, Polanus, Zanchius, Hoornbeek, and Voetius; Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation*, 56–57; cf. Sytsma, “Herman Bavinck’s Thomistic Epistemology,” 9–13, 23–26; Vos, “Knowledge According to Bavinck and Aquinas,” part 2, p. 13; and Van den Belt, “Religion as Revelation?,” 12, who remarks on the similarity between Bavinck’s views on religion and the Leiden *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae* of 1626, an edition of which Bavinck had edited for publication in 1881. Also see the discussion of common notions in Reformed thought in J. V. Fesko, *Reforming Apologetics: Retrieving the Classic Reformed Approach to Defending the Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 15, 27–48.

“one principle” of Christian theology.⁶⁵ Such critique rests on a double confusion—on one hand confusing God, the *principium essendi*, with epistemological principia; and on the other hand failing to recognize that principia, as taken cognitively, have two distinct references: first, Scripture as ultimate *principium cognoscendi theologiae* juxtaposed with the *principium essendi*; and second, truths or common notions known intuitively in and through the most basic perceptions of external reality.⁶⁶ It is also a mistake to read Bavinck’s stress on common notions as a precognitive or primordial in an effort to sever its connection with the older tradition while at the same time linking his thought to nineteenth-century theories of self-consciousness.⁶⁷ Rather, Bavinck’s argumentation has found common ground between the traditional understanding of knowledge as rooted in sense perception and the nineteenth-century understanding of consciousness and its interconnectedness with the world order. Bavinck categorically links his view of common notions to a traditional understanding of “right reason” as found in Aquinas and the Reformed orthodox theologian Amandus Polanus, citing Polanus to the effect that common notions are “true knowledge . . . implanted by God in the very nature of the human mind so that they can

⁶⁵ Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 94–95.

⁶⁶ The confusion is characteristic of Van Til, as noted, and is present also in Oliphint, “Bavinck’s Realism,” 361–64, 367, 388–90. Note that Oliphint sees the continuity with Aquinas and the older Reformed tradition and rejects all three as inadequate, arguing that the Logos alone is the “principle of knowledge that has universal application” (389) and that Scripture is the “*principium* and measure” of “all else” (390). If Bavinck were able to respond to the critique, he might well argue that the Van Tilian approach is reminiscent of the Harnackian Hebrew-Greek dichotomy and offers an inadequate epistemology that cannot account for knowledge in general that is both true and extrabiblical.

⁶⁷ As, e.g., in Sutanto, “Neo-Calvinism on General Revelation,” 500–1. Note that Sutanto’s identification of what he calls precognitive truths, as distinct from propositional truth, rather misses the point that the reduction of truth generally or of revelation to propositions was not characteristic of early modern Reformed orthodox theology. Truth, as the adequation of the mind to the thing and the most basic knowledge, namely, common notions, can and were expressed in propositional forms, but these forms are subsequent to the apprehension of the truths. Such basic truths, moreover, are not “pre-cognitive” or “primordial”—rather, they are grafted or intuitive and pre-ratiocinative.

govern life and generate the sciences and disciplines.”⁶⁸ The echo of Schleiermacher in Bavinck’s references to self-consciousness and a feeling of dependence does not lead Bavinck to build a theology in Schleiermacherian fashion on modifications of the sense of dependence—Bavinck’s positive assessment of Schleiermacher rested on the latter’s sense of revelation, identifiable in a form of consciousness, as “a communication not of doctrine but of life.”⁶⁹ Bavinck also traces the issue of consciousness back to notions of a “seed of religion” and a “sense of divinity,” as argued by Calvin and other early Reformed theologians.⁷⁰ Bavinck does not so much follow Schleiermacher as find the basis of his thought in their common ancestor.

In some parallel with Kuyper but on an epistemological ground more critical of the idealist tradition whether of Descartes or of more recent German idealist philosophers,⁷¹ and on the assumption that all revelation comes from God, Bavinck insists that a methodological separation of natural from supernatural theology is mistaken. The problem is that this method begins with natural revelation and natural theology severed from the supernatural and then builds a theology of special revelation on the foundation of the natural.⁷² He also makes the important historical point that

whereas natural theology was originally an account, in the light of Scripture, of what Christians can know concerning God from creation, it soon became an exposition of what nonbelieving rational persons could learn from nature by the power of their own reasoning. In other words, natural theology became rational theology.⁷³

⁶⁸ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Ethics: Created, Fallen, and Converted Humanity*, ed. John Bolt, with Jessica Joustra, Nelson D. Kloosterman, Antoine Theron, and Dirk van Keulen (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 193–94.

⁶⁹ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:290.

⁷⁰ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:71.

⁷¹ Cf. Vos, “Knowledge According to Bavinck and Aquinas,” part 2, 10, 12, 17, 22–26, 31–34.

⁷² Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:74; and, perhaps more fully stated, Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 32–43; cf. Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 139–40.

⁷³ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:78.

We have seen this point also in Kuyper, who recognized that the older, orthodox Reformed natural theologies were explicitly Christian.

Bavinck not only expressed a distinct admiration for the Reformed orthodox as well as the Reformers, he also—in considerable contrast to neo-orthodox writers like Barth and Otto Weber—tended to identify the decline of Reformed thought not so much with the rise of orthodoxy but with the decline of orthodoxy and the rise of rationalism and mysticism in the late seventeenth century and their dominance in the eighteenth century.⁷⁴ This alternative (and, I would argue, far more accurate) reading of the history of Reformed thought gave Bavinck direct and positive access to the flowering of Reformed dogmatics and the development of Reformed natural theology as a Christian discipline in the early modern era. It also served to frame Bavinck's distinction between an acceptable natural theology grounded in revelation and unacceptable natural theology, whether a product of early modern rationalism, deism, modernism, or a neo-Thomist abstraction of Aquinas's philosophy.⁷⁵ Bavinck could, accordingly, identify one positive development associated with Kant and Schleiermacher, namely, the critique of rationalist dogmatics.⁷⁶

In his lecture "Revelation and Nature," Bavinck drew on these historical perceptions and argued pointedly against a "dualism" that severed knowledge of God from knowledge of the world and isolated knowledge of God within theology at the same time that it sequestered theology from a

⁷⁴ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:183–84, 189; there are some places where Bavinck follows a line of nineteenth-century scholarship and identifies Reformed orthodoxy as a prelude to rationalism: Herman Bavinck, *De Zekerheid des Geloofs* (Kampen: J. Kok, 1901), 39; in translation, *The Certainty of Faith*, trans. Harry der Nederlanden (St. Catharines, ON: Paideia Press, 1980), 41–42. As indicated in "Herman Bavinck's Lectures on the Certainty of Faith (1891)," *Bavinck Review* 8 (2017): 35–63, here 66, the material for *Zekerheid* actually dates from 1891. The work offers what is arguably a view that Bavinck set aside by the time of the second edition of his *Reformed Dogmatics* (1906–1911).

⁷⁵ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:87–88, 100, 105–6, 108–9.

⁷⁶ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:106.

knowledge of the world.⁷⁷ Such dualism, moreover, is not to be associated with the Reformed tradition: the Reformers denied a sharp duality of the natural and the supernatural, specifically refusing to understand supernatural revelation as belonging to “another order,” such that it would “surpass” even the intellectual powers of unfallen human beings.⁷⁸ Bavinck argues against a rigid, externalized identification of revelation that reduces it to Scripture and does so specifically for the sake of arguing, organically, that a “modified conception of revelation” recognizes that “special revelation is founded on general revelation.”⁷⁹ He had even commented in the first edition of his *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* that

revelation is identical with all God’s works in nature and grace. It comprises the whole creation and recreation. Everything that exists and happens is a means for the pious to lift him up to God.⁸⁰

Further, he understood revelation and the “experience of salvation” to be “intimately bound together.”⁸¹

This organic, antirationalist, antidualist sense of the relation of the natural and the supernatural, nature and grace, points toward a distinction between general and special revelation and away from a view of “natural revelation” that removes it from relation to the supernatural. This is, again, a point that relates directly to the assumptions of the older Reformed orthodoxy,⁸² arguably more than Bavinck himself realized. Even so, Bavinck

⁷⁷ Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation*, 83–86.

⁷⁸ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:304–5; cf. John Bolt, *A Theological Analysis of Herman Bavinck’s Two Essays on the Imitatio Christi: Between Pietism and Modernism*, foreword by David VanDrunen (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2013), 173–74.

⁷⁹ Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation*, 22.

⁸⁰ Cited in Van den Belt, “Religion as Revelation?,” 15; cf. Bolt, *Theological Analysis*, 172–76.

⁸¹ Herman Bavinck, “John Calvin: A Lecture on the Occasion of his 400th Birthday, July 10, 1509–1909,” *Bavinck Review* 1 (2010): 57–85, here 66.

⁸² Cf. Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 139–41; with Bolt, “An Opportunity Lost and Regained,” 84.

rejected Julius Kaftan's placement of general revelation after special revelation: "Objectively nature is antecedent to grace; general revelation precedes special revelation. Grace presupposes nature."⁸³ Bavinck's assumption of the unity of truth, like the Reformed orthodox, allowed him to argue that "general revelation" provided Christians with "a firm ground on which they can meet all non-Christians,"⁸⁴ a view that separates his thought definitively from the antithesis model of a later writer like Van Til.⁸⁵

This traditionary connection is patently obvious when Bavinck presses the point that given general revelation, there is some "element of truth" present even in pagan religion—a point explained by the church fathers as grounded in the work of the Logos.⁸⁶ Bavinck argues further that the availability of these "natural truths" to all human beings through the exercise of reason was recognized by Thomas Aquinas and clarified by the Reformed orthodox in their understanding of common grace.⁸⁷ Here, Bavinck is not, as one recent writer has claimed, arguing a disagreement between Reformed orthodoxy and Aquinas.⁸⁸ Rather, he is indicating a common ground improved and clarified by a doctrine of common grace—an argument that parallels Bavinck's positive recourse to *notiones communes*, or "common notions," as foundational to understanding.⁸⁹

Having denied the viability of dualism in knowledge, Bavinck nonetheless distinguished clearly the methodological boundaries of various sciences, arguing pointedly that physical science oversteps its bounds when it makes metaphysical judgments—and he finds science to be inconsistent when on one hand it rightly recognizes that "the question of the origin of

⁸³ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:321.

⁸⁴ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:321.

⁸⁵ Note Sutanto, "From Antithesis to Synthesis," 366.

⁸⁶ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:318.

⁸⁷ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:319.

⁸⁸ Contra Sutanto, "Organic Knowing," 111.

⁸⁹ Cf. Covolo, "Beyond the Schleiermacher-Barth Dilemma," 42; and Veenhof, "Revelation and Grace," 7.

things . . . lies outside of the domain of natural science” while on the other hand affirming the eternity of matter.⁹⁰ Science may also be able to recognize that there is an ultimate reality that holds all phenomena together, but it cannot determine the nature of that reality.⁹¹ Bavinck accordingly argued that a rift between Christian religion and metaphysics is untenable: it is only religion that can deal with these ultimate issues.⁹²

Bavinck’s rootage in the older tradition becomes clear as he argues that beginning with Calvin, the Reformed evidenced a “friendlier posture toward natural theology” than found in Luther. This reading of Calvin’s thought, it needs to be noted, is significantly opposed to the typical neo-orthodox reading of Calvin, and it permits Bavinck to identify a continuity of the subject of the natural knowledge of God among Calvin, the Reformed confessions, and later Reformed thinkers like Ursinus, Zanchius, and Polanus.⁹³ Just as Calvin assumed a fundamental human “awareness of divinity” and a revelation of God in the natural order, so did later Reformed writers argue the same view on the basis of a theory of common ideas, or “notions,” that arise in the mind immediately via the avenue of sense perception given the innate disposition of the mind to know—which accounts both for basic truths or fundamental principles recognized in some sense by all human beings as well as for the diversity of human opinion.⁹⁴

In accord with the majority of Reformed orthodox writers, Bavinck denied that these common notions are innate ideas in the strict sense. Rather, he affirmed that some very basic ideas, or principia, are implanted in human beings, and he identified this implanted knowledge as consisting in “common ideas,” or common notions, that are recognized to be true at the point of their immediate apprehension inasmuch as they are

⁹⁰ Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation*, 88–89.

⁹¹ Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation*, 91–92.

⁹² Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:605.

⁹³ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:66.

⁹⁴ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:67–68, 70–71.

self-evident.⁹⁵ These God-given, self-evident principles provide the basis for all human knowledge, whether “mathematical, philosophical, ethical, [or] . . . religious and theological.”⁹⁶ Every *scientia* or intellectual discipline has its own distinct principia as well as principia shared with or sometimes derived from other sciences. As several writers have pointed out, Bavinck’s understanding of the fundamental principles of knowing bears more than a passing resemblance to the thought of Thomas Aquinas.⁹⁷

The denial of this relationship to Aquinas on the part of other writers arises, arguably, from a misunderstanding of Aquinas,⁹⁸ while its acknowledgment has led to rationalizations concerning the presumed taint of “scholasticism” in aspects of Bavinck’s thought.⁹⁹ Setting aside these rather aberrant dogmatic generalizations, it needs to be observed that Bavinck’s approach to common notions also ties his thought to the older Reformed tradition and, via that tradition, to a critical appropriation of the older traditions of Christian theology. This relationship to the tradition becomes even more apparent in Bavinck’s further definitions of innate and acquired knowledge.

What is innate in human beings is “the capacity of knowledge,” whereas knowledge itself is acquired. Bavinck’s point is directed against a Lockean

⁹⁵ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:72.

⁹⁶ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:71; cf. Sytsma, “Herman Bavinck’s Thomistic Epistemology,” 16–17.

⁹⁷ Cf. Eugene P. Heideman, *The Relation of Revelation and Reason in E. Brunner and H. Bavinck* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1959), 131, 144; with Sytsma, “Herman Bavinck’s Thomistic Epistemology,” 16–45; and Eduardo J. Echeverria, “Review Essay: The Philosophical Foundations of Bavinck and Dooyeweerd,” *Journal of Markets and Morality* 14, no. 2 (2011): 463–83, here 464, 465–66, 469–70.

⁹⁸ As, e.g., in Donald Macleod, “Bavinck’s Prolegomena: Fresh Light on Amsterdam, Old Princeton, and Cornelius Van Til,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 68, no. 2 (2006): 261–82, here 265.

⁹⁹ Cf. Van Til, “Bavinck the Theologian—A Review Article,” 50–51, 53, 59; with Oliphint, “Bavinck’s Realism,” 363–64; and note the critique of Van Til and Oliphint in O’Donnell, “‘Bavinck’s Bug,’” 146–50.

critique of common notions as innate.¹⁰⁰ The ideas typically referred to as innate or common to all human beings, Bavinck indicates, are not strictly innate, as if human beings are born with them. Rather, the mind has a capacity for knowledge that is “activated” by something external. Thus, common notions are better understood as implanted via an immediate apprehension. With this qualification in mind, Bavinck allows the traditional distinction between implanted and acquired knowledge as identifying a principial knowledge that is “acquired spontaneously” and an elaborated knowledge that results from “discursive thinking”—the former “noetic,” the latter “dianoetic.”¹⁰¹ The result of this argument is, as Bavinck indicates, a closing of the distinction between implanted and acquired knowledge, given that both are acquired. In the case of theological knowing, divine revelation precedes and provides the basis for both the noetic and the dianoetic knowing.¹⁰²

It is something of a misrepresentation of Bavinck to claim this language as identifying a “primordial and precognitive” revelation that is an alternative to traditional epistemology on the basis of what Bavinck elsewhere identifies as the “external and mechanical” view of revelation that “too readily identified it with Scripture” in the “old theology.”¹⁰³ Although Bavinck can draw on nineteenth-century notions of consciousness and self-consciousness, he nonetheless states that “consciousness is knowledge” and that, in the specific case of self-consciousness, it arises “through immediate experience”—the one case in which Bavinck allows that the activation

¹⁰⁰ On the Lockean critique of innate ideas, see Frederick C. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, 9 vols. (Westminster: Newman Press, 1946–1974), 5:73–76.

¹⁰¹ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:72–73, citing Bernardus De Moor, and previously, 67–68, Calvin, Zanchius, Polanus, Vermigli, Maresius, Alting, Leydekker, Alsted, and Turretin.

¹⁰² Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:73.

¹⁰³ Contra Sutanto, “Neo-Calvinism on General Revelation,” 500; cf. Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation*, 22; note that Bavinck’s comment is not cited to any particular representatives of the “old theology,” and does not find any clear parallels in his *Reformed Dogmatics*.

of knowing is not external.¹⁰⁴ The Reformed orthodox writers from whom he explicitly drew these epistemological distinctions did not reduce revelation to Scripture, they consistently identified fundamental or principlial knowledge as implanted, and they understood “common notions” as activated by externals. What is more, the cited critique is concerned with the relation of general to special revelation and not with basic epistemological issues. Bavinck’s intention, clearly, was to draw on an older epistemology that related to his assumption that what is in the intellect is first in the senses and to adapt it to the needs of his organic model of knowledge and revelation.

Accordingly, having taken up the traditional distinction between noetic and dianoetic, implanted and acquired knowledge, Bavinck denies that it belongs exclusively in the realm of natural knowledge and natural theology. He also disputes the view that innate knowledge arises from the inward configurations of human reason alone and that acquired knowledge arises purely from the world. Inasmuch as he has replaced the concept of innate knowledge with implanted knowledge, what is implanted cannot be the result of mere reasoning; rather, it is the result of an immediate impression of divine revelation on the “human consciousness.” Likewise, in the case of knowledge of God, acquired knowledge is not merely derived from examination of the world; rather, it is the result of reflection on God’s revelation.¹⁰⁵ This being the case, the distinction between implanted and acquired knowledge belongs to supernatural theology as well.

Accordingly, although there is a distinction, there can be no separation between general and supernatural revelation or, indeed, between natural and supernatural theology. Like Kuyper, Bavinck insists that supernatural revelation is not a second, separate revelation of “an independent source of

¹⁰⁴ Herman Bavinck, “The Unconscious,” in *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, 176.

¹⁰⁵ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:74.

knowledge apart from the other.”¹⁰⁶ On one hand, supernatural revelation includes truths that can be known from nature—again, a point taken from traditional Reformed theology. Indeed, also reflecting Kuyper, Bavinck assumes the supernatural presupposes the natural as regeneration presupposes creation. In his lectures on ethics, Bavinck would emphasize the issue:

Natural morality is the presupposition of faith. The world is the field in which the seed of the Word, prepared by the Holy Spirit, is sown, germinates, and bears fruit (Matt. 13:38). Regeneration presupposes natural birth, re-creation presupposes creation, and Scripture presupposes nature. The world, the earth, is the foundation of the church; without the one the other would be impossible, just as revealed theology (*theologia revelata*) is impossible without natural theology (*theologia naturalis*).¹⁰⁷

On the other hand, right recognition of the revelation of God in nature, Bavinck insists, is possible only by way of the illumination of the Spirit: a right understanding of the general revelation of God rests on the special revelation given in Scripture.¹⁰⁸ Quite distinct from and opposed to the modern definitions of natural theology as a product of pure reason, “there is no such thing as a separate natural theology that could be obtained apart from any revelation solely on the basis of a reflective consideration of the universe.”¹⁰⁹ Natural theology presupposes the revelation of God, and Scripture includes natural knowledge. This integral relationship between the two forms of revelation can be encapsulated in the fact that Scripture, “appealing to the whole created world as a witness to, and revelation of, God . . . contains germinally all that was later elaborated and dialectically unfolded in the proofs.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 42; cf. Covolo, “Beyond the Schleiermacher-Barth Dilemma,” 41.

¹⁰⁷ Bavinck, *Reformed Ethics*, 234 (italics original).

¹⁰⁸ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:304.

¹⁰⁹ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:74.

¹¹⁰ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:76.

Conclusion

Despite their differences in formulation, Kuyper and Bavinck stand together in offering a view of natural revelation and natural theology quite opposed to the direction inspired by Albrecht Ritschl, Adolf von Harnack, and Edwin Hatch and taken by neo-orthodox theologians like Karl Barth and Otto Weber. The neo-orthodox writers denied the existence in any useful or functional manner of natural revelation, entirely ruling out natural theology by denying that there can be any genuine knowledge of God apart from what is revealed in Christ. Barth, Weber and, we might add, Thomas Torrance also argued that this conclusion was a development of the Reformed tradition by largely ignoring the thought of Zwingli and Bucer and by rooting their thought in a decontextualized and highly questionable reading of Calvin, radically severing his thought from its antecedents and from the views of the Reformed orthodox writers of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The neo-orthodox understanding of natural theology also has some affinity with various modern, purely rational, purely philosophical definitions inasmuch as it views natural theology as resting solely on reason, as lacking any basis in revelation, and as entirely outside of the framework of Christian knowing. A similar pattern of argument is found in the thought of Cornelius Van Til and his followers.

