SCOTTISH BULLETIN OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

The scope of the *Bulletin* is broadly defined as theology, especially Scottish and Reformed, whether biblical, systematic-dogmatic, historical or practical, and Scottish church history. Articles submitted for publication should be sent to the Editor, books for review to the review editor (see below).
Contributors are free to express their own views within the broad parameters of historic evangelicalism. The opinions of contributors may not be assumed to be those of Rutherford House or the Scottish Evangelical Theology Society.
Instructions for contributors may be be found online at: www.s-e-t-s.org.uk/bulletin/

GUEST EDITOR: DR JAMES P EGLINTON, Theologische Universiteit Kampen, (Broederweg), Postbus 5026, 8260 GA Kampen.

EDITOR: DR DAVID J REIMER, School of Divinity, The University of Edinburgh, New College, Mound Place, Edinburgh EH1 2LX. Email: scobethe@gmail.com

ASSOCIATE EDITOR: DR JASON M CURTIS, Rutherford House, 1 Hill Street, Edinburgh EH2 3JP. Email: info@rutherfordhouse.org.uk

REVIEW EDITOR: REVD JAMES R A MERRICK, School of Divinity, History and Philosophy King's College, University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen AB24 3UB. Email: james.merrick@abdn.ac.uk

The *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* is published twice annually by Rutherford House in association with the Scottish Evangelical Theology Society, whose officers are:

President: Professor I. Howard Marshall, University of Aberdeen

Chairman: The Revd Dr Fergus Macdonald, 113 St Alban's Road, Edinburgh, EH9 2PQ

Secretary: The Revd David Easton, Rowanbank, Cormiston Road, Quothquan, Biggar, ML12 6ND. Tel. 01899 308459. Email: deaston@btinternet.com

The *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* is indexed in *Elenchus, Cerdic, IZBG, ATLA and Relig. Theol. Abstr.*

Subscriptions should be addressed to: Rutherford House, 1 Hill Street, Edinburgh, EDINBURGH, EH2 3JP. e-mail: info@rutherfordhouse.org.uk.
Rates from 2009: £14.00; Students £7.00.
Overseas Surface Mail £16.00; Airmail £19.00.
ISSN 0265-4539 Single issue £8.00

Guest Editorial: Bavinck, Dogmatics, and Ethics

The articles in this issue of the *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* first saw the light of day as papers given at the Edinburgh Bavinck Conference, a two day symposium on the work of the Dutch neo-Calvinist intellectual Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) held at New College, the University of Edinburgh, in early September 2011. While the conference was greatly enjoyed by those present, the quality of the papers no doubt merits wider circulation. As such, it is pleasing to see a selection of these papers prepared for publication in this volume.

The conference itself broadly followed the pattern of Bavinck's own career and intellectual development. Beginning as dogmatics professor at Kampen (1883-1902) where his *magnum opus* Reformed Dogmatics took shape, he then relocated to the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (1902-21). This period was marked by a profound engagement with ethics in a variety of spheres. Accordingly, day one of the conference focused on Bavinck's *dogmatiek*, and day two on his *ethiek*. The papers included in this bundle follow the progression of these two days.

Under the heading of *dogmatics*, Professor John Bolt's paper wrestles with various critiques of Bavinck's theology from the perspective of purportedly 'biblical' theology. Bolt builds on Bavinck's belief that we all read Scripture as children of our traditions and on that basis challenges the notion that a presuppositionless, 'biblical' theology is possible. Dr Mark Elliott's paper on Bavinck's use of Augustine in relation to Ritschl offers a thoughtful, critical take on Bavinck's engagement with ancient and more recent theologies. Dr Henk van den Belt's article on Bavinck's Reformed understanding of the call to grace is a careful, insightful and thoroughly nuanced piece of work.

Under the heading of *ethics* are papers from Dutch scholars Professor George Harinck and Dr Dirk van Keulen, and Scotland's own Professor Donald Macleod and Dr Paul T. Nimmo. Harinck's thought provoking paper explains the sense in which Bavinck attempted to find his place as a Christian participant in the shifting conceptual environment of modern culture. His conclusion is that Bavinck's experiment in this regard was ultimately a failure—a claim that will no doubt spark further debate and research. From van Keulen we have a paper on the imitation of Christ according to Bavinck. Van Keulen's work is significant in that it challenges us to remember not only that Bavinck's post-Reformed Dogmatics writings were overwhelmingly centred on ethics; his pre-Reformed Dogmatics work (principally his doctoral thesis on Zwingli's ethics) was also

weighted in the same direction. As such, van Keulen challenges us to see Bavinck not simply as a dogmatician who engaged sometimes in ethics, but rather as an important ethicist in his own right. Following this, Professor Macleod's contribution gives a highly stimulating perspective on Bavinck's concept of the certainty of faith. Bearing in mind that lack of assurance in this regard is amongst the perennial problems of Scottish Calvinism (at least in certain strands), Macleod highlights an area where Bavinck offers us something very helpful. Finally, Dr Paul Nimmo's paper on the theology of the eucharist brings Bavinck into dialogue with Karl Barth. This paper highlights that while (or perhaps because) these two theological giants represent considerably different recent trajectories within the Reformed tradition, they are of considerable worth to each other as conversation partners.

It is particularly with regard to day two of the conference, the ethics papers, that the Edinburgh Bavinck Conference and, correspondingly, this *SBET* edition, take on a particular importance. For some time Bavinck has been known in the anglophone world as a dogmatician of some repute. The excellent English translation of Reformed Dogmatics has more than established that fact. However, comparatively little work has thus far been done amongst English speaking theologians to probe his merits as an ethicist. Clearly, a single day devoted to papers on his work in this regard (which, incidentally, included short papers by postgraduates on Bavinck and fashion, education, the human subject etc.) can only scratch the surface. However, it is hoped that such papers will help spur on more work in this regard. Perhaps the key issue facing Bavinck studies (for anglophone theologians, at least) is this: how did the writer of such an extensive systematic theology apply this breadth of theological knowledge to his own life context and culture? We know a great deal about Bavinck's orthodoxy, and now we must ask more questions of his orthopraxy. The challenge in developing the study of Bavinck the ethicist is obvious: we have a standardised English translation of his dogmatic work, but his ethical volume *Gereformeerde Ethiek* (discovered recently by Dr van Keulen) exists only in an unfinished, unpublished, Dutch language manuscript, and the rest of his ethical contributions (of which there are very many) are shorter, similarly untranslated pieces. As such, engagement with his ethics presents perhaps a greater challenge than work on his dogmatics. This, however, is a challenge to which we must rise if we are to develop a well orbed understanding of Herman Bavinck.

The existence of this Bavinck-themed *SBET*, which allows a wider circle to benefit from the conference proceedings, owes much to the contribution of various people.

In the first place, New College and its staff members (who provided much practical support, in addition to the use of Martin Hall and the Senate Room) deserve a vote of thanks: in particular Professor David Fergusson and Ms Jean Goldring, whose support was invaluable throughout. The conference was financially supported by both New College and the Hope Trust. My colleague Professor George Harinck contributed much by the way of encouragement (to redress the balance of European and North American Bavinck conferences) and advice in the conference planning. Every conference depends on those who attend, and the Edinburgh Bavinck Conference was no exception. A sterling group of postgraduate students representing and supported by various institutions (Princeton, Fuller, St Andrews, Kampen (Broederweg and PThU), Cambridge, Bristol, Aberdeen, Cairo Evangelical Theological Seminary and Calvin Seminary) contributed via their short papers and lively interaction. Dr David Reimer, *SBET*'s regular editor, has been gracious in accommodating a slightly longer than usual cohort of papers and in encouraging their publication in this edition.

James Eglinton
Kampen, March 2011

CONTRIBUTORS

Dr Henk van den Belt	Assistant Professor of Reformed Theology, Utrecht University
Professor John Bolt	Professor of Systematic Theology, Calvin Theological Seminary
Dr James Eglinton	Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Theologische Universiteit Kampen (Broederweg)
Dr Mark Elliott	Senior Lecturer in Church History, St Mary's College, University of St Andrews
Professor George Harinck	Director, Historisch Documentatiecentrum, VU University Amsterdam; and Professor, History of the Reformed Churches in a Dutch Protestant Context, Theologische Universiteit Kampen (Broederweg)
Dr Dirk van Keulen	Postdoctoral Researcher, Protestantse Theologische Universiteit (Kampen)
Professor Donald Macleod	Professor of Systematic Theology, Free Church College, Edinburgh
Dr Paul Nimmo	Meldrum Lecturer in Theology, School of Divinity, The University of Edinburgh

BAVINCK'S USE OF WISDOM LITERATURE IN SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

JOHN BOLT

CALVIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, 3233 BURTON SE, GRAND RAPIDS, MI, U.S.A. 49546
bltj@calvinseminary.edu

Bad ideas never die; they only put on new battle uniform. A good part of Herman Bavinck's continuing relevance as a Reformed theologian is that he not only wrestled down perennially recurring bad ideas in their classic garb—Gnosticism, Pelagianism, Arminianism—but was especially keenly aware of their modern dress. Among the bad ideas he repeatedly repudiated is one that goes back to Tertullian and is evident in varying degrees in a thread that takes us through Bernard of Clairvaux, Martin Luther, Pascal and Kierkegaard up to Adolf von Harnack, Karl Barth, and N.T. Wright: the repudiation of philosophy's legitimate role in systematic theology in the name of what Bavinck liked to refer to as 'so-called biblical theology.'[1] I will begin with a couple of recent critiques of Bavinck's own use of philosophy—both appealing to Cornelius Van Til—and briefly summarise his refusal to accept biblical theology's trumping of metaphysics and philosophy. Following this, as a test case challenge for those to claim to travel the high road of a pure and true biblical theology, I will consider the wisdom literature of Scripture, note the inadequate appropriation of wisdom *as wisdom* in a number of works of systematic theology, and finally by way of contrast, consider Herman Bavinck's use of wisdom in the *Reformed Dogmatics*.

