



The Bavinck Review

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The Bavinck Review

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The Bavinck Review

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Editorial

This fourth volume of *The Bavinck Review* is the first not to coincide with papers delivered at a Bavinck conference. Nevertheless, the first several essays find a unifying theme in exploring Herman Bavinck's approach to non-Christian religions by means of his *gratia communis* formulation.

Professor Henk van den Belt leads the way with a thorough historical analysis of Bavinck's formulation of the revelation-religion relationship. He inquires into the theological grounds for Bavinck's affirmations of the truth, goodness, and beauty evident in non-Christian religions. In what senses does Bavinck consider non-Christian religions and religiosity itself to be divine revelations? How can a Reformed dogmatics with its affirmation of a *religio vera* nevertheless find theological grounds for affirming proximate goods in non-Christian religions? His historical findings lend themselves to further dogmatic reflection on the *religio vera* within the contemporary context of religious pluralism. They also help to clarify the meaning of certain controversial passages within the *Reformed Dogmatics* wherein Bavinck makes positive statements about pagan religions in general and Muhammad in particular.

These intriguing passages are the subject of Dr. Brian Mattson's essay on the "insider" debate in contemporary Reformed missiology and Rev. J. W. Stevenson's response. Mattson argues that misguided appeals to these passages such as Stevenson's suggest that Bavinck's view of non-Christian religions in general and Islam in particular downplays the doctrine of total depravity in order to highlight the goods found in these religions. Against these appeals he argues that, rightly understood in context, Bavinck's statements regarding the goods in non-Christian religions have the opposite effect, one that is grounded in the catholic tradition and is non-controversial. Further, he argues that Bavinck's statements—when interpreted in light of his view of the relation between nature and grace—do not provide theological grounds for "insider" models of missions. Stevenson's reply challenges Mattson's reading of his appeal to Bavinck's statements as misguided. He further argues that his view of Herman Bavinck's theology and J. H. Bavinck's missiol-

ogy in relation to contemporary “insider” movement missiological discussion is not at odds with but in harmony with Mattson’s.

My review essay takes a turn to the technological. After surveying the current array of digitized Bavinck resources, sampling their functionality, and sharing some tips for rewarding digital research, I reflect upon the ways in which these digital tools can provide a boon to Bavinck researchers.

Professor Bolt’s essay revisits the VanDrunen-Kloosterman *duplex regnum* debate with a significant revision of his earlier Bavinck Society discussion guide in light of two recent dissertations by Drs. Brian Mattson and James Eglinton. The underlying theological question in this debate is one that Bavinck calls the hardest theological question of all; namely, the proper relation between nature and grace. This difficult question comes into expression in smaller, even simple, questions such as whether Bavinck, who designated a portion of his student budget for “Glas bier,”¹ would consider those Leiden pints to be *Christian* in any sense; or whether in Bavinck’s view a fundamental, creational institution such as the family can be properly qualified as *Christian*, as the title of his recently translated book suggests.² Though seemingly simple on the surface, such questions have a profound depth when viewed in light of the nature-grace relation. Bolt offers his own perspective on this discussion.

The Bavinck Institute has a new website on a new server with a new URL: BavinckInstitute.org. Please update your bookmarks and feed subscriptions as the old URL will expire. Our new digital digs are optimized for speed, distributed globally via a content delivery network, and viewable on mobile devices. Thus all users, and especially international users, should notice a faster and more fluid website experience.

Finally, the editorial committee invites potential essay authors, translators, and book reviewers to please take note of the newly posted [submission guidelines](#). The committee looks forward to receiving your submissions.

—Laurence O'Donnell

1. See Willem J. de Wit, “‘Will I Remain Standing?’: A Cathartic Reading of Herman Bavinck,” *The Bavinck Review* 2 (2011): 16n15.

2. Herman Bavinck, *The Christian Family*, ed. Stephen J. Grabill, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian’s Library Press, 2012).

Religion as Revelation? The Development of Herman Bavinck's View from a Reformed Orthodox to a Neo-Calvinist Approach

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Herman Bavinck relates religion and revelation closely. This relationship is one of the foundational elements in his theology. To quote his lecture on common grace, “All religions are positive: they are based on real or supposed revelation.”¹ Or, as he says in the Stone Lectures, “religion as *religio insita* . . . points directly back to revelation.”² Still, there seems to be a development in the way he approaches religion and revelation. First, he leans heavily on the Reformed orthodox tradition, and later he searches for a new—say, neo-Calvinist—application of that tradition.

To trace this development we will first assess the differences between the first and the later editions of the *Reformed Dogmatics* on the topics of religion and general revelation; next, compare the findings with some other statements of Bavinck; and, finally, close with some conclusions about this development and some theological remarks on this theme.

1. *De Algemeene Genade: Rede bij de overdracht van het rectoraat aan de Theol. School te Kampen op 6 December 1894* (Kampen: Zalsman, 1894), 11. For an English translation, see Herman Bavinck, “Common Grace,” trans. R.C. Van Leeuwen, *Calvin Theological Journal* 24, no. 1 (1989): 35–65.

2. *The Philosophy of Revelation* (New York: Green and Co., 1909), 159.

Epistemology

Bavinck's discussion of the essence of religion in the *Reformed Dogmatics* follows immediately after his treatment of general epistemology. He finishes the section on the *principia* of the sciences with a reference to the divine Logos. The eternal Word has created both the reality outside of the human mind and the laws of thought within it and has placed both in an organic connection and correspondence to each other.

The created world is thus the *principium cognoscendi externum* of all science. But that is not enough. In order to see we need an eye. "If the eye were not related to the sun, how could we see the light?" There must be correspondence, kinship between object and subject.³

All knowledge of the created world outside of us necessarily corresponds to laws of thought inside of us. Knowledge of the truth is only possible if subject and object, knowing and being, are related.⁴ This idea of correspondence between the objective and subjective is omnipresent in Bavinck's works. The quote is from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832): "Wär nicht das Auge sonnenhaft, wie könnten wir das Licht erblicken?"⁵ Bavinck was influenced on this point by Ethical Theology. As early as 1884 he writes in his assessment of the theology of Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye (1818–1874) that, according to this theologian, reason can be described as the ability to recognize the Logos in the world because of our natural relationship to the Logos.⁶

3. Herman Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, 4th ed. (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1928), 1:207; hereafter referenced as *GD*; all references are to this edition unless specified otherwise. Cf. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols., ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003–2008), 1:233; hereafter referenced as *RD*.

4. Herman Bavinck, *Christelijke wereldbeschouwing*, 2nd ed. (Kok: Kampen, 1913), 21.

5. J.W. Goethe, "Zur Farbenlehre" in J.W. Goethe, *Goethes Werke*, vol. 13 (Munich: Beck, 1982), 324. Elsewhere Bavinck says that it cannot be denied that to see we need both the light of the sun (objectively) and eyes (subjectively). *GD*, 2:41; cf. *RD*, 2:70.

6. *De Theologie van Prof. Dr. Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye: Bijdrage tot de kennis der Ethische Theologie* (Leiden: Donner, 1884), 79.

In his discussing of general revelation in the *Reformed Dogmatics*, Bavinck writes that a certain faculty in human beings corresponds to the objective general revelation of God. Just as in science so also in religion: there is not only an external and objective but also an internal and subjective revelation. Nature and history are the external objective means of God's general revelation, while intellect, reason, and conscience are the internal means by which God makes his general revelation known. There is a revelation of God not only outside but also inside human beings. This revelation of God in us is not an independent source of knowledge alongside nature and history but serves as a subjective organ that enables us to receive and understand the revelation in nature and history. The *semen religionis* corresponds to the revelation of God in nature and history.⁷

These remarks raise the question of how religiosity and religions relate to revelation. Is only the Christian religion related to the seed of religion, or are other religions also fruits of revelation? If all religion depends on revelation, are all religions then also revelations?

The First and Later Editions of the *Reformed Dogmatics*

The paragraphs in the *Reformed Dogmatics* on the *principia* of religion open with an analysis of the word "religion" and with some remarks from biblical theology. In the Old Testament objective religion, which is identical with God's revelation, consists in the covenant, while the subjective religion that corresponds to it is the fear of the Lord.⁸ There is no difference between the first and the later editions until Bavinck turns to the distinction between true and false religion. In the first edition he denies that Scripture teaches an essence of religion as a foundation for the specific religions. Instead, Scripture describes the relationship between God and human beings, which God himself has determined. Reformed theol-

7. *GD*, 1:312; cf. *RD*, 1:341.

8. *GD*, 1st ed. (Kampen: J.H. Bos, 1895), 1:172; *GD*, 1:209; cf. *RD*, 1:237.

ogy always has taken its starting point in the *religio vera*. “No religion can object to being tested to the pure concept of religion.”⁹

This exclusive starting point is entirely in line with Reformed orthodoxy. Perhaps Bavinck is even leaning on the *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae* that he edited while a pastor in Franeker.¹⁰ The *Synopsis* says that true religion proceeds from God alone “because it constitutes God’s covenant with humanity.”¹¹ Only the Christian religion is true, and that is proved by the fact that it is the only religion that displays the marks of a true religion: it acknowledges the true God, explains the true ground on which sinful human beings can be restored to God, and prescribes the right duties towards God and the neighbor.¹²

In the later editions of the *Reformed Dogmatics* these remarks on the starting point in the *vera religio* are deleted. This is no coincidence. Bavinck changes and deletes more phrases in which Christianity as the only true religion functions as a starting point of his argument. In the first edition alone he writes, “It may nevertheless be demanded that a researcher of religions does not have a false but a true and pure [i.e., a Christian] conception of religion. Otherwise he judges all religions only from to his own possibly very distorted view and from that of his peers; for instance, from the modern view of religion.”¹³ According to the younger Bavinck it is not only impossible to be neutral—a position he maintained throughout his whole life—but that impossibility implies that the Christian theologian should take his starting point in the *vera religio*.

The issue between orthodoxy and modernity is not a matter of method but of the truth or falsity of their starting points. The war-

9. *GD*, 1st ed., 1:174.

10. J. Polyander, A. Rivetus, A. Walaeus, and A. Thysius, *Synopsis purioris theologiae, disputationibus quinquaginta duabus comprehensa ac conscripta*, ed. H. Bavinck (Leiden: Donner, 1881); hereafter referenced as *SPT* with disputation and thesis numbers.

11. *SPT* 2.17. On the use of “religion” in Reformed orthodoxy, see Richard A. Muller, *Prolegomena to Theology*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 of *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 168–76.

12. *SPT* 2.18–20.

13. *GD*, 1st ed., 1:186.

rant for the orthodox and normative concept of religion is at least as strong as the one for the modern concept. In fact, of course, he means that the orthodox concept is stronger because orthodoxy “derives its concept from Holy Scripture in conformity with the Church of all ages, while [the modern concept] has only been valid for a short time and in the small circle of likeminded [modern theologians].”¹⁴

In the later editions all these remarks disappear, and instead Bavinck includes an assessment of the science of religion in his argument between the *principia* of religion and the concept of general revelation. Apparently he found his former position too indiscriminate and wanted to approach the phenomenon of religion from a less exclusive starting point. Whereas he argues from Christianity as the one revealed and true religion to the other religions in the first edition, in the later editions he argues from religion in general to Christianity, that he, of course, still sees as the only *religio vera*. The result does not differ too much, but the methodology does.

General Revelation

The change in approach also appears in the way in which Bavinck introduces general revelation in the later editions of the *Reformed Dogmatics*; namely, by three paragraphs on the essence of revelation.¹⁵ He first deals with religion in general before introducing the theme of general revelation.

All editions open with the claim that the concept of revelation is “the necessary correlate of all religion.”¹⁶ But only in the first edition Bavinck states that

the concept of revelation includes a certain content, of which the truth must be recognized, in order to keep talking of revelation. . . . Science and philosophy must be denied the right to determine this concept a pri-

14. *GD*, 1st ed., 1:186.

15. The English translation has “The idea of revelation,” but the Dutch reads “Wezen en begrip der openbaring.”

16. *GD*, 1st ed., 1:215; *GD*, 1:255; cf. *RD*, 1:284.

ori and to fit the historical and religious phenomena, summarized under the heading of revelation, into that scheme.¹⁷

Pantheism and materialism leave no room for revelation. "If God does not exist and if, as Feuerbach says, the secret of theology is anthropology, then religion and revelation are condemned and nothing but a hallucination of the human mind."¹⁸ According to pantheism God and man are one in substance, and this leaves no room for a relationship essential for religion unless religion is seen as the realization of God's self-consciousness in human beings. Religion is always a relationship between a human being and a divine person, whose objective and real existence is beyond all doubt for the religious consciousness. Religion always presupposes that God and man, though related, are distinct.

In the later editions Bavinck elaborates on this analysis by bringing both materialism and pantheism together under the heading of naturalism and adding a third form of naturalism: deism.¹⁹ In the first edition Bavinck claimed merely that deism was untenable. One had to choose between theism and pantheism, which is in fact the same as materialism.²⁰ He concludes the paragraph with the following summary:

Religion and revelation are not two sides of one and the same thing. As the eye and the light, the ear and the tone, the Logos within us and the Logos without us are related and still different, so it is with religion and revelation. In the religious sphere it is the same as everywhere else. We come naked into the world and bring nothing with us. We receive all our food both in spiritual and natural sense from outside. In religion, the content comes from outside to us through revelation.²¹

Although Bavinck does not copy these phrases in the later editions, this line of thought is one of the invariables in his theology.

The difference in starting point between the editions appears more clearly in the second paragraph. In the first edition Bavinck writes:

17. *GD*, 1st ed., 1:215.

18. *GD*, 1st ed., 1:215; *GD*, 1:267; cf. *RD*, 1:295.

19. *GD*, 1:267–70; cf. *RD*, 1:295–98.

20. *GD*, 1st ed., 1:218.

21. *GD*, 1st ed., 1:217.

The purpose of revelation is none other than to awaken and cultivate religion in human beings. Everything that has this goal and is subservient to it is revelation in the proper sense. 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. . . . In revelation God approaches the whole human person to win him completely for his service of love. Yes, revelation cannot be only intended to place individuals in a religious relationship with God. Mankind is one, and mankind is the object of God's love. The final goal of revelation is to make mankind as a whole into a kingdom, a people of God. Revelation is not an isolated fact that stands alone in history. It is a system of God's acts beginning with creation and ending in the new heaven and new earth. It is instruction, education, guidance, government, renewal, forgiveness, etc. It is all this together. Revelation is everything God does to re-create humanity after his image and likeness.²²

It is remarkable that this phrase is missing in the later editions. This indicates that Bavinck took distance from his former exclusive starting point in the *religio vera*. In the later editions he concludes that the study of the history of religions shows that the true concept of revelation cannot be derived from philosophy or the science of religion. In the first this conclusion was where he started from.

In the later editions he does claim that it is the goal of special revelation to strive to the re-creating of the whole person after God's image and likeness and to redeem humanity as an organic whole, but it is telling that he does not make this claim anymore for general revelation or for revelation in general.²³ Apparently he felt a need to differentiate both forms of revelation more clearly since he created more room for a general approach to general revelation.

Science of Religion

It is not so easy to answer the question why Bavinck made this shift. The inserted paragraphs on the science of religion offer a few hints. In 1895 Bavinck is very short on the subject. He mentions the historical and the psychological methods to define the essence of religion and rejects them because it is impossible to be neutral. The historical method is "virtually impossible, because any examination

22. *GD*, 1st ed., 1:218–19.

23. *GD*, 1:318; cf. *RD*, 1:346.

of the religions presupposes a notion of religion, and a comparative study of all religions is an impossible job.”²⁴ In 1906 Bavinck writes, “This method runs into the serious objection that a comparative study of all religions is an impossible job.”²⁵ The principled impossibility has become a practical impossibility.

The second edition also offers a historical introduction to the science of religion. He explains the scientific desire to find the essence of religion from a tendency in Protestantism to look for the core of faith in universal Christian truths instead of stressing confessional particularities. Immanuel Kant sought the essence of religion in moral conduct, and Friedrich D.E. Schleiermacher in religious feeling. A new science was born when George W.F. Hegel in his lectures on the philosophy of religion first studied religion inductively as a universal psychological and historical phenomenon and then defined the essence of religion deductively.²⁶

In the first edition Bavinck dealt with the philosophy of religion to explain the historical positions on the seat of religion as residing either in the intellect, the will, or the heart. These sections are copied and expanded in the later editions, but their function in Bavinck’s argument on religion as knowledge, morality, or feeling changes. In the first edition he just describes the various positions to conclude that religion is the soul of everything: “What God is to the world, religion is to humanity.”²⁷ The conclusion is the same in the later editions, but the way that leads to this conclusion is different; for, instead of placing the orthodox Reformed view antithetically over against the other views, Bavinck sees the science of religion and especially the philosophy of religion as a method to grant religion its proper value. Instead of rendering the historical and psychological methods impossible, he writes that they are “insufficient and have to be augmented . . . by the philosophical or metaphysical

24. *GD*, 1st ed., 1:185.

25. *GD*, 1:217; cf. *RD*, 1:245.

26. *GD*, 1:217; cf. *RD*, 1:245. On Hegel as the father of modern science of religion, see also Herman Bavinck, “Godgeleerdheid en Godsdienstwetenschap,” in *De Vrije Kerk. Vereeniging van Christelijke Gereformeerde Stemmen* 18 (1892), 197–225, 202.

27. *GD*, 1st ed., 1:200; *GD*, 1:241; cf. *RD*, 1:268.

method, which establishes the validity and value of religion and hence also its ideas and actions (dogma, cult, etc.).”²⁸

Bavinck also inserts three paragraphs in the later editions of the *Reformed Dogmatics* on the philosophy of religion. He emphasizes that there is little disagreement about its value and refers to Abraham Kuyper, who closes the third volume of his *Encyclopaedie der heilige godgeleerdheid* (Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology) with a discussion of “The Philosophy of Religion.” Kuyper argues that true religion and false religion have a common starting point in the *sensus divinitatis*.²⁹ Possibly the assessment of Kuyper’s work from 1894 explains Bavinck’s shift between 1895 and 1906. At least Bavinck uses the philosophy of religion in the later editions of the *Reformed Dogmatics* to argue the value of religion in general, and this is a shift from his original exclusive starting-point in the *vera religio*.

In the three new paragraphs of the *Reformed Dogmatics* Bavinck shows a positive attitude towards the science of religion as long as its assumptions are not incorrect. In the first paragraph he argues that an objective approach is impossible since those who study religion cannot divest themselves of their moral and religious convictions. In the next paragraph he writes that the premise that all religions are essentially the same is false. Regardless of their differences, all religions appeal to revelation, contain certain teachings, prescribe what human beings must do, and have their own rituals. But exactly for these reasons religions value themselves as subject to the categories of truth and falsehood. In the final paragraph he claims that the science of religion has thus far led to very meager results regarding the essence of religion. The definitions of religion given from this side are often predictable, and that prompts the question whether a study of all religions is necessary for the outcome.

28. *GD*, 1:218; cf. *RD*, 1:246.

29. 1st ed. (Amsterdam: Wormser, 1894), 3:563.

Correlation

Bavinck's critical remarks on the science of religion imply that the difference between the first and the later editions of the *Reformed Dogmatics* should not be overstated. He remains skeptical about the neutrality of the science of religion. Moreover, he maintains the last paragraph of the section on the *principia* of religion without any major changes. In this paragraph Bavinck summarizes his thought on religion and revelation. He writes that we have to follow a different method than that of the science of religion to find religion's essence and origin. "It is not possible to understand religion without God. God is the great supposition of religion."³⁰ There is a certain tension between these older remarks and the new paragraphs in which he is less critical of the philosophy of religion.

Bavinck continues that religion not only presupposes that God exists but also that he reveals himself. "There is no religion without revelation; revelation is the necessary correlate of religion. . . . The origin of religion can neither be historically identified nor psychologically explained, but points necessarily to revelation as its objective foundation."³¹ The world around us is not only the source of all knowledge revealed by God but also it is a disclosure of God's power and divinity. Human religion corresponds to this divine revelation. In religion mankind ultimately searches for an eternal life in communion with God, yes, God himself, because he only can find peace and rest in God. "In essence and origin religion is a product of revelation."³² Bavinck ends the paragraph with the conclusion that religion, like science, has three *principia*: God as the essential principle, God's objective revelation as the external cognitive principle, and human receptivity—the religious faculty or aptitude—as the internal cognitive principle.

God does not do half a job. He creates not only light but also the eye to see that light. The internal corresponds to the external. . . . The question—which of the two was first, external or internal revelation—is

30. *GD*, 1st ed., 1:209; *GD*, 1:250; cf. *RD*, 1:276.

31. *GD*, 1st ed., 1:210; *GD*, 1:251; cf. *RD*, 1:276–77. Cf. his remark: "And religion always has revelation as its foundation and correlation; there is no religion without revelation." *Algemeene Genade*, 11; cf. "Common Grace," 40.

