Bavinckiana digitalia: A Review Essay

Laurence O'Donnell (lo@calvinseminary.edu), PhD student,
Calvin Theological Seminary

If the number of languages into which selections from Herman Bavinck's corpus have been translated is impressive (Arabic, English, German, Hungarian, Korean), then the growing number of digital media by which readers may access his writings is equally so. Along with this growth come several practical questions for Bavinck researchers: What digital resources are out there? What can I do with them? How do they facilitate research in Bavinck studies? In this review I will present a snapshot of the current state of the art concerning these digital media along with critical evaluations and suggestions for best practices from the perspective of usability for academic research and writing.

Two caveats need to be stated at the outset. First, given the ever-changing nature of technology (i.e., software updates, the sudden disappearance of websites, the sudden appearance of new devices, etc.), it could well be that by the time you read this some of what is presented here might be already out of date. Second, my criticisms and suggestions arise from the perspective of a North American PhD student. I am keenly aware that academic practices differ around the globe, and anyone who has browsed the Bavinck Institute Facebook page knows well that the growing audience of Bavinck readers and supporters is more international than American. So, the following suggestions might need to be adapted to your particular academic context.

Websites

Post-Reformation Digital Library

Before diving in to Bavinck's corpus directly it is fitting to say a brief word about the digitization of post-Reformation sources. As a quick glance at the heads of his chapters in the *Gereformeerde*

Dogmatiek makes plain, Bavinck drunk deeply from the well of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed orthodoxy. He frequently interacts with the great Reformed doctors of the church such as Girolamo Zanchi (1516–1590), Franciscus Junius (1545–1602), Johannes Polyander (1568–1646), William Twisse (c.1577–1646), Gijsbert Voetius (1589–1676), John Owen (1616–1683), Francis Turretin (1623–1687), Petrus van Mastricht (1630–1706), Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635–1711), Herman Witsius (1636–1708), Campegius Vitringa (1659–1722), and Bernhard De Moor (1710–c.1765) to name but a few.

If in studying the works of a theologian it is wise to consider what books he or she was reading and interacting with from his or her own tradition, then the prudent student of Bavinck will be delighted to discover that, thanks to the Junius Institute at Calvin Seminary (http://juniusinstitute.org), many of the Reformed orthodox sources that Bavinck references—including the sixth edition of the *Synopsis purioris theologiae* (1881) that he edited, which contains the disputations of Johannes Polyander, André Rivet (1572–1651), Antione Thysius (1565–1640), and Antonius Walaeus (1573–1639)—are now available in a conveniently organized digital gateway via the Post-Reformation Digital Library (http://prdl.org).[1]

www.neocalvinisme.nl

In Herman Bavinck studies the closest analog to the impressive Digital Library of Abraham Kuyper (http://kuyper.ptsem.edu) is W. van der Schee's fulsome Bavinck archive at www.neocalvinisme.nl. This Dutch-only archive derives from R. H. Bremmer's and Jan Veenhof's excellent printed bibliography.[2] Although this is truly a wonderful website and a treasure trove for Bavinck studies, it is a

---

1. For an introduction to the PRDL, see Jordan J. Ballor, "The Dynamics of Primary Source and Electronic Resource: The Digital Renaissance and the Post-Reformation Digital Library," *Bulletin of the Association for Information Science and Technology* 38, no. 4 (2012), http://www.asis.org/Bulletin/Apr-12/AprMay12_Ballor.pdf. For access to the *Synopsis* via PRDL, see http://goo.gl/Z731c.

2. See Appendix 2, in R. H. Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck als Dogmaticus* (Kampen: Kok, 1961), 425–46.

bit technologically outdated, and a few workarounds are necessary to facilitate academic use.

First and foremost is searching. The only way to search the archive is to employ Google's[3] site-based search command. For instance, running the following query via Google will return all of the hits for the phrase "mediator unionis":

site:neocalvinisme.nl "mediator unionis"

The upside to this workaround is that you are able to perform phrase and keyword searches on an otherwise unsearchable archive. For keyword searches simply replace "mediator unionis" with whatever keyword(s) you wish minus the quotes. For example:

site:neocalvinisme.nl genade

The downside is that the search returns hits not only for the Bavinck archive but also for the entire neocalvinisme.nl website. So, you will have to wade through non-Bavinck writings as you peruse your search results. However, this downside can be mitigated through the use of search operators.[4] Adding a "+Bavinck" operator to your phrase or keyword query will significantly reduce the amount of non-Bavinck results. For instance:

site:neocalvinisme.nl genade +Bavinck

These search operators allow one to build powerful search queries such as either/or searches (e.g., site:neocalvinisme.nl "mediator unionis" OR "mediator reconciliationis" +Bavinck), wildcard phrase searches (e.g., site:neocalvinisme.nl "genade * natuur" +bavinck), searches that exclude words or phrases (e.g., site:neocalvinisme.nl verbond -"der genade" Bavinck), and similarity searches (e.g., site:neocalvinisme.nl ~genade +Bavinck). Using these operators can drastically improve the usefulness of searches on this archive.