I. CORNELIUS VAN TIL AND TWO CRITIQUES OF BAVINCK: THEOLOGY NOT BIBLICAL ENOUGH[2]

The two critiques under consideration share the charge that Bavinck's theology is insufficiently biblical. With differing degrees of intensity and severity, both use images of medical pathology to describe a duality in Bavinck. Baptist theologian Malcolm Yarnell contends that 'Bavinck's theological foundation is ostensibly Scripture, but his writings reflect a thoroughgoing rationalism that is prior to and formative for his treatment

1 H. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. by J. Bolt, tr. by J. Vriend, 4 vols (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003-2009), 1, p. 82 [hereafter cited as *RD*].

2 I am indebted to Calvin Seminary Ph. D. student Laurence O'Donnell for calling my attention to these two critiques and for the stimulation provided by our extended conversations about Cornelius Van Til.

of Scripture.'[3] Apparently without any sense of irony, Yarnell accuses Bavinck—and, by extension, the entire Reformed tradition!—of irrationality and even mental illness: 'The contradictions in Bavinck with regard to the priority of Scripture and reason form an almost schizophrenic picture.'[4] The source of this schizophrenia—or 'two minds'[5] in Bavinck—is the conflict between a biblical-theological method and one that uses philosophy. According to Yarnell, one must choose between the two—either Scripture *or* philosophy; the combination is inherently unstable: 'The schizophrenic nature of Bavinck's foundation—a schizophrenia caused by his inability to choose between a philosophical or biblical foundation—makes for interesting philosophy and unstable theology.'[6]

At this point Yarnell appeals to Cornelius Van Til's critique of Bavinck's 'scholasticism' as a species of natural theology. '[F]or all his effort to the contrary, Bavinck seems to offer us a natural theology of a kind

---

3 M. Yarnell, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine* (Nashville: B & H, 2007), p. 50.

4 Yarnell, *Formation of Christian Doctrine*, p. 51; cf., the comment on the Reformed tradition has to do with the doctrine of regeneration: 'The irrationality of the Reformed position is accepted without note' (p. 59).

5 Though I do not retract what I said in 'Grand Rapids Between Kampen and Amsterdam: Herman Bavinck's Reception and Influence in North America', *Calvin Theological Journal* 38 (2003), 263-80, I am not pleased by much of the appeal to 'two Bavincks' in recent literature. See my introduction to 'The David Van Drunen-Nelson Kloosterman debate on Natural Law and the Two-Kingdoms Doctrine in Herman Bavinck', on the Bavinck Society web page <http://j.mp/Bavinck01> [accessed 25 April 2011].

6 Yarnell, *Formation of Christian Doctrine*, pp. 64-5; Yarnell acknowledges Bavinck's 'sincere attempt to be biblical' and then cites with approval Bavinck's statement that 'A theologian, after all, is not a philosopher'. (p. 64; from H. Bavinck, *RD*, 1, p. 503). Not content with this, however, Yarnell adds: 'But soon after that, theological epistemology is made "dependent on a philosophy."' This critique is simply wrong. In the very paragraph cited by Yarnell, Bavinck explicitly states: 'Theology has its own epistemology and, though dependent on philosophy, it is not dependent on any particular philosophical system.' Bavinck's point is that when a theologian asks questions about the relation of our knowledge of God to our knowledge in general he is asking *epistemological questions* that are philosophical in nature. To acknowledge the legitimacy of *using* philosophy is not the same as making theology *dependent* on philosophy. Cf. my essay '*Sola Scriptura* as an Evangelical Theological Method?' in *Transforming or Conforming: Post-Conservative Evangelicals and the Emerging Church*, ed. by G. Johnson and R. Gleason (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2008), pp. 62-92.

similar to that offered by the Church of Rome.'[7] Like Rome, so Yarnell believes, Bavinck has too exalted a view of human nature, especially of human reason, after the Fall. Yarnell takes Bavinck's core motif that 'grace restores and perfects nature' to imply a capacity for the perfection of human reason which yields for Protestants 'an unrealistic doctrine of the infallibility of the individual theologian'.[8]

I will not belabour Yarnell's numerous missteps but stress the matter of Yarnell's own set of presuppositions and agenda to make the point that the real question at issue between him and Bavinck is not a choice between Scripture *or* philosophy but a fundamental difference in biblical *interpretation*. Yarnell explicitly declares his intention to develop a foundation for theology that is based on a Believer's Church/Free-Church soteriology and ecclesiology; in other words, 'a believers' church theological method'.[9] It is this Believers' Church presupposition, built on 'the Anabaptist doctrine of the new creation',[10] that yields his critique of Bavinck. Here is the heart of that critique: Since, in the neo-Calvinist view, the gospel reforms not only human persons but also society, 'all aspects of human existence are subject to reformation. The world can be rescued as it is by Calvinism without the need for the introduction of a new cosmos.'[11] In this way, 'discipleship in the Christian life is replaced by rationalism. Where the Anabaptists encourage Christians to glorify God with the entirety of life in the carrying of the cross and witness, Bavinck focuses on being reasonable.'[12] In

---

7 Yarnell, *Formation of Christian Doctrine*, p. 52; the reference is to Cornelius Van Til, 'Common Grace II', *Westminster Theological Journal* 24 (1961), 188, 192.

8 Yarnell, *Formation of Christian Doctrine*, p. 54; from Yarnell's footnote, the accusation apparently comes from Cardinal Ratzinger's *Principles of Catholic Theology*, p. 223; however Yarnell does not give us a direct quote but a paraphrase and it is clear the he approves the charge.

9 Yarnell, *Formation of Christian Doctrine*, p. 33.

10 Yarnell, *Formation of Christian Doctrine*, p. 53.

11 Yarnell, *Formation of Christian Doctrine*, p. 53.

12 Yarnell, *Formation of Christian Doctrine*, pp. 56-7. In a misreading of Bavinck, Yarnell concludes a thoroughgoing rationalism from Bavinck's statements that it is theology's task 'to take the thoughts of God laid down in Scripture into their consciousness and to understand them rationally' (*RD*, 1, p. 93). This assumes that for Bavinck every believer must be a theologian (something Bavinck explicitly rejects) and that being a theologian is all that there is to the Christian life. In fact, the imitation of Christ is at the heart of Bavinck's understanding of discipleship. See Dirk Van Keulen, 'Herman Bavinck's Reformed Ethics: Some Remarks about Unpublished Manuscripts in the Libraries of Amsterdam and Kampen', *The Bavinck Review* 1 (2010), 25-56.

addition, the unbiblical notion of a universal catholicity for the Christian church, based on the distinction between the visible and invisible church, 'allows Reformed theologians to take their eyes off the local church and focus them on the culture'.[13] The ultimate unbiblical move made by Calvinists is to set aside the importance of faith as 'voluntary reception of revelation' in favour of an abstract doctrine of grace and election leading to a detailed *ordo salutis* that 'defines salvation, often in opposition to the free-church movements, according to the divine decrees, calling, election, and even eternal justification . . .'.[14]

I am sensitive and even sympathetic to concerns about the misuse of neo-Calvinism's key themes as an excuse for 'worldliness'.[15] However, Yarnell's protest is really a quarrel about biblical *interpretation* and not a methodological objection that Bavinck does not use the Bible adequately. A couple of examples demonstrate this clearly. 1) Yarnell quarrels with the visible/invisible church distinction which turns on a disagreement with Bavinck's understanding of Acts 9:31 where Bavinck takes the singular Ἡ εκκλησία to be an indication that 'churches of Judea, Galilee, and Samaria considered themselves . . . unified'.[16] 2) Yarnell objects to Bavinck's anti-chiliast eschatology, ascribing it to a 'worldly Christianity'[17] without considering that those who object to millenarianism might do so for biblical grounds. The issue is not Scripture *or* philosophy but disagreement on the level of interpretation. By setting the problem as an either/or between philosophy and Scripture and positing the norm of 'theological method as disciplined response to divine revelation',[18] Yarnell begs the question and avoids—or evades—important questions about the nature of revelation. How does biblical revelation relate to other human knowledge? Does 'disciplined response' include reasoned reflection or would that be

[13] Yarnell, *Formation of Christian Doctrine*, p. 53.

[14] Yarnell, *Formation of Christian Doctrine*, p. 59.

[15] I share many of Klaas Schilder's objections to the *Reformed* (Gereformeerde) world of the Netherlands in the 1920s and 1930s. My own protest can be found in my book *Christian and Reformed Today* (Jordan Station, Ont. Paideia, 1984), especially chapter 7.

[16] Yarnell, *Formation of Christian Doctrine*, p. 54; Bavinck citation is from 'The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church', trans. by J. Bolt, *Calvin Theological Journal* 27 (1992), 220-1. In fairness to Yarnell, he does then offer an argument against Bavinck from the larger context of the Book of Acts, but my point here is that we have here a disagreement about biblical interpretation and it is this disagreement that is then turned into a methodological argument.

[17] Yarnell, *Formation of Christian Doctrine*, p. 56.

[18] This is the title of Yarnell's first chapter.

'rationalism'? In sum, Yarnell's accusation of rationalism and objection to the intrusion of philosophy into theology amounts to little more than a biblicist defence of ignoring and avoiding key important foundational-epistemological questions that require philosophical thinking.[19]

Oliphint addresses the important epistemological issues that Yarnell avoids. In his essay, 'The Prolegomena Principle: Frame and Bavinck',[20] Oliphint is quite clear in affirming that Bavinck's theological foundation rests finally and solely in Scripture[21] and that this is identical, he says, to the position of John Frame (and Cornelius Van Til),[22] though he adds that there is a 'viral bug' at loose that threatens the whole Bavinck enterprise. Furthermore, as he goes on to explore this 'viral bug', he engages in an extensive analysis of Aristotle and Aquinas on epistemology and metaphysics including the vexing question of universals. Here, he praises Bavinck for going beyond Thomas: 'So Bavinck is explicit where Thomas, as far as I can tell, is not. Bavinck affirms that the connection between the universal and the particular is produced by the Logos.'[23]

What then is at issue between Bavinck and the Van Til-Frame-Oliphint position? What is, to use Oliphint's term, Bavinck's 'viral bug'? It seems that it is the attempt to explain human knowledge in general using categories that do not directly appeal to or are not derived directly from Scripture, as, for example, when Bavinck cites Aristotle: 'The mind does not know things apart from sense perception.'[24] Along with Frame, Oliphint objects to methodologically distinguishing prolegomena to theology from dogmatic theology itself and theology from other sciences:

---

19 Yarnell's treatment of Bavinck is evidence confirming my thesis in '*Sola Scriptura* as an Evangelical Theological Method?' that whenever theologians intentionally eschew philosophical and metaphysical issues in the name of 'biblical theology' they fail to provide an adequate foundation for the truth claims of theology as a scientific endeavour.