32. *GD*, 1st ed., 1:211; *GD*, 1:251; cf. *RD*, 1:277.

entirely superfluous. True religion can only exist in a perfect harmony of the internal with the external revelation.³³

Just like he does with the *principia* of science, Bavinck relates the *principia* of religion to the doctrine of the trinity: the Father reveals himself in the Son and through the Spirit.

The continuity between the editions of the *Reformed Dogmatics* is the claim that the essence of religion cannot be found by an inductive and deductive approach from the science of religion but only by presupposing divine revelation. Theology presumes the existence of God and his revelation. Still Bavinck's approach changes. In the first edition he started with the claim that the route of the science of religion is impassible since neutrality is impossible; starting with true religion was the only reliable method. However, in the later editions he takes the attempts of the science of religion, including the philosophy of religion, more seriously, although he finally reaches the conclusion that this method is insufficient. What once was his exclusive starting point has become his final conclusion.

Non-Christian Religions

It is time to turn to the question of whether Bavinck's statement that all religion depends on revelation implies that religion itself is revelatory. In 1912 he wrote a sixty-two-page brochure entitled *Christianity* for the Great Religions series.³⁴ It is remarkable that he was willing to do so since the series had published brochures on Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and even Pantheism before publishing one on Christianity and since one of the other authors was Louis Adriën Bähler (1867–1941), a minister who had caused a hot debate

33. *GD*, 1st ed., 1:213; *GD*, 1:253; cf. *RD*, 1:279.

34. *Het Christendom*, Groote Godsdienssten 2.7 (Baarn: Hollandia, 1912); hereafter referenced in text. Some years earlier Bavinck had published an article on the essence of Christianity: "Het Wezen des Christendoms," in *Almanak van het studentencorps der Vrije Universiteit voor het jaar 1906* (Amsterdam: Herdes, 1906), 251–77; also included in his *Verzamelde opstellen op het gebied van godsdienst en wetenschap* (Kampen: Kok, 1921), 17–34; English translation: Herman Bavinck, "The Essence of Christianity," in *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, ed. John Bolt, trans. Harry Boonstra and Gerrit Sheeres (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 33–47.

within the Dutch Reformed Church because of his statement that Christianity could learn from Buddhism.³⁵ The fact that Bähler was not disciplined occasioned the start of the Reformed League in the Dutch Reformed Church in 1906. Bavinck's willingness to publish this brochure reveals his irenic attitude. He did not think that his personal faith prohibited him from doing so. As a Christian he admitted a personal interest in the subject, but a non-Christian would have a personal interest also. "Hatred makes one blind," he wrote, "but love often causes a sharper sight of things" (5).

Christianity, considered from the subjective side is a human confession: it "only stands in its truth and glory before the eye of the soul when it is perceived from the objective, theological side" (23). Turning to Christianity and pagan religions, Bavinck claims that

the lower religions (animism, spiritism, fetichism) usually still contain the acknowledgement of a supreme being called the Great Spirit, the High Father, the Great Mighty Lord, etc. But this, at least among the common people, is a dead faith; practically speaking, their religion consists of superstition and sorcery. (23)

The higher religions, however, do not lack noble characteristics. Hence they relate to Christianity not only antithetically but also provide various points of contact for missionary work. The great difference lies in soteriology: the founders of the non-Christian religions such as Zoroaster, Confucius, and Mohammed were greatly talented in marking out a way of salvation, "but each individual must after all travel that way for himself and is finally his own savior. All these religions are auto-soteric."³⁶

Part of the brochure was translated into English for *The Biblical Review*.³⁷ In the translated article Bavinck refers to the German

35. J.S. Speyer, *Het Buddhisme*, Groote Godsdiensten 1.6 (Baarn: Hollandia, 1912), J.S. Speyer, *Hindoeïsme*, Groote Godsdiensten 1.7 (Baarn: Hollandia, 1912), Louis A. Bähler, *Het pantheïsme, zijn geschiedenis en zijn beteekenis*, Groote Godsdiensten 2.5 (Baarn: Hollandia, 1912), and C. Snouck Hurgronje, *De Islam*, Groote Godsdiensten 2.6 (Baarn: Hollandia, 1912).

36. *Christendom*, 23. Cf. his remark that all religions are based on actual or alleged revelation, but the real, material difference is *gratia*; special grace is unknown to the Gentiles. *Algemeene Genade*, 11; cf. "Common Grace," 40.

37. Herman Bavinck, "Christ and Christianity," transl. A.A. Pfanstiehl, *The Biblical Review* 1, no. 2 (1916): 214–36.

philosopher K.R. Eduard von Hartmann (1842–1906) for the claim that all non-Christian religions are self-saving. Apparently he rewrote the manuscript for the translation, adding, for instance, that the “higher religions” also “afford the missionary many points of contact, and in all these grades of affinity must not be repelled but won and strengthened.”³⁸

According to Bavinck,

in the Christian religion, Christ is, as it were, Christianity. . . . The Chinese religion is deistic, the Buddhist atheistic, the Persian dualistic, the Mohammedan fatalistic. . . . [T]hat we are able to judge all these religions in this manner from a higher point of view—acknowledging the good in them and pointing out that which is erroneous and weak in them—we have to thank Christianity, which also proves itself thereby to be the true religion, the correction and completion of all religions.³⁹

The brochure does not relate the religions immediately to revelation, neither does it explain religions as revelation, but Bavinck’s approach is similar to that in the second edition of the *Reformed Dogmatics*; for, he argues from religions to Christianity as the correction and completion of all religions. In a review Benjamin B. Warfield admired the result.

It is no small task which Dr. Bavinck has undertaken, to tell in sixty-two small pages all that Christianity is, and that, in a series in which it is brought into comparison with other “great religions.” He has fulfilled this task, however, in a most admirable manner. . . . We cannot imagine how the work could be done better.⁴⁰

Bavinck generally expresses a positive view of non-Christian religions. In the *Reformed Dogmatics*—even in the first edition—he says that general revelation “is of great significance for the world of paganism. It is the stable and permanent foundation of pagan religions.”⁴¹ Scripture judges all forms of paganism and explains them as apostasy from the pure knowledge of God. The philosophy of religion replaces the simple biblical view of decay from the original

38. “Christ and Christianity,” 214. For the manuscript see Archive 176 of the Historical Documentation Centre, VU University, Amsterdam (hereafter: Bavinck Archives), folder 72.

39. *Christendom*, 23–24.

40. Review of “Groote Godsdiensten: Serie II, No. 7. *Het Christendom* door Dr. H. Bavinck,” *The Princeton Theological Review* 11 (1913), 538.

41. *GD*, 1st ed., 1:234; *GD*, 1:286; cf. *RD*, 1:314.

pure religion for an evolutionary theory that explains the religions from primitive forms of fetishism, animism, and ancestor worship.

But, however severely Scripture judges the character of paganism, it is precisely the general revelation it teaches that enables and authorizes us to recognize all the elements of truth that are present also in pagan religions. In the past the study of religions was pursued exclusively in the interest of dogmatics and apologetics. The founders of [non-Christian] religions, like Mohammad, were simply considered imposters, enemies of God, accomplices of the devil.⁴²

Scripture teaches a revelation of God, an illumination of the Logos, a working of God's Spirit also among pagans. Bavinck regrets that in Reformed theology the doctrine of common grace was applied to the true, the beautiful, and the good in the heathen world, and to all the spheres of moral, intellectual, social, and political life, but that common grace was not recognized in pagan religions.

[A]n operation of God's Spirit and of his common grace is discernable not only in science and art, morality and law, but also in the religions. . . . The founders of religion, after all, were not imposters or agents of Satan, but men who, being religiously inclined, had to fulfill a mission to their time and people and often exerted a beneficial influence on the life of peoples.⁴³

Christianity is not only antithetical to paganism, it is also paganism's fulfillment. In his *Magnalia Dei* Bavinck emphasizes that the founders of non-Christian religions lifted up the tribal religions from a state of profound degeneration and decay. In the conflict between superstition and civilization men were born who in their souls wrestled with the conflict between popular religion and their own enlightened consciousness. "By the light granted to them, they sought a better way to obtain true happiness."⁴⁴

From these and similar remarks it should not be concluded that Bavinck was only positive about the non-Christian religions. In his assessment of the theology of Chantepie de la Saussaye, he summarizes Chantepie's position by saying that it is the calling of theology to reveal, present, and explain how the truth hidden in all religions

42. *GD*, 1st ed., 1:238; *GD*, 1:290; cf. *RD*, 1:318.

43. *GD*, 1st ed., 1:239; *GD*, 1:291; cf. *RD*, 1:319.

44. *Magnalia Dei* (Kampen: Kok, 1909), 54; cf. Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, trans. Henry Zylstra (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 58.

is fully realized in Christianity.⁴⁵ In this early work he does not seem to agree with Chantepie because Chantepie takes an anthropological approach to theology. But Bavinck still might have been influenced by Ethical Theology in his view of the non-Christian religions.

In general, however, he is more critical than the Ethical theologians. His positive remarks are always accompanied by the acknowledgement that the religions do not lead to salvation and are a deformation of the original, true religion. The reform-religions—as Bavinck calls the religions founded by Confucius, Mohammed and others—differ only in degree and not in essence from other forms of idolatry. In his *Guide to the Teaching of the Christian Religion* (1913) he hardly mentions the positive aspects. There he stresses that everything human beings may know about God from general revelation remains insufficient. The founders of religions were “in many ways exalted high above the superstitions which they beheld around them, but even if they cut off some branches of false religion, its root was not eradicated.”⁴⁶

Philosophy of Revelation

Bavinck’s most mature thoughts on the relationship between revelation and religion are expressed in his Stone lectures, an apologetic defense of the Christian faith.⁴⁷ In the opening chapter

45. *Theologie van Chantepie de la Saussaye*, 83.

46. *Handleiding bij het onderwijs in den Christelijken Godsdienst* (Kampen: Kok, 1913), 17.

47. It is possible that in these lectures Bavinck responded to Warfield’s critique regarding the lack of apologetics in Amsterdam, although he does not refer to Warfield explicitly. Warfield had remarked that he was surprised that “the school which Dr. Bavinck so brilliantly represents should be tempted to make so little of Apologetics.” B.B. Warfield, “A Review of H. Bavinck, *De Zekerheid des Geloofs*,” in *Selected Shorter Writings*, ed. J.E. Meeter, vol. 2 (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), 106–23, 117. This review originally appeared in *Princeton Theological Review* (1903), 138–48. Cf. “It is therefore characteristic of the school of thought of which Dr. Bavinck is a shining ornament to estimate the value of Apologetics somewhat lightly.” Warfield, “Review of *Zekerheid*,” 114. Warfield also criticized Kuyper in the introduction to F.R. Beattie’s *Apologetics: or the Rational Vindication of Christianity* (1903), expressing his regret that Kuyper gives apologetics a very subordinate place. B.B. Warfield, “Introduction to Francis R. Beattie’s *Apologetics*,” in *Selected Shorter*

Bavinck says that true religion—to satisfy our mind and heart, our conscience and our will—must lift us up high above the world, and therefore revelation is essential to all religion.⁴⁸ According to Bavinck, however, Reformed theology had thus far not taken the means of revelation sufficiently into account. “The old theology construed revelation after a quite external and mechanical fashion, and too readily identified it with Scripture. Our eyes are nowadays being more and more opened to the fact that revelation in many ways is historically and psychologically ‘mediated.’”⁴⁹ In the underlying Dutch manuscript of the lectures Bavinck formulated his criticism in even stronger terms: “The older theology did not pay much attention to the concept and history of revelation, had no eye for its historical and psychological character, for its genesis and development, identified it quickly with Holy Scripture, allowing revelation only there.”⁵⁰

He develops his apologetic argument for revelation from self-consciousness apprehended as an absolute sense of dependence. That self-consciousness, paradoxically, at the same time posits human independence and freedom. Bavinck thus combines Schleiermacher’s concept of religion with Kant’s concept of human autonomy. Bavinck seeks the solution for the seeming antinomy of dependence and autonomy in the fact that of all creatures only human beings are aware of their dependence. This testimony of self-consciousness is the basis of religion and morality. Atheism is

Writings 2:93–105, 95. See also Henk van den Belt, “An Alternative Approach to Apologetics,” *The Kuyper Center Review* 2 (2011), 43–60.

48. *Philosophy of Revelation*, 17.

49. *Philosophy of Revelation*, 22.

50. “De oudere theologie besteedde aan begrip en gesch. der openb. weinig zorg, had voor haar histor. en psych. karakter, voor haar genesis en ontwikkeling geen oog, identificeerde spoedig openbaring met H.S. en liet dus de openbaring uitsluitend in haar bestaan.” Herman Bavinck, “Manuscript for the Philosophy of Revelation,” I, 11. The manuscript is divided into chapters and paragraphs. The quote is from chapter I, paragraph 11. Bavinck Archives, folder 7. Cf. the final Dutch text: “In de oude theologie werd deze vrij uitwendig en mechanisch opgevat, en al zeer spoedig met de Schrift vereenzelvigd. Ons oog gaat er thans hoe langer hoe meer voor open, dat de openbaring op allerlei wijzen historisch en psychologisch „vermittelt” is.” H. Bavinck, *Wijsbegeerte der Openbaring: Stonelezingen voor het jaar 1908, gehouden te Princeton, N.J.* (Kampen: Kok, 1908), 19.

unnatural and intellectually abnormal. 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, but through all nature, both that of man himself and that of the outside world, speaks to him. Not evolution, but revelation alone accounts for this impressive and incontrovertible fact of the worship of God. In self-consciousness God makes known to us man, the world, and himself.⁵¹

In *The Philosophy of Revelation* Bavinck on the one hand maintains the presupposition of Christian faith but on the other hand seeks a way to demonstrate why Christianity is the only plausible answer to the epistemological and existential challenges of modernity. In chapter 6, “Revelation and Religion,” he takes his starting point in religion as a general phenomenon: “religion is characteristic of all peoples and all men; however deeply a human being may be sunk in degradation, he is conscious of the existence of God and of his duty to worship him” (142). After discussing several theories that have tried to explain religion, Bavinck concludes that they offer no satisfactory explanation and necessarily see religion as an inborn quality.

If, however, religion as *religio insita* is an essential element of human nature, it points directly back to revelation. We stand here before essentially the same dilemma as in the case of self-consciousness. If this is not a delusion or imagination, the reality of the self is necessarily included in it; hence religion is either a pathology of the human spirit, or it postulates the existence, the revelation, and the knowableness of God. (159–60)

Bavinck concludes that both the investigation of the origin and of the essence of religion reveal “that religion and revelation are bound together very intimately, and that they cannot be separated” (163). He agrees with Cornelis Petrus Tiele (1830–1902) that all religions are redemption-religions. “The first question always is, What must I do to be saved? This being so, religion everywhere, by virtue of its very nature, carries along with it the idea of revelation”

51. *Philosophy of Revelation*, 79; hereafter referenced in text.

(163).⁵² Even the attempts to classify religions have led to the acknowledgment that revelation is necessary.

The whole chapter can be read as a defense of the importance of the former distinction between true and false religion. Bavinck writes that “it is worthy of remark that the old distribution of religions into true and false has been revived in a new form” (166). Remarkably, the original manuscript even opens with the statement: “Formerly the distinction between *religio falsa et vera* was common, and the pagan religions were seen as forms of idolatry.”⁵³ After showing that the newer approach in which all religions are only seen as different in degree and in which revelation and religion are seen as two sides of the same thing is untenable, he returns to the claim that Christianity is the true religion from the essential difference between religion and magic. “One cannot say that magic, superstition is based on revelation, has been God’s will; but of the pure religion (supposing that it exists, and for now apart from the question what it is), one must say: it rests on revelation.”⁵⁴ Either all religion is superstition, or religion differs from superstition and rests on the existence, knowability, and revelation of God.

52. The reference is to C.P. Tiele, *Inleiding tot de godsdienstwetenschap* (Amsterdam: P.N. van Kampen, 1897–1899), 1:61; 2:66, 110, 214, 215. On Tiele, see E.H. Cossee and H.D. Tjalsma, eds., *Geloof en Onderzoek. Uit het leven en werk van C.P. Tiele (1830–1902)* (Rotterdam: Stichting Historische Publicaties Rotterdamum, 2002).

53. “Maar hier staan wij dadelijk voor de vraag wat religie is. Vroeger onderscheidde men *religio falsa et vera*, en beschouwde de Heid. Godsdiensten als afgoderijen (idololatrie). De . . . der heidenen waren nog wel godsdiensten maar waren falsch. Die onderscheiding is als onwetenschappelijk . . . vervangen. Alle godsdiensten waren religie, slechts in graad onderscheiden. Openbaring en godsdienst zijn 2 zijden van dezelfde zaak. Maar daardoor kwam men in zeer groote moeilijkheid bij de vraag naar wezen en oorsprong der godsdienst.” Bavinck, ‘Manuscript for the Philosophy of Revelation’, VII, 1. Bavinck Archives, folder 7.

54. “Bij de magie, superstitie kan men niet zeggen, zij berust op openbaring, is Gods wil geweest, maar bij de zuivere religie (onderstel dat deze er is, en afgezien thans nog van de vraag wat zij is), moet men zeggen: zij rust op openbaring. Want één van beide: of God heeft Z. niet geopenbaard, en dan is er geen kennis van Hem en geen godsdienst, dan is alle godsdienst superstitie. Of: er is wel religie onderscheiden v. superstitie, en dan kan deze alleen berusten op bestaan, openbaring en kenbaarheid Gods.” Bavinck, ‘Manuscript for the Philosophy of Revelation’, VII, 8. Bavinck Archives, folder 7.

The emergence of Paganism (i.e., the false religion, superstition, magic) presupposes the true religion, the revelation of God; because otherwise there is no true or false religion, no religion or magic, but everything is magic, superstition, nonsense; just like injustice presupposes justice, truth falsehood, and evil good.⁵⁵

Any critical edition of the *Philosophy of Revelation* should take the text of the manuscript into account or maybe even publish it entirely. Although it differs from the final edition, it sometimes states Bavinck's underlying intentions more clearly than the final edition.

The science of religion, says Bavinck both in the manuscript and in the final edition, must acknowledge an essential difference between magic and religion. Superstition and magic are often connected with religion, but they are neither the source nor the essence of it. Rather, they are morbid phenomena which also occur among the most advanced religions and even in Christianity, and they have adherents not only among common people but also among thousands of the cultured and educated. The great question is not how did religions originate but where superstition and magic come from. False religion points back to true religion just as sickness reminds us of health.

Superstition and magic could not have arisen if the idea of another world than this world of nature had not been deeply imprinted on man's self-consciousness. They themselves are of a later origin, but they presuppose religion, which is inherent in human nature, having its foundation and principle in the creation of man in the image of God. Hence religion is, not only with reference to its origin and essence, but also with reference to its truth and validity, founded in revelation. Without revelation religion sinks back into a pernicious superstition. (169)

This final conclusion, of course, paves the way for the discussion of true religion in the next chapter: "Revelation and Christianity." The thoughts in this chapter unfold along the lines of general and special revelation. But his emphasis differs from the *Reformed Dogmatics*. There general revelation was God's objective revelation in nature and history combined with the subjective revelation of the

55. "Het ontstaan van het Heidendom (= de valsche religie, superstitie, magie) onderstelt de ware religie, de openb. Gods want anders is er geen ware of valsche religie, geen religie of magie, maar is alles magie, bijgeloof, dwaasheid; evenals ook het onrecht het recht, de leugen de waarheid, het kwade het goede onderstelt." Bavinck, "Manuscript for the *Philosophy of Revelation*," VII, 8. Bavinck Archives, folder 7.

semen religionis. Here, however, Bavinck stresses the continuity between the original revelation to all mankind and the Scriptural revelation to Israel. By bringing in the notion of salvation history Bavinck gives the Reformed view of general and special revelation a certain twist. "The distinction between what has come to be called general and special revelation does not begin until the call of Abraham; before that the two intermingle, and so far have become the property of all peoples and nations" (188).

Special revelation is not set antithetically over against religiosity or religion as such but over against the corruption which entered into the religious life. It takes up, confirms, and completes everything put into human nature by general revelation. Bavinck explicitly rejects the earlier view that exclusively emphasized the antithesis, although he also objects to the view which has an eye only for agreement and affinity between general and special revelation. The essential difference between the earlier general revelation and God's revelation to Abraham is not the unity of God or the moral law but the covenant of grace.