Second is HTML frames. The primary reason that frames are undesirable for academic use is that they preclude direct links to subpages on the website. For instance, if you want to refer to the

---

3. For simplicity's sake I will use Google as my default search engine throughout. However, the example search commands also work at Bing, Yahoo!, etc. Furthermore, all of the major search engines provide an "advanced search" feature that allows further refinement of these search commands.

4. See "Search Operators" (http://goo.gl/fMZR6) and "Punctuation and Symbols in Search" (http://goo.gl/z3k0r), in "Google: Inside Search."

text of Bavinck's Christianity, War, and the League of Nations (1920), the URL portion of your footnote might look something like this: "www.neocalvinisme.nl → Bavinck → Bibliografie → Boeken en brochures → 1920 → *Christendom, Oorlog, Volkenbond.*" Van der Schee suggests that, since he has included the original page numbers in each of the digital texts, readers of the texts can simply reference them as if they are the printed texts themselves (i.e., there is no need to give a URL).[5] However, since these HTML texts are either hand-typed or OCR reproductions, there is always the possibility of typos or other inconsistencies. Hence it is prudent for academic users to provide a URL for texts referenced from this archive even if the texts can be referenced according to printed page numbers.

Here is how to find the URLs for texts in this archive despite the frames limitation: when you browse to the particular text to be opened (i.e., www.neocalvinisme.nl → Bavinck → Bibliografie → Boeken en brochures → 1920), *right* click[6] on the title (i.e., *Christendom, Oorlog, Volkenbond*) and select "Open Link in New Tab." The text will load in a full window without the frames, and the full URL for the text will appear in your browser's location bar (i.e., http://www.neocalvinisme.nl/hb/broch/hbchroorlogvlk.html). With the direct URL in hand you can now provide a proper initial footnote like this: "Herman Bavinck, *Christendom, Oorlog, Volkenbond* (Utrecht: G.J.A. Ruys, 1920), http://www.neocalvinisme.nl/hb/broch/hbchroorlogvlk.html."

Third is screen resolution. This website was built back when 800x600 was a common screen size. On modern monitors, however, the font appears pretty small. Modern web browsers accommodate the need to upsize fonts with the following zoom in command: control++ (i.e., hold the control key while pressing the plus sign one or more times).[7] To return to normal zoom press control+0. Zooming in to a comfortable font size can go a long way toward avoiding a chief bane of digital research: eye strain.

5. "Colofon," http://www.neocalvinisme.nl/colofon.html.

6. On Mac: control+click.

7. On Mac: command++ and command+0

Downloadable E-Books

There are two places to find high quality Bavinck e-books in searchable Portable Document Format (PDF): De Digitale Bibliotheek voor de Nederlandse Letteren (DBNL) and The Internet Archive (IA). The DBNL has select Dutch works from Herman Bavinck; Herman's father, Jan Bavinck; and Herman's nephew, J. H. Bavinck.[8] IA has Dutch and English works from Herman Bavinck that are not found in PDF format elsewhere (http://goo.gl/BkOHr). Slightly less quality Herman Bavinck PDFs are available via Google Books (http://goo.gl/LuVrY).[9]

In terms of academic use these PDFs are exact digital reproductions of the original and as such can be referenced just like their printed counterparts. Furthermore, in terms of readability PDFs can be loaded onto e-readers and tablets for a reading experience that is closer to reading a book and perhaps easier for taking in longer passages than reading massive blocks of HTML text on a computer monitor.

Software Programs

Online Bijbel Studie DVD

This Dutch software program deserves a brief mention for the sole reason that it provides the only extant searchable digital edition of the *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, revised edition.[10]

---

8. Herman Bavinck, http://goo.gl/FyYzp; Jan Bavinck, http://goo.gl/hQDML; J. H. Bavinck, http://goo.gl/C4UwJ. Each of these author pages includes a RSS feed to which you can subscribe in order to receive notifications when new works by these authors are posted by the curators.