20 K. Oliphint, 'The Prolegomena Principle: Frame and Bavinck', in *Speaking the Truth in Love: The Theology of John Frame*, ed. by J. Hughes (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2009), pp. 201-32.

21 'As noted above, it seems clear that Bavinck allows for no other foundation than [scriptural] revelation when the context is dogmatic theology' ('The Prolegomena Principle', p. 209).

22 After noting that it is 'the Logos who, externally and internally, grounds any and every attempt to know the world', Oliphint concludes: 'These affirmations are consistent with everything that Frame has himself wanted to assert' ('The Prolegomena Principle', p. 208).

23 Oliphint, 'The Prolegomena Principle', p. 218.

24 Oliphint, 'The Prolegomena Principle', p. 211; cf. Bavinck, *RD*, 1, p. 226; cf. Aristotle, *De sensu*, c.6.

'Where the foundations of method are concerned, what is true for one discipline should be true for them all.'[25] Building on Frame's contention that God 'performs all his acts by his speech', Oliphint concludes:

> (1) that God's revelation provides the foundation for *all* our knowing and living and that (2) because God's revelation is the *principium* for all knowledge, it cannot be the case that some other methodological process can be affirmed as a ground of knowledge. This latter affirmation seems to be a part of the epistemology and prolegomena in Herman Bavinck's thought.[26]

If 'revelation' in this passage included general as well as scriptural revelation, then Bavinck would be in full accord.[27] It seems however that Oliphint intends here to refer to Scripture alone, as the following cited passage from Frame—with Oliphint's own emphasis—indicates:

> *The idea that some radically different method is needed for 'introductory matters' is unwarranted and dangerous; dangerous because the only alternative to exegetical method is autonomous speculation.*[28]

The choice is: exegesis or speculation. Leaving aside whether 'radically different method' is a fair description of Bavinck's Prolegomena, what is telling is the reference to 'exegetical method' as the contrasting position. Oliphint confirms this when he posits as the 'cure' for the 'Bavinck bug' Frame's statement that 'we reach conclusions in these areas by studying Scripture just as we reach any other theological conclusions.'[29]

Oliphint's argument against Bavinck then takes a curious turn. Rather than engaging Bavinck's own text in a careful analysis, he turns to Geerhardus Vos's review of Bavinck's Prolegomena volume in its first edition and directs attention to Vos's contention that Bavinck's work 'is the same theory of knowledge that has been set forth in this country by the late Dr. McCosh'.[30] Oliphint then enters into a lengthy discussion about whether

---

[25] Oliphint, 'The Prolegomena Principle', p. 204; (cf. Bavinck, *RD*, 1, p. 209-10).

[26] Oliphint, 'The Prolegomena Principle', p. 211.

[27] H. Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953 [1909]), p. 27.

[28] J. Frame, 'Book Review' <http://www.frame-poythress.org/frame_articles/1983Corduan.htm> [accessed 25 April 2011].

[29] Oliphint, 'The Prolegomena Principle', p. 204.

[30] Oliphint, 'The Prolegomena Principle', p. 205; Vos's review appeared in *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 7 (1896), 356-363, and was reprinted in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. by R. Gaffin Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), pp. 475-84.

it is biblical to say 'that all knowledge must begin from observation'. He apparently agrees with Van Til whom that this is evidence that Bavinck has not adequately purged himself from the scholastic pattern of 'commingling Aristotelianism with Christian principles... The net result...is a moderate realism [which]...is not a specifically Christian position based on the presupposition of the existence of the God of Scripture.'[31] After a lengthy discussion of Bavinck, Thomas Aquinas and their relation to Aristotle's metaphysics, Oliphint concludes that Bavinck follows Thomas in affirming that God is only the *cause* of human knowledge.[32] This, he judges, is an inadequate answer to the common sense philosophy of Thomas Reid and the Princeton divines (while Thomists, Reidians and the realism put forth by Bavinck do give appropriate credit to God as 'the *essendi*, the *causal* principle with respect to that epistemology' they do not deliver on the *content* of that knowledge).[33]

At several places in his discussion Oliphint raises points that seem intended as contrasts with Bavinck but in fact represent Bavinck's own views exactly. For example, in critique of Bavinck's 'Christian realist' epistemology, Oliphint raise two points from Romans 1 and 2. First, what people have is not just a *capacity* for knowing God but actual knowledge of God; and, second, that this is universal.[34] There is nothing in these two claims that Bavinck would dispute; the disjunction between 'actual knowledge' and 'capacity for knowledge' is Oliphint's creation, not Bavinck's.[35] To have actual knowledge assumes that one has the capacity for knowledge. Oliphint acknowledges, 'All of this, Bavinck seems to affirm in places.' He then claims that 'the affirmation of this surely carries implications that would destroy Bavinck's bug; it would disallow a

---

31 Oliphint, 'The Prolegomena Principle', p. 206.

32 Oliphint, 'The Prolegomena Principle', p. 221.

33 Oliphint, 'The Prolegomena Principle', p. 229. How far this is from Bavinck's understanding can be shown in a single reference to what he says about Christ as 'the mediator of union (*mediator unionis*) between God and his creation. He is not only the exemplary cause (*causa exemplaris*) but also the final cause (*causa finalis*) of creation. In the Son the world has its foundation and example, and therefore it has in him its goal as well. It is created through him and for him as well (Col. 1:16)' (*RD*, 4, p. 685).

34 Oliphint, 'The Prolegomena Principle', p. 226.

35 Cf., Oliphint, 'The Prolegomena Principle', p. 226, where he speaks more modestly and concessively: 'The confusion in Bavinck may be this: it seems that in the majority of cases, Bavinck attributes to the Logos not specifically the *principium cognoscendi*, but the *principium essendi*, in much the same way that Thomas Reid did.'

realistic epistemology.'[36] If I understand correctly the paragraph that follows, Oliphint believes that Bavinck understands the work of the Logos in giving knowledge to all people as something intellectual and abstract, enabling us 'to recognize the Logos in things'.[37]

In place of Bavinck's Christian realist epistemology Oliphint offers us John Frame's insistence that 'we begin with Scripture *alone* as our *principium cognoscendi* and measure all else by its truth. 'We need', he says, 'a universal principle of knowledge that has universal application regardless of circumstances, context or conditions. That principle...is the Word of God—as Logos and as written.'[38] In the end, however, Oliphint, avoids drawing out the implications of the Logos apart from Scripture and limits himself to Scripture. 'We are back, therefore, to the principle of *sola Scriptura* as the ground and foundation for our prolegomena and our epistemology. Thus, God's revelation alone and not a realistic epistemology is able to bring the gospel to bear on the church and on the world.'[39] My response to Oliphint is simple: Until I am shown how Van Til's 'improvement' of Bavinck's epistemology is anything more than a higher level of abstraction that makes no concrete difference in the actual content of theology, I am unconvinced that there is a viral bug.

II. BAVINCK'S REJOINDER: BIBLICAL THEOLOGY IS NOT ENOUGH

What could possibly be problematic about a theological system that simply reproduces the truth-content of Scripture and intentionally eschews all alien philosophic categories and concepts? Is this not exactly how Charles Hodge defined the task of Christian theology?[40] Bavinck raises both practical and theoretical objections. Practically it is impossible to shed oneself

---

36 Oliphint, 'The Prolegomena Principle', p. 227.

37 Oliphint, 'The Prolegomena Principle', p. 227.

38 Oliphint, 'The Prolegomena Principle', p. 227.

39 Oliphint, 'The Prolegomena Principle', p. 230. Oliphint's critique puzzles me because he repeatedly affirms Bavinck's own views and seems to find fault only at a higher level of abstraction and not in the concrete content of any knowledge of God. The claim that all knowledge of everything must begin with the self-revealing God of Scripture in order to be true depends on elevating the most simple observation of nature—e.g., 'the sky is blue'—into a secondary metaphysical-theological abstraction: 'The sky is blue because the Triune God who created the heavens and the earth made it so.' Ironically, it is this impulse toward such abstraction that can be said to be truly 'rationalistic' while the Aristotelian impulse to begin with observation is a challenge to all rationalism.

40 '[T]he duty of the Christian theologian is to ascertain, collect, and combine all the facts which God has revealed concerning himself and our relation to

of all presuppositions and confessional commitments prior to coming to Scripture. Because

> every believer and every dogmatician first of all receives his religious convictions from his or her church...theologians never come to Scripture from the outside, without any prior knowledge or preconceived opinion, but bring with them from their background a certain understanding of the content of revelation and so look at Scripture with the aid of the glasses that their churches have put on them.[41]

In an observation reminiscent of Schweitzer's judgment on the nineteenth-century quests for the historical Jesus,[42] Bavinck says this about Albrecht Ritschl: 'The 'pure' gospel that Ritschl finds back in Luther and Jesus corresponds perfectly to the conception he himself formed of it.'[43]

Bavinck also judges that any conception of a 'pure biblical theology' is *theoretically* incorrect as well. The first reason he gives is rooted in the nature of Scripture itself. 'Scripture is not a legal document'; as a book it is 'a living whole', not abstract but 'organic' and the 'full doctrine of faith... has to be drawn from the entire organism of Scripture'.[44] Then follows the statement that Yarnell and others often use to accuse Bavinck of rationalism: 'Scripture is not designed so that we should parrot it but that as free children of God we should think his thoughts after him.'[45] How far this is from individualistic rationalism should be clear from Bavinck's accompanying insistence that 'So much study and reflection on the subject is bound up with it that no person can possibly do it alone. That takes centuries. To that end the church has been appointed and given the promise of the Spirit's guidance into all truth.'[46] In sum, Bavinck's first theoretical objection is this:

> *Scripture is not a legal document but a living, organic, unified whole to be understood with the church of all ages in the power of the Holy Spirit.*

Him. These facts are all in the Bible.' Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology, 3 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1888), 1, p. 11.