Kuyper and, to an even greater extent, Bavinck retain a more positive approach to natural knowledge, natural principia, and natural theology at the same time that they deny the rationalistic separation of the disciplines of natural and supernatural theology. In the case of Kuyper, this systematic vision rests primarily on a nineteenth-century Romantic or idealist assumption of an organic unity of knowledge, albeit tempered by access to a traditional Reformed paradigm of archetypal and ectypal theology. Accordingly, if Kuyper saw a problem in earlier Reformed approaches to natural theology, this was largely a reaction to rationalistic developments in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries rather than to the early and high orthodox views of writers like Franciscus Junius or Francis

Turretin.¹¹¹ Bavinck draws more from the older Reformed theology than Kuyper and registers a deeper dissatisfaction than Kuyper with Kantian thought, German idealism, and their approach to the problem of knowing and, by extension, the problem of subject and object.¹¹²

Bavinck's solution, looking farther back into the theological and philosophical tradition, identifies knowledge in terms of the impress of the external object on the mind of the subject, assuming that the forms or categories in the mind are grounded in the reception of forms or categories that are in the things external to the mind. Bavinck is far closer in his basic epistemology to the older tradition than Kuyper and, indeed, granting Echeverria's critique of Bavinck's assessment of the Thomistic understanding of nature and grace, far closer to Aquinas than even Bavinck himself imagined.¹¹³ Indeed, what can be observed over against Echeverria's critique is that both Bavinck and Kuyper express appreciation for Aquinas's understanding of the task of theology and identify continuities between Aquinas and early Reformed theology, including, in Bavinck's case, a continuity in the understanding of natural revelation. The points of contention against Thomism, at least from the perspective of later twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholarship on Aquinas, look more like complaints against the philosophized reading of Aquinas on the part of nineteenth-century neo-Thomists—a datum that helps to explain Kuyper's and Bavinck's positive reception of Aquinas and of potentially Thomistic aspects of Reformed orthodoxy while at the same time leveling stringent critiques against perceived rationalism and dualism in Thomist thought.

In contrast to the neo-orthodox and Van Tilian theologies, both Kuyper and Bavinck assume a divine revelation in nature, and both allow that the

¹¹¹ Modifying the point made by VanDrunen, "Abraham Kuyper and the Reformed Natural Law," 285.

¹¹² Cf. Vos, "Knowledge According to Bavinck and Aquinas," part 1, 25–26, 34–36.

¹¹³ Cf. Bolt, *Theological Analysis*, 172, 180, 189; with Sytsma, "Herman Bavinck's Thomistic Epistemology," 46–47.

cognitive capacities of human beings have access to this revelation, albeit in a manner that is not saving. Bavinck in particular, given his epistemological assumptions concerning common notions, cannot be seen as a precursor of Van Til. Further, and more importantly, Kuyper and Bavinck both assume that natural knowledge and therefore also natural theology have a place within a Christian body of knowledge. They make this point, however, at the same time that they distance their views of natural knowledge and natural theology from the rationalistic projects of the eighteenth century. Both pointedly deny that there are two different knowledges of God and therefore repudiate the use of natural theology as a “cognate and preparatory” discipline to supernatural theology.¹¹⁴

Bavinck, like the church fathers, identified elements of truth in ancient pagan religion and philosophy and, in some contrast to Kuyper, was pointedly opposed to a Harnackian Hebrew-Greek dichotomy. In accord with the Reformers and the older Reformed tradition with its Augustinian and Thomistic accents, both Kuyper and Bavinck argue two sources, nature and Scripture, of the one knowledge of God and accordingly include natural knowledge and its principia in the sphere of Christian knowing. Arguably, the primary difference between the Kuyperian model and Bavinck’s approach is that Bavinck’s theology included a more profound and detailed reception of the Reformed past that enabled him both to identify more precisely the limits of his reliance on nineteenth-century patterns of thought, notably the “organic” conceptuality, and to mark out with greater clarity his positive relation to the epistemology and the doctrinal formulae of Reformed orthodoxy.

¹¹⁴Which is part of Bavinck’s critique of the Groningen Theology of the nineteenth century; see his “Recent Dogmatic Thought,” 213.

Nicolaus Steffens on Christianity as a Remedial Scheme

George Harinck

Historical Introduction¹

Who was Nicolaus Martin Steffens,² who gave his inaugural address on 29 April 1896 as Professor of Theology in the German Presbyterian Theological School of the Northwest, Dubuque, Iowa?³

Steffens was born on 13 March 1839 in the city of Emden in the northwestern part of Germany, in the region Ostfriesland. He was baptized there two weeks later in the Reformed Church, the *Grote Kerk* (the location of the present Johannes à Lasco Bibliothek). The Reformed people in Ostfriesland were more strongly oriented toward the Netherlands than their co-inhabitants. They did not expect any good from the Hanoverian government and therefore tried to strengthen and secure their relationship with the Netherlands. They claimed the freedom to study with Reformed theologians at Dutch universities, continued to use the Dutch language in

¹This historical introduction to Nicolaus Steffens's inaugural address is a reworking of passages of my book: George Harinck, *"We live presently under a waning moon": Nicolaus Martin Steffens as Leader of the Reformed Church in America in the West in Years of Transition (1878–1895)* (Holland: Van Raalte Press, 2013).

²Due to the fact that Steffens lived in different countries during his life, his name was spelled in different ways, as Nicolaus, Nicholaus, Nicolaas, or Nicholas, and Marten or Martin. I follow the spelling of his name on the only official document bearing his name that I have found, the Kampen certificate of 1864.

³Steffens's address was originally published as Nicholas M. Steffens, "Christianity as a Remedial Scheme. The Inaugural Address of Rev. N. M. Steffens, D. D. at his Induction as Van Vliet Professor of Theology, April 29, 1896" in *Christianity as a Remedial Scheme. Inaugural Address of Rev. Nicholas M. Steffens, D. D. as Van Vliet Professor of Theology in the German Presbyterian School of the Northwest, with the Charge to the Professor by Rev. W. O. Ruston, D. D., Vice President of the Board of Directors* (Dubuque: J. J. Reed, 1896), 11–32.

their worship services, and insisted upon official impartiality so that they could maintain their own confessional tradition.

This resistance by the Reformed in Ostfriesland was too weak, however, to prevent or change the policy of *Eindeutschung*, the shift of cultural orientation from the Netherlands to the German nation state in the making. Their church was not allowed to separate from the official church and to found a free church. Nevertheless, some free churches were founded there in the 1850s under influence of the Secession in the Netherlands of 1834 and subsequent years, and inspired by Seceded Dutch preachers who visited Ostfriesland.⁴ In the spring of 1856, a *Gereformeerde Kerk onder het Kruis* (Reformed Church under the Cross) was founded in Emden. The authorities prohibited this church from obtaining a minister from the Netherlands, and in 1860 the church joined the group of *Altreformierte Kirchen* (Old Reformed Churches) in Bentheim, a small group of German Free Reformed churches. It is not clear why and when Steffens and his family joined this free church, but in 1863 he was registered as a member of this church that had between 150 and 200 members at that time.⁵

Steffens attended the Emden municipal gymnasium, or grammar school, where only German was spoken. In 1857 he became a teacher at a girls' high school in Oldenburg, a town between Emden and Bremen. After two years of teaching, the wanderlust got ahold of him. His local church was an *Altreformierte Kirche*. The same kinds of churches could be found in Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Scotland, and they kept in touch with each other. Maybe it was through these contacts that he traveled to Turkey and taught at the Free Church of Scotland's Italian School for Jews in Galata, Constantinople. There he met Jane Graham

⁴Hans-Georg Ulrichs, "'Wildes Zelotengeschrei,' oder: Der 'berüchtigte' Hendrik de Cock und der 'blödsinnige' Reemt Wiards Duin. Neue Perspektiven auf den kriminalisierten Anfang der altreformierten *Afscheiding* in Deutschland," in *175 jaar Afscheiding van 1834*, ed. George Harinck and Mees te Velde (Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 2012), 192n7.

⁵G.J. Beuker, *Gemeinde unter dem Kreuz. Altreformierte in Emden, 1856–2006* (Emden, 2006), 55.

Sutherland (22 March 1836 – 6 January 1917), a Scottish woman from Perth and a member of the mission team. They fell in love and were married in the mission chapel on 14 April 1862.

During his four years of missions and teaching work, Steffens decided to enter the ministry. As a result of the ongoing Dutch orientation of his home church, he focused on the Netherlands for his academic studies. The young couple moved to the Netherlands, and in September 1863 Steffens enrolled at the Theological Seminary (*Theologische School*) of this church.⁶ He might have studied theology in Constantinople as an autodidact or under supervision of a missionary, but whatever the reason he took his literary exam and his theological exams in the same week and graduated within a year on 19 July 1864 (cum laude, according to some.)⁷

From 1864 till 1872 he served congregations of the Altreformierte Kirche in Germany, the last one in Emden. From 1865 on, Steffens functioned as a theology teacher in his church and trained several young men for the ministry in his parsonages. Two characteristics stand out in Steffens's early years as a minister: he strongly defended the separation of church and state, and he promoted a broad Reformed church and criticized secession based on minor issues. In 1869 he attended the Synod of the Dutch Seceder Church in Middelburg, the Netherlands, as an invited delegate of the Altreformierte Kirche. There the majority of the Dutch Seceder congregations that had been dissenting and quarreling since the late 1830s were united, and a new name for the denomination was adopted: *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk*. This was a development Steffens

⁶ See: George Harinck and Wim Berkelaar, *Domineesfabriek. Geschiedenis van de Theologische Universiteit Kampen* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2018).

⁷ The cum laude is mentioned by Beuker, *Gemeinde unter dem Kreuz*, 80. This distinction is not recorded on the official document of Steffens's exam that has been preserved in the Joint Archives of Holland, Michigan. Beuker included the cum laude when he read in an article by B. H. Lankamp in *Der Grenzboten*, 6 May 1951, that Steffens had passed his exam "mit Auszeichnung" (with excellence). Lankamp may have found this qualification in the synodical archives of the Altreformierte Kirche. I thank Berthold Bloemendal for this information.

applauded. At the synod Steffens met Rev. Cornelius Van der Meulen (1800–1876) from Zeeland, Michigan, who represented the Reformed Church in America that was affiliated with the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk*.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, many members of the Altreformierte Kirche emigrated to the United States, in total thirty percent of the congregation from Ostfriesland and fifteen percent from Bentheim.⁸ And between 1854 and 1900 half of all the Ostfrisian pastors of the Altreformierte Kirche emigrated to America. It was hard to resist the exodus. Steffens's family was growing, his financial situation was weak, and the Altreformierte Kirche did not satisfy him. He decided to follow the emigrants.

Unlike the Dutch Seceders, most of Steffens's fellow emigrants from the Altreformierte Kirche joined the small denomination of the Christian Reformed Church, which had about eight thousand members in the early 1870s.⁹ But Steffens accepted a call from the German-speaking Reformed Church of Silver Creek, German Valley, on the prairies of northern Illinois. In Silver Creek, the parishioners of his Reformed Church were (with a single exception) all East Frisians, although Steffens knew only a few of them personally. His pastorate activated the congregation. He took a break from his pastorate in Silver Creek beginning in May 1875 and worked in the Avenue B and Fifth Street German Reformed Church in New York, but he was glad to return to German Valley after six months. In 1878 he accepted a call from the Reformed Church of Zeeland, Michigan. This was the beginning of a stay in western Michigan of seventeen years.

⁸Herbert J. Brinks, "Ostfrisians in Two Worlds," in *Perspectives on the Christian Reformed Church*, ed. Peter De Klerk and Richard R. De Ridder (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 22–23.

⁹See "Appendix. Denominational Statistics," in James D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America. A History of a Conservative Subculture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 222–23.

Steffens started his ministry in the Dutch settlements at a time of transition. The recent death in November 1876 of the acknowledged leader of the colony since 1847, Albertus Van Raalte (1811–1876), created uncertainty. How were the Dutch immigrants to proceed without Van Raalte's leadership? There were other concerns, too. In 1878 the General Synod of the Reformed Church requested the resignation of the theological professors at Hope College in Holland, Michigan. The Synod reckoned that the Reformed Church did not really need a second seminary besides New Brunswick Theological Seminary in New Jersey. The vast majority of the immigrant Hollanders believed a school of theological instruction of their own was a necessity for their survival as a group. Uncertainty crept in: Did they have to survive *as a group*? And distrust grew among them as well: Did the eastern churches really care about the churches in the west?

The synodical decision came at an unfortunate moment. The small group of churches that had seceded from the Classis of Holland of the Reformed Church in 1857, and which would eventually be named the Christian Reformed Church, had started their own theological seminary in Grand Rapids in 1876. When the theological education at Hope College was suspended, this seminary had ten students. A few years later, in 1880, in Amsterdam, the *Vrije Universiteit*, essentially a theological school in the early days, was founded. Amidst these new developments, the closure of theological education at Hope College was a slap in the face of the Reformed Church in the west. What could these churches do to reverse this unhappy course of events?

Steffens arrived in the midst of this turmoil with an outsider's perspective. He cherished educational institutions. He had founded a provisional theological school in Veldhausen, Germany, and was one of the first in the United States to offer his support to the Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) and his *Vrije Universiteit*. Steffens's star in the colony soon rose. The General Synod of the Reformed Church appointed him as a member of the Council of Hope College in 1880. The Council elected Steffens as its president in 1883 and 1884. In 1881 he was the president

of the Particular Synod of Chicago. Far more visible to the average church member, however, was that when the editors of *De Hope* in 1879 asked for new contributors to their weekly church paper, Steffens turned up. Steffens, who was a polyglot, could write in Dutch and had a clear style and well-grounded opinions. Within a few years after he had arrived in the heartland of the Dutch immigrants, this German theologian was at the helm.

In 1882 his congregation in Zeeland was seriously harmed by the Masonic controversy. This was the final result of dissatisfaction over the way the General Synod had dealt with requests from the western classes to condemn membership in Masonic lodges and exclude these members (with a few exceptions they were all easterners, and especially ministers) from the church. When the General Synod in June 1880 did not declare lodge membership a reason for discipline, crisis broke out in the west. In this context the Christian Reformed Church made a positive impression on some in the Reformed Church, because of its more confrontational stand against Freemasonry.¹⁰ Forty percent of the 245 families of Steffens's Zeeland Reformed Church left, most of them transferring to the local Christian Reformed Church.¹¹ The situation in the First Reformed Church of Holland was even worse: this church was vacant at that moment and lost in 1882 not only the vast majority of its 40 families but also the Pillar Church building to the Christian Reformed Church. As mother church of the Reformed Church in Michigan, this congregation's edifice was a structure with an iconic value.

Steffens stayed calm amidst a storm of emotions and explained in *De Hope* that dissatisfaction with a single decision by a synod of a church that was Reformed in doctrine and government was no valid reason to secede from the denomination. Steffens explained to his western classis that

¹⁰ Harry Boonstra, *The Dutch Equation in the RCA Freemasonry Controversy, 1865–1885* (Holland: Van Raalte Press, 2008), 23–24.

¹¹ See *De Hope*, 20 April 1881; 17 April 1883.

synod could never have decided as it had wanted to. It was a principle in Reformed church order that discipline was not common and general but rather individual and explicit. If the synod would have decided in such a general way as proposed by western churches, it would have added new criteria to membership in the Reformed Church. In that way there was no end to adding new criteria. Why, then, not also officially exclude socialists or anti-prohibitionists? In the end about ten percent of Reformed Church members in western Michigan joined the Christian Reformed Church in the early 1880s. Steffens was deeply disappointed over the secessions and decided in 1882 to accept the call of the little flock in Holland, Michigan, in dire need and leave Zeeland. Now this German American was in Van Raalte's place; the mantle of the leader had fallen on his shoulders at a critical moment in the western Michigan settlements' history.

The Reformed Church had lost its dominant role in the Dutch communities of the west, not only numerically but also, as it would soon turn out, culturally. At first, however, the signs were promising. In June 1883 the General Synod of the Reformed Church decided to restore theological instruction in Holland, and a year later this body appointed Steffens as the first professor of dogmatic and polemical theology at what he himself preferred to call "Hope Seminary," although the formal name was Western Theological Seminary. He was the only teacher at that time, but in his acceptance address at synod Steffens said that "he was a Western man and believed he could work here with better effect than somewhere else."¹² For the next eleven years Steffens taught at the seminary; preached in Reformed churches in Michigan, Illinois, and Iowa; and published in *De Hope* and elsewhere.

Steffens started his work in the church in Holland and at Western Seminary in a divided community. The line of his argument against the church split was closely related to his view of the Reformed tradition.

¹² *De Hope*, 17 June 1884: "Hij was een Westersch man, en geloofde dat hij hier met beter gevolg kon werken, dan ergens elders."

He stressed that the Reformed tradition was much wider and yet less defined than many people thought it was. Reformed churches under the separation of church and state had abused their freedom by living out the tendency of theological and social specialization and of secession rather than striving for catholicity and community. He therefore was very pleased with Herman Bavinck's (1864–1921) Kampen rectoral address of 1888 on the catholicity of the church.¹³ He introduced his summary of this lecture in *De Hope* as follows:

We do this because we so often hear narrow judgments in our midst regarding the position the Reformed should take over against those we disagree with. Some get the idea *seceded* and *narrow* have the same meaning. This summary clearly shows how far from narrow-mindedness well educated Seceders are.¹⁴

He was a staunch defender of his ecclesiastical position, but he was not a stubborn hardliner. He stressed the importance of healing the wounds and of peacemaking, especially with those who harbored hard feelings toward the Reformed Church. “Because we love our people, we are able to change our mind, and to offer the hand of friendship to everyone who wants to follow the Lord, *albeit not together with us.*”¹⁵

¹³The address was published as: Herman Bavinck, *De katholiciteit van christendom en kerk. Rede bij de overdracht van het rectoraat aan de Theol. School te Kampen op 18 dec. 1888* (Kampen: G. Ph. Zalsman, 1888); English translation by John Bolt, “The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 27 (1992): 220–51.

¹⁴*De Hope*, 6 February 1889: “Wij doen dit omdat er in ons midden vaak bekrompene uitspraken vernomen worden aangaande de verhouding, die gereformeerden behooren intenemen tegenover andersdenkenden. Sommigen komen daardoor op de gedachte, dat *afgescheiden* en *bekrompen* hetzelfde beteekenen. Hoe ver echter goed opgevoede Afgescheidenen verwijderd zijn van bekrompenheid van geest, blijkt duidelijk uit het uittreksel.”

¹⁵*De Hope*, 17 November 1883: “Juist daarom, omdat wij ons volk liefhebben, kunnen wij van richting veranderen, en aan allen, die den Heere Jezus wenschen te volgen, *al is het dan ook niet met ons*, de hand van vriendschap bieden.”

According to his colleague at the seminary, Henry E. Dosker (1855–1926), “comparatively few men knew him intimately.”¹⁶ To the Dutch in Holland, the Steffenses were a bit aloof, not familiar like family. Dosker also noted that Steffens’s judgment of others and their work in general lacked appreciation and that he had difficulty accepting others’ criticism of him.¹⁷ It seems that Steffens was in many aspects not an easy man. He had a harmonious family, but as a family not originating in the Netherlands they lived somewhat secluded from the Dutch within the community of Hope College and the Reformed Church. The Steffens family usually spent their summer vacations in German Valley, Illinois.

Steffens followed ecclesial developments in the Netherlands closely and sympathized with the Neo-Calvinist movement of Kuyper, Bavinck, and others. Although he rejected the secessionist actions of 1882, he did approve of the *Doleantie* of 1886 and subsequent years in the Netherlands, where Abraham Kuyper and a Reformed group left the *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*. He had always stressed that a Reformed church was a church with a Reformed doctrine and presbyterial government, and thus he fully agreed with Kuyper’s thoroughgoing rejection of the bureaucracy of the *Hervormde Kerk*. When in 1892 two Reformed churches in the Netherlands merged, one originating in the *Afscheiding* of 1834 and the other in the *Doleantie* of 1886, hopes rose that the same might happen in the United States between the Reformed Church and the Christian Reformed Church.¹⁸ Steffens differed with the latter denomination on ecclesiology and complained about the narrow-mindedness of this church,

¹⁶ H. E. Dosker, in *In memoriam. The Rev. Nicholas M. Steffens, DD., LL.D. Professor of Theology at the Western Theological Seminary Holland, Michigan* (n.p., n.d.).