Every other view fails to do justice to special revelation, effaces its difference from general revelation, degrades the Old Testament, rends apart the two economies of the same covenant of grace, and even gradually changes the gospel of the New Covenant into a law, and makes of Christ a second Moses. (192–93)

Behind the Scriptures lies the revelation which begins with the origin of the human race, follows the line of Seth and Shem, and then flows on in the channel of the covenant with Abraham. The God who manifested himself to him and later to Moses is no new God but the Creator of heaven and earth "who had been originally known to all men, and had still preserved the knowledge and worship of himself in many, in more or less pure form" (191). In a footnote Bavinck refers to a work by Martin Peisker, who claimed that Adonai was also worshiped by the gentiles who had a natural (*naturhaft*) connection to Him.⁵⁶

Religious science tries to explain the Christian faith from the "weak beggarly elements and the poorest possible beginnings" of religion. All these attempts will not succeed, but they have an impor-

56. M. Peisker, *Die Beziehungen der nichtisraeliten zu Jahve nach der Anschauung der altisraelitischen Quellen-schriften* (Leipzig: Drugulen, 1906).

tant value and contain a rich promise. “Through them the Christian religion will become better known in its close connection with the world and history, and the words and facts of the New Testament will be better understood in their universal significance and bearing” (199–200). They will even throw into light that Christianity is unique. Christ is the desire of the nations and the savior of the world. In the whole course of revelation the will of God “unfolds itself ever more clearly as the love of God, the grace of the Son, and the communion of the Holy Ghost” (202).

Development

There is a development in Bavinck’s view of religion and revelation. He first was very skeptical about the possibilities of the science of religion, but later he took this science much more seriously. The early skepticism may have been caused by the academic situation in the Netherlands in which there was a strong tendency to see theology as science of religion. As early as 1892 Bavinck had written on the issue and had claimed that theology in the proper sense can only exist if faith in a special revelation is presupposed.⁵⁷ The distinction between true and false religion was erased by philosophy (200). The tension that characterizes his work is already present in that article. On the one hand he says that the science of religion is not based on faith and rejects the opposition between true and false, and “this is in direct conflict with the Christian faith. Because for faith Christianity is not a religion among many, not even the highest among many, but the only true religion, and all religions of the heathens are idolatry” (208). On the other hand he says that religions have a right to be studied. “The old formulas and schemes don’t work anymore. It is no longer possible to see Buddha, Zoroaster, and Mohammed as charlatans and tools of Satan” (217). Christians can also study religions to find the meaning of the nations within the history of the kingdom of God and to trace the relationship and distinction between pagan religions and the Christian

57. Bavinck, “Godgeleerdheid en Godsdienstwetenschap,” 197; hereafter referenced in text. For a discussion of Bavinck and religious science, see Jan . N. Bremmer, “Een mislukte ontmoeting: Bavinck en de godsdienstwetenschappen,” in George Harinck and Gerrit W. Neven, eds., *Ontmoetingen met Bavinck* (Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 2005), 1–12.

religion. Still Bavinck does not think that this belongs to theology but to the historical field of the humanities.

The development in Bavinck's thought would have been stronger if he had not spoken so positively on religion from the perspective of general revelation and common grace in the first edition of the *Reformed Dogmatics*. The positive assessment of religion—especially in the reform-religions and their founders—was present early in his work. Bavinck admits that this positive assessment differs from the Reformed tradition that acknowledged common grace in the elements of truth in philosophy and of beauty in the arts—in the so called *spoliatio Aegyptiorum*—but not to pagan religion as such.

Our findings regarding the differences in method between the editions of the *Reformed Dogmatics* reveal a growing independency in his assessment of Reformed theology. Bavinck maintained the superiority of Christianity as the true religion (*vera religio*) and his rejection of a neutral approach. Still he shifts from taking the exclusiveness of Christianity as starting point to arguing towards that exclusiveness as his final conclusion. As such the switch can be reduced to a methodological preference, but in the scope of the general development in his thought it underlines the turn from a Reformed orthodox to a neo-Calvinist view of religiosity and religions. This new view appears most clearly in the *Philosophy of Revelation* where Bavinck bases the openness to trace elements of truth in religions on a salvation-historical view of the relationship between general and special revelation.

Conclusions

For Bavinck religion always depends on revelation. Regarding the question of whether religions as such are revelational, Bavinck's position can be summarized in three statements.

In the first place, human religion flows from the subjective *semen religionis*, the receptivity for God's revelation, which is the *principium internum* of revelation. Religion is a form of revelation; namely, the internal counterpart of God's general revelation in nature and history. The underlying presupposition is the object-subject distinction.

Secondly, because of the essential distinction between true and false religion, only those elements in non-Christian religions that are not a result of the decay of the original true religion can be seen as revelation. The recognition of elements of truth is based on the concepts of general revelation and common grace. These concepts allow Bavinck to offer positive remarks on the founders of the reform-religions. Bavinck was inspired by Kuyper on this point, and his assessment of common grace is typical for neo-Calvinism.

There seems to be a third step in Bavinck's development in the Stone Lectures where he, for apologetic reasons, goes as far as possible in reasoning from religion in general towards the *vera religio* instead of starting with that claim. There not only is the true religion seen as the key to interpret the elements of truth in the religions, but also the true religion is viewed as that which the non-Christian religions have in common with Christianity due to their common basis in the period within which general and special revelation were still one.

Bavinck's later approach nuances the strong distinction between true and false religion. He wanted to overcome the orthodox Reformed preoccupation with *vera religio* as starting point of the discussion of revelation and religion. Perhaps in the clear assessment of truth and falsehood Reformed Orthodoxy is safer than neo-Calvinism. The strength of Bavinck's approach, however, is that he explains that Christianity as *vera religio* answers the deepest need of all human beings. Bavinck longed to express the catholicity of the Christian faith in his own context and therefore refused merely to copy traditional positions. "Christianity is the true, but also the highest and purest religion, it is the truth of all religions. . . . What is sought there can be found here."⁵⁸

58. *GD*, 1st ed., 1:240; *GD*, 1:291; cf. *RD*, 1:320.

A Soft Spot for Paganism? Herman Bavinck and “Insider” Movements

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A highly controversial trend in missiology, often referred to as “insider” movements, is generating much debate in contemporary evangelical churches, mission agencies, and Bible translation societies.¹ At least one major North American Reformed church body, the Presbyterian Church in America, has established a study committee to examine its biblical fidelity.² The challenges presented by an “insider” model of missions are multifaceted and complex. They include serious questions regarding Bible translation such as whether it is legitimate to omit biological terms (e.g., Father, Son) with respect to God since such language is confusing and offensive to Muslim sensibilities. In addition this model raises crucial theological, soteriological, and ecclesiological questions regarding whether and to what extent a Muslim background believer may retain his or her Muslim identity—that is, for instance, continue to attend the Mosque, observe dietary laws, and/or recite the *shahada* or confession of faith: “There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is the Prophet of God.”

My field of expertise is not missiology, and I would not presume to attempt a final settlement on these controversial topics. I do have a particular interest in the theology of Herman Bavinck. And, somewhat to my surprise, the name “Bavinck” surfaces from time to time in the context of this debate.³ It is, of course, highly gratifying that

1. Joshua Lingel, Jeff Morton, Bill Nikides, eds., *Chrislam: How Missionaries are Promoting an Islamized Gospel*, rev. ed. (Garden Grove, CA: i2 Ministries Publishing, 2012).

2. Part One of their report may be found at <http://www.pcaac.org/2012/05/report-of-the-pca-ga-ad-interim-committee-on-insider-movements/>.

3. In this essay “Bavinck” refers to Herman unless noted otherwise.

“Uncle Herman” is (finally!) getting the recognition he deserves. It is simultaneously alarming (to me, at least) that some apparently find in his doctrine of common grace a sympathetic rationale for an “insider” model of missions.⁴ This essay aims to clarify significant confusion in this regard, first, by critically examining one repeated and misleading appeal to Bavinck, and, second, by examining the issue through the lens of Bavinck’s nature/grace polemic, which renders any appeal by “insider” advocates highly dubious at best.

A Soft Spot for Paganism?

One purpose of Richard J. Mouw’s helpful, popular-level introduction to Abraham Kuyper is to explore ways in which Kuyper’s Neo-Calvinism might be supplemented, nuanced, or otherwise tasked to peculiarly twenty-first-century problems.⁵ He calls this an *aggiornamento* or “updating” of Kuyper. One of the ways he has in mind is reading Kuyper in conjunction with his closest colleague, Herman Bavinck. In contrast to Kuyper’s strident antithetical language, Mouw finds in Bavinck a much more moderate tone. His first example relates directly to Islam:

Take Bavinck’s comments about Islam. In one of his hefty volumes in systematic theology he writes that “in the past the [Christian] study of religions was pursued exclusively in the interest of dogmatics and apologetics.” This meant, he says, that Mohammed and others “were simply considered imposters, enemies of God, accomplices of the devil.” Now

Herman’s nephew Johan is obviously relevant to this topic as well. For interaction with J. H. Bavinck’s missiology and Islam, see Chris Flint, “How Does Christianity ‘Subversively Fulfil’ Islam?” *St. Francis Magazine* 8, no. 6 (December 2012): 776–822.

4. There is in fact no such thing as *the* “insider” model; rather, there is a continuum of missiological approaches ranging from little to no cultural contextualization of Christianity (C1) on the one hand and near complete cultural absorption of Christianity (C6) on the other. I will use the term “insider” movement to refer to the “C4–6” end of the spectrum, which, with various nuances, encourages Muslim background believers to continue to identify as Muslims, observe Islamic law (dietary and otherwise), recite prayers, and not to leave the Mosque. For the origins of the C1 to C6 spectrum, see John Travis, “The C1 to C6 Spectrum,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 34 (1998).

5. *Abraham Kuyper: A Short and Personal Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), Section 2.

that their perspectives are becoming “more precisely known,” however, “this interpretation has proven to be untenable.” We do well to search for the ways, he insists, in which such perspectives display “an illumination by the Logos, a working of God’s Spirit.”⁶

This is not just a “moderate” Bavinck—this is a *shockingly* moderate Bavinck. The implication is quite clear: Herman Bavinck did not believe that Mohammed was an imposter, an enemy of God, or an accomplice of the Devil. On the contrary, he was illumined by the Holy Spirit of God himself. Mouw simply leaves the matter hanging without further comment. But seeds, once sown, inevitably bear fruit.

In a recent master’s thesis J. W. Stevenson seeks to apply the biblical-theological and missiological insights of J. H. Bavinck to contemporary questions of contextualization and “insider” movements.⁷ Drawing a contrast between J. H. and Herman, he suggests that Herman substantially softened the antithesis between Christianity and pagan religions and believed that in at least some respects paganism is a “longing for Jesus Christ.” To substantiate this claim, he proffers the same quote as did Mouw, but a bit more fully:

In the past the study of religions was pursued exclusively in the interest of dogmatics and apologetics. The founders of [non-Christian] religions, like Mohammed, were simply considered impostors, enemies of God, accomplices of the devil. But ever since those religions have become more precisely known, this interpretation has proven to be untenable; it clashed both with history and psychology. Also among pagans, says Scripture, there is a revelation of God, an illumination by the Logos, a working of God’s Spirit . . . an operation of God’s Spirit and of his common grace is discernible not only in science and art, morality and law, but also in the religions. . . . Founders of religion, after all, were not impostors or agents of Satan but men who, being religiously inclined, had

6. *Kuyper*, 77; quoting Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols., ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003–2008), 1:318; hereafter referenced as *RD*.

7. J. W. Stevenson, “Johan Herman Bavinck and Contemporary Contextualization Among Muslims: An Evaluation of the Insider Movement,” (MAR thesis, Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte, NC, 2011). I should emphasize that Stevenson himself is not an “Insider” advocate; rather, he seems to think that Herman Bavinck is more congenial to “insider” thinking than J. H. Bavinck.

to fulfill a mission to their time and people and often exerted a beneficial influence on the life of peoples.⁸

Mouw left the reader to draw his or her own conclusions about Bavinck’s beliefs, but Stevenson spells them out: (1) Mohammed was not an accomplice of the Devil; (2) even amidst his error, the Spirit of God worked through Mohammed; and (3) Mohammed did provide some benefit to those around him. These observations lead Stevenson to conclude: “[W]e see in Herman Bavinck a willingness to admit that while certainly truth is mixed with error regarding salvation, we have in Islam many elements pointing toward salvation in Christ. Thus Islam could—in a limited sense—be seen as preparation for the message of salvation in Christ.”⁹

There are a number of problems with Mouw’s and Stevenson’s use of this quote, not least of which is the manner of quotation itself. The use of ellipses is a helpful academic tool so long as it does not serve to obscure material germane to the subject at hand. In Stevenson’s version two ellipses appear. A casual reader would not know that this small quote actually covers over two pages of material and that more than a dozen sentences are elided in the first one alone. Mouw’s version is so paraphrased that quotation marks are hardly needed.

So what is missing even in Stevenson’s expanded version of the quote? Fifteen Scripture references; appeals to the church fathers (Justin, Clement of Alexandria, Bede, Augustine), a Medieval theologian (Thomas), John Calvin, and the Reformed tradition; as well as several other relevant contextual clues. The portion of the text chosen for omission makes obvious that the author deliberately omitted all references to the Bible and church tradition, even to the point of omitting this singular sentence: “Calvin rightly spoke of a ‘seed of religion,’ a ‘sense of divinity.’” The result is a significant distortion: far from attempting to say anything unusual (much less controversial), Bavinck is self-consciously locating his views in a perennial stream of thought in the orthodox Christian tradition from its earliest times (Justin) to the more recent Reformed tradition.

8. Stevenson, 26–27; quoting Bavinck, *RD*, 1:318–19.

9. Stevenson, 29.

The Christian church has almost universally recognized—from Paul’s address in Acts 17 (cited by Bavinck) to Justin’s second-century apologetic to Thomas’s Medieval synthesis to the Swiss Reformation and beyond—that there is much “good” in the pagan world whether it be in philosophy, art, civics, or other cultural artifacts. The question is how to account for that “good.” His discussion of the tradition makes clear that, whatever he is saying, he is in significant continuity with longstanding Christian tradition. More specifically, he singles out the Reformed tradition with its doctrine of common grace as providing a uniquely helpful explanation of the problem. Simply put: everybody recognizes the relative “goods” in pagan cultures including Islamic culture. The doctrine of common grace maintains that the Holy Spirit is the sole source of good in the fallen world; the ultimate agency of any good accomplished by fallen humanity is God himself. For theologians who take the gravity of sin and the fall seriously, what, after all, is the alternative? This profoundly important doctrine enables Bavinck to (1) consistently maintain the doctrine of total depravity (an advantage, he argues, over Thomism), (2) nevertheless recognize the “good” wherever it may be found, and (3) attribute this “good” not to the account of humanity (e.g., Thomism’s “natural man”) but to God himself.

Particularly important here is that far from softening the antithesis between good and evil or blending light and darkness, the doctrine of common grace claims that any “good” in paganism is not *because* of paganism (this would blur the antithesis) but *in spite of* paganism (this starkly upholds the antithesis). It is not paganism that is to be praised in any way, shape, or form but the God who, in spite of human rebellion, continues his good works.¹⁰ In his rendition of the quote Stevenson omits this revealing summation by Bavinck: “What in paganism is the caricature, the living original is here [in Christianity]. What is appearance there is essence here. What is sought there can be found here.”¹¹ Note well: paganism is “caricature” and “appearance.” It has no resources of its own but rather is parasitic of the truth.

10. Cf. his assertion: “Hereby [in the doctrine of common grace] we have not denied the serious character of sin.” Herman Bavinck, “Common Grace,” trans. R.C. Van Leeuwen, *Calvin Theological Journal* 24, no. 1 (1989): 60–61.

11. *RD*, 1:320.

There is an important additional cue in Bavinck’s text; namely, his interest in different *disciplinary approaches* to evaluating founders of pagan religions. So, for example, Bavinck claims that in the premodern period figures like Mohammed were evaluated for strictly “dogmatic or apologetic” purposes. He believes that such a disciplinary approach is not sophisticated enough, for it rarely goes beyond assuming that the person was demon-possessed or a snake-oil salesman. This is hand-in-hand with Bavinck’s well-known fascination with the brand-new discipline of psychology about which he not only published an entire book but also critically included as a significant conversation partner in his *Dogmatics*.¹²

So when Bavinck writes, “[b]ut ever since those religions have become more precisely known, this interpretation has proven to be untenable; it clashed both with history and psychology,” he is providing a *disciplinary* context.¹³ And it is precisely that context in which this (otherwise controversial) comment needs to be read: “Founders of religion, after all, were not impostors or agents of Satan but men who, being religiously inclined, had to fulfill a mission to their time and people and often exerted a beneficial influence on the life of peoples.”¹⁴ Bavinck is not stating this as an objective matter; rather, he is stating this from the relatively recent disciplinary standpoint of the psychology of religion as a *subjective* matter (i.e., “being religiously inclined”). In other words, the founders of pagan religions did not consider *themselves* demon-possessed, accomplices to the Devil, or simple con artists.

Bavinck was fascinated no less than his nephew by the psychological phenomenon of the ungodly “suppressing the truth” (Rom. 1:18ff.), and he did not believe that allegations of demon possession or “knowing frauds” were sufficient to explain either the founders of pagan religions or their successes. Bavinck took the “conversions” of these founders, whether Buddha or Mohammed, seriously. In his mind, they did have some kind of (false) religious experience which, as a subjective matter, far better explains their success than the

12. See Herman Bavinck, *Beginnselen der psychologie* (Kampen: Kok, 1897); cf. *RD*, 3:556–64.

13. *RD*, 1:318.

14. *RD*, 1:319.

supposition that they were self-conscious, knowing frauds.¹⁵ As his own words indicate, Bavinck's concern in this passage is that pre-modern apologetic approaches to paganism short-circuit complex questions and, as a direct result, do not take the deceptiveness of sin and the power of truth suppression *seriously enough*. He is only highlighting that lies need to resemble the truth to have plausibility; the Devil masquerades as an angel of light; false religion must provide some benefit to be successful. So he adds, "The various religions, however mixed with error they may have been, to some extent met people's religious needs and brought consolation amidst the pain and sorrow of life."¹⁶ This is not only uncontroversial but also fairly obvious. There is no such thing as a religious sect that offers literally nothing for adherents to gain.

As an objective matter—or, better, from the standpoint of Christian faith—the religions they founded were false. Bavinck writes:

But the person who positions himself squarely in the center of special revelation and surveys the whole scene from that perspective soon discovers that, for all the formal similarity, there exists a large material difference between the prophets of Israel and the fortune-tellers of the Greeks, between the apostles of Christ and the envoys of Mohammed, between biblical miracles and pagan sorceries, between Scripture and the holy books of the peoples of the earth. The religions of the peoples, like their entire culture, show us how much development people can or cannot achieve, indeed not without God, yet without his special grace. But the special grace that comes to us centrally in Christ shows us how deeply God can descend to his fallen creation to save it.¹⁷

To say these religions are objectively false does not mean that the Holy Spirit is entirely absent from them. This is why Bavinck notes that, according to Scripture, there is among pagans "a revelation of God, an illumination by the Logos, a working of God's Spirit" and that "an operation of God's Spirit and of his common grace is discernible not only in science and art, morality and law, but also in the religions."¹⁸ He routinely describes this as God not leaving him-

15. Cf. *RD*, 4:133–34.

16. *RD*, 1:319.

17. *RD*, 1:343.

18. *RD*, 1:318 and 319.

self “without a witness.” As revelation it establishes moral culpability, but it is insufficient to save. His comment about the founders of religions not being mere imposters or tools of Satan falls in the same vein. With such statements he is not saying that these elements “point toward salvation in Christ” as Stevenson claims but only that God’s common grace is at work in them.

By failing to recognize the disciplinary context of Bavinck’s discussion, which is of a piece with omitting all historical and biblical context, Stevenson’s first conclusion “culled” from Bavinck is entirely superficial: that Bavinck did not consider Mohammed an “accomplice of the Devil.” From an objective standpoint he certainly did believe Islam to be the work of the Devil. Whatever “goods” one might ascribe to it is solely the work of the Holy Spirit in common grace. These goods are not, in other words, to Mohammed’s credit, much less in any way salvific.¹⁹ So the second conclusion, that “even amidst his error, the Spirit of God worked through Mohammed,” is not only liable to grave misunderstanding (e.g., at worst, positively endorsing Islam) but, additionally, it begs the question as to what exactly the “goods” are in Islam. And here a significant statement is omitted from the quotation:

What comes to us from the pagan world are not just cries of despair but also expressions of confidence, hope, resignation, peace, submission, patience, etc. All the elements and forms that are essential to religion (a concept of God, a sense of guilt, a desire for redemption, sacrifice, priesthood, temple, cult, prayer, etc.), though corrupted, nevertheless do also occur in pagan religions.²⁰

Notice that what is in view here are “elements and forms” rather than material content. When this is compared with his later statement that “for all the *formal* similarity, there exists a large *material* difference between . . . the apostles of Christ and the envoys of Muhammed,” it is apparent that Bavinck is operating with a form/matter distinction. The “elements and forms” do form a point of unity and contact between pagan religion and Christianity. What

19. “By [God’s] common grace he restrains sin with its power to dissolve and destroy. Yet common grace is not enough. It compels but it does not change; it restrains but does not conquer. Unrighteousness breaks through its fences again and again.” Bavinck, “Common Grace,” 61.