41 *RD*, 1, p. 82.

42 Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, trans. by W. Montgomery (London: A. & C. Black, 1910), pp. 10, 398.

43 *RD*, 1, p. 82.

44 *RD*, 1, p. 83.

45 *RD*, 1, p. 83.

46 *RD*, 1, p. 83.

The implication is that the search for a 'pure biblical theology' fails to do justice to the nature of Scripture itself as well as the importance of church tradition in reading and interpreting Scripture.

Bavinck's second theoretical objection amounts to this: Proponents of a pure biblical theology 'forget that the Christian faith is universal' and ignore the need for its translation, its contextualisation; that 'it can and must enter into all forms and conditions.' To reject this universal need for translation is 'to deny the incarnation . . . , to oppose grace to nature in a hostile fashion'. The truth of God and about God, given in Scripture in an organic, unified whole rather than as a set of aphorisms or propositions, must take on flesh and blood concreteness in human consciousness. 'Dogmatics is and ought to be divine thought totally entered into and absorbed in our human consciousness, freely and independently expressed in our language, in its essence the fruit of centuries, in its form contemporary.'[47] In other words, since translation can only take place when God's words and thoughts enter fully into human consciousness and are set forth in new forms, theoretically, an appeal to a pure biblical theology is an attempt to do the impossible: to resist translation; do its proponents really want to advocate this? In addition, two points to which I will return: theology must be contemporary and done in a spirit of freedom; both are at risk in a 'purely biblical theology'.

Thirdly, Bavinck considers this issue from a slightly different vantage point when he discusses Schleiermacher and others who see theology's task as only historical report of what is believed by the church at a given time. 'The case is different', he notes—though, I would add, not altogether different—'when it is said that the sole task of dogmatics is to furnish a historical report on the content of revelation. This, in a sense, is the position adopted by the "biblical theologians"'[48] and ignores the *purpose* of scriptural revelation which 'is *designed* to generate faith in our hearts, to place us in a proper relation to God'.[49] This purpose assumes the reality of God and his revelation as objective givens; there is a God who desires a relation with us and he reveals himself for that reason. While it is important for a theologian to have a personal faith,[50] it is equally important to insist that the content of theology does not arise from personal religious self-consciousness (Schleiermacher). 'This denies that in nature or in Scrip-

47 *RD*, 1, p. 83.

48 *RD*, 1, p. 89.

49 *RD*, 1, p. 91.

50 'Hence for dogmatic work personal faith is imperative. In that respect the statement that every dogmatics is a confession of one's own faith is perfectly true' (*RD*, 1, p. 91).

ture there is a revelation that provides knowledge of God. It thus severs theology, and particularly dogmatics, from all its objective connections, robs it of its own object, and then tries nevertheless to build up a kind of dogmatics from the material of one's own consciousness (mind, feelings, heart, conscience) without this being bound to anything objective.'[51] At stake is the very character of theology as a science.

> *If a given science has no object and no epistemic source of its own, then neither does it have any right to exist. So if there really is some religious knowledge among us—no matter what its scope and extent, and regardless of whether a system of such knowledge can be credited with the name 'science'—there has to be a source from which it is drawn.*[52]

What does this have to do with 'biblical theology'? Bavinck does not say and I am not suggesting that those who agitate for a 'pure biblical theology' are closet followers of Schleiermacher. However, there is a connection which brings me to Bavinck's fourth theoretical objection: 'biblical theology' has a chequered history in the church. He is aware that throughout the church's history there have been significant protests against the use of philosophy, protests accompanied by accusations of rationalism and intellectualism, and calling for a return to Scripture, to a proper biblical theology that would be practical and not speculative. He acknowledges the legitimacy of many of these protests,[53] even when he raises equally strong concerns about the protests themselves. Thus, he approves of the 'many movements...in the Middle Ages, and later, especially during the Reformation...that rose up in opposition to the devaluation and neglect of Scripture'; of Erasmus and other Renaissance men who sought stronger mooring in Scripture and 'advocated a simple, practical, biblical Christianity' in which they were followed by Socinians, Remonstrants, and numerous sects'; even of Johannes Cocceius and J. C. K. von Hoffman.[54] However, this list also serves as a flashing yellow light of caution; Bavinck is keenly aware that these protests involve a delicate dance in which the first step all too often became the start of an increasingly subjective journey through pietism to rationalism. As the Reformational 'back to the early church and the New Testament' symphony became the Anabaptist single-note 'back to Jesus only' chorus and eventually morphed into the numerous 'Song of myself' nineteenth-century 'lives of Jesus our example', the *object* of theology—the self-sufficient triune Creator and

---

51 *RD*, 1, p. 91.

52 *RD*, 1, p. 91.

53 *RD*, 1, p. 63.

54 *RD*, 1, pp. 63-5, 103-4, 185; *RD*, 3, pp. 209-212.

Redeemer God whom we know through revelation—is replaced by an emphasis on human *subject*ivity.

Again, without charging each and every 'pure biblical theology' advocate with such a lapse into subjectivity, one has to grant Bavinck this reading of church history. When Bavinck takes up the issue of theological developments in the early church,[55] he observes that the first 'theologians' of the church in the apostolic era were content with 'simple repetition and practical application of the truth of Scripture.'[56] 'However', he adds, 'theology could not stop [here].' Prompted by external opposition and attacks, Christian theologians became more methodical and scientific in their handling of revealed truth. This required knowledge of pagan philosophy; in fact, says Bavinck, 'theology originated with the help of and in alliance with philosophy.'[57] Harnack erred in trying to explain Christian theology '*in terms of* Greek philosophy, [but] it also did not come into being apart from it.' Christian theology was an attempt 'to think through the ideas of revelation, to link it with other knowledge and to defend it against various forms of attack. For this purpose people needed philosophy.' This was done, he notes, 'in the full awareness of and with clear insight into the dangers connected with that enterprise; they were conscious of the grounds on which they did it, and they did it with express recognition of the word of the apostles as the only rule of faith and conduct.'[58]

In that light we can see better the delicate dance I spoke of earlier. Let us grant, for the sake of argument, an occasion in which 'scholasticism' of an unhealthy sort— dry, arid, preoccupied with philosophical minutiae and devoid of any personal, biblical, evangelical soul—demands of us a clarion call to 'return to the Bible!' Well and good; understandable and appropriate! But, if we have even a rudimentary awareness of church history in general and the fate of such protests in particular, we will realise that the call to return to the Bible is not an innocent one; without the appropriate ecclesiastical and metaphysical cautions in place, the cure will be every bit as fateful as the disease. In Bavinck's view, not only should names such as Erasmus, the Remonstrants, the Socinians, Johannes Cocceius,[59] Von

[55] Eg., *RD*, 1, pp. 61ff., 116ff.

[56] *RD*, 1, p. 121.

[57] *RD*, 1, p. 123.

[58] *RD*, 1, p. 607.

[59] Bavinck's objection to the covenant theology of Cocceius is that it 'exchanged the theological for an anthropological viewpoint'. This objection is not to the use of covenant concept as such in theology, 'for that occurs already in Zwingli and Calvin and had been developed by Bullinger, Olevianus, and Cloppenburg. Cocceius's novelty lay rather in the fact that he was the first to divide all the material of dogmatics in terms of the covenant idea and planned

Hoffmann, Strauss, Ritschl, Hermann, Hans Küng, and Brian McLaren, raise warning flags, but, even more importantly, Bavinck makes the point that the doctrine of the Trinity itself has most frequently been repudiated *within* the church in the name of a biblical theology.

'The dogma of the Trinity', Bavinck noted, 'has at all times encountered serious opposition.' This opposition came, understandably from Jews and Muslims and rationalists, but, Bavinck notes, 'also within the boundaries of Christendom' itself.[60] The Arian and Sabellian opposition to the doctrine, he observes, appealed extensively to Scripture, especially to such 'subordinationist' passages as John 17:3, 1 Cor. 8:6, Col. 1:15, and Phil. 2:9. He traces the opposition through church history highlighting the heretical views of people such as Joachim of Fiore in the Middle Ages, Servetus and the Anabaptists in the Reformation period, Socinianism, Pietism, and esoteric 19th century figures such as Swedenborg. He also takes note of the philosophic re-imaginings of the Trinity in Kant, Schleiermacher, Schelling, Hegel and Strauss. One of the common threads here is an appeal to the non-speculative teaching of Scripture and a protest against church teaching as having been corrupted in some way or another. Bavinck is quite aware that heretical voices love to appeal to Scripture, even to *sola Scriptura* as a theological method, but he refuses to concede:

> *True, the use of extrabiblical terms was condemned by the Arians as well as by the representatives of many schools of thought in later times, such as the Socinians, the Anabaptists, the Remonstrants, the [so-called] biblical theologians, and others. Christian theology, however, always defended it as proper and valuable. Scripture, after all, has not been given us simply, parrot-like, to repeat it, but to process it in our own minds and to reproduce it in our own words.*

That last point about the freedom of the theologian brings me to Bavinck's fifth theoretical objection:

> *The appeal for a 'pure biblical theology' threatens the freedom of the Christian theologian and the contemporaneity of his or her work.*

This final point serves as a summary of the previous four; it ties together convictions about the nature of Scripture, the work of the Holy Spirit in

---

in this way to offer a more biblical-theological and antischolastic dogmatics.' 'By its historical movement his perspective erases the boundary between the history of revelation and dogmatics and thereby undermines the latter.' (*RD*, 1, p. 103-4; cf. *RD*, 3, p. 210)

60 *RD*, 2, p. 288.