¹⁷ H. E. Dosker to H. Bavinck, 21 December 1892. Bavinck Papers. Historical Documentation Center for Dutch Protestantism, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

¹⁸ See John H. Kromminga, “Abandoned at the Altar,” in *The Dutch and Their Faith. Immigrant Religious Experience in the 19th and 20th Centuries. Proceedings of the 8th Biennial Conference of the Association for the Advancement of Dutch American Studies, September 20 and 21, 1991* (Holland, MI, 1991), 71–84.

but in the end he felt theologically more at home with the Christian Reformed Church.¹⁹ In June 1892, the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church, with 103 of 117 votes, called Steffens as a professor of systematic theology in a new chair, created on its professor Geerhardus Vos's (1862–1949) advice, at their theological seminary in Grand Rapids.²⁰ This call might have been a surprise to the Reformed Church, but it underlines Steffens's ambivalent position at Western Seminary, his marginal position within the Reformed Church, and his sympathy for his Christian Reformed brothers.

In his letters to Kuyper, Steffens explained that the Reformed tradition in America could never have the same impact on church and society that it had achieved in the Netherlands. His observation was that irenic and modern ideas had a hold on American Reformed and Presbyterian churches and the United States in general. The small Reformed community of the Dutch in the west could not change this course of the nation. Steffens himself did try to communicate the Reformed tradition to an American audience, but editors on the East Coast did not always publish his contributions. And even within his own Reformed Church, the opposition against his staunch Reformed opinions grew.

Steffens was an autodidact who had no favorite in theology. But this changed shortly after 1880, when he presented himself as an ardent supporter of the *Vrije Universiteit*. He praised its theological professors for not wanting to merely return to the Reformed orthodoxy of the seventeenth century but rather to aim at a theological renewal of this tradition. What Steffens appreciated in Neo-Calvinism was the combination of staunch Reformed orthodoxy and catholicity. He was outspoken in his admiration, more so than the Seceders in the Netherlands. While promoting the new developments in Dutch Reformed theology, Steffens

¹⁹ N. M. Steffens to A. Kuyper, 25 January 1891, *Kuyper Papers*. HDC.

²⁰ See *Gedenkboek van het vijftigjarig jubileum der Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk A.D., 1857–1907* (Grand Rapids: Semi-Centennial Committee, 1907), 102.

criticized other new developments in theology within and outside the United States. He soon realized that by stressing the Reformed dogmatic tradition, he was promoting and opposing the same developments as Benjamin B. Warfield (1851–1921), professor at Princeton Theological Seminary. Steffens concluded that within his own church he alone remained to defend the Reformed tradition. After the mid-1880s, leading ministers in the Reformed Church did not focus on a relationship with the Christian Reformed Church anymore but became more oriented toward the American religious scene.

Steffens promoted a direction the Reformed Church leaders appreciated to a certain extent but did not follow. The difference between Steffens and his colleagues in the Reformed Church was evident in their hesitancy to appropriate the term *Calvinist*. Calvin and Calvinism were not popular in nineteenth-century American culture.²¹ Steffens, by contrast, had no reservations at all: “Our principle is Biblical—we admit and we glory in it; but the emphasis we put upon it is truly Calvinistic.”²² When introduced in the United States, Kuyper’s theology and world and life view were explicitly labeled as Calvinist, to distinguish these from the older Reformed or Presbyterian traditions in America. Adding to this, Steffens’s colleagues were more strongly oriented toward American theological traditions than to Dutch Kuyperianism. Tired of the opposition of his colleagues against his staunch Reformed opinions, Steffens felt himself isolated within his own community and without prospect to make a change for the better.

Steffens had been personally acquainted with Kuyper since 1886, when Kuyper asked him to look after his twenty-year-old son, Frederik, who

²¹Thomas J. Davis, “Images of Intolerance: John Calvin in Nineteenth-Century History Textbooks,” *Church History* 65, no. 2 (June 1996): 246. In the United States, Calvin was seen as “an authoritarian theocrat who preached an authoritarian and despotic God. This Calvin threatened the freedom. . . . Thus, Calvin became the very image of intolerance.”

²²N. M. Steffens, “The Principle of Reformed Protestantism and Foreign Missions,” *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 5, no. 18 (April 1884): 246.

would come to Michigan and stay there for some years. In the mid-1890s he assisted translators of Kuyper's *Encyclopaedie*, and in early 1898 Steffens translated the Dutch text of the fourth Stone Lecture on science that Kuyper was to deliver in October of that year at Princeton Theological Seminary. In 1903 he wrote an introduction to a German translation of one of Kuyper's works. They met each other two times. The first time was in 1893 at the General Synod of the Gereformeerde Kerken in Dordrecht, the Netherlands, where Steffens represented the Reformed Church. And when five years later Kuyper traveled from Princeton to the Dutch American communities in the west, Steffens met him in Orange City.²³

When Bavinck visited Michigan in the summer of 1892, he and Steffens met for the first time. In 1908 they would meet again in Holland, and this time Bavinck stayed at Steffens's house. Bavinck's wife noted, "Herman finds him the only scholar, thus far, with whom he agrees."²⁴ In 1893 Steffens quoted lengthy clauses from Bavinck's article on the future of Calvinism to defend the solidity and the non-exclusive character of Calvinism.²⁵ Steffens was very active in introducing Neo-Calvinism to the western branch of the Reformed Church. New books, brochures, and articles by the Dutch Neo-Calvinists, especially Kuyper and Bavinck,

²³ See George Harinck, "A Triumphal Procession? The Reception of Kuyper in the USA (1900–1940)," in *Kuyper Reconsidered. Aspects of his Life and Work*, ed. Cornelis van der Kooi and Jan de Bruijn (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 1999), 280.

²⁴ V. Hepp, *Dr. Herman Bavinck* (Amsterdam: Ten Have, 1921), 221; quote on 302: "Herman vindt hem den eenigen wetenschappelijken man, waar hij tot dusver mede overeenstemt."

²⁵ *De Hope*, 27 December 1893. Steffens referred to Bavinck's article "The future of Calvinism," *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 5 (1894): 1–24.

were enthusiastically introduced by him without his favoring one over the other.²⁶ In 1894 Steffens announced the release of Kuyper's *Encyclopaedie*.²⁷

For Steffens this was a defining moment in the history of Reformed theology. He was enthusiastic about this *Encyclopaedie* that was aimed at modern culture and modern issues and at the same time was strongly rooted in the Reformed tradition.²⁸ Since he was in the last year of his stay at Western Seminary, he no longer had the opportunity to introduce this book into the curriculum. He did, however, encourage local churches to provide their ministers with this book: "Don't rest before all ministers in our churches have Dr. Kuyper's *Encyclopaedie* on their shelves."²⁹ Time and again he showed himself an advocate of Neo-Calvinism in the church and in educational institutions. "Our seminaries ought to enable our young men to form for themselves a correct view of the universe and of human life in harmony with the Calvinistic system," he wrote in 1901.³⁰ Thanks to Steffens, the names Kuyper and Bavinck became well known among readers of *De Hope*, and Kuyper's devotional volumes in particular were advertised widely.

Steffens especially promoted the Neo-Calvinist stance on the relationship between science and religion by opposing a separation of these two and defending the premise that scientific work is rooted not in reason but

²⁶ According to Eugene P. Heideman, *The Practice of Piety. The Theology of the Midwestern Reformed Church in America, 1866–1966* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 143, 194, theologians in the RCA in general favored Bavinck over Kuyper. Heideman wrote a dissertation on Bavinck: *The Relation of Revelation and Reason in E. Brunner and H. Bavinck* (Assen: Van Gorcum, Prakke & Prakke, 1959).

²⁷ A. Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie der heilige Godgeleerdheid. Deel een: Inleidend deel* (Amsterdam: J. A. Wormser, 1894).

²⁸ *De Hope*, 25 April 1894.

²⁹ *De Hope*, 19 September 1894: "Rust niet eerder, totdat alle leeraars onzer kerken Dr. Kuyper's *Encyclopaedie* in hunnen boekenkast hebben."

³⁰ N. M. Steffens, "Calvinism and Theological Crisis," *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 12 (1901): 223.

in a world and life view.³¹ He stressed this point in an article in the *Presbyterian and Reformed Review*:

Calvinism is not only a system of theology, it is also a Christian view of the universe and of life, a *Welt- und Lebensanschauung*, as the Germans call it. It is said that religion is a private affair. Indeed it is, but it is vastly more. It is an affair not only of the individual but also of the human race in all its relations. A Christian has a right to say: *Homo sum, et nihil humani a me alienum puto* [I am human and regard nothing human as foreign to me]. Calvinism is in earnest when it says by the mouth of Thomas Chalmers: Christianity is true humanity. We cannot and we will not separate the realm of nature from the realm of grace.³²

Kuyper in the Netherlands followed the developments in the United States and applauded the activities of Steffens and other Americans in *De Heraut*:

In America, like in all churches, one has been towed by *Vermittlung* [mediating] theology far too easily, and it is only in the last decade, that against this dubious theology a reaction came to the fore. We thank this reaction in the first place to the courageous acts of the theologians Warfield, Steffens, and Vos, whose influence is still rising.³³

After a difficult start, Western Seminary started to flourish in the 1890s, but in 1895 the German Presbyterian Theological Seminary at Dubuque, Iowa, called Steffens as a professor. This call had been prepared for some months. There had been a vacant chair at this seminary since the summer of 1894. Warfield was eager to provide this seminary a future; he had known about Steffens's dissatisfaction with the situation

³¹N. M. Steffens, "Wetenschappelijk geloof" voor de derde keer," *De Hope*, 7 September 1887.

³²Steffens, "Calvinism and Theological Crisis," 222.

³³*De Heraut*, 8 November 1891: "... in Amerika, gelijk in alle kerken, veel te gemakkelijk door de Vermittelungs-theologen op sleeptouw laten nemen, en het is eerst in het laatste decennium, dat juist tegen deze bedenkelijke theologie zekere reactie openbaar werd; en aan deze reactie danken we in de eerste plaats het moedig optreden van de hoogleeraren Warfield, Steffens en Vos, wier invloed steeds klimmende is."

in his church and had suggested him in Dubuque as a candidate. Acting president Adam McClelland (1833–1916) replied, “The name of doctor Steffens was already before us, and your hearty commendation will doubtless increase our interest in his appointment to the vacant chair. I shall place your letter where it is likely to do the most good in the line indicated by you.”³⁴ Steffens visited the school, founded in 1852, at the end of November 1894, and as *De Hope* wrote, “The Reformed Church in this country, east and west, looks forward anxiously to the decision his reverence will make.”³⁵ Steffens accepted the call. He did not feel at home anymore in the Reformed Church in its present condition, as he wrote to Warfield:

Comparisons are odious, they say, but I cannot help saying that the Presbyterian Church compares favorably unto ours, which seems to love peace better than truth. The wrangle between our people and the Seceders in our immediate neighborhood is deplorable and alas! there is no end to it. I am between two millstones; I sympathize with the seceded brethren in their love for the truth, but their ecclesiastical position I cannot share. I begin to feel that I am out of place here.³⁶

Early in June he preached for the last time in his former congregations in Holland and Zeeland, his last official act in the Reformed Church before he transferred in Dubuque to the German wing of the Presbyterian Church. He now laid down his chief editorship of *De Hope*. In Dubuque new tasks awaited him as editor of *Der Presbyterianer*. On 12 June 1895 Steffens and his wife, with their daughters Mary and Isabella, left Holland

³⁴ A. McClelland to B. B. Warfield, 3 September 1894: “As always so now I have received and read your letter with great pleasure, the more because it expresses and manifests such interest in our seminary,” *Warfield Papers*. Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Libraries.

³⁵ *De Hope*, 5 December 1894: “Dat de Gereformeerde Kerk in dit land, Oost en West, angstvallig uitziet welk besluit Z.Ew. in dezen zal nemen, zal wel niet behoeven te worden gezegd.”

³⁶ Steffens to Warfield, 16 November 1894, *Warfield Papers*.

by boat, waving farewell to a crowd of more than a hundred people, and traveled to Silver Creek and then seventy miles west to Dubuque.

While traveling west, Steffens read the first volume of Bavinck's *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, recently published.³⁷ The theology of Princeton and of Neo-Calvinism had been his beacon of hope in the west. At Dubuque Steffens kept in touch with the "rabbis" in Princeton and with the Neo-Calvinists. He might have been too independent to be called a Neo-Calvinist, but Kuyper saluted him as a fellow-thinker by publishing in full his inaugural address "Christianity as a Remedial Scheme" at Dubuque in *De Heraut*.³⁸

The original English text of this inaugural address follows below. The original page numbers are shown in brackets.

Christianity as a Remedial Scheme³⁹

[11] Mr. President and Members of the Board of Directors:

I assure you, dear brethren, that I feel the solemnity of this hour. Although I have completed my first year's work in your service, I have today officially taken upon my shoulders the task you have entrusted to me. It is indeed a difficult work I have to do in your midst. The year, now belonging to the past, has taught me many lessons with regard to the special difficulties surrounding us in our peculiar sphere of labor. But apart from these, it is always a task of paramount importance to prepare young men for the ministry and to take active part in the discussion of the

³⁷ *De Hope*, 12 June 1895.

³⁸ *De Heraut*, 13 September 1896. Kuyper published the address under the title "Het christendom, herschepping" [Christianity: Recreation].

³⁹ Originally published as Nicholas M. Steffens, "Christianity as a Remedial Scheme. The Inaugural Address of Rev. N. M. Steffens, D. D. at his Induction as Van Vliet Professor of Theology, April 29, 1896" in *Christianity as a Remedial Scheme. Inaugural Address of Rev. Nicholas M. Steffens, D. D. as Van Vliet Professor of Theology in the German Presbyterian School of the Northwest, with the Charge to the Professor by Rev. W. O. Ruston, D. D., Vice President of the Board of Directors* (Dubuque: J. J. Reed, 1896), 11–32.

great theological questions of our times. In our days, days of restlessness, worldliness and unsettled opinions, days of a pronouncedly anti-dogmatic character, it is indeed an herculean task to uphold the banner of Reformation Theology. If the source of our strength and wisdom were not inexhaustible, well might we shrink from entering upon such a tremendous work. Our Lord, however, who calls His servants to the post assigned to them, is our constant guide and strong tower. In His strength and wisdom I also glory, and upon His mighty arm I desire to lean.

I have had some experience in the work, whereunto you have called me. Dogmatic Theology has been my chief study in the past twelve years, and you have called me to a similar work. In particulars my work in your Seminary may differ from what I have been accustomed to, essentially it is the same.

It is not my intention to lay before you a program of my work in your midst as Professor of Dogmatic Theology. [12] I know it is often done at such a service as has brought us together at this place, but it seems to me rather monotonous to repeat what has been said so often and by many so well.

Instead of this I desire to discuss with you a thought which has occupied my mind for a long time. It is apparently commonplace, and yet it is indeed full of depth and meaning. I read it many years ago in a popular religious book and it attracted forthwith my attention. *Christianity is a Remedial Scheme*. My first impression was: What a happy expression! But when I began to analyze its contents, I soon saw the fulness of its meaning. Allow me to ask your kind attention, while I attempt to set before you *Christianity as a Remedial Scheme*.

The question has often been asked in times gone by, and it is still occupying the minds of all earnest seekers after truth: What is the nature of the Christian religion? The importance of a correct answer to this question we all undoubtedly concede. All our expectations and aspirations are wrapped up in it. Christianity is the reality of realities, if true; it is the greatest and most cruel delusion, if not based on facts. But even in case

we are convinced of its truth, yea, just on account of our convictions, we desire to know how great the treasure is which God has given us in the Christian religion. A partial view of it may help us to understand some of the details, a complete and correct conception, however, will bring to light the glory of God revealed in it as a scheme, whereby the eternal designs of God for the world and the human race are carried out and brought to perfection. No wonder then, that the question about the nature of the Christian religion comes up again and again, and that everyone is concerned about the correctness and sufficiency of the answer given to it.

In approaching this question I start with an axiom. I fully and earnestly believe, that God has revealed Himself in the Holy Scriptures. God in Christ is the wonderful picture the Holy Ghost has drawn on the pages of Holy Writ. This picture of God's own fingers is the beauty of [13] the Bible, the mystery of its unity as an organism and the proof of its Divine authority. All revealed knowledge concerning God we draw from this source, and even natural theology has to acknowledge the Bible as its guiding star, if it desires to be kept from going astray. If we seek an answer to our question: What is Christianity? we have to go to Him whose handiwork it is. Christianity is not the production of Peter or Paul, it is God Himself who has created it. Neither the reason nor the church has any authority to settle our question in an arbitrary manner. They may assist us in finding out what the Holy Scriptures teach regarding this matter, for our method of investigation is both rational and historical, but direct authority they have none. All answers given to our question have to be judged by the standard, given us by God Himself.

If some might be disposed to question the validity of this axiom, laid down by me, I answer: Axioms cannot be subjected to a lengthy process of reasoning, they have simply to be accepted or rejected. We need a starting point, "*Voraussetzungslosigkeit*," as the Germans call it, i.e., to start without any presuppositions, is an impossibility. Not even Naturalists, who claim to be preeminently scientific, because they consider the things which can be weighed in the balances and measured with the measuring rod, can prove

the correctness of their theories without the help of an axiom. Ernest Haeckel, e. g., the most consistent follower of Darwin, believes— mark well, believes, not knows—that upon a certain time, perhaps billions or trillions of years ago, matter, which had been—why, he does not tell us—inert up to that moment, began to move. He cannot explain how this came to pass, but it is nevertheless his firm conviction, that such a mysterious event occurred, whereby the evolution of all individual existences in the heavens and on the earth, which have since that time begun their course, became possible. This axiom is Haeckel's substitute for the first article of our undoubted Christian creed, "I believe in God, Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth." Do you expect me to discuss the respective [14] merits of these two axioms? There is nothing to discuss; you have to reject the one and to accept the other. And as your faith is, so your choice will be. In my estimation the axiom I have laid down as my guiding star in all my investigations is more rational than Haeckel's, and explains far better the true nature of Christianity than his the evolution of our present world in all its cosmical glory. As a *dos moi pou sto* mine is a firm rock, his nothing but quicksand.

I therefore with a good conscience invite you to put your feet upon the impregnable foundation offered to us in the Holy Scriptures. The mechanical theory of the universe cannot be explained without faith in some axiom or other, should we then be ashamed to own that we are unable to explain correctly the true nature of Christianity without the axiom, laid down by me, that God has revealed Himself unto us in Christ and that He has made known to us everything concerning Christianity, which is emphatically the work of His hands, and by no means the device of a man?

Turning now to the subject in hand, it seems to me, that the Holy Scriptures point to Christianity as a Remedial Scheme. Christianity is not the first work of God. He was the Creator first and after that He revealed Himself as the Savior. It is a great privilege to confess our faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord, who saved us and procured for us the glorious liberty of the sons of God, but this part of our creed rests upon the first, wherein

we confess our faith in God, Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth. The order of creation precedes the order of grace. God has created the world for His own glory; He has introduced Christianity into a sinful world in order to restore it to its pristine glory, and to bring it to perfection in harmony with His original design.

All this is clearly taught in the Holy Scriptures. The twenty-four elders, whom John saw in a vision, fell down before Him that sat on the throne, saying: "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created."—Rev. 4:11. It is true, the revised [15] version renders it somewhat differently, saying: "Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive the glory and the honor and power: for Thou didst create all things and because of Thy will they are, and were created." It seems to me, however, that the authorized version interprets the original *dia to thelema sou* very properly, and in harmony with the use of the preposition *dia*, when construed with the accusative. It is not the arbitrary will of God, whereby heaven and earth were brought forth, but the intelligently working will of God, who desired to reveal His glory in the work of His hands. Paul teaches the same, when he closes the doctrinal part of his epistle to the Romans, exclaiming in devout admiration: "For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things; to whom be glory for ever. Amen."—Rom. 11:36. God in His wisdom designed this world, in His power He carried His design into execution, ergo it is His work, wherein He delights. We are not simply called upon to believe that no creature has aided our God in the creation of the world, which is a mere truism, but that it is our duty, as creatures of His hand, to glorify Him in all our actions, because the world is created for Him. Many of our contemporaries, who worship at the shrine of eudemonism, may judge this a strange doctrine, but it is nevertheless taught in the Bible from the beginning to the end.