20. *RD*, 1:319.

makes them divergent is their material content.²¹ Stevenson's final conclusion, therefore, "Islam could—in a limited sense—be seen as preparation for the message of salvation in Christ," is also liable to grave misunderstanding if for no other reason than that he does not explain what he means by "in a limited sense." Materially, as it respects the actual subject matter of Muslim religious practice, Islam is not a "preparation" for the message of salvation in Christ as though Christ were a supplemental capstone to a religion already good as far as it goes. Formally, however, in the ways Bavinck himself suggests ("a concept of God, sense of guilt, desire for redemption," etc.) Christianity does in fact supply in broad daylight that for which the pagans formerly (and currently!) groped in futility (Acts 17:27).

The implications drawn from Bavinck by Stevenson are superficial and misleading, stemming from insensitivity to the biblical, traditional, and interdisciplinary contexts Bavinck is addressing. Extrapolating from these comments any congeniality, however cautiously stated, toward paganism (or, in this context, Islam) is a misreading of Bavinck's doctrine of common grace. Stevenson has hastily confused common grace with a form of natural theology. But common grace is not God's stamp of *approval* on pagan cultural artifacts, as though God declares ignorant worship in some sense good enough; common grace is his patience with and forbearance of paganism:

[T]here is nothing in Israel for which analogies cannot be found elsewhere as well: circumcision, sacrifice, prayer, priesthood, temple, altar, ceremonies, feast days, mores, customs, political and social codes, and so on occur among other people as well. . . . Yet we must not—for the sake of the kinship and connection between them—overlook the essential difference. This is the special grace that was unknown to the pagans. All pagan religions are self-willed and legalistic. They are all the aftereffects and adulterations of the covenant of works. Human beings here consistently try to bring about their own salvation by purifications, asceticism, penance, sacrifice, law observance, ceremony, and so on.²²

Noting commonality does not in the slightest entail a lessening of the antithesis (indeed, he says, "we *must* not"), and Stevenson

21. *RD*, 1:342–43.

22. *RD*, 3:219; cf. "Common Grace," 41.

draws a distinction between uncle and nephew in this regard that is a mirage of his own making.

Grace Supplements Nature?

Considered more broadly, the notion that Herman Bavinck’s doctrine of common grace gives some aid, comfort, or rationale for “insider” models for missions runs into a much bigger problem. Bavinck wrote three magisterial treatments of the doctrine: “The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church” (1888), “Common Grace” (1894), and “Calvin and Common Grace” (1909). In each of these one theological construct that he is most concerned to overthrow dominates the discussion: represented in purest form by Roman Catholicism, this is the view that nature and grace represent two “tiers” of reality and that grace is a supplementary add-on (the so-called *donum superadditum*) to nature. Nature in this view (inclusive of sociocultural artifacts) is not wholly corrupted by sin but ethically neutral in and of itself, only of a lower order than that of supernatural grace. God’s grace is conceived as bringing nature, which is good so far as it goes, to its highest fulfillment or expression. It is no exaggeration to say that above all else it is this hierarchical, supplementary system that Bavinck dedicated his entire career to dismantling. In this view sin is regarded far less seriously than it ought, and the special, blood-bought grace of the Lord Jesus Christ becomes something less than fully necessary for much, if not most, of human experience.

Since Rome views nature and grace, or creation and re-creation, as two independent realities, Bavinck perceptively notes that “[n]othing remains but a *compromise* between the natural and the supernatural. . . .”²³ This explains “the remarkable phenomenon that Rome has always reared two types of children and has tailored Christianity more or less *to suit all men without exception*.”²⁴ He goes on to explain:

Accordingly, we can find as many grades and stages of goodness and virtue as it pleases God to make. Hierarchical order and arrangement

23. “The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 27, no. 2 (1992): 229 (emphasis added).

24. “Common Grace,” 47 (emphasis added).

constitute the central principle of the Roman system. Hierarchy among the angels, hierarchy in the knowledge of God, hierarchy in moral life, hierarchy in the church, and, on the other side of the grave, hierarchy in the *receptacula* [places of rest]. The highest is not for everyone. The natural man of 1 Cor. 2:14 is, according to Rome, not sinful man but man without the *donum superadditum*. This man is capable, through the exercising of his gifts, of completely attaining his natural destination. *Hence the milder judgment that Rome pronounces over the heathen.*²⁵

Bavinck saw that this nature/grace scheme can only result in syncretism, a “compromise” of greater or lesser degrees between grace and nature, or, if you will, Christianity and pagan cultural forms. And it has resulted historically in Roman Catholic syncretism with the gospel being a supplemental adornment, the fruition or fulfillment of pagan religion. The gospel *elevates* the “natural” rather than permeates and renews it. And if there were any doubt whether Bavinck properly understood the pulse of Roman Catholic theology, Rome has essentially written its own vindication of him with Vatican II’s embrace of sincere Muslims, well-meaning unbelievers, and those who “strive to live a good life” into the communion of saints.²⁶

25. “Common Grace,” 47 (emphasis added).

26. *Lumen Gentium* 16. Many Roman Catholics understandably continue to bristle at Bavinck’s critique, claiming that he did not properly understand Roman Catholicism, particularly Thomas Aquinas. See Arvin Vos, *Aquinas, Calvin, and Contemporary Protestant Views on the Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: Christian University Press, 1985); Eduardo J. Echeverria, *Berkouwer and Catholicism: Disputed Questions* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); Echeverria, “The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology: A Catholic Response to Herman Bavinck,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (2010): 87–116. While obviously beyond the scope of this essay, a few comments are in order. Attempts at exonerating Thomas from Bavinck’s charge of nature/grace dualism or a “two-tiered” cosmos are revisionist in character. This does not make them wrong. It is quite possible that a careful, nuanced reading of Thomas reveals in his thought a more integrated cosmos than is commonly assumed. The problem is that Roman Catholic theologians themselves articulate Roman Catholic dogma in precisely the dualistic terms Bavinck describes. They did so in his day (see *RD*, 2:255n69) and they continue to do so today. Echeverria admits as much: “I do not mean to deny that there have been and still are Catholic rationalists of this sort, but such rationalism is a corruption of Aquinas’s thought and by implication the teaching of Vatican I. Thus, Bavinck’s charge will not stick.” “A Catholic Response,” 99. That hardly settles matters. Recently, Roman Catholic philosopher Edward Feser took to the online pages of *First Things* to present a thoroughly dualistic version of Thomism, and he would no doubt be resistant to the notion he is “corrupting” Aquinas. “A Christian Hart, a Humean Head,” *On The Square*,

We are thus not really left to speculate what Herman Bavinck would have thought of “insider” models for missions. The theological construct that underwrites phrases like “Messianic Muslim” or “Jesus-following Muslim” and practices such as professing Christians praying Muslim prayers, reciting the *shahadah* in any number of modified forms, reading the Koran, going to the Mosque, and observing ascetic Islamic dietary restrictions is—and can only be—one that views the gospel and grace of Jesus Christ as a supplementary add-on to a pre-existing, morally neutral, socio-religious identity. Islam needs only supplementation, not death and resurrection. It needs elevation, not regeneration.

There is no doubt whatsoever, on the other hand, that Herman Bavinck believed that grace *restores* and *renews* nature. Not mere supplementation but permeation, renovation, regeneration, and renewal. Nature (much less *pagan religion*) is not ethically neutral in a fallen world but hostile to the things of God. It is upheld by the common grace of God not because it has anything in itself to commend it but because by it God insures there is a world susceptible of salvation at all.

I conclude with a final observation from Bavinck about common grace. Counterintuitive though it may be, he maintains that “[i]n this doctrine of *gratia communis* the Reformed maintained the *particular and absolute* character of the Christian religion on the one hand, while on the other they were second to none in appreciating all that God continued to give of beauty and worth to sinful men.”²⁷ It seems that many accounts of common grace play these hands off of each other. Appreciation for beauty and worth among sinful men means *downplaying* the particular and absolute character of Christianity. “Insider” movements, it would seem, promote this very thing. But they should remove Herman Bavinck’s name from their list of supporters.

www.firstthings.com, 6 March 2013; cf. David Bentley Hart’s reply in *First Things*, May 2013, 71–72. The very existence of Fergus Kerr’s *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002) indicates that Thomism is far too variegated for Echeverria or others to lay the blame of misunderstanding at Herman Bavinck’s feet.

27. “Common Grace,” 52 (emphasis added).

A Brief Response to Mattson’s “A Soft Spot for Paganism? Bavinck and Insider Movements”

J. W. Stevenson

It was with both surprise and gratitude that I discovered that Dr. Brian Mattson had chosen to deal with my thesis in his article “A Soft Spot for Paganism? Bavinck and Insider Movements.” Since I spent considerable time correlating the work of Herman and J. H. Bavinck with the current insider movement discussion, I obviously believe there is much fruit for current issues to be found by exploring their theology and missiology.

At the same time I was quite surprised by the substance of Mattson’s response to my thesis, or, to be more accurate, to Chapter 2 of my thesis.¹ While I appreciate portions of his article, particularly the reflections on Bavinck’s views on grace and nature in relation to other religions, I believe that Mattson has misunderstood and mischaracterized my position. Though I do not intend to give a full reply to all of his criticisms, I will offer three responses that hopefully clarify my thesis in relation to Bavinck and the insider movement.

1. Bavinck should not be used to support insider movements.

Mattson’s apparent impetus for writing his article was his alarm that Herman Bavinck’s thought may be used as support for insider methodology. He writes, “It is simultaneously alarming (to me, at least) that some, apparently, find in his doctrine of common grace a

1. J. W. Stevenson, “Other Religions in the Perspectives of Johan Herman and Herman Bavinck,” in “Johan Herman Bavinck and Contemporary Contextualization Among Muslims: An Evaluation of the Insider Movement,” (MAR thesis, Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte, NC, 2011), ch. 2.

sympathetic rationale for an ‘insider’ model of missions” (33). Regarding my thesis in particular, he notes, “I should emphasize that Stevenson himself is not an ‘insider’ advocate; rather, he seems to think that Herman Bavinck is more congenial to ‘insider’ thinking than his nephew, Johan” (34, n. 7). His concluding words further illustrate his concern: “But they [insider advocates] should remove Herman Bavinck’s name from their list of supporters” (43).

What is troubling about this central concern of his essay is simply that nowhere in my thesis do I suggest that Herman Bavinck’s theology can be used to support insider methodology.² In fact, my conclusion is that “*combining the biblical-theological views of Herman Bavinck and Johan Herman Bavinck on other religions* with Johan Herman Bavinck’s missiological insights produces sound reasons for rejecting the insider approach to contextualization while cautiously accepting C-4 contextualization accompanied by biblically faithful and culturally appropriate Bible translations.”³ Thus the burden of my thesis is contrary to how Mattson seems to have read it, and I reiterate that I do not believe that Herman Bavinck’s theology can be used to support insider methodology.

In trying to understand how Mattson arrived at his reading of my thesis, I must note that in Chapter 4 I indicate that J. H. Bavinck’s firm opposition to seeing any other religion as having its fulfillment in Christ is helpful in analyzing the insider movement.⁴ Perhaps Mattson saw this statement as giving credence to the idea that Herman Bavinck’s views—which are formulated slightly differ-

2. While the specifics of the insider movement discussion are not the focus of Mattson’s piece, he either makes a mistake or is nonchalantly offering quite a redefinition of the term “insider movement.” In note 4 he rightly notes that “insider movement” is shorthand for a variety of contemporary approaches in missiology. However, he goes on to conflate “insider movements” with the C1–C6 scale of Christ-centered communities developed by John Travis. Though related, they are not the same, as Chapter 4 of my thesis illustrates. What is more concerning is that he says that he uses the term “insider movement” to refer to C4–C6 contextualization. I have yet to see any missiologist or theologian suggest that C4 is to be included under the insider rubric. C5 is often closely connected to the insider paradigm, but C4—as exemplified in the writings of Phil Parshall and others—has key differences that would render including it under the label of “insider movement” untenable.

3. Stevenson, 5 (emphasis added).

4. Stevenson, 80.

ently on the question of the “longing of the nations”—can be used to support insider movements. That was never the intent of my thesis, nor do I believe that is a fair reading of it as a whole. But if I was not clear, then I must acknowledge that lack of clarity.

2. J. H. Bavinck disagrees with his uncle regarding the “longing of the nations.”

Mattson writes, “Drawing a contrast between J. H. and Herman, he suggests that Herman substantially softened the antithesis between Christianity and pagan religions and, in fact, believed that in at least some respects paganism is a ‘longing for Jesus Christ’” (34). Aside from the fact that nowhere in my thesis do I claim that Bavinck softened the antithesis between Christianity and pagan religions, Mattson fails to respond to the key citations related to the “longing of the nations for Christ.”

Instead, he immediately goes on to suggest that a quote from Bavinck on the status of Muhammad is the citation that I offer for this point. That is simply not the case. I deal with the “longing of the nations” under a different heading several pages later.⁵ Mattson cites a passage that I do not connect to the question of the longing of the nations and then ignores the evidence that I adduce specifically in connection with the issue at hand.

In order to illustrate the point, here is my paragraph concerning Herman Bavinck’s view of the longing of the nations:

Herman Bavinck makes the following statement regarding the longing of the nations for Christ: “One can with some reason speak of an ‘unconscious prophet tendency’ in paganism. In its most beautiful and noble expressions, it points to Christianity. Jesus Christ is not only the Messiah of Israel but also, as the Authorized Version puts it in Haggai 2:7, ‘the desire of all nations.’” Accordingly, he sees within the desire for salvation, a final judgment, and one who will come to restore the world a desire for Christ himself and the salvation and restoration that he provides. Coupled with his belief that “we must take advantage of the truth elements in pagan philosophy and appropriate it,” we see in Herman Bavinck a willingness to admit that while certainly truth is mixed with error regarding salvation, we have in Islam many elements pointing toward salvation in

5. Stevenson, 28–31.

Christ. Thus Islam could—in a limited sense—be seen as preparation for the message of salvation in Christ.⁶

In that paragraph, based on Bavinck's discussion of Haggai 2:7, I posit that he sees in non-Christian religions a desire or longing for Christ among the nations. This point was worth noting for one key reason: J. H. Bavinck specifically disagrees with his uncle on this point. Oddly, Mattson never seems to acknowledge this in his criticism of my reading of Bavinck, going so far as to say that the disagreement between uncle and nephew is a "mirage" of my own making (41). Nonetheless, after noting that some biblical texts have been understood as saying that there is a "longing of the heathen for Christ," J. H. Bavinck goes on to say this regarding Haggai 2:7:

H. Bavinck also disapproves of the older translation in his *Systematic Theology* but adds: "The thought which is contained in the expression 'desire of all nations' is however entirely scriptural. The heathen hope for the arm of the Lord and the lands wait for the instruction of his servants."⁷

J. H. Bavinck goes on to question whether that interpretation is correct, noting that other passages (Isa. 11:10; 42:4; 51:5; 60:9; and Rom. 15:12) similarly mention the "waiting of the peoples." He remarks:

Does all this signify that there is indeed among the heathen an unconscious longing for the great redeemer and king? When these passages are viewed in their context, it becomes clear that they belong to the salvation prophecies which refer to the last days when the Messiah shall have appeared and Israel shall be redeemed and glorified. Then, as a consequence of the glorifying of Israel, there shall be a movement among the peoples and they shall then ask after him who has delivered Israel with so great a salvation. In other words, these passages do not portray a constant attitude of heathenism through all the centuries, but they refer rather to a very particular saving event which shall appear to our wondering eyes in the time of the Lord's good pleasure. Scripture's judgment

6. Stevenson, 29. The citations refer to Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols., ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003–2008), 3:240 (hereafter *RD*) in which Bavinck notes that "the desire of all nations" is not an accurate translation of the Hebrew, but he claims that the idea is fully Scriptural. The second citation is from *RD*, 1:318.

7. *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, trans. David H. Freeman (Phillipsburg, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1960), 63–64.

of heathenism gives little reason to speak of a longing for Christ among the nations.⁸

Further, in a paragraph that I cited in my thesis, he argues:

Scripture's judgment of heathenism gives little reason to speak of a longing for Christ among the nations. There is to be sure a thirst for salvation, a search for a savior in practically all non-Christian religions, but the savior is never the one who was crucified. Objectively speaking, no one can come to peace without Christ; all nations have need of him. But this does not mean that all nations of themselves long for and seek after Christ. . . . It is only where the light of God's grace has begun to shine that the heart becomes restless and the heathen begin to ask after the great son of David.⁹

In light of these citations it is clear that J. H. Bavinck disagreed with how his uncle understood the existence of a longing for Christ among the nations. It was J. H. Bavinck's own words that led me to that conclusion. Notwithstanding this difference between them, I still nowhere suggest that this means that Herman Bavinck can be used to support insider methodology.

Perhaps J. H. Bavinck misunderstood his uncle, and perhaps the disagreement is more semantic than substantial. However, by failing to even reference J. H. Bavinck's discussion of his uncle's words, Mattson undercuts his criticism of the disagreement I note in my thesis. In my view, given the substantial agreement on other religions that I posit between them,¹⁰ this one instance of disagreement does not indicate that uncle and nephew would take different views of the insider discussion.

8. *Introduction*, 64.

9. *Introduction*, 64; cf. Stevenson, 60.

10. In terms of listing various agreements that I note in my thesis, consider the following: Muslims are in flight from God (24); general revelation is inadequate for salvation (15); the presence of truth in non-Christian religions is due to general revelation and common grace, and even those elements of truth are distorted (17); they share similar views of Muhammad (27); and they are in "complete agreement on the inadequacy of Islam as a religious system for salvation" (29).

3. Bavinck's theology of common grace does provide a basis from which to address insider movements.

Mattson discusses my citation of a quote from Bavinck about the status of Muhammad. He criticizes the manner in which I quoted Bavinck, suggesting that I “deliberately omitted all references to the Bible and church tradition” (35). He goes on to explain how Bavinck's view was not novel and that it fits within the mainstream of Christian thought at this point. To that I simply respond with agreement. Nowhere did I suggest that Bavinck's view was novel, and in that light my lack of citation of every detail of his defense in no way invalidates the summary that was presented.

He also takes issue with three of my conclusions: “First, Muhammad was not an accomplice of the devil. Secondly, even amidst his error the Spirit of God was at work through Muhammad. Thirdly, Muhammad did provide some benefit to the life of the people around him.”¹¹ He writes at length on the problems that proceed from these conclusions, leading to the following statements:

Notice that what is in view here are “elements and forms” rather than material content. When this is compared with his later statement that “for all the *formal* similarity, there exists a large material difference between . . . the apostles of Christ and the envoys of Muhammed,” it is apparent that Bavinck is operating with a form/matter distinction. The “elements and forms” do form a point of unity and contact between pagan religion and Christianity; what makes them divergent is their material content. (39–40)

Mattson makes it appear as if my thesis states or implies that Bavinck saw material similarity or agreement between Christianity and other religions. However, he does not cite my *fourth* conclusion, which immediately follows the three that he quoted:

By looking later in the same volume, we can add a fourth dimension to H. Bavinck's view of Muhammad: his message, though containing a great deal of formal similarity to Christianity, also is characterized by a great material difference, namely, the lack of the special grace of Christ.¹²

11. Stevenson, 27. Again, Mattson cites these conclusions as if I used them to explicate Bavinck's view on the longing of the nations. That is simply not the context. I treat the longing of the nations and Muhammad under separate headings.

12. Stevenson, 27; cf. Bavinck, *RD*, 1:343.

Not the difference but the similarity between Mattson's treatment of Bavinck's views and my own becomes clear in the light of this fourth conclusion. Indeed, I specifically note that Bavinck sees formal but not material similarity in Muhammad's message and Christianity. Accordingly, I can appreciate the latter half of Mattson's article regarding Bavinck's view of common grace and the insider movement since I see no fundamental disagreement between it and my presentation of Bavinck.

In fact the article that Mattson references in passing—"How Does Christianity 'Subversively Fulfill' Islam?"—is likely a step in a helpful direction.¹³ Certainly any talk of "fulfillment" or "preparation" among the non-Christian religions can be misunderstood or misapplied, but "subversive fulfillment" may be a helpful way to integrate the theology of common grace found in Herman Bavinck with the missiological insights of his nephew.

Mattson brought up other specific issues with my thesis. Some of them are worthy of further explanation, some of them could have been clearer in my own thesis, and others may have been misunderstood. However, the three responses above hopefully clarify both my thesis and the general criticisms that Mattson offered.

13. Chris Flint, "How Does Christianity 'Subversively Fulfil' Islam?" *St. Francis Magazine* 8, no. 6 (2012): 776–822.

Bavinckiana digitalia: A Review Essay

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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), Gijbert 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's³ 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/hbchroorlogvbk.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/hbchroorlogvbk.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 Apps¹⁴

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.