the church as she goes out into the whole world, proclaims the gospel to the nations and guides the work of faithful theologians. In that task Bavinck defends the legitimacy of going beyond the strict language of the Bible because the church has 'always defended it as proper and valuable' and because 'Scripture, after all, has not been given us simply, parrot-like, to repeat it, but to process it in our own minds and to reproduce it in our own words.' Remarkably, Bavinck points here to the very example of Jesus and the apostles and notes the legitimacy of using 'reasoning . . . [to] draw inferences' from Scripture. It is impossible to do theology 'without the use of extra-biblical terminology' and this applies not only to the doctrine of the Trinity but 'in connection with every other dogma and throughout the entire discipline of theology.' Bavinck concludes: 'Involved in the use of these terms, therefore, is the Christian's right of independent reflection and theology's right to exist.'[61] It goes without saying that such independent reflection is an essential ingredient of the church's responsibility to translate the gospel of truth to all places and all ages. To proclaim to the world the Good News of what God is doing and how we must respond requires that we not 'parrot [Scripture] but...as free children of God... think his thoughts after him.'[62]

Conclusion: *Properly understood, theology is an exercise in understanding and articulating the truth about God; it is done in believing submission to God's Word revealed in Scripture as an integral part of our responsibility as free people in Christ to translate it for our times and places.*

III. WISDOM LITERATURE AS A TEST-CASE FOR 'BIBLICAL THEOLOGY'

Let us for the moment bracket out Bavinck's objections and consider what seems to me at least to be a key criterion for a theology that seeks to be purely biblical. In addition to *sola scriptura*, I judge that one would also

---

61 *RD*, 2, p. 296; the full passage reads: 'Jesus and the apostles used it in that way. They not only quoted Scripture verbatim but also by a process of reasoning drew inferences from it. Scripture is neither a book of statutes nor a dogmatic textbook but the foundational source of theology. As the Word of God, not only its exact words but also the inferences legitimately drawn from it have binding authority. Furthermore, reflection on the truth of Scripture and the theological activity related to it is in no way possible without the use of extra-biblical terminology. Not only are such extrabiblical terms and expressions used in the doctrine of the Trinity but also in connection with every other dogma and throughout the entire discipline of theology.'

62 *RD*, 1, p. 83.

need to insist on *tota scriptura*.[63] We all know from the history of biblical interpretation how easy it is for theologians to operate with a limited 'canon within the canon.' Let me also propose here that a critical test for a biblical theology is how it deals with the wisdom literature of Scripture. There are two good reasons for this. (1) Without rehearsing the full story, one of the reasons why the 'biblical theology movement' of the 20th century ran into difficulties was its inability to incorporate wisdom literature into its dominant soteriological and historical categories of covenant, promise and *Heilsgeschichte*.[64] As such, this difficulty was part of the larger challenge of integrating the Old Testament's teaching about God as Creator with the biblical theology movement's overwhelming emphasis on the mighty acts of the Redeemer God in history.[65] (2) Since the wisdom literature of the Old Testament clearly borrows from and affirms the insights of non-Israelite sages,[66] its content is a direct challenge to any 'pure' theology that refuses to go beyond special, redemptive revelation to Abraham,

---

63 One of the few who has treated this question is H. Vander Goot, '*Tota Scripture*: The Old Testament in the Christian Faith and Tradition', in *Life is Areligion: Essays in Honor of H. Evan Runner*, ed. by H. Vander Goot (St. Catherines, Ont.: Paideia Press, 1981), pp. 97-118.

64 See B. Waltke, 'The Book of Proverbs and Old Testament Theology', *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 136 (1979), 302-17. Of course, incorporating biblical wisdom was not the only challenge faced by the soteriologically-oriented biblical theology movement. Langdon Gilkey, among others, pointed out the problematic character of language about 'the mighty acts of God' in the context of modern cosmology; see his 'Cosmology, Ontology, and the Travail of Biblical Language', *Journal of Religion* 41, 194-205. Reprinted in O. Thomas, ed., *God's Activity in the World: The Contemporary Problem* AAR Studies in Religion, 31; (Chico, Cal.: Scholars Press, 1983), pp. 29-43. For a broad overview of the biblical theology movement's main ideas and difficulties, see B. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970).

65 The classic expression of this angst is Gerhard von Rad's programmatic essay, 'The Theological Problem of the Old Testament Doctrine of Creation', in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*, trans. by E. W. Trueman Dicken (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), pp. 131-43. Von Rad's Barthian 'solution' was to marginalise the doctrine of creation as a subset of soteriology and to consider any 'independent' doctrine of creation as something 'borrowed' from non-Israelite (i.e. Egyptian) wisdom sources. Of course, after completing his two-volume *opus magnum, Old Testament Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962-1965; German original, 1960), von Rad came to a more positive affirmation of Old Testament wisdom in his last publication, *Wisdom in Israel*, trans. by James D. Martin (Nashville and New York: Abingdon, 1972).

66 B. Waltke, 'The Book of Proverbs and Ancient Wisdom Literature', *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 136 (1979), 226-28.

Moses, and the prophets.[67] Both of these reasons are neatly captured in a single quotation from Bruce Waltke:

> *In contrast to the scholarly success in showing the comparative similarity of Israel's wisdom with its pagan environment, Old Testament theologians proved unable to integrate the Book of Proverbs into the rest of the Old Testament which builds around Israel's covenants and its history of salvation.*[68]

Let us now take a quick look at how well some systematic theologians have handled the Bible's wisdom literature.[69]

I need to introduce an important qualification here. If one scans the Scripture index of Louis Berkhof's *Systematic Theology*, one will find Proverbs and Ecclesiastes (along with the Apocryphal book of Judith, incidentally) cited as *dicta probantia* in support of the divine attribute of wisdom or the doctrine of *sheol-hades*, but little if any use of Old Testament wisdom *as wisdom*.[70] Similarly, Charles Hodge appeals to wisdom in his discussions of the divine attribute of knowledge, God's providence, and original sin.[71] Herman Hoeksema has an extended discussion of wisdom as a divine attribute but also, in the anthropology locus, includes a wonderful paragraph-long meditation on the law of God that is based on phrases from Psalm 119 and, without citing biblical wisdom, nonetheless captures its essence as the delightful harmony and joy of living within the boundaries of God's created order.[72] A more contemporary Reformed theologian, Hendrikus Berkhof, goes beyond basic citation of texts. In *Christian Faith* he takes note of the influence of Barth on von Rad and others

---

[67] It was one of the distinguishing marks of the biblical theology movement to acknowledge Israel's 'borrowing' from her Ancient Near Eastern context but then immediately to insist that this appropriation was distinct and that Israel's religion was radically different and unique. See Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, pp. 48ff.

[68] Waltke, 'The Book of Proverbs and Old Testament Theology', *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 136 (1979), 302 (emphasis added).

[69] What follows is intended to be suggestive and illustrative and not in any way thorough or exhaustive. My thanks to CTS graduate student Gayle Doornbos for her indispensable assistance in scouring a variety of systematic theologies and locating key passages and themes in their use (and non-use) of biblical wisdom.

[70] L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, new combined edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 69, 683.

[71] C. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, abridged by E. Gross (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1988), pp. 144, 220, 301.

[72] H. Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1966), pp. 100-3, 212.

as a 'problem' for the doctrine of creation.[73] He also honours wisdom *as wisdom* when he explores the pneumatological-ecclesiological significance of the world's wisdom for the church, appealing particularly to the personification of wisdom in Proverbs 8: 22-31.[74] Proverbs 8, along with other key wisdom passages, does figure in other recent systematic theologies as well, notably in discussions of God, Creation, Anthropology, Sin, Christology and Trinity (e.g., Braaten and Jenson,[75] Grenz,[76] Grudem,[77] Robert W. Jenson,[78] Spykman,[79] van Genderen and Velema[80]). Millard Erickson covers the usual attribute of divine wisdom but also does something curious in his discussion of revelation. Under 'modes of revelation' he considers 'history' and then 'divine speech' of which 'interpretation of event' is one form. It is here that he points out the problematic character of the biblical theology movement's attempt to fit all revelation into the category of 'mighty acts of God.' The major problem, as James Barr and others have pointed out, is that wisdom literature does not fit this pattern.[81] Now, in fairness to Erickson, because he accepts the doctrine of general revelation he is not at all hostile to a minor role for philosophy in theology as well as the significance of extra-biblical sources including the special sciences.[82] Yet, biblical wisdom *as wisdom* plays no role in his discussion of theological method nor in any of the loci of theology. While

---

73 H. Berkhof, *Christian Faith*, trans. by Sierd Woudstra (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans: 1979), pp. 151-2, 236.

74 Berkhof, *Christian Faith*, pp. 420-21.

75 C. Braaten and R. Jenson, eds., *Christian Dogmatics*, 2 volumes (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 1, pp. 282-4, 289, 306-7.

76 S. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman and Holman, 1994), pp. 135ff., 393.

77 W. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), pp. 229, 243-4.

78 R. Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 2 volumes (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, 1999), 2, pp. 157-9.

79 G. Spykman, *Reformational Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), p. 199.

80 J. van Genderen and W. H. Velema, *Concise Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. by G. Bilkes and E. van der Maas (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2008), pp. 184-5, 391.

81 M. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), pp. 214, 301-2.

82 'While philosophy, along other disciplines of knowledge, many also contribute something from general revelation to the understanding of theological conceptions, this contribution is minor compared to the special revelation we have in the Bible.' (Erickson, *Christian Theology*, p. 29; cf., ch. 2, 'Theology and Philosophy')

other authors include general discussions of biblical wisdom in their single-volume or multi-volume works,[83] the champion among contemporary theologians in using wisdom *as wisdom* in a clear and effective manner is, somewhat unsurprisingly, the other of the two greatest theologians in the 20th century, Wolfhart Pannenberg.[84] In addition to a thorough and penetrating analysis of biblical wisdom literature in general (2, pp. 68-76), Pannenberg makes use of wisdom *as wisdom* in his discussion of revelation (1, pp. 255-257); the Trinity (1, p. 306; 2, p. 25); the divine attribute of knowledge/wisdom (1, pp. 255, 265, 379, 392, 418, 432, 441, 444); the divine attribute of love (1, pp. 440ff.); creation (2, p. 188); the unity of body and soul; the place and role of human reason (2, pp. 190ff.); image of God (2, p. 206); human destiny (2, pp. 208-9; 216; 218-19); and, more marginally, the Holy Spirit and eschatology (3, pp. 10, 548, 632).