9. Note also the one digitized journal available for Jan Bavinck: http://goo.gl/sFs8r.

10. See http://www.importantia.com/onlinebijbel/onlinebijbel_dvd.html; cf. Willem J. de Wit, *On the Way to the Living God: A Cathartic Reading of Herman Bavinck and An Invitation to Overcome the Plausibility Crisis of Christianity* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2011), 176; de Wit, "'Will I Remain Standing?': A Cathartic Reading of Herman Bavinck," *The Bavinck Review* 2 (2011): 2n3.

BibleWorks, Version 9

This past year BibleWorks, a longtime leader in professional Bible study software for Windows, released Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* as an add-on module (http://goo.gl/gGBdT) for both its mainstay Windows version and its brand new, developmental Mac version. Since I am a Mac user who uses the "native" version that is still undergoing significant development, my full review will have to wait until the native mode is further along.[11] In the meantime a brief preview of the module's basic functionality on both Windows and Mac will suffice.

Regarding the text, with one exception, the module's edition of the four volumes is an accurate and readable digital representation of the print edition. For instance, the editorial introductions to each chapter are indented and italicized as they appear in the print edition. Print pagination is preserved throughout and is displayed with thin horizontal lines similar to <hr> tags in HTML. As in the print edition, the BibleWorks module maintains the subparagraph numbers of the Dutch original within square brackets in the text.

The one exception is that the footnotes have been renumbered and transformed into endnotes. Whereas in the print edition footnote numbers restart at the beginning of each chapter, in the module they do not. Hence academic users who are using the module edition of the text will not be able to reference footnotes in the same way as users who are reading the print edition.

In text Bible references appear as hyperlinks. So when you place your mouse over the reference, the full text of the verse appears in a mini popup window both in your default English and original language versions. Clicking on the reference loads the verse in the main BibleWorks window. This functionality is especially useful in the many places where Bavinck discusses biblical terms with reference to the original languages (e.g., *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:211).

---

11. Presently, BibleWorks can be run on Macs in one of three modes. Two of the modes are fully functional but require either virtualization or dual booting. The third (i.e., "native") mode lacks full functionality and is under active development. See "BibleWorks on a Mac," http://www.bibleworks.com/content/mac.html.

In terms of searching, perhaps the most powerful enhancement that BibleWorks brings to the *Reformed Dogmatics* is that it integrates the four volumes into its analysis window. So, when you enter a biblical reference into the main BibleWorks search engine, every instance of that reference within the *Dogmatics* displays instantly on the "Summary" tab of the third window pane. I suppose one could call this feature a lightning-fast, database-powered version of the forty-seven-page combined scripture index in volume four. Additionally, basic keyword and phrase searching of the entire text is available in the module itself.

Logos Bible Software, Version 5

The Logos Bible Software—or, what might more accurately be termed the Logos digital library system—has produced hands down the most impressive, user friendly, and fully featured digital medium by which one can read not only Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* but also several additional Bavinck and Bavinck-related titles.[12] And thanks to the free Logos apps for iOS, Android, and Kindle Fire that automatically sync one's reading location between desktop and mobile devices, readers can begin studying a passage on their desktops and pick up right where they left off on their mobile devices, say, in the library, coffee shop, or conference center.

Since Logos is a large program with a vast array of features, in the following I have opted to highlight only what I think are the most important features for academic readers of Bavinck's texts.

Logos Desktop

The Logos desktop presents the text of Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* in nearly the same formatting as the print edition. The leading has been increased to enhance screen readability. Pagination is exactly the same, and you can opt to display or hide the page

12. Bavinck's *Philosophy of Revelation* (1909), *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society* (2008), and his contribution to *Calvin and the Reformation: Four Studies* (1909) are available as Logos e-books. So is de Wit's *On the Way,* noted earlier. Additionally, the availability of Richard A. Muller's *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1995) in Logos format should be noted since this reference work is highly useful for understanding the many Latin technical theological terms that Bavinck employs throughout his *Dogmatics*.

numbers in the text. The footnotes remain footnotes (instead of being displayed as endnotes), and they are numbered exactly like the print edition. Since there is no physical bottom of the page, footnotes are displayed in a popup window when your mouse hovers over the hyperlinked footnote anchor. Clicking on a footnote anchor locks the popup window in place. Additionally, you can opt to display footnotes in the "Information" window pane.