God endowed man with all the gifts necessary to glorify Him. He gave him this world as an inheritance, a world which was very good, when it left the workshop of the Almighty. Man himself was created in the image

of God and after His likeness, perfectly qualified to reflect the Maker's glory and to proclaim the name of his God to the ends of the earth.

In his natural relation to God man was perfect. Without any *donum superadditum* he had communion with his God, who in His condescending love entered into a covenant with him. There was no missing link in paradise. No Mediator was needed, no Savior, no Bible, no revelation of grace and mercy. Adam was a perfect creature in a [16] perfect world. Indeed the order of creation preceded the order of grace.

But alas! sin entered into the world. By an act of disobedience Adam and Eve fell and carried the world along with them in their fall. They ate of the forbidden fruit; instead of glorifying their God, they rebelled against Him. The problem of the origin of sin is a tremendous one, not easily solved. It is, however, a fact, that sin and misery, which have entered into this world in paradise, have become universal. Human nature is corrupt; guilt is universal.

Mankind needs a remedy, if God's design for this world is not to fail. Or has the entrance of sin into this world had such an effect upon God, that He gave up His original plans? If that had been the case, the triumph of sin would then have been complete. The eternal God, however, is not to be thwarted in the carrying out of His purposes by any inimical power in heaven or on earth or in hell. He loved the world, which was the work of His hands, too much for that. He could have annihilated it, for He is El Shaddai, great also as a destroyer; but no, we are told, that His thoughts are full of Divine love. "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."—John 3:16. He did not destroy His handiwork, but sent a remedy to restore it.

Truly this remedy of God for the sin of the world is found in Christianity. The Lord is not only willing to save some individuals, on the contrary it is His will, that this world, which He created, shall be saved. Individuals, yea hosts of men, will be found lost at the end, as the Scriptures clearly teach, but the human race, and the world, its dwelling place, will come

forth out of the fiery trial of the latter days in resplendent glory. “For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved.” –John 3:17. God’s remedy is a veritable panacea; it is, in the fullest sense of the word, universal in its character, power and adaptability. But are we not taught that God saves the elect? Certainly. We believe [17] with all our heart in the truth, that the grace of God, which saves, is particular, and not universal.

But this is not the whole truth, revealed to us in the Holy Scriptures. When we view humanity as a series of individuals, then certainly “some are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death.” But we must not forget, that the human race also is a unit; in its connection with the first Adam in a lost condition, saved as a race in Christ, the last Adam. In Christ those, who belong to the elect of God, form this unity. They are the renewed human race, the bride of Christ, the posterity of the last Adam, if I may use such an expression, whom God in the end, when His remedy will have worked out all the purposes for which it was sent, will place in a world, which in all essential features will be the same which He created, but full of the glory of the Lord. It is true, there will be forever the dark background of the abyss, where the second death will reign everlastingly, but God’s work, heaven and earth, created by Him, will appear as the full development of all the gifts, wherewith He had adorned it in the morning of creation. Then it will be fully understood, that the order of creation is not only the first, chronologically considered, but also the last and only abiding one, differing from its condition in the beginning as the full grown fruit differs from the blossom of spring. In the consummation of all things, creation will be the perfect reflection of the glory of God, who has not only brought it into existence by the Word of His power, but also, in spite of sin and devil, to its perfect development. Then it will also appear, that the historical development of creation is not a *progressus in infinitum*, but a movement towards the goal, which God in His infinite love and wisdom has set it. And that this goal is reached at last we owe to God’s own remedy, the Christian religion.

Sin is, we do not doubt it, a tremendous power. And yet the world is not changed into sin, as if it were its substance. If this were the case, no remedy could remove it. The world, having been transformed into sin, could not be reclaimed. Happily sin is an accident, fearful, we concede, [18] in its nature and effect, but yet an accident. It is, as it were, an episode in the historical development of creation, an episode, which may have retarded, viewed from a human standpoint, the course of God's designs in history, but which cannot undo forever the work of God. This accident has been the occasion of the revelation of God's wonderful grace in providing for this sin-sick world of ours, as the only remedy, Christianity, able to cope with this fearful power of sickness and death in all its forms.

But if sin is an accident, does not then Christianity also share in this character of an episode? Indeed it does. Its nature as a remedy indicates it. As a remedy it certainly will cease to exist, when it has fulfilled its mission. The new heavens and the new earth need no longer a remedy; the ransomed people of God, dwelling in their inheritance, are forever free from sickness and sin. Of the celestial city it is said in the vision of the prophet: "And the inhabitant shall not say: I am sick; the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity."—Isa. 33:24. With the guilt of sin all its concomitant features have disappeared forever. In the future state of confirmation, sin is eliminated once for all. In this light we understand, what Paul means, when he says of Christ: "And when all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him, that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all"—1 Cor. 13: 28. As Mediator Christ has then fulfilled His mission, but as Head of the redeemed race He will be forever glorified as the only source of its eternal blessedness. The realm of grace is succeeded by the realm of glory, which knoweth no end.

From the outline given above, which of necessity had to be brief on account of the little time at my disposal, it is easily seen, it seems to me, that the view of Christianity as a Remedial Scheme is of eminently scientific value in Dogmatic Theology. I do not propose to advocate it as

a central principle in order to construe upon it as a foundation our system of theology. For that we need a basis that knows [19] no change or modification. We do not forget that Christianity has become a necessity in the development of the world on account of man's disobedience and fall, and will cease to exist as a Remedial Scheme, as soon as the cure is completely effected. God is the Author of heaven and earth, the Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the rock of salvation for all who trust in His name. He, therefore, is the only adequate principle of a system of theology. Theology must be theological in its character, theological even in its conception of anthropology and everything connected with it. I at least am firmly convicted, that the foundation of a system of Christian doctrine is the revelation of God Himself.

It seems to me, however, that we do well to use the great truth, we are now discussing, as a corrective. We all as a rule are apt to become one-sided, when an important idea or fact has taken hold of us. Theologians especially, at least as far as my experience goes, are liable to be very dogmatic. They contend for the truth, but sometimes it happens to them, that they fight for contorted views of truth, and then their position is stubborn dogmatism. We stand, therefore, in need of a monitor, who keeps us from going astray, or from making a caricature of truth, whereby it is transformed into a lie, which in its nature is contorted truth.

It is apparent that Christianity, considered as a Remedial Scheme, emphasizes the soteriological character of our religion. It presents itself as God's answer to an anxious sinner's query: What must I do to be saved? Christianity provides for the needs of fallen humanity. A dogmatic theologian does well to be always mindful of this fact. A system of theology without the soteriological leaven in it may be a lofty speculation about God and divine things, but it is by no means a faithful representation of God's revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ. Soteriology, therefore, ought to have a prominent place in a system of Christian doctrine.

Contemporaneous theology stands in need of such a reminder. There are some, who advocate as the central principle of their system the fatherhood

of God and the [20] brotherhood of man. There is a grain of truth in this statement. God has revealed Himself as Father and He brings about the true brotherhood of man. Who is there to deny it? It is a truth, more solid than a rock. Many of our contemporaries, however, make a caricature of this truth and thereby transform it into a lie. They convoke parliaments of religion on the strength of their principle and try to establish them by the fact that God is the Father of Christians, Jews, Mohammedans and heathens as such, and that all are brethren.

A few things, however, are forgotten by these liberal men. Are they aware of the fact, that God is a consuming fire, and that the human race is lost in Adam? Do they remember Christ's agony and cruel death on the cross? Or are these fundamental doctrines a thing of the past? If that were the case we might say: O Paul, thou hast been mistaken in being willing to bear the offense of the cross of Christ! Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, Greeks, Barbarians and Romans, who combined in their enmity against Christ, were the children of God and the brethren of the humble followers of the crucified Savior. Take away soteriology from your system of doctrine, and the fatherhood of God becomes a sham and the brotherhood of man a cruel mockery. We ought to leave such a barren theology to the old rationalists, who discoursed so sentimentally about the Father above the stars and the glorious unity of mankind.

We repeat, the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man are very precious to us. We long for a realization of such a condition in this sinful world of ours. But as long as the cross of Christ is considered a stumbling block, which has to be removed, in order that the dear heathen may not be offended, the day of its realization is yet far off. Theologians, who tremble at the Word of God and know the fulness of God's grace, revealed in Christ, will insist upon it, that the doctrine of God's fatherhood ought to be intimately connected with soteriology. It is Christ, who leads us to the Father and unites us in one happy family through faith in His name. Let us covet the truth, not its caricature.

Christianity is God's only remedy for sin, hence [21] Christianity is the only true religion. This also is a strange sound in the ears of many of our contemporaries. Schleiermacher's influence upon the development of theology in the nineteenth century has been mighty indeed. The effects of his definition of religion as the feeling of absolute dependence are felt even among us, who live at the end of the century which opened when he began his career. His influence has been deepened and widened in our day by the study of the history and philosophy of religions. We confess, that these modern sciences have a great charm, and we are the last to dissuade anyone from the study of them. If they prove anything, they show the original unity of the human race, according to the order of creation. Religion is not a *donum superadditum*, but a part of the natural heritage of man. He was created a moral and religious being, destined to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. However true this may be, we are at the same time convinced, that natural religion does not and cannot save a man. Sin has so corrupted our nature, that the order of creation without the introduction of the order of grace, is utterly unable to save us, and to re-establish our former estate. It is not by the covenant of works, as the older theologians would express it, but by the covenant of grace, that we are saved. Soteriology elevates Christianity to the position of the only and universal religion. It offers a remedy to all, who stand in need of salvation. We feel inclined to call upon the theologians of our age to beware of being carried away by the study of comparative religions or of losing sight of the cross of Christ and the salvation this cross alone imparts. When we behold in the false religions of the heathen elements of truth, let us be glad to see, that Christianity, which also teaches those truths, is meeting human aspiration and needs, but let us not for a moment assume, that on account of the few remains of God's gifts to mankind, these several religions are sufficient for the salvation of those, who live up to their convictions.

Soteriology, furthermore, has no place in the system of those who are the followers of Darwin and Herbert Spencer. [22] The theory of evolution cannot look upon Christianity as a Remedial Scheme. The Christian

religion, according to theists, who favor this philosophy, is the highest form, which the religious germs [origins] have assumed, since the process of evolution began. Christianity accordingly would be the latest achievement in the development of the religious spirit in man, whilst viewed as a Remedial Scheme it is the restoration of sick humanity to a state of former health. We know there are hosts of preachers and many theological professors, who maintain that they are able to combine both views, or to harmonize evolution and redemption. We confess that we are unable to see how this is possible. They tell us that theologians have been obliged to adjust their views in harmony with the results of scientific investigations more than once. They point to the Copernican system and the revolution it caused in theology, or to geology and the influence its discoveries had upon our interpretation of the Bible, or to modern astronomy and the modifications of our theory of the universe, which resulted therefrom. It is true the development of science may help us now and then to understand our Bible better than ever before, but we deny that the theory of evolution is a result of scientific investigation. It is in our materialistic age, what Hegel's philosophy was for the men that flourished fifty years ago, an attempt to explain the principles of being. Evolution and redemption are antipodes; if the one is true, the other cannot be true. God, however, has revealed in His Word, that He has bestowed upon mankind Christianity as a remedy to restore it to former health, therefore evolution has to be rejected. Christianity was not latent in protoplasm. It was sent from heaven. Its evolution began, when the Son of God was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary.

The synthetical philosophy of Herbert Spencer exerts a tremendous influence at present upon theologians. We have to set our faces against it with all the energy we can command. Let us study the aspect of Christianity as a Remedial Scheme and the result will be such a theory of the [23] universe as will enable us to overcome completely the materialistic and mechanical views of our times.

The dangers alluded to are doubtless great, but they are not yet the greatest. We represent Reformed theology, and more particularly that form of it, which is commonly known as Calvinism. Are we on the lookout against the danger which results from a neglect of soteriology? I fear we are not always as circumspect as we ought to be. We have to be on our guard against onesideness in our work as dogmatic theologians.

The central principle of our system is in its nature theological and not soteriological. I have said I do not wish to modify, far less to reject this principle. I am satisfied that the general tone of our theological discussions would be far more healthy than it actually is, if the true Calvinistic spirit were revived. Religion is not in the first place love to one's neighbor, whatever our ethical friends may say, and how necessary it may be to manifest our religion in love, but it emphatically consists in the true fear of God, which is the result of faith and knowledge. This being my conviction, I am not prepared to retract anything of what I have said about the theological character of our system. I am constrained, however, to add the caution, that it ought to be our earnest endeavor to bring our theology into close connection with our anthropology, by means of soteriology.

Not all who profess to take kindly to the Calvinistic system do this. Alexander Schweizer of Zurich and J. H. Scholten of Leyden professed to be great friends of the theology of the Reformed Church. It cannot be denied that they have drawn the attention of theologians to the great treasures, that are found in the writings of the great men who flourished in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries in the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland. They did it in a time, when the common judgment about Calvinism seemed to be that it would never again be revived. We owe these men a debt of gratitude for their persistent efforts to open the eyes of theologians to the vigor [24] and beauty of a system, reviled by many, but understood by only a few.

But why was it, that these men were such great friends of the doctrines of the Reformed Church? It can hardly be said that they took a great fancy to the doctrines the Reformed Church confesses. They esteemed

the principle, which formed the basis upon which the doctrinal structure was reared. Both found this principle in the doctrine of God, although in the formulation thereof they did not entirely agree. But it must be acknowledged, that they have exerted a great and beneficial influence upon the development of Reformed theology by establishing the fact, that the character of Calvinism is theological rather than anthropological. The revival of Calvinistic theology would have been very problematical, if these men had not drawn the attention of theologians to the hidden treasures alluded to above.

The soteriological element of Calvinism, however, which is very prominent in the standard works of Reformed theologians, was entirely modified by these men. They belonged to the liberal school, which eliminates everything of a supernatural character from the theological system. It is on this account easily understood, that they had nothing in common with the evangelical faith of the Reformers and the so-called scholastic theologians of the seventeenth century. Schleiermacher, and not Calvin, was their teacher. It was the dangerous element of Calvinism, in its supralapsarian form, if I may say so, which attracted them. It agreed with their philosophical views; at least they thought so. The pious feeling of absolute dependence and a deterministic psychology and metaphysics were the ingredients of their peculiar theological tendency of thought. It was a kind of Calvinism in the superlative, wherein their spirits, accustomed to view the relation between God and the world from the standpoint of immanency, found rest. They seemed to think that the harmony between faith and knowledge was established by means of a pantheistically tinged supralapsarianism. Calvinism became in their hands universalism, i. e. the restitution of all things, and Christ the [25] *anthropos pneumatikos*, who leads all men to perfection. The theology of blood, the vicarious suffering and death of Christ had no place in their system. Not even theology proper remains in its essentials untouched. The doctrine of the Holy Trinity is entirely discarded, and the Godhead of Christ denied. This is proof enough that they cared more for the relation of this world to God than

about God Himself. If they had understood the mystery of godliness in the manifestation of the Savior, they certainly would not have made a caricature of Calvinism.

Let us beware of such a position. An a priori construction of a theological system on the basis of an abstract principle out of connection with the order of grace, which for sinners is of primary importance, must of necessity lead to pernicious error. There is no Christian theology possible without the redemption of Christ as a chief cornerstone. Calvin's theology was by no means a mere human speculation in the spirit of an idealistic philosophy. In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, the masterpiece of Reformed theology, he speaks not only of the knowledge of God the Creator, but also of the knowledge of God the Redeemer, and he does not forget to show, how the grace of God is received and which are the external means of grace, instituted by God. It is true, his system is decidedly theological, for even in speaking of Christ, he dwells with emphasis upon the fact, that it is God the Redeemer, who has given us the Savior. But he cannot be accused of onesidedness. He is mindful of the *meden agan* not only in regard to the form but also to the subject matter. His system is well balanced; the order of creation and the order of grace are harmoniously blended. It is rational but not rationalistic; theological but not speculative. The Reformers were led to God by Christ, how could they forget Him as the Redeemer and the Logos?

To be in harmony then with the theology of the Reformed Church means to emphasize the unity of theology and soteriology, or in other words to view Christianity as a Remedial Scheme. If we forget this cardinal point, we are [26] no longer in harmony with the faith of our fathers, yea, it must then be said of us, that we have made a caricature of their principles.

How dangerous it is to be too exclusively theological is seen in the history of the Oriental churches. All who are acquainted with the present condition of those churches will certainly agree with me, when I maintain, that they give scarcely any signs of life. In the field of theological

investigation their influence upon the development of Christian thought is almost nil. And yet these churches were the leaders of theological thought during the first centuries of the history of the Church. With gratitude we remember what has been done by them for the historical development of the doctrines of God and of Christ. Later ages have speculated a great deal about the doctrines of the Trinity and of the person of Christ, but whether they have succeeded in adding much to our stock of knowledge, is a question, which I at least am not prepared to answer in the affirmative.

How then do we account for the present petrified condition of these churches and the poverty of their theology? If I am not mistaken the answer to this question is found in the entire lack of interest in soteriology. The *Logos* was everything; the *Soter* and the *soteria* were of little account. The place of soteriology was taken by a senseless worship of images and a strict adherence to the so-called orthodox faith, i.e. the theology of the Niceo-Constantinopolitan creed. This confession is strictly theological, whilst the subjective elements of the Christian religion have been left entirely undeveloped. The soteriological element in the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church is far from satisfying a truly evangelical mind; but compared with that of the Oriental churches, it deserves a great deal of praise. We do not wonder that the Roman Church is in this respect far ahead of her Greek sister, and we ascribe this difference not entirely to the wonderful machinery of its hierarchy, but in part also to the better development of soteriology.

Augustine, the greatest Western Church Father, shows, what a power there is in a man, whose theology is a [27] combination, well adjusted, of theological and soteriological elements. He was in his times the champion of Trinitarianism. If we are not mistaken, we may look upon him as the man, in whom the development of the doctrines, connected with this great mystery, found its ablest interpreter. And yet, how great was his name in the soteriological questions which began to move the Christian world, when Pelagius began his course. In Augustine we see how beautifully theology and soteriology grow up together, when the latter gains strength

from the former, whilst the former is kept in the right place by the latter. In Pelagius we learn the same lesson negatively; for his theological system proves that a stunted theology will result in a meagre soteriology, whilst an impoverished soteriology will undoubtedly result in a lifeless theology.

Enough has been said to convince us of the necessity to cultivate soteriology in connection with theology proper. We must not forget, however, that soteriology may not usurp the place we have assigned to theology. If we fully understand what it means, when we call Christianity a Remedial Scheme, we will be kept from erroneous positions and crooked representations on the other side of the question. Many there are, however, who make soteriology too prominent in their system. We do not say anything against a man who writes a monograph on soteriology. It is a good thing to write books on some special doctrines, for it will certainly result, as Julius Mueller has said, in a better understanding of the entire system, provided its organical connection with the other parts, which are not discussed at the time, is not lost sight of. But if Christianity is viewed as "*Erlösungsreligion*" (religion of redemption) in too narrow a sense we then certainly lose in breadth of view, what we may gain in intensity.

The first mistake generally made when Christianity is viewed from an exclusively soteriological standpoint, consists in looking upon the Christian religion as something absolutely new. It is then no longer a Remedial Scheme, but a substitute for the old, which is entirely set aside. There [28] may be some truth in it, when we view Christianity as the economy of the Spirit, as compared with the economy of the letter, but even in the relation between the Old and New Testaments an organical link is found, which allows us to look upon the New as a development of the Old. But when we compare the order of grace with the order of creation, it ought to be clear to every unsophisticated mind, that the former is the restorer of the latter and by no means a new creation. And yet there are many forms, wherein this tendency in theology appears. We have no time to present all of them, but have to confine ourselves to a few.

This tendency appears in a wrong conception of the doctrine of regeneration in its two meanings, regeneration of man and of the world.