IV. BAVINCK'S USE OF WISDOM LITERATURE IN REFORMED DOGMATICS

I now turn, at last, to Bavinck.[85] He also calls attention to biblical wisdom in his discussion of the communicable divine attributes, but in a way that is quite different than those who simply cite passages such as Proverbs 8 as *dicta probantia*.[86] Wisdom, he notes, is distinct from 'knowledge', adding, 'Nearly all languages have different words for these two concepts.' (2, p. 203) While 'we acquire knowledge by study', we gain 'wisdom by insight. The former is achieved discursively; the latter, intuitively. Knowledge is theoretical; wisdom is practical and goal oriented... Knowledge is often totally unrelated to life, but wisdom is oriented to, and closely tied in with, life. It is ethical in nature; it is 'the art of living well.' (2, p. 203) Wisdom comes through experience and is a way of knowing that is tied to the heart, 'the radical centre of the personality.' (2, p. 203) That is also the way in which Israel gained wisdom, though Bavinck then adds that over time, wisdom 'became the handmaiden of revelation' and genuine wisdom was

---

[83] E.g., H. von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A theological Aesthetics*, 7 volumes (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1982-1989), VI. *Theology: The Old Covenant*, ed. by J. Riches, trans. by B. McNeil and E. Leiva-Merikakis, ch. 6, 'Job', esp. pp. 286-8, 290.

[84] W. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. by G. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982-1989), 3 volumes; references will follow in the text, citing volume number and page; e.g., (1, p. 34).

[85] For ease of reference I will simply cite Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* by volume number and page in parentheses within the text; e.g., (1, p. 34).

[86] It is worth highlighting here Bavinck's extended discussion of wisdom/logos in intertestamental Judaism (2, pp. 264ff.; 4, pp. 602-3).

seen to be rooted in 'the fear of the Lord.' It is for this reason that Philo and after him Christian theology, 'linked the doctrine of Scripture concerning the word and the wisdom of God with [Plato's] ideas.' (2, p. 204) It is also in keeping with the character of wisdom as intuitive insight gained from experience, I will suggest, that Bavinck takes up the notion of 'ideas', not as moderns do, namely as concepts obtained from pure thought, but as an artist working with a model or pattern.

> *Applied to God, the idea means that God has made all things with wisdom, that wisdom is 'the firstborn of his ways' (Prov. 8:22; Col. 1:15; Rev. 3:14). God is the supreme artist. Just as a human artist realizes his idea in a work of art, so God creates all things in accordance with the ideas he has formed. The world is God's work of art. He is the architect and builder of the entire universe. God does not work without thinking, but is guided in all his works by wisdom, by his ideas.* (2, p. 206; emphasis added)

I trust that this is sufficient to dispel the notion that when Bavinck calls us 'to think God's thoughts after him' he is a rationalist.

My favourite example of Bavinck's use of biblical wisdom *as wisdom* occurs in the opening chapter of his eschatology section in the *Reformed Dogmatics*, 'The Question of Immortality' (4, ch 12; esp. pp. 598-602). 'In revealing himself to Israel', says Bavinck, 'God accommodated himself to the historical circumstances under which it lived', and this is also true for 'popular belief in the afterlife.' (4, p. 598) Old Testament Israel follows its neighbours in their horror of death; the finality of Sheol as a place of utter deprivation, darkness, corruption, silence and forgetfulness: 'The dead do not praise God!' (Pss. 6:5; 115:17; 4, p. 600) Death is complete, total; 'there is no room for a view that permits only the body to die and comforts itself with the immortality of the soul. The whole person dies.' (4, p. 600) If so, how did God's people come to affirm that 'The God of Israel is not a God of the dead but of the living' (Matt. 22:32)?

Recall that wisdom is learned from experience, and over a period of time, says Bavinck, it became part of the received wisdom of humanity itself that death is 'not the way it's supposed to be' and that it is, in some sense, punishment for human conduct.

> *Just as the whole person was destined for life through obedience, so the whole person also by his transgression succumbs, body-and-soul to death (Gen. 2:17). This idea had to be deeply impressed upon the consciousness of humankind; and in antiquity it was also realized by all peoples that death is a punishment, that it is something unnatural, something inimical to the essence and destiny of human beings. The revelation God gave to Israel is therefore bound up with this revelation. In the same way that this revelation took over so many customs*

> *and ceremonies (sacrifice, priesthood, circumcision, and so forth) while purging them of impure accretions like self-mutilation (Lev. 19:28; 21:5; Deut. 14:1) or consulting the dead (Lev. 19:31; 20:6, 27; Deut. 18:10-11), so the idea of the unnaturalness of death was also allowed to continue and take over.* (4, p. 600; emphasis added)

However, 'revelation does something else and more as well.' Specifically, it heightens the antithesis between life and death, weaves 'into the fabric of the universally known natural antithesis between life and death...a moral and spiritual contrast—that between a life in the service of sin and life in the fear of the Lord. Death is bound up with evil; life is bound up with good (Deut. 30:15). Godliness leads to life. It is true that for Old Testament saints this vision was tied to the future earthly hope of Israel as a people and not to individual destiny; the latter development takes place after the exile and return. Still, 'the basic elements for this development were already present...in the revelation of the past', including that of the canonical sayings of the wise (4, pp. 601-2).

What Bavinck has done here, I am suggesting, is bring together the wisdom of the peoples and the *sharpened* wisdom of Israel living before the face of God to provide a seamless portrait of a biblical vision of life and death in a way that fully honours wisdom *as wisdom*. Life is good for the Godly; to live apart from God is death.

In conclusion, I only want to add that my sketch of Bavinck and wisdom is fully consistent with and fleshes out the claim I have made elsewhere about Bavinck's repudiation of fideism and biblicism and his insistence that the Christian theologian incorporate the wisdom from universal human religious experience into the constructive task of Christian systematic theology.[87]

[87] J. Bolt, '*Sola Scriptura* as an Evangelical Theological Method?' (cf. note 6, above); idem., 'Een Gemiste en een Nieuwe Kans: Herman Bavinck over Openbaring en Religie', in *Ontmoetingen met Bavinck*, ed. by G. Harinck and G. Neven (Barneveld, Neth.: De Vuurbank, 2006), pp. 143-64.

BAVINCK'S USE OF AUGUSTINE AS AN ANTIDOTE TO RITSCHL

MARK W. ELLIOTT

ST MARY'S COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS, SOUTH STREET, ST ANDREWS, FIFE KY16 9JU
mwe1@st-andrews.ac.uk

The main source for this paper will be Bavinck's *Gereformeerde dogmatiek* in the splendid recent English translation.[1] In the case of Ritschl, his main work *Die christliche Lehre von der Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung* will be quoted either in English translation[2], or in German in the case of the untranslated Volume 2 (*Der biblische Stoff der Lehre*) and occasionally in the case of Volumes 1 and 3 where it seemed important to look at the original.

Although conclusions might possibly be speculative at best, it could be worth attempting to posit a logical connection between Bavinck's identity as a systematic rather than a biblical theologian, and his self-distancing from covenant theology. In the latter respect he was in good Reformed company, given that Calvin and the mature Bullinger hardly were.[3] True, in Bavinck's *RD* Vol. 3 there is a concern to keep the covenant of salvation (*pactum salutis*) and the covenant of grace as such mutually distinct, and there is an insistence against Cocceius that the covenant of grace runs through both dispensations. However in both cases he is trying to correct

---

1 H. Bavinck, *RD*, ed. by J. Bolt, trans. by J. Vriend, 4 vols (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003-2008), cited hereafter as *RD*. Where references appear in the text (e.g. 2, p. 143) these are to the respective volumes of this work.

2 3 vols (Bonn: A. Marcus, 1870-74). Translations: Volume 1—A. Ritschl, *A Critical History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, trans. by J. Black (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1872); Volume 3—A. Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation. The Positive Development of the Doctrine*, ed. by H. Mackintosh and A. Macaulay (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1900).

3 Cf. P. Opitz, *Heinrich Bullinger als Theologe. Eine Studie zu den Dekaden* (Zürich: TVZ, 2004). On Calvin, while there are covenantal themes throughout Calvin, such that it does no harm to call him a 'theologian of the covenant', as Lillback does, he is not in the formal sense of those whose titles testify to the centrality of the concept (e.g. Cocceius [*Summa doctrinae de foedere et testament Dei,*] Witsius [*De oeconomia foederum*]). See further C. Venema, 'Covenant and Election in the Theology of Herman Bavinck', *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 19 (2008), 69-115.

a perversion of covenant theology rather than build on it. There is no consistent treatment of a scheme of covenant of works or nature: the covenant is mentioned but it is not a controlling theme that gives structure to the theology.[4] Indeed the dissertation by Hoekema laments how in comparison with the treatments by Aalders and Vos, Bavinck's covenant theology is meagre.[5] If there is a title that suits Bavinck's theology it would be 'organic', not in the sense of a Schelling or Hegel, but as that which allows a mutuality and a correspondence, and eschews mechanism.[6] Organic too in his view, expressed in the first hundred pages or so of Volume 2, that sin is something that is 'an ethical phenomenon; it is lawlessness'. Therefore he opposes (2, p. 141) the notion that 'not the law but the gospel is the source of our knowledge of sin', for it is the created moral law that is the constant thing against which each and every individual transgression offends.[7] Hence whenever we disobey in one thing, we participate in Adam's sin of bring a law unto ourselves (3, p. 33).[8] The story of the Fall might be sketchy but the fact is sure (3, p. 37).

If covenant theology at this point is merely in the background, was that because biblical theology was troubled waters, muddied even poisoned by the developments in modern biblical criticism? More positively, could it be the influence of Augustine at work, or at least his realist, hence organic model of creation, fall and salvation? The answer to this second question soon appears to be: 'not at all'. Having stated clearly that those who sin are without excuse, quite apart from the revelation of Christ, he continues:

> Adam's disobedience is the originating sin; that is the clear teaching of Scripture. How can that not be seen as arbitrary? Only by recognising the organic unity and solidarity of the human race. This unity is first of all physical and organic, but, more importantly, also representative. Here too we must begin with Christ, who is our representative mediator in redemption. Physical unity and a realistic understanding of the transmission of sin is inad-

---

4 Bavinck, *RD* 3, p. 226.

5 A. Hoekema, 'Herman Bavinck's Doctrine of the Covenant' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1953).

6 I owe this judgement to the work of James Eglinton in his 'Trinity and Organism: Towards a New Reading of Herman Bavinck's Organic Motif' (unpublished doctoral thesis, The University of Edinburgh, 2010).