Herman Bavinck on Natural Law and Two Kingdoms: Some Further Reflections¹

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Dr. David VanDrunen, Robert B. Strimple Professor of Systematic Theology and Christian Ethics at Westminster Seminary, California, has become well known in recent years for his work to rehabilitate the importance of natural law and the two kingdoms doctrine for Reformed ethics.² The rehabilitation has not been un-

1. This article is a revision of my earlier “Discussion Guide” to “The VanDrunen-Kloosterman Debate on Natural Law and Two Kingdoms in the Theology of Herman Bavinck” that was posted on the Bavinck Society website (<http://goo.gl/4qAzA>, June 2010). It also may be read as a companion piece to my “The Imitation of Christ as Illumination for the Two Kingdoms Debate,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 48, no. 1 (2013): 6–34. This revision provides a less extensive summary than did my earlier “Discussion Guide,” and I have incorporated more Bavinck scholarship including two important dissertations published after June 2010: Brian G. Mattson, *Restored to Our Destiny: Eschatology & the Image of God in Herman Bavinck’s Reformed Dogmatics*, Studies in Reformed Theology 21 (Leiden: Brill, 2011); James Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism: Towards a New Reading of Herman Bavinck’s Organic Motif*, T&T Clark Studies in Systematic Theology 17 (London: T&T Clark, 2012).

2. In addition to the “Discussion Guide” referenced in note 1, see also David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010); VanDrunen, “The Two Kingdoms and the *Ordo Salutis*: Life Beyond Judgment and the Question of a Dual Ethic,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 70, no. 2 (2008): 207–24; VanDrunen, “The Two Kingdoms Doctrine and the Relationship of Church and State in the Early Reformed Tradition,” *Journal of Church and State* 49, no. 4 (2007): 743–63; VanDrunen, “Abraham Kuyper and the Reformed Natural Law and Two Kingdoms Traditions,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 42, no. 2 (2007): 283–307; VanDrunen, “The Two Kingdoms: A Reassessment of the Transformationist Calvin,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 40, no. 2 (2005): 248–66; VanDrunen, “The Context of Natural Law: John Calvin’s Doctrine of the Two

eventful or uncontroversial. Some of us are grateful for the recovery that has taken place, while others wish the patient had died. Admittedly, my choice of metaphors here probably tips my hand, but in this essay I do not enter fully into the fray and attempt to survey the entire range of objections and counter claims that have entered into the marketplace of Reformed theological-ethical debate; rather, I restrict myself to a brief summary of VanDrunen's case with respect to Herman Bavinck and Nelson Kloosterman's response. My assessment which follows will incorporate a number of the new insights into Bavinck's theology from the two recent Bavinck dissertations by Brian Mattson and James Eglinton.³

VanDrunen's Proposal

VanDrunen acknowledges that reading Herman Bavinck as a proponent of natural law and the two kingdoms is not the first thing that comes to mind. Ever since the pioneering work in Bavinck scholarship by Eugene Heideman and Jan Veenhof, there arose a scholarly consensus that "grace restores nature" was the defining motif in his theology.⁴ With that framework in place, natural law and the two kingdoms "appear to intrude like uninvited guests, archaic remnants of a dualistic past."⁵ Nonetheless, VanDrunen argues that "Bavinck, adopting categories of historic Reformed orthodoxy, indeed taught doctrines of natural law and the two kingdoms." Furthermore, "Bavinck's defense of these doctrines was neither incidental nor a mindless repetition of his theological inheritance. Grace-restoring-nature and the kingdom-as-a-leaven are certainly themes in his theology, but expounding these themes in his thought

Kingdoms," *Journal of Church and State* 46, no. 3 (2004): 503–25.

3. See note 1.

4. E.P. Heideman, *The Relation of Revelation and Reason in E. Brunner and H. Bavinck* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1959). J. Veenhof, *Revelatie en Inspiratie: De Openbarings- en Schriftbeschouwing van Herman Bavinck in Vergelijking met die der Ethische Theologie* (Amsterdam: Buijten en Schipperheijn, 1968).

5. David VanDrunen, "'The Kingship of Christ is Twofold': Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms in the Thought of Herman Bavinck," *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (April 2010): 147; hereafter referenced in text.

without accounting for the natural law and two kingdoms categories will produce a distorted picture of Bavinck” (147–48).

VanDrunen’s first point is that natural law and the two kingdoms are not simply “Roman Catholic and Lutheran [notions], respectively,” but common categories of Reformed theology from its earliest days. “In a nutshell, the traditional Reformed doctrine of the two kingdoms teaches that God rules all things in his Son, yet does so in two fundamentally different ways. As the creator and sustainer, through his Son as the eternal Logos, he rules over all human beings in the *civil* kingdom. This civil kingdom consists of a range of non-ecclesiastical cultural endeavors and institutions, among which the state has particular prominence. As redeemer, through his Son as the incarnate God-Man, God rules the other kingdom, sometimes referred to as the *spiritual* kingdom. This spiritual kingdom is essentially heavenly and eschatological, but has broken into history and is now expressed institutionally in the church. Both kingdoms are good, God-ordained, and regulated by divine law, and believers participate in both kingdoms during the present age. From this distinction between a twofold kingship of the Son of God and the consequent distinction between two kingdoms by which he rules the world, Reformed orthodox theology derived a series of distinctions between political and ecclesiastical authority. The civil kingdom is provisional, temporary, and of this world. The spiritual kingdom is everlasting, eschatological, and not of this world” (148–49).

The two kingdoms doctrine has natural law as its “natural” correlate. Reformers like Calvin understood natural law to be “the moral law of God as it is written upon the heart and witnessed to by every person’s conscience, as described in Romans 2:14–15, a favorite proof text for the doctrine” (149). This too is based on “the doctrine that the Son of God has a twofold mediatorship and consequently a twofold kingship; . . . the Son is mediator of both creation and recreation (or redemption).” The Son as Logos is the “firstborn of every creature” and the Son as incarnate redeemer is the “first born of the dead.” Thus, “through natural revelation, Christ as *Logos* issues to all human beings the call of the law, which compels them to organize as families, societies, and states (in distinction from the call of the gospel that comes not from the Logos but from Christ, through special revelation). The order of creation is thus the basis for culture.” “In classic Reformed theology, this twofold medi-

atorship—over creation as Logos and over redemption as Christ—corresponded to a twofold kingship. Bavinck followed this lead. In his own words, ‘The kingship of Christ is twofold.’ On the one hand Christ holds the ‘kingship of power’ by which he has authority over all things in heaven and on earth. On the other hand Christ exercises his ‘kingship of grace’ by which he acts ‘to gather, protect, and lead his church to eternal salvation.’ In this latter role, ‘Christ is not the head of all human beings, not the prophet, priest, and king of everyone, for he is the head of the church and has been anointed king over Zion.’ Christ’s kingship of grace, according to Bavinck, ‘is totally different from that of the kings of the earth.’ It operates without violence through the ministry of word and sacrament” (150–51).

In this twofold kingship Bavinck follows the tradition in attributing a priority to the kingship of grace. “Christ does not ‘concretely govern all things,’ but if he is to gather his church then all must be ‘under his control, subject to him, and will one day, be it unwillingly, recognize and honor him as Lord.’ In this sense the kingship of power is ‘subordinate to, and a means for, his kingship of grace.’ Based upon Christ’s perfect obedience, his Father exalted him and granted him the right to protect his people and to subdue their enemies. Thus the obedient, exalted God-Man now exercises both the kingships of power and of grace. At the end of history Christ’s mediatorial work will be finished and he will hand over the kingship to his Father, who ‘himself will then be king forever.’ Through all eternity Christ will remain the ‘head of the church,’ but his ‘mediatorship of reconciliation, and to that extent also the prophetic, priestly, and royal office . . . will end” (151).⁶

Christians participate in both kingdoms, but their submission to Christ’s kingly rule is not identical in each one. With respect to the church, unlike the Lutherans, the Reformed did not “constrict the ‘kingdom of the right hand’ to the church’s spiritual ministry of word and sacraments and to view external church government as a matter for the ‘kingdom of the left hand,’ thus often handing over

6. In this paragraph VanDrunen references the following passages: Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols., ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003–2008), 3:375, 471, 479–80; 4:371–72, 436; hereafter referenced as *RD*. Cf. Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation* (New York: Green, and Co., 1909), 267.

church government to the civil magistrate. The Reformed, conversely, insisted that Christ's kingship over his church includes an interest in its government, and thus they defended the church's right to exercise discipline and to administer its own affairs. On this matter Bavinck again followed his Reformed forebears, stating that Christ himself instituted church offices and that ecclesiastical government is a gift from God that must remain distinct from civil government. Thereby Christ alone remains king in his church" (151–52).⁷

Bavinck also "followed the earlier Reformed tradition in deriving a series of distinctions between political and ecclesiastical power from the doctrine of the twofold kingship of Christ. The *origin* of political (and other social) power 'comes from God as the creator of heaven and earth (Rom. 13:1), but ecclesiastical power comes directly from God as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. . . .' Second, political power is 'legislative' and ecclesiastical power is 'ministerial.' Third, political and ecclesiastical power differ in *nature*. While ecclesiastical government is 'spiritual,' political government is 'natural, earthly, secular. It extends to all subjects for no other reason than the fact that they are subjects and only regulates their earthly interests.' Fourth, the *purpose* of ecclesiastical power is to edify the body of Christ, whereas political power 'strives for the natural and common good.' Finally, the *means* the church employs are 'spiritual weapons,' but the civil government 'bears the sword, has power over life and death, and may exact obedience by coercion and violence.' The church's authority is spiritual because Christ is its king and "his kingdom is not of this world." The church operates "not with coercion and penalties in money, goods, or life," but "only with spiritual weapons." This spiritual authority is essentially distinct from every other authority that God has bestowed in the various cultural relationships and institutions. In regard to the state, Bavinck warned that civil government should not usurp jurisdiction that God has not entrusted to it. He faulted Calvin for the execution of Michael Servetus and believed that early Reformed theologians erred in seeing unbelief and heresy as crimes against the state. With Abraham Kuyper, Bavinck supported revision of Belgic Confession 36 and en-

7. VanDrunen refers to Bavinck, *RD*, 4:297–98, 329–30, 340, 359, 371, 379, 381–82, 394, 409–10, 413–14.

dured opposition from his contemporaries for breaking with the ideal of a state church” (152–53).⁸

Bavinck’s view of common grace is also relevant here since “evidence suggests that his understanding of the issue reflected the earlier two kingdoms doctrine. For Bavinck, common grace is common in the sense that God bestows it upon all people, the good and the evil together. Grounded in the covenant with Noah, which Bavinck termed the ‘covenant of nature’ in distinction from the covenant of grace, common grace restrains sin and evil in a fallen world. (Special grace, in contrast, renews and redeems the world and conquers sin.) Bavinck explained common grace in connection with the various two kingdoms themes. He specifically associated the distinction between common and special grace with the twofold kingship of Christ, and he connected the Noahic covenant of nature with the work of the Logos in distinction from the work of Christ as mediator of the covenant of grace. Bavinck ascribed a crucial role to common grace in the ongoing preservation of culture. According to Bavinck, *everything* good after the fall in *all* areas of life is the fruit of common grace, and all the arts and science have their *principium* in common grace, *not* in the special grace of regeneration and conversion. The civil state in particular was established by God in the Noahic covenant of nature in Genesis 9:6. In summary, then, the ongoing development of culture finds its ultimate explanation in the blessings of common grace by the work of God the Son as Logos, the mediator of creation, not in the special grace brought by Christ as mediator of re-creation.”

Bavinck also reflects the classic Reformed tradition in linking the doctrines of natural law and the two kingdoms. “While they emphasized that Scripture is the only conscience-binding standard in the church, they ascribed a broad importance to natural law in the state and in other cultural arenas.” With the Reformed tradition, Bavinck also believed “that the source of natural revelation generally and of the natural, moral revelation of God’s law in particular is the Son of God *as Logos*, who now bestows this revelation through common grace. Thus the topic of natural law follows appropriately from that of the two kingdoms. There is a ‘general reve-

8. VanDrunen refers to Bavinck, *RD*, 4:370, 373, 377, 386, 395, 398, 408, 411–12, 414–17.

lation' (in the sense of being accessible and known to all people) that is given primarily by natural revelation, that is, God's revealing himself 'in nature all around us' and 'in the heart and conscience of every individual.' Since Bavinck viewed general revelation as the gift of the Son as Logos rather than as Christ, he predictably distinguished general revelation from special revelation chiefly in that only the latter reveals special grace and salvation. General revelation is insufficient in various respects, yet it remains extraordinarily useful, providing a point of contact with non-Christians as well as knowledge to support all sorts of cultural activities. He explained: 'It is not the study of Scripture but careful investigation of what God teaches us in his creation and providence that equips us for these tasks'" (155–56).

Bavinck also "believed that Scripture teaches natural moral revelation" because "all human beings have the requirements of God's law written on their hearts, and also possess a 'sense of divinity' and a 'seed of religion,' precisely because they all bear God's image" (156–57). The content of this "natural law is simply *law*; it is not *gospel*. Nature impresses upon people what God requires them to do, but Bavinck emphasized that nature knows nothing about forgiveness and hence that natural law is insufficient for salvation." The doctrine of the covenant works is crucial here and the foundation for the covenant of works is "the moral law, known to man by nature." Therefore, the content of natural law, even after the Fall, "was to be identified with the moral law revealed in a different form in Scripture, specifically as summarized in the Decalogue." "The purpose of this natural moral law remaining in effect even after the fall into sin is twofold: (1) It renders all people accountable in the final judgment, and (2) it provides the key foundation for civil justice and civil law" (157–58). All this is standard fare for traditional Reformed theology.

VanDrunen concludes that the two kingdoms and natural law doctrines both found a home in Bavinck's theology and draws four important inferences from this observation:

1. Bavinck's appropriation of the two kingdoms and natural law doctrines from classical Reformed theology dispels the misconception that these two doctrines exalt human autonomous reason, underestimate the effects of sin, and dualistically turn the cultural realm into something neutral that leads to Christian disengagement

and social conservatism. If Herman Bavinck saw no conflict between these classic doctrines on the one hand and active Christian engagement in cultural endeavors on the other hand, then we should be wary about assuming that there is such a conflict.

2. While active Christian engagement in cultural endeavors is placed in a positive light, it also portrays nature as we know it and natural institutions as temporary and provisional. Culture is a good gift from God. Nevertheless, we ought to have sober expectations about what can be accomplished in this life, and we ought to set our hearts not upon the things of earth but upon the things of heaven. It is here that we are given a check on the implications that are sometimes evoked by Bavinck's grace-restoring-nature and kingdom-as-a-leaven themes. Taken together, they lend credence to a Christian optimism about what can be accomplished now through cultural endeavors, the effects of which carry over even into the age to come. VanDrunen concludes that "Bavinck's embrace of historic natural law and two kingdoms categories" properly cautions us against reading too much of an eschatologically-charged cultural optimism into many of his familiar themes." Though he spoke "of the kingdom as a leaven, such that the preaching of the gospel and the Christian's cultural work has a reforming effect in every area of life, he also reminded his readers that the kingdom is a leaven only *secondarily*. The kingdom is first and foremost a pearl that demands readiness to sacrifice everything in this life for its sake" (162).

3. VanDrunen "is not convinced that Bavinck has left us with an entirely coherent portrait of Christians' basic relationship to this world and of the fundamental nature of their cultural endeavors." He finds both a world-denying emphasis on suffering and an occasional world-affirming cultural optimism in Bavinck. Noting that Bavinck himself even acknowledged that some tensions between world-denial and world-affirmation are inevitable in this life, VanDrunen writes that "some statements and discussions in Bavinck's corpus defy easy reconciliation with a two kingdoms doctrine and a concept of the Christian life as nothing but a suffering pilgrimage under the cross" (163).

4. "The next generation of Reformed thinkers should reappropriate the two kingdoms and natural law doctrines. These doctrines not only ground us in our rich heritage but also promise to help us to capture many of Bavinck's chief concerns without falling prey to

certain temptations that we ought to avoid. They require us to honor the created goodness of family, science, art, and state. They place all of life under the moral reign of the one true God. They encourage Christians to participate in cultural activities and to engage them both critically and appreciatively. Yet they also teach us that these cultural activities do not belong to the redemptive kingdom of Christ and thus they remind us that these activities are not only good but also temporary, provisional, and destined to pass away. They check our this-worldly dreams, focus our attention upon the church, remind us that we participate in cultural endeavors as pilgrims rather than as conquerors, and draw our eyes toward the things that are above, where Christ is seated at his Father's right hand and from where he is coming again to bring the end of the world as we know it" (163).

VanDrunen concludes: "This, I believe, is a biblically faithful perspective on the Christian life that Reformed Christians would do well to recover and to cultivate" (163).

Response by Nelson B. Kloosterman

And now to Professor Kloosterman's response.⁹ He begins by indicating significant points of agreement with VanDrunen and then proceeds to denote his reservations and to sketch an "alternative unified approach to natural law and the kingdom of God." He says that he shares "VanDrunen's concerns regarding the apparent triumphalism among some neo-Calvinist heirs of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck," though he wonders "whether in this case the error of the disciples can properly be attributed to the masters." And, rightly, in my judgment, he calls attention to the way in which "in the 1960s and later, the neo-Calvinist project became misdirected to the extent that it embraced the transformational Calvinism of H. Richard Niebuhr" (165–66).¹⁰ Where he wishes "modestly to de-

9. Nelson D. Kloosterman, "A Response to 'The Kingship of Christ is Twofold': Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms in the Thought of Herman Bavinck by David VanDrunen," *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (April 2010): 165–176; hereafter referenced in text.

10. I have made a similar claim in my essay, "In Theo's Memory: A Narrative of H. Richard Niebuhr and the Transformation of Christian Education," in Jason Zuidema, ed., *Reformational Thought in Canada: Essays in Honour of*

mur” is with the heart of VanDrunen’s allegation that there are two threads in Bavinck that are in tension and result in an inconsistent and incoherent stance (i.e., VanDrunen’s third point above). “That there were tensions, even polarities, in Bavinck’s life and thought is incontrovertible, but in my judgment these need not be elevated to the level of incoherent inconsistencies or irreconcilable themes” (166).

Kloosterman agrees with VanDrunen that the Reformers and Bavinck both have a doctrine of natural law but insists that “the Reformers’ doctrine of natural law needs to be coordinated with their robust acknowledgement of the radical seriousness of the fall, of the pervasive depravity of human reason, and of the necessity of Holy Scripture as the spectacles for correctly interpreting all of general revelation.” He adds, “the Reformers never used their doctrine of natural law as the basis for a twofold ethics, one derived from nature, the other from grace, the one governed by human reason, the other by the Christian faith. Instead of speaking of “nature” and “natural law,” Kloosterman points out that “it is God, not nature, that explains all the external moral righteousness we see around us.” The continuing existence of natural, creation structures like marriage and the family are thanks to God’s providential rule. “In God’s daily government of the universe we may recognize constants that serve to restrain human beings who would otherwise live out their rebellion unto total destruction.” This emphasis on God’s personal and active governance of creation “prevents natural law from becoming, as it so often has throughout the history of the concept, a handmaiden to secularization” (167). In fact, although the Gentiles have the “work of the law” inscribed on their hearts by God, we recognize it as such thanks to revealed law. Kloosterman concludes that “there is a providential correspondence between the content of the Decalogue and the law embedded within the give and take of human living in God’s universe” (167–68). The *lex scripturae* must be the hermeneutical key for the *lex naturae*, not the other way around (168).

Kloosterman does not deny that Bavinck holds to a version of the two kingdoms doctrine, even granting that “the state is an agent not of grace but of the law,” but he insists, with Bavinck, that the

state does have “the ability and the calling to work in service to the kingdom of God” (169).¹¹ The kingdom of God points to the rule of Christ beyond the organized, institutional church. “For that reason,” says Bavinck, we speak of a Christian society, of a Christian school. There is nothing human that cannot be called Christian. Everything within and outside the church that is enlivened and governed by Christ who exercises sovereignty over all things, constitutes and belongs to the Kingdom of God.”¹² “With a clarity that astonishes twenty-first century ears,” Kloosterman observes, “Bavinck insisted that even the state finds its goal and destiny in the kingdom of heaven.” While the state “neither establishes the kingdom of God nor brings about redemption,” by fulfilling its divine calling to pursue justice and to uphold the moral order . . . the state can become a *paidagogos* or tutor (Bavinck uses the Dutch word *tuchtmeester*; he is alluding to Gal. 3:24) unto Christ. In that sense the state has the ability and the calling to work in service to the kingdom of God” (169). Just like individuals “must not seek the Kingdom of God outside of but in their earthly vocations, so too the Kingdom of God does not demand that the state surrender its earthly calling, its own nationality, but demands precisely that the state permit the Kingdom of God to affect and penetrate its people and nation. Only in this way can the Kingdom of God come into existence.”¹³

Bavinck comes to a similar conclusion about the relationship between the kingdom of God and culture. Human culture is not the fruit of redemptive grace but a given of creation. “Culture exists because God bestowed on us the power to exercise rule over the earth.”¹⁴ Because “knowledge is power” and modern culture uses its power to “emancipate itself more and more from Christianity,” our culture is becoming increasingly debased and debauched. This will bring God’s judgment upon it. All this shows that “culture can find

11. Kloosterman cites Bavinck’s essay, “Het rijk Gods, het hoogste goed,” in *Kennis en leven. Opstellen en artikelen uit vroegere jaren* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1922), 28–56. This essay was a lecture given to the theological students at Kampen on February 3, 1881. ET: “The Kingdom of God, The Highest Good,” translated by Nelson D. Kloosterman, *The Bavinck Review* 2 (2011): 133–79.