Regeneration of man, according to this view, is the creation of a new substance in man. Melancthon's synergism has had a baneful influence upon many orthodox theologians in their attitude to the doctrine of regeneration. Melancthon's pendulum swung from the *stock and stone* view of the Augsburg Confession to the other extreme of synergism; the pendulum of many theologians, who feared that the doctrine of total depravity might suffer loss by such a tendency swung back to an ultra-passivity. They magnified soteriology, making of man a new creation without any connection with his former self. It is hardly an exaggeration to maintain that they teach that God was unable to restore a sinner to communion with Himself; instead of renewing him, the *anthropos* as such was destroyed and a new man arose in his stead. The expressions, old and new man, used in the Bible, were interpreted as meaning the annihilation of man and the creation of a Christian in his stead. How wrong this position is, will be seen, when we remember that man was not in a lost condition because he had ceased to be a man, but because he had become a sinner. Sin had to be eliminated from his system by imparting new life unto him; this is the reason why regeneration was a necessity. Regeneration was the remedy, appointed by God, to accomplish this end. On the basis of the old, the new arose; the personality, created by God, remained; only its quality was changed. This view is in harmony with Christianity as a Remedial Scheme; if the former view is taken, Christianity is no longer a remedy, but a new creation.

[29] In harmony with a wrong view of man's regeneration is generally connected an erroneous conception of the regeneration of the world. We look upon the final consummation of all things as an *apokatastasis ton panton* in the sense of a perfect realization of all the designs of God the Creator, by means of the great remedy He has given in the Mediator. Those, however, who look upon Christianity as a new creation are forced by their principle into the supposition that this world will be annihilated

to make room for the new heaven and the new earth. Reformed theologians, as a rule, have been kept from entertaining such a monstrous idea, but Lutheran theologians, during the reign of Lutheran orthodoxy, believed in a universal annihilation of this universe. This was in harmony with their soteriological principle, which postulates a new creation in man. They were but consistent in extending their view of the *paliggenesia* to the entire universe.

The so-called Christo-centric theology has the same tendency in making Christianity to be something entirely new. We have to Christologize our system, we are told. How have we to do it? In the sense of a [Isaac] Dorner, who makes the idea of the God-man the essential characteristic of religion? It is not clear to my mind that this idea can be established on an a priori basis. God has revealed Himself in Christ, who is indeed the Godman, but the Scripture tells us that He was sent into the world to seek and to save that which was lost. Certainly the Godman is the object of our worship, but as conceived by the speculative theologians of the middle of this century, He is a riddle, and the whole world becomes more and more an indissoluble enigma. It is true, God has created the world by the Logos. But did He do it by Him as the Godman? Speculative theology leads to the brink of pantheism and does not magnify soteriology.

Or have we to follow Ritschl in confining, as it were, our system to the development of the Christian doctrine of justification and redemption? Are we prepared to leave all the treasures of theology for what he styles: "the historical Christ"? Do we know what this position entails? We have to give up natural theology on the one hand and on the other the mystical union with the living Christ, who is sitting at the right hand of God and is present with us unto the end of the world. Are we willing to pay such a price? I am not.

[30] Nothing remains then for us but to take the so-called evangelical view of Christology, which narrows our theology down to a doctrine of salvation. It may be very popular with people who tell us ad nauseam that religion is a private affair, which must abstain from meddling with

things outside its sphere. It divorces Christianity and creation, faith and knowledge, theology and soteriology. It concerns itself with the salvation of men, but leaves everything else in the hands of the world. It contents itself with cultivating its religious garden, surrounded by high walls and shut out from communion with the rest of God's creation. If it is a dreadful undertaking to secularize religion and theology, it is certainly no less calamitous to confine theology within its narrow religious bounds.

I do not hesitate to call such a view baneful in its results. In the Middle Ages it created monasteries and the ridiculous distinction between *religiosi* and *seculares*, the law and the evangelical counsels, and in our own time it results in sectarianism and an atheistical state. In an analysis of Christianity it may be proper to begin with the soteriological question of the Heidelberg Catechism: What is thy only comfort in life and death? but in the building up of our theological system I at least prefer the question of the Assembly's Shorter Catechism: What is the chief end of man? It was but natural that in the beginning of the Reformation the great question which agitated the hearts of men, was not the true conception of a theological system, but the way of salvation. It was, however, as natural that men's minds began afterwards to turn to other questions, such as touched upon the building up of a system of theology on the foundation of the Reformed religion. It was a logical process whereby the question of the Heidelberg Catechism: What is thy only comfort in life and death? was developed into that of the Shorter Catechism: What is the chief end of man?

Reformed theologians ought not for a moment to consider the advisability of transforming their theology into Christology. But who does, you say? Everyone who makes Christology his central principle. A theologian of the Christological school may not discard theology proper entirely, but he will be obliged to stow away his knowledge of God in his Christological system. It may be true, that a Christological theologian may object, when I tell him that he makes soteriology to rule over his theology, by telling me that he [31] beholds the Father in Christ. It cannot be denied, Christ

told Philip: "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father." Christ leads us back to the Father, whom He glorified in this world. And we follow Him, when we delight in what Zinzendorf sneeringly called the God-Father theology of the Reformed Church. In Christ we truly behold the Father; Christ the Redeemer clears away the mists, which had come in between us and heaven. The Lamb of God points to our heavenly Father and reveals to us His majesty as the Holy One of Israel and His condescending love as God the Redeemer; the risen and ascended Savior opens heaven to our view and fills us with adoration and praise. In behalf of soteriology itself we protest against Christology as a central principle of theology.

In close connection with this soteriological or Christological theology we generally find a narrow view of Christianity in its relation to the world. Our theology claims this world in the fullest sense for God and Christ. We believe that God has endowed this world with many gifts which ought to be exercised and developed. Think of the organization of mankind in family life, in society and the state. These institutions are of Divine origin and appointment. They have been modified by the entrance of sin and perhaps the introduction of the state may have been made necessary on account of sin, but God did not annihilate the original condition, wherein man was created to glorify his Master. A pietistical view of Christianity leaves all these forms of human life either entirely out of consideration or treats them in a partial manner. Salvation of man from guilt is its chief topic, which absorbs almost everything else. Our theology enables us to see God's footsteps in all this. We believe that God is in history, that science, literature, art and industry, in short our civilization in all its branches is not to be left to the devil as his special domain, but has to be looked upon as a gift bestowed upon creation and redeemed by grace. Chalmers uttered a great word when he said: "Christianity is true humanity." The ancients expressed the same idea, when they said "*Gratia naturam non tollit, sed sanat.*"

This is the glory of a theology which views Christianity as a Remedial Scheme. We do not wish to minimize sin or the glory of the Redeemer

and His work, but we desire to emphasize the truth, that sin did not undo God's work, and that the Redeemer did not bring forth a new creation, but rescued the old.

[32] Calvinistic theologians, as a rule, have kept this in view in building up their system of theology. But I do not wish to be understood to say that they have always been consistent or that they have reached perfection in this respect. I admire the work of the Reformers and the theologians of the seventeenth century, but if I were to say that they have scaled all the mountains of difficulty or brought to view all the glories of God's revelation in grace and nature, it certainly would be blind enthusiasm and gross exaggeration.

There are many lines which have not yet been followed up to the end. The union of natural and revealed theology has been accepted in principle, but not yet carried out to its fullest extent. The doctrine of common grace, *in nuce* found in the works of our best theologians, has not yet been developed as it should be. Other doctrines as e.g. predestination need to be stated anew, in connection with the history of mankind as a whole, whilst eschatology especially is to a great extent still a barren wilderness. Truly there is yet room at the top. Theology is by no means a fossil. It is on the contrary full of life. The churches are full of practical work in our day and we rejoice in it, but they ought not to forget the necessity of developing theology in order that they may have a good theory whereon to build. If I may use the expression, they, especially their leaders, ought to work as professionals, not as amateurs.

I desire to do my part in this work. I call upon you all to sustain me and the school, wherewith I am connected. You, gentlemen, as a Board of Directors, have a great opportunity in working for this school and in putting it upon a solid foundation. It needs your utmost care.

I desire to do this work in fellowship with you, professors of our school. We have to do it shoulder to shoulder, working with untiring zeal and unflinching faithfulness.

I desire to do it for you, young brethren, who confide in me as one of your guides and teachers. If we, professors, are faithful in the discharge of our duties and you in yours, then certainly the blessing of the Lord will follow us.

I desire to do it for the Church, in order that loyalty to her principles, doctrines, discipline, and worship may be increased and her reason to exist may appear above doubt and reproach. In God we trust. His cause we desire to champion. Let our strength and wisdom be found in Him, in Him alone. *Soli Deo gloria.*

Herman Bavinck's Foreword to *Unbelief and Revolution*

*Andrew Kloes and Harry Van Dyke*¹

Introduction to Bavinck's Foreword

The foreword that Herman Bavinck wrote for the third edition of Groen van Prinsterer's classic work *Unbelief and Revolution* testifies both to the enduring significance of this work and to the state of mind of its writer.² The text gives us an unexpected glimpse into Bavinck's outlook at the beginning of the twentieth century as he reflects on the challenges facing the church of his day, as well as the importance of remembering and rehearsing the basic principles of the neo-Calvinism of which Groen was an undisputed precursor.

Bavinck grew up in the home of a Secession pastor where deep appreciation was cherished for Groen van Prinsterer, the champion of freedom of religion and conscience against the government which undermined the civil rights of the Seceders, who in 1834 separated from the national church and soon pioneered ventures to establish and operate separate Christian schools. Although Bavinck Senior and his colleagues never quite understood why Groen had not also joined them in abandoning the official latitudinarian denomination, nevertheless he stayed in their gallery of heroes of the faith who maintained the truth in the face of perennial opposition, obstruction, and derision.

¹The introduction to Herman Bavinck's "Foreword" is by Harry Van Dyke. The translation of the Dutch text of Bavinck's "Foreword" is by Andrew Kloes. He would like to thank Marinus de Jong for kindly reviewing the translation and for his helpful comments. Harry Van Dyke also edited the translation.

²Herman Bavinck, "Voorrede": *Ongeloof en revolutie. Eene reeks van historische voordrachten*, 3rd. ed., by G. Groen van Prinsterer (Kampen: J. H. Bos, 1904), v–xiii.

In this atmosphere young Herman must have embraced the basic direction of the author of *Unbelief and Revolution* and imbibed its lessons for life as a Christian community in a secularizing society. Reinforced no doubt in his outlook by the remarkable activity on the national stage and in the academic world by Abraham Kuyper, who by 1904 was his colleague and friend, Bavinck was well equipped to glean the cardinal points and salient message from Groen's often controversial book. His eight-page foreword reviews all the seminal ideas found in each of its chapters and gives them his well-considered endorsement. Speaking here is the author of the 1894 magisterial oration on "Common Grace." With a paraphrase of one of his favorite texts, Bavinck underscores the meaning of the Christian faith, not only for eternity but also for temporal life in all its aspects (1 Tim. 4:8). He warns against restricting the gospel to church and theology, to conversion and moral living, however primary and crucial these are, because he wants his fellow believers to be on guard against what he calls "the dangers of pietism and separatism." These words foreshadow his inspiring address of the following year: "Christian and Secular Politics."

The reprint of Groen's book was well served by this pointed, powerful foreword.

Foreword to *Unbelief and Revolution*³

[v] Groen van Prinsterer's classic work *Unbelief and Revolution* has no need of a long, laudatory introduction from me. The book is already well-known and its author is greatly respected. Yet, a brief description of the character of this work can help explain why a new edition deserves our hearty recommendation and support.

It is almost sixty years since the first edition of this work was published, and more than forty years since the second edition appeared. Over

³ Bavinck, "Voorrede," v-xiii. The original page numbers of the Dutch text appear in brackets in this English translation, e.g. [v].

these years the world has changed in many ways. Almost all of the enemies against whom Groen took his stand are now gone. The ideas that he fought against have almost no defenders any longer. Who now still speaks enthusiastically about the Declaration of the Rights of Man? Who still praises the ‘heroic deeds and blessings’ of the French Revolution? Who is still infatuated with the slogan ‘liberty, equality, and fraternity’? And who still dares to declare that the state and society, language and religion, law and morality have all been created by the will of man, through man’s own conscious deliberations and negotiations? All of the theories that infatuated earlier generations and that were once seen as solutions to the riddle of life, have passed away. Just like the mist that disappears with the [vi] rays of the sun, they are gone. With the turn of the twentieth century, a change has taken place in the lives and aspirations of all the nations.

Rousseau has yielded way to Darwin, Kant to Hegel, deism to pantheism, rationalism to mysticism, and optimism to pessimism. While man was formerly envisioned as an angel, he is now looked upon as a clever animal. Formerly it was attempted in vain to construct, in a Pelagian manner, all institutions and relationships by the sheer force of human will and chance. Now it is proposed that everything is determined by unconscious urges and explained by fate. After repeated failed experiments, the Revolution has given way to Evolution.

Nevertheless, Groen’s work has not become outdated in the least. This is because the enemy that Groen fought against has merely changed its appearance but not its essential attitude. In both cases, it is still *man* who imparts meaning to language and religion, to law and morality, and to the state and society. In both cases, God with his Word and his law is excluded. From this viewpoint, nothing has improved; indeed, the situation has worsened. There has been progress—but only progress in the sense of further dissolution. There has been development—but only in a downward direction. While in former days God was considered essential for explaining the origin of things, his existence, or at least our ability to know Him, is now denied. It is said to be ‘unscientific’ to take God into

account when discussing such things. Science believes that it must either be ‘non-theistic’ [*athée*] or else be untrue to itself. Family, society and the state, religion and morality, language and thought have to be explained as the products of their historical development, or when that proves impossible, they are to be explained psycho-genetically or, in the final analysis, mechanically.

Groen was not unaware that revolutionary principles would unfold in this manner. After all, he had studied Plato and believed that ideas were real. After Groen heard the preaching of the [vii] Gospel by Merle d’Aubigné, he became influenced by the Réveil movement and learned to count all things as loss for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ. As the King’s secretary he had access to the historical archives of the House of Orange, and he beheld in the history of our national struggles faith in practice and the fruits of doctrine in real life. In this way he was prepared to guide the wonderful religious life of the Réveil movement into a historic, national, and Reformed channel. In following a Christian-historical compass, Groen did not strive to lead the Awakening movement backwards, but to move forward and make progress.

During this period of preparation, Groen developed both a clearer understanding and a more sincere attachment to the unchanging truths of the Reformation. At the same time, he gained new and unexpected insights into the essence of the Revolution. He now recognized the Revolution as a product of systematic unbelief. He regarded the Revolution, with all its vicissitudes and disasters, as the fruit of revolutionary notions; the natural unfolding of these disastrous ways of thinking was according to him the cause of these events. Groen even believed that one could interpret the phases of this development in advance. Because the revolutionary ideals proceeded in such a logical order, they would inevitably pass through phases that manifested the essential character of the Revolution and so one could set down ahead of time an outline of what their history would be.

Yet this should not be construed to mean that Groen believed that ideas had the power to realize themselves, as if facts were nothing other

than embodied thoughts. Groen himself recognized that what takes place merely reflects the continual outworking and revealing manifestation of the spirit of the age. Also, the development of the doctrine of the Revolution never goes unchecked; it always meets objections which, because they arise from how God has ordered the nature of man and his needs, cannot be overcome. These objections and the revolutionary doctrine together make up the *two factors* of history. Nature and history come into conflict with the ideas of the Revolution. The historical emergence and development of states, the sacred origins of law and authority, the supreme sovereignty of God, the mutually independent relationship between church and state: one may well decide that all these truths are the results of errors and prejudices. Nevertheless, they are and remain the foundational pillars of basic constitutional law. For this reason, the life course of the Revolution is a continual struggle of its principle against the immutable ordinances of God. And despite the uniformity of principle and direction there are also manifold differences; the course of circumstances in different countries was not the same. However, the revolutionary theory was never fully realized, because its realization is quite an impossibility.

With his conception of history Groen van Prinsterer stood diametrically opposed to that of historical materialism, which came after him. Groen believed in the reality and operation of ideas, not as powers with a substance of their own, but as they are able to wield influence on persons, who become their bearers and supporters, and through them, on the course of the history of mankind. He believed not only in the laws of nature but, without fatalism, also in the laws of the moral world. And this belief he had in common with all great historians. Because there is no history in the proper sense if, alongside factors of economics, the existence and power of factors of ideas are not taken into account. And in distinction to many historians, Groen was still animated by his profound conviction that, according to the words of Scripture, righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to the people. Groen believed in the blessings of Christianity, and still more particularly in those of the Reformation. He was on guard

against the Renaissance and unbelief, and equally against the expansive activities and arrogance of Rome. And while Rome associated the Reformation with the Revolution, Groen demonstrated that they are polar opposites, because the Revolution [ix] had plunged the civilized world into an abyss of disbelief and misery, while the Reformation had led Europe out from superstition, while also rescuing it from unbelief.

Therefore, Groen did not face the events of his time with a neutral disposition. He saw and judged from a certain, consciously adopted perspective. And this was the position of a Christian, who desired nothing other than to glory in Christ and in Him crucified. Groen was a Christian who in religion, morality, and law, in family life and in affairs of state recognized no wisdom or truth that does not begin with the subordination of the heart and mind to revelation. In history he not only, along with the deist, detected and observed the leading of Providence, but he also trusted with the strength of his conviction in the profession of the Gospel and in the coming and triumphant return of the Savior. In Him, Groen looked forward to the resolution of all of the riddles of the history of mankind.

And yet, in spite of, or rather, precisely because of this position, Groen was in the highest degree an unprejudiced and impartial historian. This was born out in both his assessment of the Reformation and in the Revolution. Groen cannot be charged with anti-papism; he did not conceal the flaws and faults of the Reformers and their followers. He had an open eye towards that which was Christian in Rome and he was even sharply and undeservedly blamed for extenuating the Romanists' crimes during the Reformation. But he also warned Protestants against neglecting the pledge with which they have been entrusted; that they, while knowing that on their side not everything has been excellent, they might surrender themselves to an ill-conceived magnanimity, which tilts the scales in favor of their opponents and of injustice, *if they did not investigate the issues more deeply*. He wished to be impartial and wished it completely. He adhered, as much as anyone, to the principle of *audiatur et altera pars* [let the other side be heard as well], so long as the other party is heard and, after careful

consideration, judgment is passed. He warned against the danger [x] that, through *ignorance of the facts*, Protestants might underrate the excellencies of the Reformation in the character of the Reformers and in the course of events.

Likewise, the Christian-historical perspective enabled Groen van Prinsterer to understand the essence and character of the French Revolution. By this Revolution, he did not understand one of the many events, by which public authority is removed, nor just the revolutionary tempest that has raged in France, but the overturning of the way of thinking and of religious disposition throughout all of Christendom, along with the development of an utter skepticism in which God's Word and law were laid aside. The revolutionary concepts that he had in mind were the basic theses of liberty and equality, the sovereignty of the people, the social contract, the refashioning of conventions, which men honor as the cornerstones of constitutional law and state-building. This Revolution, Groen argued, was born out of a rejection of God's Word and law, and it had, from its outset, not merely a political but also a social character. The Revolution intended not only to change the form of the state but also to alter society. It manifested not only a political aberration like that which, indeed, also occurred in earlier history, but also a misconception of society. For when God's sovereignty is rejected or denied, what then remains as the source of authority, of law, of every sacred and obligatory relationship in the state, in society, and in the family circle? What ground remains for the distinction of rank and position? What reason is there why I obey and someone else commands me? Why one is poor and another rich? All institutions, law and liberty, all religion and morality, all property and life lose their foundation and become dependent on the sovereign will of the people—that is, on the majority of half, plus one.

The accuracy of these insights into the essence of the Revolution was confirmed every year by the history of nations both during Groen's life and after his death. Everywhere and in every sphere of life, in family [xi] and society, in science and art, in religion and morality, in law and in history,

the consequences of the principle of the Revolution have been drawn, which Groen saw in their incipient form. If these consequences are not, or not fully, implemented in life, this is not thanks to the revolutionary principle itself, but only thanks to the forces that God has placed in nature and history to oppose it, and to the return to the Gospel, which his Spirit has awakened in a portion of Christendom. Supported thereby and with hope in his heart, Groen did not despair, even though he often had a pessimistic take on the future. The Gospel was the only adequate remedy for the ills of the age. Neither a dead orthodoxy nor old-fashioned forms were what Groen desired, but rather sincere faith, personal repentance, submission to God's Word and law, to every truth that is deduced from God's word, to every authority that is derived from God's authority, and a heartfelt embrace and experiential knowledge of the unchanging truths of the Reformation. Looking around with this perspective, he found his sympathizers and supporters among all of those who professed Christ. He never sought only defense, but always also recruitment. Even in the pagan world, he found support for the principles of authority and liberty which he promoted. In the final analysis it was not he who stood alone, like a field marshal without an army, but it was the Revolution that was isolated by its atheism. He was offended not only by the Revolution's unchristian character, but equally by its thoroughly unhistorical nature.