7 J. Veenhof, *Nature and Grace in Bavinck*, trans. by A. Wolters (Sioux Center: Dordt College Press, 2006), pp. 14, 22. For Bavinck, grace counters non-substantial sin, resulting in a once-again intact nature.

8 Cf. O. Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards and the Metaphysics of Sin* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005).

> equate...Among human beings there is a moral solidarity that is greater than the physical. Reformed theology tries to explain this through the doctrine of the covenant—the covenant of works with Adam and the covenant of grace in Christ. The covenant of works and the covenant of grace are the forms by which the organism of humanity is maintained, also in a religious sense. ....Physical heredity cannot explain original sin (3, p. 77).

It is a moral solidarity. Yet what does it here mean to 'begin with Christ'? Namely that as we relate to him (morally, not ontologically) so too we relate to Adam. Bavinck wants to avoid the idea of sinning in some Platonic Adam. The rendering *in quo* by Augustine and other was a mistake. People commit their own sins but they do this because of what Adam did since all are somehow included in Adam, without any idea that we all sinned his sin. 'God apprehends and regards, judges and condemns all humans in one [representative man], and so also they all descend from him as sinners and are all subject to death.' (3, p. 85) The unity is an ethical, federal one. There is no place for realism, that sin is like a plague which we contract, for then in theory we could atone, and would also have the sin of all others, not just Adam. God chose Adam to represent us and we are guilty because of his sin. '[W.T.] Shedd[9] admittedly asserts that Augustine, the scholastics, as well as the earliest Reformed theologians were all realists. But that is incorrect. Whereas the doctrine of the covenant had not yet been developed, the idea already occurs in the church fathers and the medieval theologians.' (3, p. 103) Bavinck does not say which. 'In the human race, we encounter a variety of forms of community that are absolutely not based only, nor even principally, on physical descent but on another, moral unity.' (3, p. 104) In short, we have to bear the debts of the estate when we claim the inheritance.

What strikes one from this discussion is how, again, Bavinck uses the federal concept to say what is not the case (ontological unity), and cannot even be bothered to tell us who remedied Augustine's 'mistake' in the Middle Ages.

It is being born as those imputed to have sin that makes us sinners: 'On the ground that they were comprehended in Adam, either as the natural or the federal head, they were declared guilty by God.' (3, p. 110) The way in which this "originated sin" becomes the experience of all of us is not through imitation but through generation based on imputation. There is an antecedent judgement (*krima*) of God, and in virtue of that judgement all people are born of Adam guilty, impure, and in the process of dying' (3, p. 110).

---

[9] W. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (New York: C. Scribner, 1888).

This is all a little impressionistic, short and reluctant to engage with details of federal theology. Although in his heart he might well have been a covenantal theologian, in his *Dogmatics ad extra* this is not so apparent. This is, I think because his work was intended as an ecumenical work that would speak to Lutherans, Catholics and others. Or a more substantive reason is an insistence that ultimate reality is moral that is at stake in this section. Throughout the four volumes there is much readiness to make common cause with Augustine, even on Augustine's terms, as one who located sin in the will and combined a doctrine of Divine Sovereignty with a high doctrine of Creation.[10] There is some attempt in Volume 1 (ch. 13: 'Human Destiny') to invoke Augustine in a treatment the covenant of works according to which moral image was natural—a *posse non peccare*, yet still some way off from the blessedness of *non posse peccare*. 'Paradise was not heaven' (1, p. 573). 'The Lutheran believer enjoys the new life in the present and feels no need for more. For the Reformed, who walked in the footsteps of Augustine, things were different. According to them, Adam did not possess the highest kind of life.'[11] Hence the need for 'Augustinian' perseverance, yes, (although for Augustine it is perseverance of *faith*), and Bavinck is right to see Augustine's account of the pre-lapsarian Adam as chiming with the Reformed tradition as Bavinck saw it. This alliance with the bishop of Hippo is for the sake of showing how the wisdom of that church father could be used by orthodoxy to withstand the onslaught of moderns, including Ritschl. Augustine was as a moral theologian in the fullest sense of that term, who would bypass creation in an account of the moral law.

For all that, the covenant of works is hardly corresponded to by a real interest in the covenant of grace, as we have seen above.

---

[10] M. Wisse ('The First Modern Man? Twentieth-Century Theological Reception of Augustine', in *Oxford Guide to the History of the Reception of Augustine*, ed. by K. Pollmann [Oxford: OUP, 2011], *forthcoming*) suspects that Bavinck knew most of his Augustine through Harnack or other 'handbooks. More research would need to be done to see whether Bavinck read Augustine's work without any such mediation.' Cf. the online resource: W. van der Schee, 'Augustinus, Aurelius (354-430)', in *Register Project Neocalvinisme* (2001) <http://www.neocalvinisme.nl/rg/a/augustinus.html> [accessed 26 April 2011].

[11] A few pages earlier (1, p. 567) Bavinck has called on Augustine for help. The City of God passage however (XVI, 27) describes the 'covenant from the beginning' (*testamentum autem primum*) as 'You will surely die'.

ALBRECHT RITSCHL'S BIBLICAL MATTER

It would be inaccurate to say that Bavinck misrepresented Ritschl—yet he hardly gives him respect or the benefit of the doubt. There is little attempt to stand where Ritschl stood, just as when describing Lutheran positions in general there can often be a use of trusted secondary sources at the expense of primary texts. Perhaps Bavinck was simply aware how damaging Dutch versions of liberal (and Lutheran) theology could be in conspiring to drive confessional Christianity into the side-streets if not the fields. Or it might simply be because Bavinck was not a historical theologian as such, whose task is to present and account for, before evaluating. Nor was he a Christian apologist who would pay his opponent the honour of a brick by brick demolition. It is the boldness of the Systematic Theologian, to call it as he sees it and to use the quarry as suits the edifice he is constructing. Added to this is the genre of Dogmatics: thematic treatment based on answers to questions from difficult students ever since the High Middle Ages. A fair amount of scriptural proof-texting takes place in the *Reformed Dogmatics*, although Bavinck's knowledge of contemporary biblical studies is impressive.

Now for Ritschl too, the notion of covenant *was* important (though perhaps not quite central in his theology) as was a concomitant personalism in his doctrine of God along with a sensitivity to the biblical witness to Israel's struggle to obey.[12] His theology was 'eschatological' in the sense of forward-looking: he found it unfortunate that the traditional doctrine of original sin had such nostalgia for or horrid fascination with the past. This obscured the gospel's character as an anticipation of the future goal for humanity in response to the revelation of God in Christ. He disagreed with Schleiermacher's devaluing of the guilt aspect of sin, for guilt can be viewed as sin's own punishment in the conscience and as a feeling which leads to reconciliation, just as physical pain drives one to the doctor.[13] The kind of sin that is forgivable may and should be viewed as part of God's plan.[14]

Like Bavinck, Ritschl was keen to throw off the burden of philosophical Idealism. In 1864 Ritschl, who had been mentored in philosophy by R. H. Lotze, followed I. A. Dorner at Göttingen, a university then enjoying its reputation for excellence in the natural sciences and philosophy. Ritschl had taken leave of F. C. Baur's Hegelian optimism as early as 1857. For all that his theology continued to be 'eschatologically' informed by

[12] R. Schäfer, *Ritschl, Grundlinien eines fast verschollenen dogmatischen Systems* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1968), pp. 85, 97.

[13] *Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung*, 1, p. 83.

[14] *Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung*, 3, pp. 358-60.

consideration of 'God's purposes', his account of church history was less about 'steady progress' and more about interruption and renewal in light of the goal. It was not the case that Christianity had become more mature as it became more rational. As James Redmond puts it:

> No longer is the emergence of the second-century Catholic Church regarded as the quasi-Hegelian *Aufhebung* of apparently contradictory and mutually incompatible movements and beliefs—rather, the second edition [of *Die Entstehung der altkatholischen Kirche*] strongly hints at Ritschl's later and very complex theory that the contradictions in second-century Christianity are more real than apparent, that early in its history Christianity "fell from grace" because of its adulteration by alien, nonreligious, speculative elements, an adulteration which was in later centuries to become encapsulated in the Catholic Church of the late middle ages.[15]

Christianity had declined after the glorious age of Revelation through Jesus to the apostles, and so the Reformers had been right to try to retrieve this.[16] However, Hegelian theology could and had become just as much a rationalist scholasticism and any advance of theology always had to be tested by the message of the man from Galilee.

At the same time, one can trace in Ritschl that which R. Schäfer named 'revelatory positivism', which might sound counterintuitive as an epithet for this paragon of nineteenth-century liberal theology. Yet, as Julius Kaftan observed in the first decade of the twentieth, the development from 'kingdom of God' emphasis to this *Offenbarungspositvismus* was a natural and consistent one. Schäfer sees Ritschl's contribution as adding historically based knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) to the experience or *Erfahrungstheologie* of Schleiermacher, basing knowledge of God, hence theology, on secure understanding of the revealing man Jesus and his mission. Over against Schleiermacher, Dogmatics was to be founded on history, not on the experience of present-day believers today. As for Ethics, Ritschl had a strong ecclesiology whose content was communal morality, such that the will replaced any over-reliance on 'feeling'.[17] Wilhelm Hermann would continue in this direction.[18] Again, this is not miles apart from Reformed Orthodoxy as developed by Bavinck, with his move from dogmatic to ethical themes in his later career.

---

[15] J. Richmond, *Ritschl, A Reappraisal: A Study in Systematic Theology* (London: William Collins, 1978), p. 15.

[16] This 'Romantic' outlook was furthered by Wellhausen, against the idealism of Vatke.

[17] R. Schäfer, 'Ritschl', *Theologisch Realencyclopedie*, pp. 29, 220-38, 224.

[18] Schäfer, *Ritschl, Grundlinien*, pp. 177f.