The text is enhanced such that, when you click on any word in the text including Greek, Hebrew, and Latin words, the definition of that word display automatically in the "Information" window. Which dictionaries display depends upon what resources you have purchased. For instance, if you have added Professor Muller's *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* to your Logos library, then when you click on the word *foedus* in Bavinck's text, Muller's definition is displayed in the "Information" window.

Related to this feature, all references in the text (including those in footnotes and bibliographies) to books that are available in Logos format appear as hyperlinks. For instance, at the end of subparagraph 88 Bavinck references Origen's *Contra Celsus* 4.4 (*Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:320n71). Since this work is included in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* set that I have in my Logos library, the reference appears as a hyperlink in the footnote, and when I click on it *Contra Celsus* open in a new tab at book 4, chapter 4. Obviously the amount of joy this powerful cross-referencing feature will bring to your digital studying of Bavinck's *Dogmatics* is correlative with the size of your Logos library. Adding the *Ante-* and *Post-Nicene Fathers* series, Thomas's *Summa*, and Turretin's *Institutes* are good starters in this regard.

Additionally, all Bible references in the text appear as hyperlinks. Mousing over these links displays the passage in a popup window, and clicking on them opens the passage in a new Bible tab. Moreover, you can highlight and annotate any word or phrase using Logos's sophisticated annotation system. Such annotations automatically sync with your mobile devices.

Perhaps the most useful feature of the Logos desktop software for academic use is its incredibly powerful search engine. Logos makes it easy to perform lightning-quick, full-text searches on individual books, collections of books, or your entire library. For instance, if you add all of your Bavinck-related books to their own col-

lection, you can search this collection all at once. This is useful, for example, in tracing the use of technical terms throughout the four volumes of the *Dogmatics*.

Logos's search operator functionality is more robust than the Google search operators noted earlier. As the following sample queries demonstrate, this functionality facilitates searching that is optimized specifically for theological texts such as Bavinck's *Dogmatics*.[13]

The following query returns every instance of a biblical reference such as Genesis 1:1 regardless of whether the reference appears within a range of verses (e.g., Gen. 1 or Gen. 1:1–3):

<Gen 1:1>

Exclude ranges with the "=" modifier:

<=Gen 1:1>

Enhance either of these queries further with the "NEAR" or "AND" modifiers which allow you to find keywords or phrases that appear with close or far proximity to specific biblical references:

<= Gen 1:1> NEAR creator

<=Zech 6:13> AND "pactum salutis"

Since Logos allows Greek- and Hebrew-specific searches, you can find every instance of a biblical term such as λόγος in Bavinck's *Dogmatics*:

g:logos [then select λόγος from the popup window]

h:berith [then select ברית]

While standard searches include the footnotes by default, you can search the footnotes exclusively with the "footnote:" operator:

footnote:covenant

Specific phrases, even long passages, can be found by enclosing the query in quotes:

"an operation of God's Spirit and of his common grace is discernible not only in science and art"

---

13. For an explanation of the Logos search operators, see the "Search Helps" menu that appears when opening a new search tab (Windows shortcut: control+shift+s; on Mac: command+shift+s).

Logos includes similar words by default in keyword searches. So, if you want to find an exact keyword you must enclose it in quotes.

Common logical operators such as "AND," "OR," and "NOT" allow you to search the logical relations between words and phrases. Similarly, proximity searches allow you to find words or phrases with specific physical relations to each other. For example:

"grace restores nature" AND "grace perfects nature"

"regina scientiarum" OR "queen of sciences"

dogmatics NEAR ethics

grace BEFORE nature

grace AFTER nature

grace ANDNOT nature

grace BEFORE 7 WORDS nature

grace WITHIN 10 WORDS nature

As you can see the powerful Logos search engine facilitates unbelievably detailed interaction with Bavinck's texts.

As good as Logos's presentation of the *Reformed Dogmatics* is, it could be enhanced even further for academic users by including the revised edition of the Dutch text in the Logos library. This would allow Bavinck scholars to read the primary source alongside the translation similar to Logos's bilingual editions of several works by Aquinas and Logos's bilingual edition of Turretin's *Institutio* currently in community pricing.

Logos Apps[14]

The text of the *Reformed Dogmatics* displays beautifully and crisply on the iPad's retina display. You can choose to display the text in one, two, or three columns in both vertical and horizontal orientations, and the font sizes and background colors are adjustable. You turn the page by swiping left or right.