Groen did not, however, stop at this demand for a personal return to the Gospel. However much he emphasized individual, true conversion, he was always on his guard against the dangers of pietism and separatism. From the Gospel he derived principles which would bring blessings for family and society, for law and state-building, and for the arts and sciences. The power of the Gospel to effect order and liberty and prosperity was, after all, substantiated by world history. [xii] The fear of God promotes whatever is beneficial and useful to man, while the denial of God thwarts and obstructs the same.

While at present there exists a particular desire to release the state from all higher, religious-moral principles and against these more and

more to assign to the state the promotion of material interests, Groen moved in the opposite direction. He defended the divine right of the government and could think of no well-ordered state in a Christian land that was indifferent or hostile towards the Church. Indeed the sovereign, whether that is the prince in the monarchy, or the body politic in a republic, is called to act. This action must observe the rules of morality. For morality to have a foundation and meaning, it must have its basis in religion, which, when faithfully exercised, is protected and supported by the sovereign in the interest of justice, morality, and the public order.

But this divine right of the government is not of such a nature that the will of the sovereign is identical with the will of God. Nor is regal authority omnipotent. It serves not only to *confirm*, but also to *regulate* and *restrain* the highest power. It belongs not only to government officials but also to all who among men have been entrusted with any authority. It is the same doctrine that safeguards the throne and the home of the most insignificant subject. The rights and liberties of the people cannot be ignored without destabilizing the right of the sovereign.

The divine right is also the foundation and guarantee of a free society, of the independence of its constituent spheres of life. In former days, every family head, every corporation, every class was, within the bounds of its own competence, entitled to wield authority over persons and property, to apply the law to those who were under them, to govern their affairs at their own discretion, and to wield a power that differs from the sovereign's authority only by lacking independence, which is the hallmark of sovereignty. The common welfare was deemed inseparable from the free development of the *estates*, that is, the *states within the state*. There was, despite disparity in rights, equality before the law. This principle of association and corporation Groen regarded as applicable even today, if amended according to circumstances. He was convinced that solving the social problems was the key to the future, also for international conflicts. But concerning this he paid more attention to the organic growth of society than to manmade institutions. Upon the sovereign he placed above all

the obligation to set no obstacles in the path of the historical workings of nature, by which, starting from the simplest members of the community, society crystallizes itself into a variety of outlines and forms.

In all of these ways, Groen's work is significant not only for the past and the present, but also for the future. There are, as Groen agreed with Francis Bacon, a small number of books that possess a consuming power like the staff of Moses against the staffs of the Egyptian magicians. This is also true of his own work: his book devours many others.

W. B. Kristensen's "On Herman Bavinck's Scientific Work"

Laurence O'Donnell

Translator's Introduction¹

William Brede Kristensen (1867–1953) was a Norwegian scholar of classical languages and ancient Mesopotamian religions. In 1896 he completed a doctorate at the University of Oslo on ancient Egyptian views of the afterlife.² He lectured at the university from 1897–1901 before emigrating to the Netherlands. From 1901–1937 he held the chair of the history and phenomenology of religion at Leiden University, where he taught up-and-coming leaders of the *religionswissenschaftliche* school such as Gerardus van der Leeuw, Hendrik Kraemer, and C. J. Bleeker.³ Though he and Bavinck did not cross paths at Leiden (Bavinck had completed his doctoral studies there two decades earlier), they did find a point of contact when Bavinck was inducted into the Royal Netherlands Academy

¹This translation, with the translator's introduction, was previously published in *Reformed Faith and Practice: The Journal of Reformed Theological Seminary* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 38–49. It appears here with permission, for which we are thankful. The original Dutch text of Kristensen's article was published as: W. B. Kristensen, "Over den wetenschappelijken arbeid van Herman Bavinck" in *Jaarboek der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen te Amsterdam, 1921–1922* (Amsterdam: 1923), 1–12. The original pagination is included in brackets in the text of the English translation below.

²*Ægypternes forestillinger om livet efter døden i forbindelse med guderne Ra og Osiris* [Egyptian ideas about life after death in connection with the gods Ra and Osiris] (Kristiania: Det Kongelige Frederiks Universitet, 1896).

³H. J. Ponsteen, "William Brede Kristensen," in *Biografisch lexicon voor de geschiedenis van het Nederlands protestantisme* (Kampen: Kok, 1998), 4:266–69; "William Brede Kristensen," in Jacques Waardenburg, *Classical Approaches to the Study of Religion: Aims, Methods and Theories of Research; Introduction and Anthology* (New York: De Gruyter, 1999), ch. 25; Richard J. Plantinga, "W. B. Kristensen and the Study of Religion," *Numen* 36, no. 2 (1989): 173–88.

of Arts and Sciences, as Kristensen notes in his eulogy. Additionally, that Bavinck read and appreciated Kristensen's scholarship is evident from the references to his works that appear in Bavinck's writings.⁴

When a member of the Academy passed away, it was customary for a current member to deliver a eulogy and for the eulogy to appear in the Academy's yearbook. Kristensen fills this role for Bavinck. Bavinck's widow and close relatives were in attendance when Kristensen read the eulogy at the Academy.⁵

R. H. Bremmer ranks Kristensen's eulogy among the more important early studies of Bavinck's thought and provides a concise summary: "Kristensen gave a short survey of the main features in Bavinck's thoughts on the foundations of science."⁶ For contemporary readers who come to Bavinck largely by way of the *Reformed Dogmatics* and know him primarily as a theologian, the choice to focus on the "man of science," as Kristensen describes him, might come as a surprise. Yet the choice is fitting when one considers the significant works that Bavinck produced during the time period that Kristensen knew him such as *Christelijke wetenschap* (1904), an essay on the implications of a Christian conception of science for a Christian university;⁷ *Christelijke wereldbeschouwing* (1904), a Christian theistic formulation of the relations between thought and being, being and becoming, and becoming and acting;⁸ his 1908 Princeton Stone Lectures

⁴Herman Bavinck, *De zekerheid des geloofs*, 1st ed. (Kampen: Kok, 1901), 15; *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:30n3 (subpara. 307). In the notes below, references to the subparagraph (abbrev. "subpara.") are provided to assist readers in comparing the second and subsequent Dutch editions of *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*.

⁵"Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen," in *Nederlandsche Staatscourant*, no. 224, 17 November 1921, p. 2. Also, a summation of the eulogy was reported in "Kon. Akademie van Wetenschappen," in *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 14 November 1921, evening edition, third sheet, p. 9. Thanks to Prof. Van den Belt for these references.

⁶Rolf Hendrik Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck als dogmaticus* (Kampen: Kok, 1961), 5; cf. 2.

⁷Herman Bavinck, *Christelijke wetenschap* (Kampen: Kok, 1904).

⁸Herman Bavinck, *Christelijke wereldbeschouwing*, 1st ed. (Kampen: Bos, 1904); 2nd ed. (Kampen: Kok, 1913); 3rd ed. (Kampen: Kok, 1929).

on the philosophy of revelation;⁹ and his studies of contemporary religious psychology (1912–1920).¹⁰ The “short survey” to which Bremmer refers applies largely to these works.

Along with the “man of science,” Kristensen highlights the “modern man.” He presents Bavinck as fully immersed in the intellectual currents of his day—so much so that Jan Veenhof cites Kristensen to support his characterization of Bavinck as “a thoroughly modern man” whose “writings form valuable news reports in which the life and strife of the former days is reflected in a very lively way.”¹¹ Yet at the same time Kristensen touches on the fundamental difference from modern thought that is all-controlling in Bavinck’s conception of science, one that he attributes to the strong influence that the classical Western theological tradition exerted upon his thought: in the end all human knowledge rests on faith. Hence he does not refrain from bringing the convictions of the Christian faith fully to bear upon scientific work. “In the great systems of Plato, Augustine, and Thomas,” remarks Bremmer, “Bavinck found answers to the questions that modern times and modern thought posed.”¹² In the eyes of first-generation Bavinck scholars such as these, the modern Bavinck, though “thoroughly

⁹ Herman Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation: The Stone Lectures for 1908–1909*, Princeton Theological Seminary (New York: Longmans, 1908).

¹⁰ Herman Bavinck, *Bijbelsche en religieuze psychologie* (Kampen: Kok, 1920), which is a collection of articles published in *Orgaan van het Gereformeerd Schoolverband* from 1912–1920. In 1910 Bavinck added new material on religious psychology into the revised edition of *RD* starting at subparagraph 427a, which addition made good on a remark he had made in the 1908 Stone Lectures: “Dogmatics, especially in the doctrine of the *ordo salutis*, must become more psychological, and must reckon more fully with religious experience.” *Philosophy of Revelation*, 209. See also Bavinck’s correspondence with Abraham Kuyper regarding the doctrine of man in *RD* being “incomplete” and thus in need of being supplemented with Bavinck’s *Beginselen der Psychologie* in the Translator’s Introduction to Bavinck, *Foundations of Psychology*, trans. Jack Vanden Born, Nelson D. Kloosterman, and John Bolt, ed. John Bolt, *Bavinck Review* 9 (2018): xvi. In the eulogy Kristensen references Bavinck’s 1907 lecture at the Academy on the “Psychology of Religion.”

¹¹ Jan Veenhof, *Revelatie en inspiratie* (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 1968), 107–8.

¹² Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck als dogmaticus*, 331.

modern,” is not exclusively modern. He joined the modern fray armed with classical Christian wisdom.

All of the footnotes below are my additions. They indicate, albeit selectively, that Kristensen wove together many passages from Bavinck’s writings, often lifting phrases and sentences verbatim. The artfulness of his weaving can be seen by comparing his terse conclusion with the passage from which it derives.¹³ Those familiar with Bavinck’s corpus will recognize his voice throughout, which surely was Kristensen’s way of honoring his esteemed colleague.

I wish to thank Professor Henk van den Belt for his helpful feedback on the translation.

On Herman Bavinck’s Scientific Work¹⁴

[1] The man to whose memory we dedicate these moments has taken the place of a leader in the spiritual life of our generation. So great was the measure of his work and so penetrating its influence that an overview of Bavinck’s entire lifework would have to cover subject matter and activities that are only remotely related to the work of our Academy.¹⁵ Nevertheless, Bavinck was first and foremost a man of science. It is certainly not the type of science that we normally term “contemporary,” but precisely for this reason it bears ideas that can lead to renewed research on the foundations of science.

A rare unity of demeanor and orientation characterizes his whole career. The young student who arrived in Leiden had already taken the direction that was decisive for his life. During his activity at the Theological School at Kampen and later at the Free University in Amsterdam, we see

¹³ See note 29 below.

¹⁴ Kristensen, “Over den wetenschappelijken arbeid van Herman Bavinck,” 1–12.

¹⁵ I.e., Koninklijke Nederlandsche Akademie van Wetenschappen (The Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences). For Bavinck’s membership data, see www.dwc.knaw.nl/biografie/pmknaw/?pagetype=authorDetail&caId=PE00000987 .

his development, always in living contact—at times in conflict—with the life of the church and society. But the line once drawn remains unchanged, unbroken, at least to the outsider's eye.

In 1906 Bavinck became a member of this Academy where he belonged among the most loyal visitors of the monthly meetings. [2] He participated repeatedly in the seminars and discussions. He spoke twice on topics of his own choosing: in 1907 on the “Psychology of Religion” in which he gave a description and assessment of the work of the American religious psychologists who were less known then than today,¹⁶ and in 1915 on “Ethics and Politics,” a subject that became especially pertinent due to the war.¹⁷ It speaks for itself that on both occasions Bavinck's personal posture toward questions of principle was clearly acknowledged. However, the hearers of these lectures likely received the impression that what they heard was to be considered largely an introduction to a more basic treatment of the subjects, a treatment that the speaker had in mind and which he also might have worked out completely but which he did not want to go into on the given occasion. A phrase in the first paper should confirm that impression. In the published version we read, “In determining the value of this religious psychology (i.e., of Stanley, Hall, Starbuck, James, et al.), I restrain myself from all theological objections in this sphere, and I confine myself to a few comments of a generally scientific nature.”¹⁸ Undoubtedly, it cost him a good bit of trouble to impose this restriction. His writings most clearly

¹⁶ Bavinck, “Psychologie der religie,” in *Verslagen en mededeelingen der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afdeling letterkunde*, 4e reeks, deel 9 (Amsterdam: Johannes Müller, 1909), 147–78; republished in Herman Bavinck, *Verzamelde opstellen op het gebied van godsdienst en wetenschap* (Kampen: Kok, 1921), ch. 4; English trans., “Psychology of Religion,” in Herman Bavinck, *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, ed. John Bolt, trans. Harry Boonstra and Gerrit Sheeres (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), ch. 4.

¹⁷ Bavinck, “Ethiek en politiek,” *Verslagen en mededeelingen der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afdeling letterkunde*, 5e reeks, deel 2, 1e stuk (Amsterdam: Johannes Müller, 1916), 99–128; republished in *Stemmen des Tijds* 5, no. 2 (1916): 32–56; and in *Verzamelde opstellen*, ch. 15; English trans., “Ethics and Politics,” in *Essays*, ch. 15.

¹⁸ Amended by Kristensen. See Bavinck, *Verzamelde opstellen*, 72; Bavinck, *Essays*, 76.

demonstrate that the systematic-theological treatment of subjects as is mentioned here was the only method that fully satisfied him.

We may regret that he has deprived us of this, but we also acknowledge that his restraint was completely understandable. The name “science” includes a greater richness of types than those of which we are generally aware, and the diversity of types is connected with the deepest factors in our spiritual life. Bavinck’s science has allowed us to behold this richness with extraordinary lucidity. I believe that we can best show our gratitude towards him by paying attention to this merit.

[3] A peculiar contradiction characterizes Bavinck’s demeanor as a man of science: no one oriented his work more strongly to the questions and needs of our time, our civilization, our science, than did Bavinck; but also no one took as decisive a distance from the zeitgeist than did he. Regarding the former, timeliness has always characterized his work. Science for him was not an aristocratic pursuit that gives some satisfaction and enjoyment to our intellectuals and to those who are aesthetically inclined; not a work that goes its own way, unconcerned with the strife on every side, the clashes between worldviews—not the least in the classrooms—the battle over humanity’s spiritual direction. It is precisely this battle that drove him onward, not as a spectator but as a contestant. With intense interest he steeped himself in the questions, immersing himself in very diverse areas of research. He concentrated his effort on the leading ideas, the principles, not only in the theological and philosophical area in a narrow sense but also in the literary and social sciences; even in the realm of the natural sciences he was no stranger. Above all, there is no separation to make between his theoretical and practical interests. He felt himself driven to the research by the gravity of life itself and by the longing for personal truth, motives of an eminently practical nature. Still, he never forgot—quite the opposite, he repeatedly and emphatically maintained—that especially the purely intellectual faculties have no less right to speak than the emotional faculties. For him science was always about life’s fundamental questions, but he knew that these questions come to

bear no less in the mechanical and biological sciences than in the historical and social. He stood dead center in the spiritual current of our time, and he never lost touch with it.

Timeliness in the noble sense of the word marks all his research. And yet in another way Bavinck was not at all a child [4] of his time. The type of scientific thinking that was dominant ever since the seventeenth-century, that was undermined by Kant's critiques, and that upon which a type was built up later that brought about a separation between experiential science and metaphysics, knowledge and belief, relative and absolute reality—this type Bavinck found bizarre. He fights it deliberately and repeatedly. And he chose to do so by utilizing the method of his opponents. He himself walks criticism's way to provide proof that the foundations of our knowledge, of our ethical and aesthetic judgment, and above all of our religious faith are of a wholly other nature than Kant and his followers in philosophy and theology have assumed. The manner in which he applied the critical method derives from the philosophy that he is fighting against. In this way he has come under its influence. He has not completely severed ties with the leading intellectual powers on this important point at any rate. Nevertheless, he diverged from them in principle. His epistemological standpoint signifies a break with the dominant type of scientific research. Neither Descartes, Kant, nor Schleiermacher were his intellectual ancestors; rather, his worldview was formed under the powerful influence of the faith, Augustine's speculation, and Calvin's ideals.

What that means for the conception of the epistemological question is evident. Bavinck's stance is this: in the final analysis knowledge and science rest on faith. Actually, faith is the objective existence of the truth that we attempt to approach by means of our capacity for knowledge. Truth exists independently of our science; it is not from ourselves but from God.

That knowledge rests on faith is, according to Bavinck, an axiom that is in fact accepted by every human being even when he or she is not aware of it. Every person proceeds spontaneously upon the conviction that the external world exists objectively and [5] thus exists when a person comes

to know it through pure perception. But the conviction is a conviction of faith; the sharpest reflection fails to demonstrate its scientific character. Whoever eschews proceeding by faith here and instead expects conclusive evidence bars the road to science and does not escape from illusionism and skepticism. The notion that our observations are reliable and that our categories possess objective validity presupposes faith in the harmony of subject and object, of thinking and being. The world can be our spiritual possession only on the condition of the belief that its spiritual, logical [order] exists and rests in thought. In other words it is presupposed that objective truth exists along with the world. The truth is displayed for us in all the works of God's hands, in nature and history, in creation and re-creation; not in the pantheistic sense of this thought, for the ideas that are in the world can never obtain the explanation of their own origin from the world; but in the sense that Christian theism gives to it. The doctrine of the creation of all things through God's Word, through the absolute Wisdom, is the explanation of all human knowing. In Augustine's words, "We know things because they are, but they are because God has known them."¹⁹ This removes all autonomy from the human spirit, all presumption that the truth could be produced from its own reason and by its own means. Humanity is neither the creator nor shaper of the world. The human intellect does not dictate its laws to nature, and humanity has not arranged things into their categories by its scientific research. Rather, human beings must conform their perceptions and thoughts to God's revelation in nature and grace.

Now one might say that this conception of the epistemological question is largely Augustinian and thus that it belongs to the heritage of Christian thought. That is so. But saying this indicates only part of Bavinck's relationship with his predecessors. For the problem of [6] knowledge has

¹⁹Augustine, *Confessions* XIII.38. Bavinck refers to this passage in *Christelijke wereldbeschouwing*, 1st ed. (Kampen: Bos, 1904), 22f., which Kristensen appropriates throughout this paragraph.

not always remained the same. It comes to be known again and again from new angles with the changing currents of thought, and it sets new requirements for critical research. A time such as ours that is predominantly oriented toward the natural sciences sees itself as confronting difficulties and dangers that were hardly known before. Bavinck has undertaken his research precisely in view of this situation. He certainly makes use of traditional views. He sees the tradition not as a dead meaning but rather as a living significance, which continued in its own spirit and should be cultivated. Thus no attempt is made to revive theories from the past—even if it is a classical past—but there is an attempt to demonstrate the value of the Christian faith for scientific thinking in our time.

Faith bridges the gap between thinking and being and allows us to know objective reality. But to this reality belongs not merely what falls to the senses and the intellect to acknowledge. Our ideal norms of goodness and beauty also must possess objective reality. Whenever the absolute validity of ethical and aesthetic values are accepted, one actually presupposes their objective existence; but it still applies that this presupposition—this immediate conviction—is not accessible by scientific proof. It is an act of faith. Each ethical and aesthetic judgment rests on the faith that goodness and beauty belong to the knowledge of things, that the Creator of the world has willed the good and the harmonious. The norms do not owe thanks for their origin to humanity for whom they were laid down as laws. They are not abstract concepts that exist only in theory but are aspects of reality itself, and they would lose their absolute character if they did not have their origin and explanation in God.

Faith, in the Christian-theistic sense of the word, is thus the foundation of the spiritual life. Only the religious person can be fully aware of this. [7] To such a person religion and understanding go hand in hand. It thus needs no proof that one's religious life, even more than one's intellectual, ethical, and aesthetic endowments, bears witness to the being of objective, transcendent reality and brings one into contact with God. From religious certainty it follows first of all that this reality does not originate

from humanity. Certainly no psychological or historical theory has been able to explain religion's origin or grasp its essence. Religion presupposes the existence, revelation, and knowability of God.²⁰

With this thought the line is extended. The intuitive knowledge of truth, goodness, or beauty is not a creative activity of the human spirit. Intellect and heart, reason and conscience, feeling and fancy are not sources of the knowledge of reality but are only organs whereby we take possession of reality within and unto ourselves. The autonomy of the human spirit is radically abolished; the spiritual origin of being alone is autonomous.