12. “The Kingdom of God,” 161.

13. Bavinck, “The Kingdom of God,” 160.

14. Bavinck, “The Kingdom of God,” 161.

its purpose and reason for existence only in the Kingdom of God.” Bavinck concludes: “Cult and culture ought then to be sisters, independent to be sure, but still sisters bound together in love.”¹⁵

Kloosterman’s concern in his rehearsal of Bavinck’s understanding of the Kingdom of God is an appeal to the two kingdoms doctrine that sets aside the basic unity of Bavinck’s thought. “[T]hough Bavinck recognized the twofold kingship of Christ, this never functioned in his theology as the warrant either for a dual ethic or for a duality-of-independence between religion and cultural life in the world, including politics” (170). Kloosterman proposes a christological framework for the two kingdoms doctrine that provides greater integration and unity. “In contrast to positing a continuing duality between the Logos and the Incarnate One, Bavinck saw Jesus Christ as revealing himself progressively in human history through his unitary and unitive mediatorial activity. Although, before his incarnation, the Second Person of the Trinity was indeed the *Logos Asarkos*, after his incarnation he remains the *Logos Ensarkos*. The profound significance of the incarnation is precisely that Christ’s work in the creation is taken up within and made serviceable to his work of redemption” (170). Kloosterman cites a long passage from Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics* as evidence:

Christ—even now—is prophet, priest, and king; and by his Word and Spirit he persuasively impacts the entire world. Because of him there radiates from everyone who believes in him a renewing and sanctifying influence upon the family, society, state, occupation, business, art, science, and so forth. The spiritual life is meant to refashion the natural and moral life in its full depth and scope according to the laws of God. Along this organic path Christian truth and the Christian life are introduced into all the circles of the natural life. (4:437)

Kloosterman concludes: “For Bavinck, church and world, grace and nature, faith and reason, though *distinguishable*, are best understood as *integrated* in Christ Jesus” (171).

According to Kloosterman, a passion for unity of thought is a hallmark of Bavinck’s wrestling with the numerous questions of faith and reason that have arisen in the modern world. He cites the following conclusion of George Harinck about Bavinck’s spirituality:

15. “The Kingdom of God,” 162.

All his theological work can be regarded as a refutation of the duality of faith and culture, which was, given his secessionist background, so familiar to him and for which a meeting with modern theology offered such an opportunity. This rejection of duality, which he knew from the Secession and from Leiden, was a decisive step in Bavinck's spiritual development and became characteristic of his Reformed spirituality. (171)¹⁶

In fact, "Harinck describes Bavinck's emphasis on the unity between faith and scholarship as 'the *Leitmotiv* of Bavinck's life.' Such unity between Christianity and culture was rooted in the Christian confession of the one God, one Creator of all things and the one Redeemer." What Kloosterman finds missing in VanDrunen's portrait of Bavinck is the latter's strong emphasis on the cosmic scope of God's work in Jesus Christ and the consequent catholicity and integration of the Christian faith and life. Catholicity for Bavinck is not just geographical nor even only ecclesiastical, it is, in Bavinck's own words, "a joyful proclamation, not only for the individual person but also for humanity in general, for family, and society, and state, for art and science, for the entire cosmos, for the whole groaning creation" (172). It is this catholicity, according to Bavinck, that sets Calvin apart from Luther. "Luther's mistake here is that he restricts the Gospel and limits the grace of God. The Gospel only changes the inward man, the conscience, the heart; the remainder stays the same until the final judgment. As a result, dualism is not completely overcome; a true and full catholicity is not achieved."¹⁷

Kloosterman concludes with some reflections on how to integrate the themes of a Christian's spiritual pilgrimage with that of cultural participation. He agrees with VanDrunen that it is important to "warn us of the toxin of triumphalism arising from an over-realized eschatology that sees our efforts as establishing and ushering in the Kingdom of God." At the same time he also warns against an "equally toxic danger, namely, ingratitude arising from an *under-realized eschatology that refuses to extend the Third Use of the Law beyond personal ethics into social-cultural relationships*, an ingratitude that quarantines the active rule of King Jesus, and com-

16. Citing George Harinck, "Something That Must Remain, If the Truth Is to Be Sweet and Precious to Us": The Reformed Spirituality of Herman Bavinck," *Calvin Theological Journal* 38, no. 2 (2003): 252.

17. Herman Bavinck, "The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church," translated by John Bolt, *Calvin Theological Journal* 27, no. 2 (1992): 237.

munal principled response to it, to the church parking lot.” Pilgrimage is not “an *alternative* to Christian cultural engagement, but rather the *mode* of Christian cultural engagement.” In summary: “Everything we do—all our eating, drinking, buying, selling, marrying, childrearing, educating, entertaining, burying—must be directed to the glory of God. Our orientation toward the future need not paralyze our responsible cultivating of creation in the present” (173).

Kloosterman adds two helpful addenda to his essay: (1) Were there really “two Bavincks?” And (2) what about Christian schools and Christian art? Let me take each in turn.

1. Kloosterman takes issue with an “annoying acknowledgment” that I suggested in a previously published article “that there is not just *one* but rather *two* Bavincks.”¹⁸ The duality refers to Bavinck as “a son of the Secession, loyal to the piety and orthodoxy of the church of his youth, yet critical of its cultural asceticism,” while the “other” Bavinck “was a restless student of modernity, enamored of the problematics that had surfaced in contemporary philosophy and theology, yet critical of their answers.” This tension was recognized by his contemporaries as well as more recent Bavinck scholars, though none of them “(including Bolt) elevates these as VanDrunen does, to the level of two inconsistent and incoherent Bavincks” (174).

Kloosterman then does the cause of Bavinck scholarship a great service (though at the cost of some embarrassment to yours truly) by correcting my translation of G. C. Berkouwer’s claim that “Bavinck’s theology contains so many *onweersprekelijke* motieven,” which I erroneously rendered as “*irreconcilable* themes” rather than as “*undeniable* themes.” Kloosterman is quite correct in observing that Berkouwer is not speaking of people “*with opposing views* appealing to Bavinck, but rather about the danger that *Berkouwer himself* faced” in appealing to Bavinck for one’s own agenda. Berkouwer continues by saying that it was possible to overcome any such danger because there are *undeniable* (not *irreconcilable*) themes in Bavinck that are clearly visible. It is worth citing Kloost-

18. John Bolt, “Grand Rapids Between Kampen and Amsterdam: Herman Bavinck’s Reception and Influence in North America,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 38, no. 2 (2003): 264–65.

erman's corrected translation here in full: "The danger present in describing and evaluating Bavinck's life-work is that one might annex him for one's own insights. *It is, however, not impossible to escape that annexation danger, since various undeniable themes become manifest in Bavinck's work*" (175, italics and underline added). Kloosterman wants a more nuanced treatment of any "tensions" in Bavinck's thought and dissents from VanDrunen's conclusion that Bavinck's position might not be "entirely coherent" because they "defy easy reconciliation with a two kingdoms doctrine and a concept of the Christian life as nothing but a suffering pilgrimage under the cross" (162–63). For Kloosterman, there is greater unity than this.

2. Kloosterman's second addendum raises questions about whether the adjective "Christian" should ever be used with respect to human cultural activities and products that are rooted in creation. For example, he challenges VanDrunen's assertion that Bavinck "confuses categories" when he speaks about "Christian society" or a "Christian government."¹⁹ If so, asks Kloosterman, "one may validly infer from VanDrunen's argument that the same confusion attends the language of Bavinck and Kuyper with respect to 'Christian education' and 'Christian art' and 'Christian science.'" Kloosterman is concerned that this conclusion might in fact be the "payoff" for contemporary Reformed advocates of the two kingdoms doctrine." He concludes with a challenge to such advocates to clarify "their disagreement with the worldview undergirding the establishment and support of Christian schools around the world—a Reformed Christian world-and-life-view that for more than a century has been nourished precisely by this allegedly confusing language of Kuyper and Bavinck" (176).

Response and Evaluation

This is a very important discussion not only for Bavinck interpretation but also, more importantly, for the life of Christian discipleship. Let me begin by highlighting agreements, and then I'll address the tensions and differences. There is no disagreement that Christians are called by God to honor Jesus Christ as Lord in their

19. See VanDrunen, 153n28, where he cites Bavinck, *RD*, 4:370.

vocations in the world. Furthermore, there must be a basic unity in our lives so that we do not separate Christ the Lord of our worship on Sunday from Christ the Lord of the other days of the week. I also believe that all three of us agree with a strong accent on the pilgrim character of the Christian life. As I see it, the key question is how to describe that which is common to our life as believers in the community of faith and our life in the world while distinguishing without separating that which is different. For example, as an elder in the church I have a pastoral responsibility to a fellow church member who is in jail for some offense. But what if I am also the arresting officer at the scene of the accident which he caused by being intoxicated? Christ's rule over my life is seamless, but the application to the same circumstance from two different roles and relationships does differ. How do I navigate these differences? Let me now address several issues that arise from the two essays.

The first comment I need to make is the most formal one. It has to do with Bavinck scholarship. To the extent that my translation error contributed to exaggerating tensions in Bavinck's thought (i.e., "two Bavincks") I am truly (if embarrassedly) grateful to Dr. Kloosterman for pointing that out. I also agree with him that while there are tensions in Bavinck's thought, there is an underlying unity in his thought. Nonetheless, I do dissent from his description of the ground of that unity—at least I want to qualify it considerably. Kloosterman believes "that Bavinck places more detailed emphasis on the Christological unity and integration of the so-called two kingdoms than VanDrunen lets on." He concludes: "This unity and integration are rooted particularly in the person and work of Christ Jesus. In contrast to positing a continuing duality between the Logos and the Incarnate One, Bavinck saw Jesus Christ as revealing himself progressively in human history through his unitary and unitive mediatorial activity" (170). Kloosterman then cites this lengthy passage from the *Reformed Dogmatics*:

Accordingly, the relationship that has to exist between the church and the world is in the first place organic, moral, and spiritual in character. Christ—even now—is prophet, priest, and king; and by his Word and Spirit he persuasively impacts the entire world. Because of him there radiates from everyone who believes in him a renewing and sanctifying influence upon the family, society, state, occupation, business, art, science, and so forth. The spiritual life is meant to refashion the natural and moral life in its full depth and scope according to the laws of God. Along this organic path Christian truth and the Christian life are introduced

into all the circles of the natural life, so that life in the household and the extended family is restored to honor, the wife (woman) is again viewed as the equal of the husband (man), the sciences and arts are Christianized, the level of the moral life is elevated, society and state are reformed, laws and institutions, morals and customs are made Christian. (4:437)

While there is some truth to positing a Christological unity for Bavinck's thought, it fails to penetrate deeply enough into Bavinck's theology, and it potentially opens the door to the very misunderstandings to which Kloosterman is also very sensitive. Final unity for Bavinck is something profoundly metaphysical. It is found in the very *trinitarian* being of God himself. Noting that all creation is a work of the triune God, Bavinck comments: "Certainly, all God's works *ad extra* are undivided and common to all three persons. Prominent in these works, therefore, is the oneness of God rather than the distinction of persons."²⁰ The divine unity in diversity comes to expression in the creation itself. "Just as God is one in essence and distinct in persons, so also the work of creation is one and undivided, while in its unity it is still rich in diversity."²¹ That means that the Christian worldview must be a trinitarian worldview: "The Divine Being is one: there is but one Being that is God and that may be called God. In creation and redemption, in nature and grace, in church and world, in state and society, everywhere and always we are concerned with one, same, living and true God. The unity of the world, of mankind, of virtue, of justice, and of beauty depends upon the unity of God. The moment that unity of God is denied or understressed, the door is open to polytheism."²² From the fundamental unity-in-diversity that exists in God and his works, Bavinck deduces three important "unities" for Christians: unity of (1) the human race, (2) truth, and (3) morality.²³

To consider only the latter two, Bavinck opposes all notions of "double truth" and "double morality." He laments the modern di-

20. *RD*, 2:329–30.

21. *RD*, 2:422.

22. Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith: A Survey of Christian Doctrine*, trans. Henry Zylstra (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956), 158.

23. I have discussed this at some length in my PhD dissertation, *A Theological Analysis of Herman Bavinck's Two Essays on the Imitatio Christi: Between Pietism and Modernism* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2013), 203–42.

vide between ordinary experience and science, between science and the life of faith. "There is indeed no double truth. . . . Because the human spirit is one, it must strive for an *einheitliche* world-and-life-view that satisfies the heart and mind."²⁴ Similarly, for morality, where Bavinck repudiates the Roman Catholic distinction between "precepts" and the higher "counsels of perfection," "the Christian life cannot be atomistically split up, neither can the works be separated from the person, nor one work from another. It is one organism, arising from one principle, regulated by one norm, and reaching out to one goal. . . . [T]he final goal of moral conduct can be found only in God, who is the origin and hence also the final goal of all things, the supreme good that encompasses all goods, the Eternal One to whom all finite things return."²⁵ In sum, "God claims all of man—mind, heart, soul, body, and all his or her energies—for his service and his love. The moral law is one for all humans in all times, and the moral ideal is the same for all people. There is no 'lower' or 'higher' righteousness, no double morality, no twofold set of duties."²⁶ To be clear, Bavinck was committed to and strove to achieve unity of thought. Whatever tensions we might (or not) discover in his theology, they must not be used to invalidate his own commitment to unity of thought.

But this passion for unity of thought is not the whole story. Bavinck is opposed to all notions of "double truth" and "double morality," but his repudiation is subtle and nuanced. He was also opposed to monistic efforts to develop a single scientific method that could be applied universally to all the sciences. Biology and psychology, for example, must not be reduced to chemistry and physics; all attempts to obtain mathematical-physical certainty for other disciplines, particularly the so-called "spiritual sciences," by applying the positive scientific method were doomed to failure. Such efforts find their philosophical root in a monistic worldview. So then, fundamental metaphysical unity is properly joined with a diversity in scientific method. To repudiate a notion of "double truth" does not lead one to deny multiplicity of scientific method. Similarly, emphasizing the unity of morality does not mean that ap-

24. Herman Bavinck, *Christelijke Wetenschap* (Kampen: Kok, 1904), 91.

25. *RD*, 4:264.

26. *RD*, 2:552.

plications of moral law must be the same in all circumstances. In fact, Bavinck even allows that “there is a truth” in notions of double morality with their demands of perfection, noting that this is “a truth that in Protestantism does not come into its own.”²⁷ The one law requires a diversity of moral obligations. The same law requires different duties of parents and children, rulers and subjects. Justice and love are inseparable, flowing from the same moral law, but they are not to be confused with each other, especially when it comes to the task of the state. As Bavinck put it:

In agreement with the very special task that the government has to fulfill in the world, the law calls the government to duties that no citizen can or may carry out. The state is not the vehicle for love and mercy, but of righteousness; it is the sovereign dominion of justice.²⁸

In addition to this Bavinck was profoundly aware of the mystery at the heart of all human knowing—it was, I believe, the basis of his genuine epistemological humility. Though we may *strive* for unity of thought, it will always elude us in the present age. “The farther a science penetrates its object, the more it approaches mystery. . . . Where comprehension ceases, however, there remains room for knowledge and wonder.”²⁹ That is why our striving for unity in truth is an *eschatological* goal that will always elude us in the present age.³⁰ The same eschatological reserve applies to our life of Christian discipleship where we experience a tension between living in God’s world, enjoying the gifts of creation, and using them as stewards for God’s glory on the one hand, and the need for world-renunciation on the other, thanks to our sin and the ongoing temptation to worldliness.

27. *RD*, 4:259.

28. Herman Bavinck, *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, ed. John Bolt, trans. Harry Boonstra and Gerrit Sheeres (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 277.

29. *RD*, 1:619.

30. Note, for example, what Bavinck says about theology, the object of which, ultimately, remains unfathomable: “In that sense Christian theology always has to do with mysteries that it knows and marvels at but does not comprehend and fathom.” *RD*, 1:619.

Bavinck considers this a “delicate and complicated” problem that cannot be fully resolved in this dispensation. In this life, full unity will elude us, some form of tension or “dualism” is inevitable.

[The problem] remains unresolved and . . . no one in this dispensation achieves a completely harmonious answer. Every person and every movement are guilty of a greater or lesser one-sidedness here. Life swings to and fro, again and again, between worldliness and world-flight. Head and heart painfully wrestle for supremacy. It has been said that in every human heart there dwells a bit of Jew and Greek.³¹

Bavinck then makes a distinction that seems tailor-made as an antidote to the “dualophobia” so characteristic of more recent North American neo-Calvinism.³² “And yet it makes a great difference whether one conceives of this dualism as absolute or relative.”³³

“Relative dualism”? What could this mean? It sounds like an oxymoron. Bavinck’s point here is that *because of sin* we cannot achieve unity in this life. There will always be some form of “dualism.” But, this *eschatological* tension must be clearly distinguished from *metaphysical* or *ontological* dualism. Eschatological tensions and relative dualisms are overcome by the triumph of grace and the gift of revelation, but not fully until the consummation. When it comes to Christian discipleship, for instance, this means that even a creation-affirming Calvinist should be prepared—as Calvin was!—to acknowledge that in a real sense “this world is *not* my home.” Therefore, any discussion of alleged tensions or inconsistencies in Bavinck’s thought must be sensitive to Bavinck’s own qualifications and nuances and attempt to duplicate the subtlety of his own thought. In sum, I concur with Kloosterman that there is greater unity in Bavinck’s thought than VanDrunen and others see.

31. Herman Bavinck, “Common Grace,” trans. R.C. Van Leeuwen, *Calvin Theological Journal* 24, no. 1 (1989): 56.

32. I have in mind here the tendency among many “Reformational” thinkers to attack all so-called “dualism” in a general and broad sense, including the distinctions of heaven and earth, body and soul, and, importantly for our purposes, the *regnum gratiae* (kingdom of grace) and the *regnum potentiae* (kingdom of power). For a helpful critical response to this tendency, see John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987), 232–36.

33. “Common Grace,” 56.

At the same time, as I noted earlier, I want to locate the fundamental unity of Bavinck's thought in his trinitarian metaphysics rather than in his Christology as Kloosterman describes it. Here, the two recent studies on Bavinck's theology by Brian Mattson and James Eglinton provide definite proof and new insight.³⁴ Mattson's dissertation, the first doctoral-level study of Bavinck since the four volumes of Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* have been available in English, affirms what Eugene Heideman and Jan Veenhof, the two pioneers in Bavinck scholarship after the Second World War, claimed about "grace restores nature" being the interpretive key to Bavinck's theology. However, Mattson also shows that this claim needs to be qualified in two important ways. First, restoration in Christ must be understood eschatologically. The redemption Christ wins for his own is a "plus," it is more than what Adam lost in the Fall. Second, this full eschatological goal was itself a given of the original creation. It is implied in the covenant of works, and this doctrine is essential for maintaining an eschatological understanding of creation itself. Adam was created for a higher glory, and the path to that destiny was obedience. Bavinck derives this primarily from 1 Corinthians 15 where the Apostle Paul points to the contrast between the *unfallen* Adam in his "psychical, earthy" existence and the *resurrected* Christ in his "pneumatic, heavenly" existence. This is all reinforced by the Adam/Christ parallel in Romans 5.

This insight is an enormous advance in Reformed theological scholarship. The emphasis on "grace restoring nature" became so important in Dutch neo-Calvinism because it is the correct vehicle for combatting nature/grace dualism, particularly of the neo-Platonic sort. Here's how Mattson summarizes Bavinck's appropriation of the Reformation tradition:

For Bavinck, the true genius of the Reformation, especially as pioneered by Calvin, is its replacement of Rome's ontological or vertically hierarchical version of the nature/grace relationship (i.e., "higher" and "lower" realms of reality) with an *historical* or horizontal version of the nature/grace scheme, starting with the state of integrity (nature) and ending in the state of glory (grace).³⁵

34. See note 1 above for full bibliographic information.

35. Mattson, *Restored*, 5.

This is only possible thanks to the redemptive work of Christ, but the important nuance here is that the redemptive work of Christ is itself “subordinate to a prior creational eschatology.”³⁶ That all things should come under the Lordship of Christ was intended *from the beginning* and reminds us that Reformed Christology begins with Christ as the pre-Fall mediator of *union* and not as the post-Fall mediator of *reconciliation*.