Similar to the Logos desktop, the text in the iPad app is digitally enhanced. All biblical references are hyperlinks. Tapping them displays the passage in a popup. Tapping the "jump to reference" link

---

14. The following comments are based upon my experience with the iOS apps, especially the iPad app. I have not tested the Android or Kindle Fire apps, and they might have slightly different features and functionality.

at the bottom of the popup loads the verse into the Bible study feature of the app. Footnotes are hyperlinked in text, and tapping them displays the footnote in a popup. Like in the Logos desktop footnote popups in the app are linked to the Logos library; so, if the footnote references a book that you have in your library, tapping on the reference will open that book at the referenced location.

Furthermore, tapping on any word in the text allows you to look up the word's definition, search on that word, share the passage via social media, highlight the passage, or add a note to the passage. Highlights and annotations sync automatically with the Logos desktop.

In the iPad app page numbers display exclusively in the footer rather than in text as they do in the desktop. Since there is no way to locate in the text where one page stops and another starts, academic users will need to base their citations on the desktop version.

Even though, quite amazingly, within the Logos mobile apps you can perform the same powerful search queries on Bavinck's texts that are sampled above, the nature and purpose of mobile devices (i.e., smaller screens, smaller CPUs, lack of full keyboards, etc.) precludes the apps from providing the same lightning-quick, fully-featured researching experience that the Logos desktop provides. Hence as I see it the chief benefit of Logos's mobile apps for academic users is readability.

Obviously no digital reading experience will be the same as reading the handsomely bound four volumes. And I have yet to meet a Bavinck reader who has taken in even one of the 600-plus-page volumes exclusively digitally. But as e-reading devices such as the iPad continue to increase their screen resolutions and decrease eye strain it might not be too long before at least some students prefer to take in the *Reformed Dogmatics* in digital rather than paper format.

Conclusions

After looking at the current array of digital tools for engaging Bavinck's corpus and sampling a bit of each tool's functionality, we are in a position to draw some conclusions pertaining to the academic utility of such tools as a whole.

The first is fairly obvious: currently, there is no single digital master key that unlocks the entire field of Bavinck studies. All of the existing digital resources are limited both in scope and in functionality. From one website or software program you can access Dutch texts but not English translations, and vice versa. One resource gives you HTML text, another is formatted in PDF, yet another in proprietary plain text.

Second, the current array of tools is—and will likely remain—in varying stages of flux. That BibleWorks's Bavinck module for Mac "native" mode is still under development is a case in point. That, surprisingly, the *Reformed Dogmatics* and all other English translations of Bavinck's writings are currently unavailable in Kindle format is another.

Third, given this digital cacophony, and given the fact that selections from Bavinck's Dutch corpus continue to be translated, it would be prudent for interested academic institutions to begin discussing whether there is enough interest in Bavinck studies to warrant the development of a unified digital library project the likes of the recent Kuyper digital library, one that provides international access to Bavinck's Dutch corpus and, so far as possible, the growing body of translations.

Fourth, the chief benefit that digital Bavinck resources provide in terms of academic research is searchability. This benefit is by definition a second-order benefit: it only yields its riches in tandem with the first-order activity that it presupposes; namely, reading and analyzing the text. Hence attaining the benefit requires prudent use.

When we make Bavinck's texts searchable, we turn them into databases. Databases are wonderful tools in all sciences, but they are limited, especially in theological science. When we access them by way of logical queries, we look at them from a limited perspective, and we read them in a certain way. Queries that arise out of life experience yield to formal matters, the qualitative to the quantitative. It is unlikely, for example, that we would send the Bavinck database queries such as "What difference does it make whether I believe grace restores and perfects rather than replaces or supplements nature?" or "Why does it matter what I think about rationalism, empiricism, and realism before attempting to theologize?" Rather, we ask databases questions such as, "In which writings and

how often does Bavinck use the idiosyncratic term *mediator unionis* in connection with the more common *mediator reconciliationis*?" As long as we remain self-conscious about the limitations of the tool, we can enjoy the true fruits of database searching: a second-order boon to deeper first-order reading and prudent reflection.

Digital Bavinck research tools are not magic bullets. In fact, used poorly, they can hinder rather than help the research process. But with prudent use such tools can provide fresh wind in the sails for the individual Bavinck scholar and for the Bavinck studies community as a whole. Thus we look forward to their continued development in the days to come.