This view must lead to a fundamental reconsideration of the contemporary idea of science—a point to which Bavinck returns again and again. Faith is the foundation of science, and the foundation must, it goes without saying, determine the whole edifice. In its attempt to trace the ideal unity of things, every science proceeds upon the belief that this unity really exists, that an idea underlies things and comprises their essence. The character of the ideal unity is most clearly seen in the core sciences, the ones which examine the most complex phenomena: the biological, the historical, and above all the philosophical sciences. The wisdom of philosophy is the reflection of the wisdom that is present in the world and in all of its parts, the divine wisdom that binds the world into an organic whole. The organic is the hallmark of this universal unity. Each science, and [8] especially each core science, presupposes that the world is an organism and that it is thus to be thought of first of all as such.

The idea of the universal organism has given a remarkable breadth and depth to Bavinck's conception of the task and method of science. At the same time the organic structure connects diverse elements to a substantial extent, and the organic function means harmonious cooperation among diverse factors—although the manner of this cooperation is often hidden from us. All of this reveals that God, in connection with and guided by a unity of construction, of idea, of purpose, created the world with

²⁰Cf. Bavinck, *RD*, 1:505 (subpara. 131).

the richest variety of elements, factors, substances, and forces. But contemporary science disregards repeatedly both the unity and the diversity. Each mechanical or dynamic worldview is a premature generalization that destroys diversity, constrains the concept of nature, and forces the psychological phenomena into the shackles of a predetermined system. Each time the spiritual is explained by means of the sensual, the psychological from the animal, the religious from the ethical, the wealth of types is devalued, and an artificial, imaginary unity is constructed. According to the organic worldview, there is an abundance of powers, substances, and laws. The laws all differ for inorganic and organic nature, for the psychological and the physical, for nature and history, for the head and for the heart of human beings, for the intellectual and the ethical. In a physical sense giving makes one poorer, but in an ethical sense it makes one richer.²¹ Nothing is lawless any more than something ever happens without a cause; the causality of a lower or higher order is always present.

The grand diversity answers to the sublime unity. The diverse laws, substances, causes, and powers that appear in creation have a common origin and thus cannot contradict each other. Creation displays the unity of [9] an ascending order wherein the lower serves the higher; even inorganic materials are incorporated as organic parts of the world's whole.²² We [thus] understand the emphasis with which Bavinck opposes all dualistic theories; namely, theories with a separation in principle between two supreme powers in the world: the knowable and the unknowable, science and faith, intellect and instinct or intuition; such theories are logical abstractions, human fables that deny reality's spirit and cannot satisfy the whole person. Reality in its organic development—the world as planned

²¹ In this paragraph Kristensen is appropriating from Bavinck, *RD* subpara. 101. This sentence is taken verbatim from 1:370.

²² The "ascending order" alludes to Bavinck, *RD*, 1:368 (subpara. 101); cf. Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation*, 10, 94.

and guided by God—removes the dualistic contradiction and instead makes it useful to the idea that realizes itself in the world.

The organic unity of things is God's omnipresent, eternal power and wisdom that lead all things to a goal. Development and advancement, evolution and progress, truly are the law of being. The proponents of a mechanistic or dynamic worldview also speak of the development of the material and spiritual world, but they satisfy themselves with nothing but noise so long as the all-important starting point bound up with the goal of development remains disregarded. Where no guiding principle is known, development continues to occur in the nature of the case, even if only an accidental development. Organic development occurs only when things have a nature that controls them and leads them in a certain direction. The organic worldview is teleological. The world becomes a divine destiny in successive stages. Finality brings causality into its service. The final causes are the forming and guiding principles that guide creatures along the path of development and give direction to their movement. God is the last and highest intelligent and free causality of all things and at the same time their goal. All that exists through God and to his glory.

But now comes the question: What science is possible on this basis? [10] The answer: the science of divine revelation. This expression entails no contradiction. Science presupposes revelation, for the human intellect is not a source of truth. Humans stand on the foundation of creation and are established and sought after by God's power and wisdom. Humanity is bound to laws that it did not contrive but which are prescribed by God to rule its life. Thinking not before but after [God] is humanity's lot.²³ The

²³“*Niet vóór-, maar nadenken . . .*”; repeated below. Kristensen's turn of phrase appropriates Bavinck's play on the compound of “*na*” and “*denken*”: “The imperative task of the dogmatician is to think God's thoughts after him [*die gedachten Gods na te denken*] and to trace their unity.” *RD*, 1:44 (subpara. 8). Bavinck recapitulates this thought several times. For instance, “We can only reflect (*re-flect*) [*nadenken*] on that which has been pre-conceived [*voorgedacht*] and comes to our consciousness through the world.” *RD* 1:521 (subpara. 136); cf. 83 (subpara. 22), 588 (subpara. 152); see also Bavinck's terse

truth that one acknowledges stands independently as a divine thought, and one can acknowledge truths because they themselves are really revealed in the order of things. Revelation thus denotes the divine act that gives life to true science. This is only another formulation of the assertion that faith undergirds the foundation of all science.

The Christian faith is this: that God has revealed himself in the life of the visible and invisible world not only in deeds but also and especially in words; namely, in Holy Scripture. This special revelation by means of the word conflicts neither with the idea of science nor with revelation in the physical and psychological world; rather, the ambition to receive the Word of God must be the highest and most fundamental science. Theology's elevated task is to reproduce the content of divine thought not from the world or from humanity but from this Word. For Holy Scripture contains no elaborate system of truths that we only need to discuss and to write down afterward. God desires that we contemplate him and follow him into his workshop. He presents the Bible before the human race clearly and vividly in all its riches and splendid variety as an organism wherein we have to sort and record the phenomena and trace the spiritual life that connects all things. True theology is nothing but an imprint and reflection in our consciousness of the knowledge that God has from himself and that he has decided to share with his creatures. [11] Thinking not before but after [God] is the theologian's lot as well. Such thinking is carried out systematically in dogmatics. Dogma is not a description of a religious mental state such as Schleiermacher and many later theologians along with him understand it to be. Neither is it speculation over the data of religious experience, the form in which they have maintained it to be in recent times. Dogma is a form of faith that is grounded in the authority of revelation. When taken together, the dogmas form a unity. Actually, there is only one dogma that is born out of Scripture and has branched

summary contra innate ideas at 565 (subpara. 147). Cf. Wolter Huttinga, *Participation and Communicability* (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 2014), 83n18.

out and arranged itself into several specialized dogmas.²⁴ From this point light shines on the riddles under which all special sciences labor: from the questions of physics and history to the goal and meaning of evolution, from the question of science to the essence of being.²⁵

This ideal of science leaves room for all forms of empirical research; it only sets itself against the exclusive empiricism that utilizes an inadequate theory of knowledge and thus is unable to penetrate to the essence of reality. Bavinck's relation with the new religious psychology is distinctive in this respect: the phenomena of the religious life can be considered and studied from the psychological angle. For instance, the elucidation of conversion by means of the widespread transformations of the consciousness [that occur] under the influence of subliminal forces enlarges one's view of and deepens one's insight into the religious life.²⁶ But it remains an explanation, as it were, from below or from the outside; the psychological viewpoint does not penetrate to the religious reality, to the substance of the religious consciousness of the believer. Whenever it thinks it does that, it has destroyed rather than explained the object of its research.²⁷ It is a fact that the faithful of all times and places have thought quite differently about religion than has been taught in the historical and psychological

²⁴ Here Kristensen is quoting Bavinck, *RD*, 1:94 (subpara. 26); cf. 2:29. The "one dogma" motif is rooted in the classical Western Christian and Reformed scholastic traditions. E.g., Aquinas, *Summae theologiae*, 1.1.4 sed contra; 1.2 div. text; F. Turretin, *Institutio theologiae elencticae* I.vi.i; English trans., Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992), I.vi.i; *Synopsis purioris theologiae*, 6.1; English trans., *Synopsis of a Purer Theology: Latin Text and English Translation*, vol. 1, Disputations 1–23, ed. Dolf te Velde, trans. Riemer A. Faber (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 6.1, 151. Similarly, Abraham Kuyper, Bavinck's predecessor in the chair of dogmatics at the Free University of Amsterdam, lectured on "whether the whole of dogmatics is the locus de Deo." *Dictaten Dogmatiek*, 2nd ed. (Kampen: Kok, 1910), 1.II, 7–10.

²⁵ Cf. Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation*, 94.

²⁶ This sentence is quoted from Bavinck, *RD*, 3:584 (subpara. 431).

²⁷ Cf. Bavinck, *RD*, 3:586 (subpara. 431).

schools [12] of science.²⁸ The method of the historical or psychological research of religious reality—when maintained unilaterally—faces a barrier to understanding genuine religion and the conviction of the believer; namely, that in his eyes he possesses objective truth. True science cannot withdraw itself from this most sacred task without denying the reality of the soul.

The foundation of all science is faith. But there is an ascending order of sciences, and the personal factor in research plays a greater role the higher we ascend, the more comprehensive the field, and the more the science ceases to be merely formal. Bavinck returns to this personal factor time and time again. None of our spiritual faculties come into their own in isolation. This is especially true in theology, the central science, which demands one's whole personality for itself. For theology is itself religion. It is not the science of Christianity but Christianity itself as science. And it is a general rule that when the richest thoughts, the boldest concepts, the most important discoveries of imagination, of intuition, derive from divination, then the true theologian holds that the Holy Spirit is leading in the truth.

Let not the man and the man of science be separated.²⁹ Many can parrot Bavinck. Few can prove the truth thereof as he did: through a life in the service of science.

²⁸Quoting Bavinck, *Godsdienst en Godgeleerdheid* (Wageningen: "Vada," 1902), 22.

²⁹Cf. Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation*, 83–84.

Herman Bavinck's Notebook on Calvin's Doctrine of Sin

Gregory W. Parker Jr.

Translator's Introduction

How does one fit together the sovereignty of God and sin? Bavinck turns to Calvin for advice, or at least turns to his edition of the *Institutes* to wrestle seriously with the Genevan Doctor's reflections on the subject matter. Below is a translation of Bavinck's notebook on Calvin's doctrine of sin.¹

The Calvin notes are undated by Bavinck and therefore somewhat difficult to place. Nonetheless, a subsequent page in the notebook is dated "Maart 77" (March '77), so it is likely that the Calvin notes were written prior to this date, during Bavinck's early student years at Leiden before he became a candidate in theology. If so, the notes are likely the reflections of a young Bavinck on Calvin. His honesty in the preamble is an insight into his own irenic spirit and the mind of a young theologian at work.

One must be careful not to read too much into Bavinck's preamble to these notes. Bavinck was not questioning the doctrine of election. As late as 1918 Bavinck gave a speech on predestination, in which he stated, "Election is the crown!"² Both in this notebook and in that speech, Bavinck engages the tension between the doctrine of sin and God's sovereignty in the system of Reformed theology.

I've done my best to maintain Bavinck's style. Where I have made additions, it is to forge a smoother experience for the reader. These instances,

¹Herman Bavinck, "Zonde bij Calvijn," (n.d.), box 346, folder 284, archive 176 of the Historical Documentation Centre, Free University, Amsterdam (hereafter abbreviated as "Bavinck Archive").

²Herman Bavinck, "Praedestinatie," (1918), box 346, folder 406, Bavinck Archive, 1–12, on 12.

which are few, are in brackets. In the text below, anything that was originally in Latin rather than Dutch is italicized. In places where Bavinck's Latin notes are identical to Calvin's own Latin, I've used the John T. McNeill and Ford Lewis Battles edition of the *Institutes* as the translation, and noted the reference in that edition in a footnote.³ Thus, all of the footnotes below are mine and not in the original text. The underlined words are underlined in the Dutch original.

Calvin's Doctrine of Sin⁴

[1] This belief [in sin] is that of the Christian church universally, of all ecclesial parties. Election, the sovereignty of God is the specialty of the Reformed church. Therefore, the first universal [belief] should never be sacrificed to the second.

Calvin and the Reformed have self-consciously, with full awareness, with conscious inconsistency allowed sin to exist alongside predestination.

Sin hangs together with the whole system.

Instit. II.i.1 — a) Knowledge of oneself is necessary, of our excellent nature, but also of our fall. b) Men hear and prefer praise, but this is self-deception. c) Method of self-knowledge: our obligation for which we were created and our *capacity* to satisfy them.

Instit. II.i.4 — Not greediness, but pride “*Unfaithfulness, then, was the root of the fall*”⁵ and as a result of that: ambition, pride. “*if apostasy, by which man withdraws from the authority of his Maker—indeed insolently shakes off*

³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (London: S. C. M. Press, 1961).

⁴ Herman Bavinck, “Zonde bij Calvijn.” (n.d.), box 346, folder 284, Bavinck Archive.

⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.i.4, 245.

his yoke—is a foul and detestable offense, it is vain to extenuate Adam's sin."⁶
 And this *apostasy* was "joined with vile reproaches against God."⁷

Instit. II.i.5 — Adam received in its place "plagues, blindness, impotence, impurity, vanity, and injustice."⁸ Adam's sin passed to all: "before we saw the light of this life we were spoiled and spotted in God's sight."⁹

Instit. II.i.6 — Adam was therefore *as a root of "human nature."*¹⁰
 (Romans 5:12¹¹)

Instit. II.i.7 — With Adam all stood or fell; without the fall we share his "gifts."¹²

Instit. II.i.8 — Original sin is a "hereditary depravity and corruption of our nature, diffused into all parts of the soul, which makes **us** first liable to God's wrath, then also brings forth in us . . . the 'works of the flesh'."¹³ Already by such a

⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.i.4, 245.

⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.i.4, 245.

⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.i.5, 246. "Therefore, after the heavenly image was obliterated in him, he was not the only one to suffer this punishment that, in place of wisdom, virtue, holiness, truth, and justice, with which adornments he was clad, there came forth the most filthy plagues, blindness, impotence, impurity, vanity, and injustice—but he also entangled and immersed his offspring in the same miseries."

⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.i.5, 248.

¹⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.i.6, 248.

¹¹ Rom. 5:12, "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned." (ESV)

¹² Calvin, *Institutes*, II.i.7, 250.

¹³ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.i.8, 251. Bavinck inserts the Latin word *nos* into the middle of this quotation, seemingly notating for himself that "we" too take part in being liable for the wrath of God. By bolding "us," above, I have striven to communicate Bavinck's reminder to himself.

*corruption we are condemned and found guilty.*¹⁴ Adam's imparted contagion "resides in us, which justly deserves punishment."¹⁵ Children have the seed of a variety of sin within them. "Our nature is not only destitute and empty of good, but so fertile and fruitful of every evil that it cannot be idle."¹⁶ *All of man is nothing but concupiscence.*¹⁷

Instit. II.i.9 — Not only *sensual impulses σαρκ;* but "all that proceeds from him is . . . imputed to sin."¹⁸

Instit. II.i.10 — "Our destruction therefore comes from the guilt of our flesh, not from God."¹⁹ "Let us accordingly remember to impute our ruin to depravity of nature, in order that we may not accuse God himself, the Author of nature."²⁰ Man "by his own folly sunk into vanity."²¹

Instit. II.i.11 — *Man at birth is corrupt, which did not flow from nature.*

[2] Instit. II.ii.12 — *Natural gifts in man were corrupted (intellect, reason, will); supernatural destroyed.*²² "Similarly the will, because it is inseparable

¹⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.i.8, 251. Bavinck is paraphrasing the middle of this sentence: "First, we are so vitiated and perverted in every part of our nature that by this great corruption we stand justly condemned and convicted before God, to whom nothing is acceptable but righteousness, innocence, and purity."

¹⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.i.8, 251.

¹⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.i.8, 252.

¹⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.i.8, 252. "Or to put it more briefly, the whole man is of himself nothing but concupiscence." Bavinck utilizes this passage in *Reformed Dogmatics*, see e.g. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 3:98.

¹⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.i.9, 253.

¹⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.i.10, 253.

²⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.i.10, 254.

²¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.i.10, 254.

²² Calvin, *Institutes*, II.ii.12, 270.

from man's nature, did not perish, but was so bound to wicked desires that it cannot strive after the right."²³

Instit. II.ii.13 — *"In the arrangement of this life no man is without the light of reason."*²⁴

Instit. II.ii.15 — The intellect has outstanding gifts.

Instit. II.ii.18 — In spiritual things people are *blind* as *moles*.²⁵

Instit. II.ii.27 — Augustine: *"Nothing is ours but sin."*²⁶

Instit. II.iii.1 — Flesh = *"whatever we have from nature."*²⁷ (Ephesians 4:17–18, 24²⁸)

Instit. II.iii.2 — *The soul is utterly devoid of all good.*²⁹ (Romans 3)

The heading of this section: *"Only damnable things come forth from man's corrupt nature."*³⁰

²³ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.ii.12, 271.

²⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.ii.13, 273.

²⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.ii.18, 277.

²⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.ii.27, 287.

²⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.iii.1, 289. "Whatever we have from nature, therefore, is flesh."

²⁸ Eph. 4:17–18, "Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart." (ESV) Eph. 4:24, "and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness." (ESV)

²⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.iii.2, 291–92. "For in the diseased body some vigor of life yet remains; although the soul plunged into this deadly abyss, is not only burdened with vices but is utterly devoid of all good."

³⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.iii.2, 289.

Instit. III.xx.45 — “*He calls Sins ‘debts’ because we owe penalty for them.*”³¹

Instit. III.xxi.3 — Look no further than the revealed things.

Instit. III.xxi.7 — *Damnation is his just and irreprehensible and incomprehensible judgment, he has closed life to those whom he has given over.*³²

Instit. III.xxii.8 — “*God’s grace does not find but makes those fit to be chosen.*” (Augustine).³³

Instit. III.xxiii.1 — “*election itself, could not stand except as set over against reprobation.*”³⁴

Calvin as Paul (Romans 9:20).³⁵ “*God’s secret plan is the cause of hardening.*”³⁶

Instit. III.xxiii.2 — God’s will *is free from all fault, but also is the highest rule of perfection, and even the law of all laws*³⁷; is a superb answer. He does not have to give an account for his actions and we are not a *fitting jury*.

³¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xx.45, 910.

³² Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xxi.7, 931. “We assert that, with respect to the elect, this plan was founded upon his freely given mercy, without regard to human worth; but by his just and irreprehensible but incomprehensible judgment he has barred the door of life to those whom he has given over to damnation.”

³³ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xxii.8, 943.

³⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xxiii.1, 947.

³⁵ Rom. 9:20, “But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, ‘Why have you made me like this?’” (ESV)

³⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xxiii.1, 949.

³⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xxiii.2, 950.

Instit. III.xxiii.3 — The man cannot argue against that, because *they feel led toward (death) by their nature itself according to the will of God, whether they will or will not.*³⁸ “*How perverse is their disposition to protest is apparent from the fact that they deliberately suppress the cause of condemnation, which they are compelled to recognize in themselves, in order to free themselves by blaming God. But though I should confess a hundred times that God is the author of it—which is very true—yet they do not promptly cleanse away the guilt that, engraved upon their consciences, repeatedly meets their eyes.*”³⁹

[3] *Against general opinion.*⁴⁰ “*The reason may be hidden, but it cannot be unjust.*”⁴¹

Instit. III.xxiii.4 — God can do no wrong, rather his *justice* is too high for our understanding (Paul).

Instit. III.xxiii.7 — *I confess the decree is dreadful.*⁴²

Instit. III.xxiii.8 — “*For if predestination is nothing but the meting out of divine justice—secret, indeed, but blameless, because it is certain that they were not unworthy to be predestined to this condition, it is equally certain that the destruction that they undergo by predestination is also most just.*”⁴³

³⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xxiii.3, 951. Paraphrase of this sentence: “Let them not accuse God of injustice if they are destined by his eternal judgment to death, to which they feel—whether they will or not—that they are led by their own nature of itself.”

³⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xxiii.3, 951.

⁴⁰ I believe this abbreviation (*Con. Gener.*) is *contra generalem*.

⁴¹ Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, trans. J. K. S. Reid (London: James Clarke, 1961), 122.

⁴² Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xxiii.7, 955.

⁴³ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xxiii.8, 956–57.

*He falls down etc. “By his own evil intention, then, man corrupted the pure nature he had received from the Lord.”*⁴⁴ We prefer to search for the cause in God’s hidden will.

Instit. III.xxiii.9 — *The ordinance of God (of damnation) “has its own equity—unknown indeed, to us but very sure.”*⁴⁵

Instit. III.xxiv.13 — *There is always enough light to convict the conscience of the wicked.*⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xxiii.8, 957.

⁴⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xxiii.9, 957.