This is a crucial point because Reformed orthodoxy’s doctrine of the covenant of works is often faulted by Reformational neo-Calvinists for not being sufficiently Christological.³⁷ Behind this critique, it seems to me, is a concern that the *redemptive* work of Christ needs to play a more prominent role in Christian thought and action about culture and society. Beginning with a strong emphasis on the kingdom of God and on Jesus as Lord, it seems to follow naturally that Christian discipleship in society and culture ought to be “redeeming” these areas in some way. The logic seems impeccable: Jesus the Redeemer is Lord; we must serve his kingly rule in all areas of life; we should be agents of redemption and transformation in the world. In this way, our eschatological destiny must shape our discipleship today. Mattson’s analysis of Bavinck shows that this reverses the biblical order and pattern. Creation must inform redemption and eschatology, not the other way around.³⁸ The original creational eschatological horizon is not re-

36. Mattson, *Restored*, 103.

37. Two Dutch Reformed theologians who expressed their dislike for the covenant of works are G. C. Berkouwer (*Sin*, trans. Philip C. Holtrop [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971], 206–07) and S.G. De Graaf (*Het Ware Geloof* [Kampen: Kok, 1954], 31–32; De Graaf, “De Genade Gods en de Structuur Der Gansche Schepping,” *Philosophia Reformata* 1 (1936): 20–21). I am indebted to Cornelis P. Venema, “Recent Criticisms of the Covenant of Works in the Westminster Confession of Faith,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 9, no. 3 (1993): 165–198 for these references. It is to Gordon J. Spykman’s credit that, as a committed “Reformational” theologian, he does nonetheless affirm a “covenant of creation” (*Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992], 259–65.) He does, however, offer his own distinct version of it with his notion of the “threefold form of the Word of God.” “True religion, therefore, centers covenantally on the mediating Word of God, spoken in creation, inscriptured in the Bible, and incarnate in Jesus Christ” (263).

38. It would take us too far afield to pursue this in detail, but this reversal of creation and redemption, the reading of creation through the Christological

demptive or soteriological in nature, and this means that the key to overcoming neo-Platonic forms of dualism is to recognize the “organic or historical relationship between the state of integrity and the state of glory.” As Mattson puts it, “creational *anthropology* (image of God) is here wedded, necessarily, to a creational *eschatology* (covenant of works).”³⁹

James Eglinton builds on Mattson’s work in his exploration of the important “organic” motif in Bavinck’s work. Eglinton disputes the scholarship that located this neo-Calvinist theme in nineteenth-century Romanticism and Idealism with a longer pedigree going back to a semi-mystical Platonism that includes figures such as Jacob Böhme, Schelling and Hegel, and is further traceable back to Aristotle.⁴⁰ Eglinton rejects this genetic-historical explanation and shows how Bavinck’s understanding of the organic motif flows forth from and expresses his Augustinian “trinitarian appropriation of reality.” Not only is there a fundamental unity to Bavinck’s thought, it reflects a trinitarian metaphysics in which the priority is given to creation, a creation itself pregnant with eschatological promise and hope.

With that background in place, let us return to the question of the two kingdoms and the VanDrunen-Kloosterman debate. Both men share antipathy to the use of the “grace restores nature” motif as the rationale for pushing a transformational vision of socio-cultural activism. This is VanDrunen’s primary concern. Kloosterman shares the distaste for what he calls “the toxin of triumphalism arising from an over-realized eschatology that sees our efforts as establishing and ushering in the kingdom of God,” but he wants to emphasize Bavinck’s Christology as the key to a unified, integral vision of the Christian life which acknowledges Christ’s kingship in communal, social, cultural, and political ways as well as in personal

lenses of redemption and eschatology, reflects the baneful influence of Karl Barth on twentieth-century Reformed theology including such Dutch Reformed theologians as G.C. Berkouwer and S.G. De Graaf. This is also the conclusion of Cornelis Venema, “Recent Criticisms of the Covenant of Works in the Westminster Confession of Faith.”

39. Mattson, *Restored*, 239–40.

40. Eglinton, *Trinity*, 60. This pedigree is the one followed by Jan Veenhof in his massive study of Bavinck’s understanding of revelation and inspiration (*Revelatie en Inspiratie*, 250–68).

and individual discipleship. Otherwise, so he frets, enterprises such as “Christian” education become problematic. How do we speak of Christ as King outside of the church’s walls? It might be helpful to observe that there are two different concerns going on here. VanDrunen is concerned that “grace restores nature” has become a slogan for neo-Calvinists to justify what is in practice a more Anabaptist vision in which all of life must be “Christified.” Kloosterman, on the other hand, worries that Reformed people who strongly push the two kingdoms doctrine are in fact closet Lutherans who leave the natural realm to its own devices outside of Christ’s redemptive work.

I cannot say that I have no dog in this fight.⁴¹ I consider both men as friends and respect them as fellow Reformed theologians. My own view is that there is a greater unity in Bavinck’s thought on this matter than VanDrunen allows. At the same time, I agree with him that there are statements in Bavinck that give ammunition to neo-Calvinist transformationalism, statements that also make me uncomfortable. VanDrunen provides a number of examples in his essay that I will not rehearse here. In particular, Bavinck made comments that—when abstracted from their fuller context!—left his readers open to confusion in the doctrine of revelation.⁴² Some of his statements about *general* revelation have been taken to suggest that Bavinck regards science as a revelation from God in the same sense that the Bible is the Word of God. Here is one such statement: “And therefore all things are also a revelation, a word, a work of God.”⁴³ This was taken, among other Bavinck sayings, by the Study Committee on Creation and Science that reported to the Christian

41. My very first book publication, *Christian and Reformed Today* (Jordan Station, Ont.: Paideia, 1984) carried on a running critique of neo-Calvinist triumphalism and called for pilgrimage as an antidote (see especially chs. 3, 6, and 7). On top of that, I do have a vested interest in defending the honor of Herman Bavinck!

42. Jan Veenhof’s helpful discussion of nature and grace in Bavinck (*Revelatie en Inspiratie*, 345–65, trans. Al Wolters, “Nature and Grace in Herman Bavinck,” *Pro Rege* 34, no. 4 [2006]:11–31) provides plenty of illustrative material that showcases Bavinck’s elaborate (and perhaps not altogether successful) efforts to tie general and special revelation, particular and common grace, creation and incarnation, all together in a harmonious whole.

43. *RD*, 1:370.

Reformed Synod of 1991 as evidence for the Reformed tradition's affirmation of science as a "revelation." Appeal was also made to Belgic Confession, article 2, and its reference to the "two books" of Scripture and "the creation, government, and preservation of the universe." Now, Bavinck did say concerning the "facts of geology" that "these facts are just as much words of God as the content of Holy Scripture and must therefore be believingly accepted by everyone."⁴⁴ The context makes clear that what he has in mind are things like dinosaur bones and other fossils, the sedimentary layers of the earth's crust and the like. These are just there and have to be accepted. He continues with a reminder that the *exegesis* of these "facts" is a different matter altogether and raises objections to an old age for the earth and the long periods posited by geologists.

Even with that caution in mind, however, Bavinck here does seem to be accepting a fact-value split that he ordinarily rejects.⁴⁵ My own judgment is that he made an incautious statement at this point in order to impress upon his more conservative, pietist Reformed hearers the importance of taking empirical knowledge seriously. It would be an error however to over read this isolated comment and force a Unitarian thought on Bavinck that would not be true to his explicit statements. For it is clear that in Bavinck's view all revelation in creation and history is spoken of *as revelation* because it "reveals God to us." All things in creation speak of God *to the devout*. In the following lengthy citation that gives us Bavinck's position clearly, notice the important opening qualifier and the carefully worded manner in which he speaks about the relationship of our scientific knowledge of the world to God's revelation in creation:

In a sense we can say that also all knowledge of nature and history as we acquire and apply it in our occupation and business, in commerce and industry, in the arts and sciences, *is due to the revelation of God*. For all

44. *RD*, 2:501.

45. See, e.g., his essay, "The Theology of Albrecht Ritschl," trans. John Bolt, *The Bavinck Review* 3 (2012): 123–63. In his analysis of Ritschl Bavinck fiercely resisted the dualism of Immanuel Kant as he evinces in this passage where he describes the end result of such dualism: "Faith, therefore, occupies a free zone; our imaginative capacity can fill this unknown world to our hearts content and [philosophical] idealism can find complete satisfaction. Faith and knowledge—separated for good—can live happily together" (126).

these elements of culture exist only because God has implanted in his creation thoughts and forces that human beings gradually learn to understand under his guidance. . . . But since creation's existence is distinct from God, and nature and history can also be studied by themselves and for their own sake, *knowledge of God and knowledge of his creatures do not coincide, and in the latter case we usually do not speak of revelation as the source of knowledge.*"⁴⁶

Bavinck does *not* say that the data of science are a revelation of God paralleling Scripture. Rather, all knowledge of the world, including our scientific knowledge, *is due to* the revelation of God. Our minds are created by the same divine *Logos* who gave order and structure to the cosmos. Creation reveals God to us. Comparing and contrasting scientific knowledge with Scripture is apples and oranges. The two are quite different realities.⁴⁷ And the most important conclusion? "Knowledge of God and knowledge of his creatures do not coincide, and in the latter case we usually do not speak of revelation as the source of knowledge."⁴⁸

What does this commentary on general and special revelation have to do with our discussion about the two kingdoms? Was this a sideline or an excursus? No. It goes to the heart of the matter. Yes, we can discern a unity of thought in Bavinck that is Christological in nature and which links the *Logos* by whom all things are created and upheld with the *Logos* who became incarnate, died, and was raised for our salvation. Yes, all knowledge, including the knowledge and wisdom that is taught in Christian schools, celebrated by Christian artists, and worked for by Christian social activists, all of this must be tied to Christ. On this Kloosterman's cautions are appropriate. Nonetheless—and this is the crucial point—Bavinck does not identify scientific knowledge of the universe with general revelation as such because the point of talking about general or creation revelation is to *talk about God* and not first of all to describe or celebrate science.

46. *RD*, 2:341 (emphasis added).

47. I have discussed this at much greater length in my "Getting the 'Two Books' Straight: With a Little Help from Herman Bavinck and John Calvin," *Calvin Theological Journal* 46, no. 2 (2011): 315–32.

48. *RD*, 2:341.

The relevance of this to the differences between VanDrunen and Kloosterman is that the most robust defense of Christian education, for example, rooted in the conviction that a disciple of Jesus must yield *everything*, including our thoughts and concepts, to our Lord, still requires of us the need to build up the *content of our knowledge about the cosmos* through the fully human and natural means of gaining knowledge. Kuyper's emphasis on "two kinds of people, two kinds of science" has all too often served to set up an absolute epistemological divide between Christian believers and others and has resulted in an extreme form of "perspectivalism" that insists on distinctly Christian ways of doing penmanship, spelling, and multiplication tables.⁴⁹ At a more sophisticated level this yields an Anabaptist understanding of socio-political life with the broader human community, including the state, seen through the lens of the Christ-community and needing to be governed by the Sermon on the Mount rather than natural law. Bavinck regularly and firmly resisted this conclusion.⁵⁰ When considered from this angle, Bavinck's Reformed and integrally Christological position is clearly in the natural law/two kingdoms camp. We need to exercise some caution when using the adjective "Christian" to speak of important cultural arenas or products lest we be understood as advocating a theocratic vision which is not Reformed (Rushdoony and his followers to the contrary!). At best we might consider language that speaks of a particular social order or cultural activity as "consistent with" a Christian worldview, particularly a biblical anthropology that includes such elements as the dignity and worth of every individual image bearer of God, liberty of conscience, liberty of religious expression and association, and a constitutionally-fixed rule of law to which those who govern as well as the governed are equally subject, and so forth.

Let me add one additional point in response to the oft-heard complaint that this emphasis on two-kingdoms is more Lutheran than Reformed. It is true that the Lutheran tradition differs signifi-

49. For a further elaboration of this point, see my "The Imitation of Christ as Illumination for the Two Kingdoms Debate," especially pp. 32–34.

50. See "Christian Principles and Social Relationships" and "On Inequality," in Bavinck, *Essays*, chs. 7–8. Cf. Bavinck, "Appendix B: The Imitation of Christ II," in Bolt, *A Theological Analysis*, 402–40.

cantly from both the Reformed and Roman Catholic traditions by tying philosophy to law and making the notion of a *Christian* philosophy seem like an oxymoron. In this view philosophy has to do with creation and law which are accessible to and approached by human reason.⁵¹ The Bible is about salvation or gospel which is special, privileged to those to whom the Holy Spirit has been given. These are two realms, and it is a matter of great confusion to blur the differences between them as the Anabaptists do, for example, when they try to build a civil order on the basis of the gospel. We must grant that the Lutheran objection has the merit of warning us against any facile uses of the word “Christian” applied to natural or creational realities. It seems absurd to speak of a Christian bridge (in contrast with a pagan bridge), or a Christian beer, or a Christian pickup truck. The adjective is just inappropriate. However, the matter becomes more complicated when we speak of human institutions. Families and schools are creational, natural realities, realities shared by believer and unbeliever alike. Yet, we do not hesitate to speak of a Christian family or marriage nor of a Christian school. Why? Because in the case of institutions, even though they are based on creation-order givens, the role of human cultural shaping and formation in the actual character of the institution is so important. A “Christian bridge” might be one that is built to cross “troubled waters,” but whether it is a good or bad bridge depends on basic engineering and construction facts. All the prayer in the world

51. This is the definite view of Swedish Lutheran theologian Gustav Wingren, who is rightly critical of Karl Barth’s excessively christocentric theology, accusing it of failing to take creation seriously. But at the same time that he has a strong doctrine of creation in his theology, Wingren also thinks it is impossible to talk about a Christian philosophy. The term is a contradiction because it confuses Law and Gospel. See his *Theology in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1958); *Creation and Law* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1961); *Flight from Creation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1971); *Creation and Gospel: The New Situation in European Theology Today* (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1979). A good example of a Christian who does philosophy but not a “Christian” philosophy, according to Wingren, is fellow Scandinavian Knut Løgstrup, *The Ethical Demand*, trans. Theodor I. Jensen (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971). Løgstrup insists that it is improper to speak of a Christian ethic; the moral reality, the truth about right and wrong is a natural reality. To separate nature and grace, law and gospel, in this manner is a typically Lutheran formulation, one that is challenged by Reformed and Roman Catholic alike, both of whom insist that grace restores or perfects nature, that gospel completes law.

will not keep a bridge with a major engineering design flaw operational. Christian marriages do need and use prayer as a key ingredient of their wholeness and wellness and pay attention to Scriptural teaching on marriage. Though unbelievers may have good marriages when they obey God's norms for marriage such as fidelity, mutual love, caring, and so forth, what distinguishes a Christian marriage is that it is self-consciously patterned after the relationship between the bridegroom Jesus Christ and his bride the church. Much the same can be said about systems of thought and ideas. Of course, the truth of any Christian philosophy or sociology or psychology will depend on the correspondence that exists between reality and the account of that reality by the philosopher, sociologist, or psychologist. Yet, not only does the Christian thinker have the advantage of special revelation when it comes to, let's say, human nature, an advantage that helps prevent foolish claims being made in the name of science (e.g., there is no difference between boys and girls; gender is entirely a social construct, a product of nurture), but also it provides constructive insights into useful research projects and incentives to honor human dignity as image bearers of God.⁵² Thanks to the first commandment—"Have no other gods before me"—the Christian faith also puts up serious roadblocks against ideologies, against a set of ideas becoming a blueprint for a utopian social order.

Concluding Propositions

Let me summarize, conclude, and open the door for further discussion by way of five propositions:

1. Bavinck fully affirms the natural law/two kingdoms tradition that was an integral part of Reformed theology from John Calvin onward.
2. Christian discipleship requires a robust sense that Christ is Lord and King and a robust sense of responsibility to bring every thought and action captive to Christ.

52. For some of the ways in which the Christian faith affects research and scholarship, see Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984).

3. The *content* of our obedience as disciples of Jesus Christ within the structures and relationships that are an integral part of our *created human condition* as God's image bearers must be normed by the laws, ordinances, and wisdom of general revelation and natural law, as the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament shed light on them and equip us to follow them. In other words, we are to be guided here by natural law rather than gospel.

4. Acknowledging the need for Scriptural guidance to understand general revelation should not be used in such a way that it provides *privileged knowledge* for the followers of Christ that can trump public, natural knowledge. Our arguments in the public square include witness to the gospel and reasoned argument from common principles.

5. Assessing the degree to which a people, a culture, a nation, a civilization has been "Christianized" should not be measured in distinctly Christian (or gospel) terms but by how natural and human markers such as the following are realized: protection of life, freedom and human dignity, equality of opportunity for betterment, equitable laws and justice applicable to all people, and possibility of peaceful voluntary association and cooperation among groups within a society.

Letters to a Dying Student: Bavinck's Letters to Johan van Haselen

Translated and introduced by James Eglinton (jeglinton@tukamp en.nl), Theologische Universiteit Kampen

Between Autumn 1886 and March 1887 Herman Bavinck wrote four letters to Johan van Haselen, a student in Kampen who died at the age of twenty-one.* In 2010 Wiljan Puttenstein, head librarian at the Protestantse Theologische Universiteit in Amsterdam, transcribed and chronicled the letters, and thanks are due to him for making them available in electronic format.¹

These letters are striking for a variety of reasons. They present an intimate picture of Bavinck in a new light: rather than a dogmatician or an ethicist, we find here a pastor and a friend. Although the letters hint at Bavinck's bookish nature—the third letter's reference to him spending a holiday in his office, where his “books were [his] true company,” for example—they also reveal a distinctly human figure, one who encourages a young man facing death and who, in so doing, could engage gracefully with the ultimate and the quotidian. And for those of us who are theological educators, these letters remind us that our students' lives include suffering, illness, and perhaps even premature death. Bavinck's example is that of a teacher willing to offer comfort and theological consolation in that context.

Opportunity to observe the application of Bavinck's thought when forced by circumstance to reflect on the issues of life and death is also interesting. Of particular significance is the manner in which he consoles van Haselen, a young man no doubt deeply

* I would like to thank my colleague Wolter Huttinga, PhD student at the Theologische Universiteit Kampen, for proofreading my translation.

1. See Wiljan Puttenstein, “‘Mijn boeken houden mij trouw gezelschap.’ Vier brieven van Herman Bavinck aan een student,” <http://goo.gl/CcY5h>.

pained at his enforced departure from his studies in Kampen, by emphasizing that Kampen was really quite dull and that its students were not entirely happy with their lot there. Heaven, in comparison, meant being with Christ, which was far better.

At the time of writing Bavinck was an unmarried man in his early thirties. His correspondence from that time hints at various personal struggles. He pined for Leiden University's superior library and was no doubt conscious of Kuyper's Amsterdam—then in the throes of the Doleantie—as *the* place to be in the Netherlands. For example, on 1 January 1887, the day after Bavinck's third letter to van Haselen, he writes to his friend Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje: "How often I long for the Leiden library! And how gladly I would move from Kampen to Leiden or Amsterdam. Here [in Kampen] we live so far away and are becoming so provincial!"² Evidently, Bavinck felt rather unsettled in Kampen at that time.

Additionally, it is worth noting that his correspondence with Hurgronje in 1885 deals with Hurgronje's recently published "Mijne reis naar Arabië," a celebrated account of his journey to Mecca.³ Kampen, in comparison, most likely seemed a less glamorous location to the young Bavinck. Writing to Hurgronje a year before van Haselen's death, he remarks, "Not much has changed here in the Netherlands, I think, or if so, I do not know of it. It seems to me that in each area, also in that of the academy, we live in a time of malaise."⁴

Bavinck's letters to Hurgronje from this time, of course, make no mention of van Haselen. However, in reading of Bavinck's own discontent in this period, it is worth noting that involvement with van Haselen's care no doubt had its own impact on his mood in these years.

2. "Hoe dikwerf verlang ik naar de Leidsche bibliotheek! En hoe gaarne zou ik metterwoon van Kampen naar Leiden of Amsterdam verhuizen. We wonen hier zoo achteraf en worden zoo kleinstedsch!" Jan de Bruijn and George Harinck, eds., *Een Leidse vriendschap* (Baarn: Ten Have, 1999), 131.

3. Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, 'Mijne reis naar Arabië,' in *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, 26th and 27th November 1885. See also de Bruijn and Harinck, *Een Leidse vriendschap*, 125–26.

4. de Bruijn and Harinck, *Een Leidse vriendschap*, 125.

In writing to van Haselen about the less exciting aspects of life in Kampen, Bavinck adopts a tone quite different to that of his letters to Hurgronje. He does not speak the language of “malaise” or write critically of Kampen’s poorly stocked library; in fact, Bavinck stresses the opposite, writing of the books in Kampen as his friends. No doubt his letters to van Haselen are informed by a gracious pragmatism. Life in Kampen during the years in question was probably less boring than Bavinck makes out. However, it served little good to remind van Haselen of the more positive aspects of study there when the reality to which he was being ushered—that of Christ’s presence in heaven—truly was much better.