⁴⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xxiv.13, 980–81. Bavinck is pulling from this sentence: “For however much obscurity there may be in the Word, there is still always enough light to convict the conscience of the wicked.”

Pearls and Leaven

John Bolt

“Collision of Duties”¹

The expression “collision of duties”² is used for those cases where people are confronted simultaneously with two or more duties that are mutually exclusive; to fulfill one duty means to omit another one. [Bavinck gives examples from classical mythology and then the following from Cicero’s *On Duties* III.23.] “When two shipwrecked men grab hold of one plank, but this plank can support only one man, is one then duty bound to surrender the plank to the other man and perish himself?”

These questions were taken up also in Christian ethics. Jesus himself resolves cases of conflict: “Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” (Matt. 22:17–22). “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” (Luke 14:3–6) . . . The New Testament does not know any collision of duties, but it does mention collision between duty and inclination (Luke 14:2–6; Matt. 14:6–9) or dereliction of duty (Matt. 22:17, 21). But although there is no collision as such, a conflict can arise owing to the diversity of the objects toward which we are to fulfill our duties.³ Such a conflict is resolved by means of a proper coordination and subordination of those objects: the heavenly above the earthly, soul above body, necessity above honor, God’s

¹ Ed. note: The following is an excerpt from §30 of Herman Bavinck’s *Reformed Ethics*. It will appear in chapter fourteen of the forthcoming second volume of the English translation of *Reformed Ethics*. The text is the edited text that will be published; bracketed material is inserted by the editor to maintain an orderly narrative flow. The footnotes of the excerpted material have been retained and amplified for the benefit of our readers.

² Latin original: *collisio officiorum* (from *con laedo* = to injure each other; to strike each other).

³ J. T. Beck, *Vorlesungen über Christliche Ethik*, 3 vols. in 2 (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1882–1883), 2:182.

commandments above human laws, etc. Furthermore, prayer, training, and the like are necessary.⁴

[In contrast with the Jesuit casuistical practice of “probabilism,” Protestant ethicists deny that a real collision of duties can exist. For example,] Isaak Dorner denies that a collision of duties as such can exist; the moral law “cannot stand in opposition to itself; for we must ascribe to it perfect oneness in and with itself. Hence there can be no objective conflict of duties.”⁵ Dorner does add: “On the other hand, subjective conflicts of duties are indeed not to be denied. Here belongs the celebrated case of the plank which two shipwrecked persons grasp, while it is able to bear only one.”⁶ Dorner concludes: “We still insist, after all, that there can be no such objectively necessary conflict of duties as could not be solved by wisdom.”⁷

[Bavinck agrees with this in principle but adds a qualification.] Now it is undoubtedly true that the law is singular, whole, an organism, and that God’s commandments by their nature never converge in such a way that a need exists to violate a commandment through sin.⁸ Intrinsically, in the abstract, all commandments together form a single harmonious whole; love governs all. But the law of God comprises many commandments, specifically two tables: commandments with respect to God and commandments having to do with our neighbor. Concerning the latter there is a great variety of relationships, such as father or mother, son, brother, daughter; domestic servant toward a family; citizen toward the state; professional toward society; etc. In a word, we live in a great

⁴J. T. Beck, *Vorlesungen*, 2:182–83.

⁵Isaak A. Dorner, *System of Christian Ethics*, ed. August Johannes Dorner, trans. Charles Marsh Mead and R. T. Cunningham (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1887), 213 (§ 22).

⁶Dorner, *Christian Ethics*, 220.

⁷Dorner, *Christian Ethics*, 220.

⁸Thus William Ames, *Conscience with the Power and Cases Thereof* (Leyden and London: W. Christiaens, E. Griffin, J. Dawson, 1639; reprint, Amsterdam and Norwood, NJ: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum and Walter J. Johnson, 1975), III.xvii.26.

variety of spheres, and every sphere comes with its own duties. There are duties toward God, to ourselves—our soul and our body, our honor and reputation—and toward our neighbor, family, parents, brothers, country, society, to art, science, and the like. Why would it not be possible that the duties of one sphere clash with those of another? Why could there not be cases in which we are bidden to do this by the duties of one sphere and to do that by those of another? Such cases may well have been possible in the state of original perfection, and even for Jesus. Precisely because we live in various spheres, standing in various relationships to various objects, God's commandments may therefore occasionally conflict, objectively and genuinely. That is not at all in conflict with the inner unity and harmony of God's law (this remains untouched), but instead is precisely the maintaining of God's law in the various spheres of life, evidence that the law of God controls the whole of our life always and everywhere.

[To resolve apparent conflicts, Bavinck defends the practice of casuistry, i.e., assessing concrete cases by the law of God.] Casuistry does not wish to deaden the moral individuality and moral character, to rob believers of the right to evaluate, but only to inform, to aid the conscience in evaluating. After all, one faces countless difficult cases in life. Never to discuss these at all will not do. Every ethicist discusses them, whether briefly or at length. Modern ethicists, when they say they must leave these cases to the individual person, are also supplying a rule. In fact, if one rejects casuistry, one is rejecting any practical ethics at all. At that point, one should not talk about suicide, dueling, killing in self-defense, divorce, capital punishment, compulsory school attendance, the right to revolt, etc., each of which is a case of conscience.⁹ In fact, the conscience, which then has to decide everything, will then likewise be engaged in casuistry,

⁹Latin original: *casus conscientiae*.

that is, it will weigh the pros and cons according to God's standards, and then make a decision.¹⁰

[Bavinck then borrows from the tradition of theological ethics (notably William Ames) to draw up a few rules:]

1. Duties toward God take precedence over duties toward ourselves and the neighbor, family, country, government, etc.: "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).¹¹ [Bavinck discusses the following examples: Naaman bowing in the temple of Rimmon (2 Kings 5:18); the disciples plucking heads of grain on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:1–8, Mark 2:23–28, and Luke 6:1–5).]¹²
2. When duties of the same class conflict with each other, the weightiest duties take precedence . . . One must rather surrender life than speak falsehood or break a promise. The soul takes precedence over the body, honor and chastity and all moral goods take precedence over life.
3. The interests of the soul of one person take precedence over the material interests not only of myself but also family, country, and

¹⁰ Cf. Thor Sundby, *Blaise Pascal. Sein Kampf gegen die Jesuiten und seine Verteidigung des Christenthums*, trans. Heinrich Paul Junker (Oppeln: Franck, 1885), 37; Ferdinand Brunetière, "Une Apologie de la Casuistique," *Revue des deux mondes* 67, no. 1 (January 1885): 200–13 [Ed. note: this is a review of Raymond Thamin, *Un Problème dans l'antiquité. Étude sur la casuistique stoïcienne* (Paris: Hachette, 1884)].

¹¹ Greek original: *πειθαρχεῖν δεῖ θεῷ μᾶλλον ἢ ἀνθρώποις*; Bernardinus de Moor, *Commentarius Perpetuus in Johannis Marckii Compendium Theologiae Christianae Didactico-Elencicum*, 7 vols. (Leiden: J. Hasebroek, 1761–71), 2:675.

¹² ὄδον ποιεῖν in Mark can also mean "go away" (*weg gaan*), not "make a way" or "clear a path" (*banen*); see Heinrich August Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Gospels of Mark and Luke*, vol. 1, trans. and ed. William Dickson and William Stewart (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1880), 43 (on Mark 2:23). Ed. note: Bavinck appears to have misread Meyer here: "The only correct explanation is: *they began to make a way* (to open a path) *by plucking the ears of corn* . . . We must rather conceive of the field-path on which they are walking—perhaps at a place where it leads through a field of corn which it intersects—as overgrown with ears, so that they must of necessity, in order to continue their journey, *make a path*, which they do by *plucking the ears of corn* that stand in their way." Unlike Matthew and Luke, Mark makes no mention of the disciples eating.

humanity. I may and must be prepared to lay down even my life, money, property, and name for the sake of my country, family, etc., but I may not commit an immoral act, lie, kill, commit unchastity, and so forth on behalf of country, family, etc. The value of virtue surpasses that of the world. The soul possesses nothing even when it gains the entire world.

4. If equal interests of myself, family, country, and humanity conflict, then those belonging to the broadest sphere take precedence over those of the narrower sphere. Those of the family take precedence over those pertaining to myself; those of country take precedence over those of family. Thus, a son is obligated to oppose his father who is conspiring against his country, and, if necessary, to turn him in.
5. When in doubt, abstain;¹³ if we are uncertain and in doubt about which of two duties must be performed, then we should do nothing, for everything not arising from faith is sin. Or, if we must perform either of two duties, then we should perform the more probable, i.e., the one that commends itself as most probable, not to the learned experts¹⁴ but to our own conscience. It is preferable, at that point, that we choose the safest route, the one that at any rate is not a sin, and the one in connection with which we have no interest, but suffer disadvantage rather than seek personal advantage.¹⁵ But we may never choose the lesser of two evils, for our conscience can never obligate us to do what it judges to be evil.

¹³ Latin original: *in dubiis abstinere*.

¹⁴ Latin original: *doctor gravis*.

¹⁵ William Ames, *Cases of Conscience*, III.xvii.q. 12.

Book Review

Herman Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation*, annotated edition, edited by Cory Brock and Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, foreword by James P. Eglinton, adapted and expanded from the 1908 Stone Lectures presented at Princeton Theological Seminary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2018).

Herman Bavinck (1854–1921), the Dutch Reformed master of dogmatics, gave the 1908 Stone Lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary. This new edition of the *Philosophy of Revelation* is not only an adapted and expanded version of the 1909 English publication, but also an improved translation. In addition, this edition is annotated by the editors, Cory Brock and Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, with helpful editorial and explanatory notes.

Bavinck's essay is a work of philosophical theology on the necessity of revelation for knowing not only God but also the world and man. This book elaborates in detail the fundamental ideas expressed by Bavinck in his magisterial study of 1904, *Christelijke Wereldbeschouwing* (23). He takes as his starting point dogmatic reference points established by faith. Yet, rather than a study in a dogmatic theology of revelation, this essay's methodology is that of Christian philosophy, which is a philosophical reflection conceived and practiced in dynamic union with faith's reference points. Put differently, Bavinck's concern here is that of fundamental theology, justifying and expounding the relationship between faith and philosophical thought regarding metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. Bavinck seeks to show how, in faith's knowledge conferred by revelation, there emerge certain truths providing the scaffolding necessary for, *inter alia*, a Christian understanding of nature (70–91), history (92–116), religion (117–141), religious experience (164–191), and culture (192–212). He demonstrates throughout this rich book the necessary metaphysical, epistemological and ethical presuppositions demanded by the Christian faith

and its corresponding doctrine of revelation (26–69, 204–12). Bavinck summarizes his conclusion:

[R]evelation is the starting point (*uitgangspunt*) of the inner unity of nature, of the human race, the unity of history, and is also the source of all laws—the laws of nature, of history, and of all development. The ideas and norms which govern religious, ethical, and social life, and appear in the self-consciousness and the thought of humanity, are the products of this revelation of God (*zijn aan die openbaring Gods te danken*). (240)

Bavinck's thesis is: "With the reality of revelation, therefore, Christianity stands or falls" (20). What, then, is revelation? Bavinck reaffirms the orthodox idea of revelation with its fundamental distinction between the modes of special and general revelation (23–25, 185). General revelation is God's revelation of himself to all men in and through the works of creation (66). Regarding this revelation, God reveals himself to all men at all times and all places such that men, in principle, may know something of God's existence, his attributes, and his moral law (Rom. 1:20; 2:14–15). Special revelation is about God revealing himself in and through salvation history, a history that runs through the events and people of Israel, culminating in the concentration point of that history in Jesus Christ, who is the Mediator and fullness of all revelation (24, 163, 209–10, 241). Jointly constitutive of God's special revelation are its inseparably connected words (verbal revelation) and deeds, intrinsically bound to each other because neither is complete without the other; the historical realities of redemption are inseparably connected to God's verbal communication of truth. However, there is also an interdependency between general and special revelation, both coming with divine authority. "General revelation leads to special revelation, and special revelation points back to general revelation. The one calls for the other, and without it remains imperfect and unintelligible. Together they proclaim the manifold wisdom which God has displayed in creation and redemption" (25). Furthermore, biblical revelation has epistemic priority over general revelation, according to Bavinck, surpassing

general revelation, disclosing “the greatness of God’s heart,” while general revelation itself “makes known to us the power of his mind” (25, 23).

Bavinck claims that the implications of this distinction, particularly its significance for the whole of human life, have never been thought through philosophically. Hence, the distinctiveness of Bavinck’s work, *Philosophy of Revelation*, is to give a philosophical account of “the idea of revelation, both in its form and in its content, and *correlate it with the rest of our knowledge and life*” (22, emphasis added). Indeed, Bavinck argues, “revelation . . . extends to the uttermost ends of creation.” He explains,

[Revelation] does not stand isolated in nature and history, does not resemble an island in the ocean, nor a drop of oil upon water. With the whole of nature, with the whole of history, with the whole of humanity, with the family and society, with science and art it is intimately connected. The world itself rests on revelation; revelation is the presupposition, the foundation (*gronslag*), the secret (*geheim*), of all that exists in all its forms. . . . Together with all created things, that special revelation which comes to us in the Person of Christ is built on these presuppositions. The foundations of creation and redemption are the same. The Logos who became flesh is the same by whom all things were made. (24–25)

Revelation is not only the foundation of all existence but also the knowledge of that existence in all its unity and diversity (26–69). In this connection, Bavinck answers the fundamental question: What must the world, including man, be like in order that man may know it, in order that knowledge of that world be possible at all? “For how can it be explained that man through his senses can observe the world, and through his intelligence can know and understand it? Whence the wonderful correspondence of knowing and being? What is the basis of the belief that the conception and the thought in the human brain are no imagination and no hallucination, but correspond with the reality? What is the ground for the harmony between subject and object, the ego and the non-ego?” (89).

In his answer to this last question regarding the harmony between knowing and being, Bavinck breaks with the egocentric predicament of

philosophical modernism, in which the isolation of the self and the world from each other are taken as the epistemic starting point. In this view, the individual is an enclosed consciousness containing ideas in the mind that are the direct object of our conscious awareness and from which inferences are drawn about what the real world must be like. Bavinck criticizes epistemic modernism as being unable “to reinstitute the inward connection between [ideas and reality].” It is doomed to failure. He adds, “The mind, having once shut itself up in the circle of representations, is unable to free itself from this self-constructed prison. . . . Representations gird it about on all sides, and nowhere is access open to reality; for no inference can be drawn from thinking to being; from the representations, there is no bridge to reality” (51–52).

By contrast to epistemic modernism, Bavinck’s starting point is the revelation in our self-consciousness of the pre-established harmony between knowing and being, the reality of our ego and the world. “In consciousness, our own being and the being of the world are disclosed to us antecedently to our thought or volition; that they are *revealed* to us in the strictest sense of the word” (63). “Whosoever here does not believe shall not be established” (59). Furthermore, disclosed to our self-consciousness is not only man’s “own existence and of the reality of the world,” but also “the reality and personality of God” (65). Bavinck develops this point about the correlation among self-consciousness, world-consciousness, and God-consciousness. Man “does not invent the idea of God nor produce it; it is given to him and he receives it.”

Of course, Bavinck does not ignore the distortion, misinterpretation, and rejection of that revelation, not only in the other religions but also in atheism. Regarding the former, says Bavinck, “without revelation, religion sinks back into a pernicious superstition”; absent “the pure knowledge of God,” the true character of man, nature, and history is disowned as a result of “vain speculations of the mind and a darkening of the heart.” He adds, “Hence, religion is, not only with reference to its origin and essence but also with reference to its truth and validity, founded in revelation.”

Regarding atheism, he says, "Atheism is not proper to man by nature, but develops at a later stage of life, on the ground of philosophic reflection; like skepticism, it is an intellectual and ethical abnormality, which only confirms the rule." That is, "By nature, in virtue of his nature, every man believes in God. And this is due in the last analysis to the fact that God, the creator of all nature, has not left himself without witness [Acts 14:17] but through all nature, both that of man himself and that of the outside world, speaks to him. . . . In self-consciousness, God makes known to us man, the world, and himself" (66).

Bavinck does not think that this pre-established harmony between knowing and being, our epistemic faculties and reality, guarantees our epistemic infallibility. However, it does give us a place to stand epistemologically in virtue of their "origin in the same creative wisdom . . . one and the same Reason," the Logos of God (66–67). "On this firm theistic foundation, finally, there is room for belief in the progress of science and realization of the ideal of truth. There is some degree of warrant for the assertion that truth *is* not but *becomes*" (67). Read in context, Bavinck means to provide a justification for the growth in knowledge of the truth about nature, history, culture, religions, and its corresponding epistemic justification. Arguably, Bavinck presupposes the distinction between truth and justification, between the conditions that make a statement true and the conditions under which I come to know that it is true.

Bavinck is a realist about truth but also an epistemic realist about the truth-attaining capacity of the human mind. Says Bavinck, we cannot "find the truth apart from the reality." For a realist about truth this means that a statement is true if and only if what it asserts is in fact the case about objective reality; otherwise, it is false. Hence, Bavinck's point, "We do not create the truth, and we do not spin it out of our brain; but, in order to find it, we must get back to the facts, to reality, to the sources." Thus, "truth is bound to reality and finds its criterion in correspondence with reality" (68). Furthermore, the condition under which I come to know that something is true is not merely the intellectual assent to propositional

truth, but also truth as it is experienced. “Reality is intended to become truth in our consciousness and in our experience” (68).

Bavinck extends epistemic realism over all the domains of thought, including religion and morality. “Man does not produce truth by thought (*denkende*) in any domain, and certainly not in religion, but by inquiry and study he learns to know the truth, which exists independently of and before him. Therefore, religious experience is neither the source nor the foundation of religious truth; it only brings us into union with the existing truth. . . . It is not the least merit of Christianity that it includes such a harmonious whole of representations, which reconcile subject and object, man and world, nature and revelation” (189–90). Now, although propositional truth is an indispensable dimension of truth itself, according to Bavinck, existential truth, which is the fruit of conversion, is also indispensable. In his religious epistemology—namely, how truth is authenticated (that is, lived out, practiced, carried out)—truth cannot be reduced to propositional truth, to being merely believed, asserted, and claimed. This is because faith’s knowledge of God “is at the same time *cognitio* and *fiducia*, a trustful knowledge and a knowing trust.” That knowledge is born in our heart in connection with assenting to the truth of propositions, binding us irrevocably to them, bearing “witness in our hearts as to the religious representations which existed outside and before us” (190). In sum, existential truth, which is the fruit of conversion, “is a turning back to God, but at the same time a coming to one’s self” (204). In sum, “a true philosophy [of revelation] gives full satisfaction both to the demands of the intellect and to the needs of the heart” (69).

Bavinck is also a moral realist. His metaphysics of morality embraces the idea of a culture-transcendent Moral Law, a natural law, whose normativity presses down upon the conscience of man, obliging him to obedience (206). This moral law is grounded in the eternal law of God, in the Godhead. “God alone is the source (*oorsprong*) and thus also the guarantee of the reality of the moral law (*zedewet*), of the objectivity of duty, the ethical vocation, and destiny of man. Insofar as this is the case, all ethics

is also heteronomous” (206, 208). However, Bavinck insightfully distinguishes here: heteronomy of the moral law is not unrelated to man’s good, because man freely internalizes the truth of the law, which consists of norms related to his good; otherwise, there would be nothing but a form of self-alienation (206–7). Thus, the moral law is not only written on the heart of man, bearing witness in the inmost recesses of the heart, but also must be effectually at work in man himself, so that the whole person becomes “good in intellect and will, heart and conscience” (207). Therefore, “The heteronomy of law and the autonomy of man are reconciled only by this theonomy” (208).

Finally, Bavinck makes clear that his perspective of creation revelation is not only Christocentric but also eschatological. Here is Bavinck’s theology of hope. “God is creator: he is further the *reconciler* of all things” (240). That is, “For God is the creator and redeemer, but also finally the *restorer* and *renewer* of all things” (241). Revelation provides an anchor with regard to the future, “not only for our thought but also for our whole life and action” (238). The Christian faith’s hope for the value of human life “is inseparably connected with the future.” He explains, “If the world at the end of its development is dissolved in a chaos [see Bertrand Russell’s 1903 essay, ‘A Free Man’s Worship’], or sinks back into everlasting sleep, the value of personality, of religious and ethical life, and also of culture cannot be maintained” (238). Bavinck’s eschatological perspective leaves us with a positive vision that Christian revelation is life affirming. That is certainly good news for modern man.

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