Letter 1

Kampen, Autumn 1886

Very Dear Friend,

I had thought of writing to you earlier, but I was waiting for word from you which, at this point at least, has not yet come. However, I understand well that you will feel no desire or strength with which to write. Therefore, having assumed that your condition is not improving, I will not postpone my intention any longer.

I would much rather write having heard that you were gaining strength and would shortly be able to return to Kampen. But it seems that this is not the Lord’s will. Certainly, all things are possible with Him. He is the Healer of Israel, even when all hope is lost (humanly speaking). He is the Almighty, who can do away with sickness and grant health. I also sincerely hope that the Lord would still lengthen your days and give back your strength and once again use you as a worker in his vineyard. Alongside you, your parents, and your family I pray and beg Him that He would once more grant this and would make us joyful together with you by His mighty deeds.

But I cannot disguise the facts at hand. Sometimes I fear that the Lord’s path can be very different from that for which we would wish. We know nothing. Our knowledge is yesterday’s. The Lord’s thoughts are different from our own. I can understand that it will be difficult and hard to give you confidence through these thoughts. So young and so fully in the prime of life—who would not shudder at

the thought of death. To do so requires grace, but, after that, grace is also needed to want to die. Grace to be at one with God's will, to deny one's own will, and with joy and in quietness to follow the Lord. Only the Christian can do this, who through faith has given himself over to the Great Leader and is now assured that nothing shall separate him from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus his Lord.

And is it not so, my friend? You know something of this. You seek your salvation and blessing through and in Him alone. You know and confess it: in me, there is nothing but sin and guilt, nothing that can stand before God's face. But God made the one who knew no sin to be sin for me, so that I would become God's righteousness in Him. But then there is no distress. Then we can die. Then death becomes victory, a passage to eternal life. Then you stand to lose nothing in this life, the sum of which is difficulty and sorrow, and we all must set it aside sooner or later. I hope, should the Lord's plan be to take you away—and I pray this of Him, that He would strengthen you in the faith and in the blessed hope of the resurrection—that He would bring this life to an end and focus the eye of your faith on Him who has won over death, who has achieved eternal life, in whom is our life, and in whom we have open access to the Father's House where there are many mansions and to which He has gone to prepare a place for us.

I do not dare to ask you to write a short letter to me; it will certainly be too much of a bother to you or be something you simply do not wish to do. In that case I would not wish to ask it. But otherwise, I would be so grateful to know, even if just in a single word, how you are bearing up under all of this. I was so grateful to hear from your own mouth that you had given yourself over to the Lord's will and also that you named his doing Majestic and Glorious.

I know how He can take us from life. When my friend Unink died some years ago in Almelo—also young and having only been a minister for but a few months—he had been prepared for some time and had given himself over to the Lord. And when I met my friend Dr. Klinkert this summer, a few weeks before his death, he also knew that in dying he went to be with Jesus. I was jealous when he said this. No, I did not envy him, but the question came to me: if I could say this with such certainty, and if I also lived in this firm faith, I would be able to, I would want to die.

No, then there is truly not much in this life that could suppress or remove our longing for the glory of [being] God's children. Then, if you can say this—to be with Christ, which to me is by far the best—then my dear friend, you are going before us. And then may God grant that we might follow you to where there shall be no more death.

Here in Kampen, we carry on quietly and peacefully. Normal life goes on in its normal way. There is little change and little movement. You shall certainly hear from some of the students from time to time. Your name is still mentioned often with much concern. Now, dear friend, the Lord bless you in all of your circumstances, in body and soul. The Lord restore and heal you, or should His will be otherwise, the Lord prepare you and us for His coming and make us go forth in peace.

Your loving friend,

H. Bavinck

PS: It is Saturday evening. I had enough time and thus wrote now. I am posting the letter today so that it will reach you quickly. Tomorrow I must preach. I hope to remember you with the congregation in prayer. How glorious is it that our prayers are united in heaven above.

HB

Letter 2

Kampen, Monday evening [December 1886]

Very Dear Friend,

I felt compelled to write to you once more. Your letter, and also that which I heard about you from Prof. Wielenga, has made me deeply happy. And I thought you would find it welcome if you could hear something from Kampen. There is not much news here. Life carries on as usual. Each day is largely the same as the other. But that is perhaps for the best. We are beginning (slowly) to look towards the holiday. That said, time has flown by, and I can scarcely believe that we are already so near to Christmas and New Year.

Our time has probably not passed as slowly as yours. If one is healthy and has work, the days pass as quickly as seconds. But then we also forget to number our days so that our hearts become wise. God uses illness and adversity as excellent teaching means to train us for heaven. In illness He turns our soul from the earthly and strips us of all that upon which we so lightly build on—our health and powers, our work and industry—and He draws us to Himself so that we would seek our stability and strength in Him. And then, when received by us as God's messenger, illness brings forth the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

Sometimes I still have a quiet hope that you shall become better. I pray to God for this, that He would restore you fully to your parents and family and would give you back to us all. But I was nonetheless made glad that you are at one with God's will, whatever that may be.

His will is always wise and holy and good. To follow Him as a child is also—under pressure and testing—blessedness. May God grant that you would remain in this humble position. May He be good to you in every way, glorify His grace in you, and make you bear witness with Paul: whether I live or die, I am the Lord's.

I thank you heartily for your dear letter. You certainly exhausted yourself in writing it. I was so thankful with but a few sentences. Still, now that you have written, I am so glad. If you should have the desire and strength to write a few words, you know how pleased I would be to receive it. But please do not exhaust or overly strain yourself on account of me.

Greet your parents on my behalf. May God bless you in His grace now and always, in body and soul.

From your loving friend,

H. Bavinck

Letter 3

[Kampen, 31 December 1886]

Amicissime,

I have little time, but I did not want this year to end without writing a few words to you. A turning point in our lives is always important. The change from one year to another calls each of us to earnestness. How much more if we are ill. I thank God that you might still bring in the year 1887. And I pray to Him that He will lead you through it, strengthen and restore you, and will richly bless the year '87 in your body and soul.

Sometimes my hope increases that we will yet see you here in Kampen with restored powers. All things are possible with the Lord. That said, at all times he keeps our minds ready for His coming.

In Kampen it is very quiet, but not too quiet. For a teacher, a holiday is also refreshing, one I enjoy in my office. My books are my faithful company.

Sincere greetings to your parents and others in your household, and may God bless you,

*t.t.*⁵

H. Bavinck

Letter 4

Kampen, 2 March 1887

Beloved Friend,

You have perhaps thought that I had wholly forgotten you. I had given reason for such a thought. Since New Year you have received no word from me. Nonetheless I have thought of you often, also in prayer. But writing to you has sometimes been unintentionally delayed. However, I heard yesterday that your condition was once again not so favorable, and so I resolved to write to you immediately.

I wonder how your state of mind is? So constantly living between hope and fear, at one moment better and then worse, sometimes facing life with some courage and then again being cast into despondency! What can go on in a human soul during such circum-

5. *Totus tuus* (wholly yours).

stances! I wished that I could cheer and comfort you, but as I think of your condition I feel powerless in that regard. Could it really be the Lord's will to take you away and receive you into His glory at such a youthful age? It is indeed possible. When I hear how you are, I sometimes receive courage, but then again all hope fails me. But it goes on for so long, the path towards the good seems so far off. Often I feel sorry for you: life is so attractive, death seems so burdensome. But sometimes, momentarily, if I consider the glory of being with Jesus and understand this life in its futility and idleness, on these occasions I envy you and others called out of the fight early by the Lord.

I sincerely hope that you might always remain so, that Paul's wish would be yours: to be with Christ is by far the best. Then dying is no longer dying, and to die young even becomes a privilege. Yes, I ask it of the Lord that He might still restore you and renew your strength and health. But a Christian learns to pray after his Savior: Your will, O Father, be done. You know better than I what is good for me. Is it not a glorious thought—the weeks of the Passion remind us again—that Jesus, the Great Leader has also gone before us in suffering and death?

Following Him, imitating Him, we are also assured through Him, and then we go with Him into the deepest of deaths, but we also rise with Him out of the grave. After death follows life and the resurrection. May this rich, full Christ, who Himself is life, be all your comfort and treasure in your heavy path, my friend. If it is God's will that you must pass on, may Jesus Himself take you by the hand and lead you through the door of death into the heavenly Jerusalem. And God give grace that I might follow you sooner or later! This earth is not our resting place.

Everything carries on here as normal. Tomorrow evening I must give a lecture for the students at the *Vrije Krans* [a student meeting]. There is not much life or movement. The students are, I believe, sometimes unhappy, and not unjustly, that the typical student activities [*het "studentikoze"*] are ceasing. At present there is nothing but going from home to lectures and from lectures back home, and that gets monotonous.

Greet your dear parents and family. May God bless you in everything.

James Eglinton

Your friend,

H. Bavinck

Pearls and Leaven

The Imitation of Christ Is Not the Same in Every Age

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Those who read Herman Bavinck for the first time are often struck by how current and timely his writing seems to be. Though he wrote them 100 years ago, his words speak to *our* issues in *our* day. Not only is the true for the *Reformed Dogmatics* when his comments on justification, for example, seem to anticipate some of the current debates among evangelicals, it is often—quite remarkably!—even more true for some of his social analysis. In his 1918 essay, “The Imitation of Christ and life in the Modern World,”¹ he insists that the circumstances of Jesus’s own context and that of the first-century church are crucial for a proper reading of the Sermon on the Mount and that different circumstances call for a different application. A hostile, pagan culture and a marginalized church help explain the emphasis on passive virtues such as self-denial, forfeit one’s privileges and rights, and so forth. But Bavinck insists that the position of Christians in his day is different:

It is difficult to prove the contention that our position vis-à-vis our culture must be identical to that of the early church. We grant that nothing may be subtracted from the truth of Paul’s statement that the cross is a scandal for the Jews and foolishness for the Greeks. This remains true throughout the ages and is confirmed by our daily experience. Yet the culture of the present is simply not saturated with paganism in the same way and to the degree that it was in the apostolic era. Although it con-

1. A full translation is provided in Appendix B of my *A Theological Analysis of Herman Bavinck’s Two Essays on the Imitatio Christi: Between Pietism and Modernism* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 2013), 402–40. All excerpts are taken from this translation. Page numbers in brackets refer to the pagination of the original.

tains many pantheistic and materialistic tendencies which attempt to gain the upper hand, [138] our culture does not find its origins in these tendencies. Rather it is in principle and in essence rooted in the free and unprejudiced view of nature and the world made possible by Christianity, especially by Protestantism.

At this point Bavinck becomes rhapsodic in his enthusiasm for the blessings of the modern world:

Consequently, the Christian struggle against our modern culture, while similar in some respects, is nevertheless significantly different from that of the early church against the Greco-Roman civilization. The present struggle lacks the unity and closed nature so characteristic of the earlier one. There is simply far too much in our present-day culture that we gladly and thankfully accept and which we daily use and enjoy. The discoveries of science, the new vistas opened up by the historical sciences, the wondrous things brought forth by technology, are of such a nature that they cannot but be regarded as good and perfect gifts coming down from the Father of lights.

At the same time, he shows that he is aware of the moral challenges of his day and does not indulge himself in the progressive dream of ongoing betterment of the human condition. He points out that “whatever moral objections one may have about our present society it cannot be simply designated as pagan,” and then adds that “we simply do not know” what will come. He is aware of certain dangerous developments:

There are developments that fill our hearts with sorrow and fear. If some of the principles being proposed for a future moral order are accepted by society and pass into legislation we shall experience difficult times ahead. But that day has not yet arrived. Governments, legislatures, judiciaries, [139] official life in its entirety are still influenced by the ethical norms derived from Christianity. Even the modern state and civil order, for the most part, are grounded in Christian principles. In general it must be said that our society, unlike that faced by the early church, does not make the imitation of Christ impossible. The Christian church today enjoys a freedom for which it must be truly grateful. It is not a prey for oppression and persecution.

Much of what Bavinck said about the Europe of his day remains true for those of us who are North Americans. At the same time we too face increased hostility to public expressions of the Christian faith, and Bavinck’s wisdom will continue to be a helpful guide as we wrestle with the public expression of our Christian discipleship.

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Book Reviews

***Restored to our Destiny: Eschatology & the Image of God in Herman Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatics* by Brian G. Mattson. Leiden: Brill, 2012. Pp. xii + 258. \$144 hardback.**

Trinity and Organism: Towards a New Reading of Herman Bavinck's Organic Motif* by James P. Eglinton. London: T & T Clark, 2012. Pp. xiii + 224. \$120 hardback.

Good scholarship builds on the foundation of what has been done before and takes a conversation a few steps farther. Good scholars, therefore, stay modest in trumpeting their findings, aware that great paradigm shifting scholarship is rare and is often a collaborative affair. The two volumes under review that adjust our understanding of Herman Bavinck in an important way are meant to be read together; it took this reviewer the combined contribution of both to fully gauge the import of the change.

Ever since the deaths of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck, in 1920 and 1921 respectively, the Dutch Reformed theological and philosophical tradition that intentionally followed their revitalization of Calvin (so-called neo-Calvinism), worked with a two-Kuypers and two-Bavincks model of interpretation. Led by Dirk Vollenhoven, Herman Dooyeweerd, and Klaas Schilder in the Netherlands (aided by G. C. Berkouwer and his many students) and Cornelius Van Til in North America, the Kuyper/Bavinck tradition was viewed appreciatively for what was judged to be its biblical, “reformational” side and criticized for what it retained of Protestant scholasticism. The latter dimension, so it was argued, needed to be jettisoned as a leftover of synthesis with alien Greek philosophical thought. Among those notions dismissed were the distinctions between archetypal and ectypal knowledge, general and special revelation, the broader and narrower sense of the image of God, the doctrine of the covenant of works, natural law and the two king-

* This review appeared in the *Calvin Theological Journal* 48, no. 1 (2013): 171–175 and is reprinted here with permission.

doms (of *power* and *grace*), and the active and passive obedient suffering of Christ.

The renaissance in Bavinck scholarship after World War II was initiated by two dissertations: Eugene Heideman's *The Relation of Revelation and Reason in E. Brunner and H. Bavinck* (1959) and Jan Veenhof's *Revelatie en Inspiratie* (1968). Heideman introduced the theme of "grace restoring nature" as the fundamental theme in Bavinck's theology, a conclusion validated by Veenhof and subsequently repeated by a number of Bavinck scholars including this reviewer. Consequently, "grace restores nature" became the "authentic" reformational note, the biblical side of Bavinck and served as a motivational idea for transformational neo-Calvinism in North America. The net effect of this bifurcation was to separate much of North American neo-Calvinism from the Reformed confessional and theological tradition and to create suspicion against it from the conservative Presbyterian and Reformed community, a suspicion often borne as a badge of honor by reformational neo-Calvinists.

It took two young scholars coming from outside the Dutch Reformed club, doing their work independently in Scotland, the first at Aberdeen and the second at Edinburgh, to provide the definite repudiation of this interpretation of Bavinck. Brian Mattson, Senior Scholar of Public Theology for the Center for Cultural Leadership, produced the first doctoral dissertation after the four volumes of Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* were translated into English. He affirms the importance of "grace restores nature" as the interpretive key to Bavinck's theology but provides the necessary qualification that this restoration must be understood eschatologically: what redemption in Christ gains for us is more than what Adam lost; the state of glory has a "plus" that was not present in the state of integrity. But there is more. Mattson shows that for Bavinck this eschatological goal was itself a given of the original creation and, furthermore, that it is implied in the covenant of works. In fact, the covenant of works is essential for maintaining an eschatological understanding of creation. Adam was created for a higher glory, and the path to that destiny was obedience. Bavinck derives this primarily from 1 Corinthians 15 where the Apostle Paul points to the contrast between the *unfallen* Adam in his "psychical, earthly" existence and the *resurrected* Christ in his "pneumatic, heavenly" existence. This is all reinforced by the Adam/Christ parallel in Romans 5.

To grasp what Mattson has accomplished we need to remind ourselves that “grace restores nature” became such an important theme in neo-Calvinism because it is the correct vehicle for combating all nature/grace dualisms, particularly of the neo-Platonic sort. Mattson provides a helpful summary of Bavinck’s appropriation of the Reformation tradition:

For Bavinck, the true genius of the Reformation, especially as pioneered by Calvin is its replacement of Rome’s ontological or vertically hierarchical version of the nature/grace relationship (i.e., “higher” and “lower” realms of reality) with an *historical* or horizontal version of the nature/grace scheme, starting with the state of integrity (nature) and ending in the state of glory (grace). (p. 5)

To move from state of integrity to state of glory requires the redemptive work of Christ, but the redemptive work of Christ is itself structured by and therefore “subordinate to a prior creational eschatology” (p. 103). That all things should come under the Lordship of Christ was intended *from the beginning* and reminds us that our Christology begins with Christ as the pre-Fall mediator of *union* and not as the post-Fall mediator of *reconciliation*.

This is a crucial point. In the crusade to overcome nature/grace dualisms reformational neo-Calvinists often fault classic Reformed orthodoxy with its doctrine of a covenant of works for its failure to be sufficiently Christological. What is usually meant by this critique, so it seems to me, is that the *redemptive* work of Christ must feature more prominently in biblically-based thinking about culture and society. The latter need to be *redeemed* in some sense or other if Christ is to be Lord. What Mattson’s analysis of Bavinck shows is that this reverses the biblical order and pattern. (Incidentally, it also opens a Pandora’s box of mischief, not the least of which is the risk of grandiosity.) The original creational eschatological horizon is not redemptive or soteriological in nature, and this means that the key to overcoming neo-Platonic forms of dualism is to recognize the “organic or historical relationship between the state of integrity and the state of glory” (p. 239). As Mattson puts it, “Creational *anthropology* (image of God) is here wedded, necessarily, to a creational eschatology (covenant of works)” (p. 240).

Mattson proves once for all that one cannot with integrity make hay with “grace restores nature” while rejecting the cut grass of covenant theology as so much disposable straw. In other words, “grace restores nature” is organically united to the doctrine of the

covenant of works, and severing the theme from the latter doctrine “is like enjoying the utility of a beautiful suspension bridge while thinking that architectural engineering is an unimportant, or even dangerous discipline” (p. 107). This conclusion challenges a significant amount of reformational scholarship that picks and chooses approved of elements from Reformed thinkers like Bavinck and Kuyper without acknowledging the architectonic whole of their thought in its organic connections.

And that brings me to the second dissertation by James Eglinton, currently doing a post-doctoral fellowship at the Theological University of Kampen (Liberated). The notion of the “organic” plays a major role in the theology of neo-Calvinism, affecting the thought of both Kuyper and Bavinck, influencing their understanding of the Holy Trinity, Scripture’s inspiration, Christology, ecclesiology (e.g., the institute/organism distinction), and the normative working of human society. Until recently, scholars attributed the source of this organicism in neo-Calvinism to nineteenth-century movements, notably Romanticism and Idealism, with a longer pedigree going back to Aristotle. In Bavinck’s case (as well as in Kuyper’s), there was an assumption by later interpreters that placed neo-Calvinist organicism within a semi-mystical tradition that includes Jacob Böhme and judges it to be “reminiscent of the *Zeitgeist* of Neo-Idealism” (p. 60).

Eglinton builds on Mattson’s work, and, after dismantling the genetic-historical approach to organicism, places Bavinck’s use of the organic firmly in the longer tradition of Augustinian trinitarianism. Not only is Bavinck’s understanding of the organic of one piece with his orthodox trinitarian theology, the notion of the organic is subservient to and flows from the trinitarian foundation, not the other way around. It is Eglinton’s conclusion that Bavinck’s use of the organic motif arises from and expresses his “trinitarian appropriation of reality.” And this conclusion doubles down on the “lesson” to be learned from these two studies.

First, it points to the need to reject definitively the genetic and etymological fallacy in the realm of ideas to which reformational neo-Calvinists are particularly prone. Simply making an association between someone’s ideas and identifying them as “neo-Platonic” or “Thomist” or “Kantian” in order to dismiss them just will not do. We need to put a stop to the method of finding “false” elements in a

great thinker's work and then setting his "genuine" insights at odds with these false elements. A closer look often reveals that there is a fundamental unity of thought which the interpreter missed and that the fault is with the presupposition of the interpreter who failed to find it.

Second, seeing the helpful organic thinking of neo-Calvinism as the fruit of trinitarian theology is an important corrective to what is at best the general indifference and at worst the downright hostility to classic Reformed theology so often seen in reformational neo-Calvinism. The result has been tragic in my view: neo-Calvinism in North America has all too often been alienated from the very church that gave it its life. It is my own firm conviction that Bavinck shows us a better way, and these two revisionist interpretations by Brian Mattson and James Eglinton show us the proper way of following Bavinck's lead. If reformational neo-Calvinism is to have a future as part of a vital orthodox and evangelical Christianity, it must build on the foundation of classic Reformed and Christian theology, especially its Christology and doctrine of the Trinity.

One final observation: as someone who reads books like these with a sharp pencil in one hand for underlining and creating marginalia, it is a burden to my Calvinist conscience to mar by marking volumes that cost as much as these.

—John Bolt