Ritschl consequently insisted that his *Dogmatics* was based on biblical theology. In this, as Wolfhart Pannenberg noted, he was echoing J. P. Gabler's insistence that Justification could not be *the* formal principle of Christian theology. Formal and material principles are one and the same, and that principle is Scripture.[19] Schleiermacher had first defined dogmatic theology as having ecclesial doctrine as substance, but this was to give too far too much to *a priori* reasoning, and it only got worse when Schleiermacher then wanted to put 'pious consciousness' in the place of ecclesial doctrine, which in turn encouraged his follower Rothe to be even more speculative. When the early church lost sight of its Old Testament heritage of the covenant people it ended up with moralism, and this was happening in the nineteenth century too. As Schäfer notes, the Old Testament with its content of theology through history was invaluable for theological reasons in Ritschl's view, against Schleiermacher.[20] Biblical theology was the antidote to Baur's history of early Christianity.

One of the consequences of this biblical theological approach, where New Testament statements are to be understood according to Old Testament categories (and not Second Temple Jewish ones) is that justification becomes a subdivision of Providence and correlative trust in the covenant God. As Eckhard Lessing observes, in Ritschl's system, forgiveness of sins corresponds to God's attributes as King and Lord, who is made present and known in Christ's life which witnesses to God's covenant loyalty.[21] A

---

19 'Das protestantische Prinzip in ökumenischen Dialog', in *Beiträge zur systematischen Theologie. Band 3: Kirche und Ökumene* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2000), p. 186. Tillich would choose to lose 'Scripture' and keep 'Justification', although Dorner had already made moves in this direction.

20 Schäfer *TRE*, p. 225. In his monograph Schäfer (pp. 44, 79) notes the significance of his friendship with Ludwig Diestel, whose famous article ('Die Idee der Gerechtigkeit, vorzüglich im Alten Testament, biblisch-theologisch dargestellt', *Jahrbücher für deutsche Theologie*, 5 (1860), 173-204) contained the statement, at p. 204: 'Der Aufgabe, die Bundesidee mit der der Gerechtigkeit zu durchbringen, hatten sich die großen Propheten des achten, siebenten, sechsten Jahrhunderts mit Erfolg unterzogen, ohne dieselbe zu Ende zu führen.' It took a prophet like Jesus to complete the task over against Pharisaic notions through his piety. Diestel claims that only Ritschl has got this right. The dogmatic consequences are that righteousness and grace should not be opposed, as in some sort of Idealist game.

21 E. Lessing, *Geschichte der deutschsprachigen evangelischen Theologie von Albrecht Ritschl bis zur Gegenwart. Band 1, 1870 bis 1918* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), p. 41, who quotes Ritschl 'Die "Sündenvergebung (ist) nicht an sein besonderes Attribut als Gesetzgeber geknüpft.., sondern an sein allgemeines Attribut als König und Herr seines Reiches.' (*Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung*, 3, p. 89)

Christology of 'exalted royal priest and prophet' offering an umbrella of providential care reinforces the idea that God's fatherly providence is the Old Testament motor that drives the New Testament revelation.

Volume 2 of Ritschl's *Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung* is given to pouring the biblical foundations of the doctrine of *Justification and Reconciliation* (for the dogmatic treatment to follow in Volume 3). Yet in Volume 2 the apostle Paul is largely absent until page 142 where begins a thirteen-page section which then concludes with the comment that Romans 2:6 is to be explained as merely a left-over of a pharisaical point of view.[22] For Christians, the idea that God feels anger is of no religious worth: instead wrath marks the area which is opposite to that of salvation, as a cultic/communal measure for holiness. Divine anger it is not a moral quality, despite what Lactantius encouraged the Christian tradition to think.[23] And the Bible knows nothing of the wrath of God against original sin ('von einem Zorn Gottes um der Erbsünde willen wisse die Bibel nichts'.) On Romans 3:25, Ritschl refused the idea of reconciliation as being something that could happen by cultic means in the death of Christ; rather it took place in our working out of the fact of justification on the cross. What Christ offered was his gracious presence, not the removal of sin. The cross had to be thought of in terms of mercy, of life and protection against death, not ransom. Mark 14:24 ('This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many') was the key 'covenantal' text about life-giving blood being poured out; Mark 10:45 ('to give his life as a ransom for many') was irrelevant. The language of ransom should not confuse us into thinking that God is dealing with his own wrath.[24]

In any case Paul (like Jesus) was much more indignant about present unbelief than pre-existent sinfulness. Any idea of being taken out of the realm of sin, as in Romans 4:15, was the expression of a *pre*-Christian viewpoint. Only with the increase of active or actual sin through the law did Adam's children come under the threat of wrath. In Paul's gospel the history of sin is no longer only a mirror of the history of grace, but even a means to the latter's success.

Otto Pfleiderer, in a famous essay later to be quoted by B. B. Warfield, contested Ritschl's claim to be taken seriously as a biblical theologian. It is wrong to see Galatians 3:13 ('Christ redeemed us from the

[22] *Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung*, 2, p. 155.

[23] Ibid. 2, p. 137. Ritschl, in the light of Luther's theology of baptism and J. C. K. von Hofmann's formulation saw the wrath of God as irrelevant to the Christian state by definition. See W. Schütte, 'Die Ausscheidung der Lehre vom Zorn Gottes in der Theologie Schleiermachers und Ritschls', *NZSThR* 10 (1968), 387-97, 395.

[24] Ibid. 2, p. 85f.

curse of the law by becoming a curse for us') as applying only to Jewish Christians who would have understood such. Pfleiderer could not blame Ritschl for attacking the doctrine of original sin,[25] but why did he have to go to the opposite extreme in his attempt to allow free will and the possibility of human education/improvement? What about the Zwinglian/Kantian notion that humanity is born with an inclination (*'Hang'*) to evil? Paul may not have believed in original sin *per se*, but there is sinful tendency in everyone that is unexplained.[26] There is plenty of scriptural 'chorus' that affirms that the idea of such an inclination is not a result of the intrusion of metaphysics into Christian theology. In fact it was Socrates, a Greek, who identified evil with ignorance, such that the Good was learnable—Ritschl seems unaware of Aristotle's objection that the will is ruled as much by the passions as by intellect. Furthermore, Romans 7 shows sin to be more than mere ignorance, and actually a power. This playing down of sin leads to antinomian tendencies in the Christian churches.[27] According to Pfleiderer's criticism, there was no place in Ritschl's theology for the reality of religious objects of faith, and the claim to be ethical in a churchy life of reconciliation (*Versöhnung*) was a sham. Sin is also played down when it can be dealt with by our own feelings of remorse (*Selbstpeinigungen*).

Pfleiderer is correct to conclude that, as for divine anger, it is Ritschl's strong 'love of God' doctrine that implies that anger does not suit God, rather than some classical notion of divine impassibility.[28] It is true that the New Testament identifies sin as *agnoia*, but it does this only in a few places, and Pfleiderer lists them: 1 Pet. 1:14; Eph. 4:18; Acts 17:30; 1 Tim. 1:13. His judgement is that Ritschl is wrong to argue that there is *no* connection between Christ's death and the sin of human beings.[29] The death of Christ gives sin its due so that the dead are no longer held by it. Ritschl misses the notes of identification and solidarity which are so important to Paul.

One might want to describe Ritschl's account of salvation one where God makes the positive superlative. Jesus saves, in that he brings people into a common life (as his friend and colleague L. Diestel observed, the New Testament adds love for neighbour to the Old Tesament's love for God). Of course this means he saves from sin, yet sin is in two types,

---

25 O. Pfleiderer, *Die Ritschl'sche Theologie* (Braunschweig: Schwetschke und Sohn, 1891), p. 63.

26 Ibid., p. 66.

27 Ibid., p. 75.

28 Ibid., p. 65.

29 Ibid., p. 47.

and the serious one is conscious opposition to Jesus and his work.[30] One becomes free from sin through recognition of, not rejection of Jesus. For Ritschl, sin was less an inborn condition, but since Christ sin was 'now' a forgetting of Christ as the source of forgiveness and ethical instruction which if unresponsive to challenge could amount to intentional denial. There is however responsibility and an account to be given when a person makes the kingdom of sin's drive one's own when we confuse the good with the Highest Good.[31]

As a 'covenantal theologian' of both Testaments Ritschl argued, not that the traditional Christian sin and atonement doctrine was too bound to the Old Testament; its problem was that it was not bound to it enough.[32] Covenantal personalism as spelled out in the Old Testament is a family, not a juridical, affair. Yet, to repeat, not all were impressed with his way with Scripture. H. R. Mackintosh concludes: 'At the end of his biblico-theological survey he leaves us less than ever clear regarding the question of authority. And his attempt to exhibit harmony where he does recognise authoritative teachings may seem to us not infrequently masterful rather than masterly.'[33]

Alister McGrath puts it well in highlighting the similarities to Grotius' soteriology in that of Ritschl:

> The objective dimension of justification is therefore prior to, although inseparable from, the subjective consciousness of his forgiveness...Of considerable greater importance , however, is Ritschl's critique of the axiom of the *Aufklärung*—that God enters into no real relationship with humanity, unless the individual in question is morally regenerate.... Christ is the revealer of certain significant (and not necessarily rational) insights concerning an unchangeable situation between God and man, rather than the founder of a new relationship between God and man.[34]

Yet, out of a horror of pietism perhaps, what seems to fall out is any real relationship. To strain the metaphor, a parent setting up his teenager in a flat and leaving alone seems preferable to a household of strife. In Ritschl's own words: 'Just as the assumed conception of original sin

---

30 Ibid., p. 38.

31 R. Schäfer, *Ritschl. Grundlinien*, p. 99: Jesus as the true human was able to avoid sin.

32 H. R. Mackintosh, *Albrecht Ritschl and his School* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1915), p. 105.

33 Ibid., p. 130.

34 A. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei. A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), pp. 350, 356.

obscures the particular guilt of individual men, so the penal satisfaction offered by Christ is made the equivalent of the eternal damnation due to all mankind, and *is by no means fitted to counteract the sense of guilt of each separate individual.*' [35]

BAVINCK AND AUGUSTINE VERSUS RITSCHL

In his 1888 article 'De Theologie van Albrecht Ritschl' , Bavinck sees Ritschl's overreaction to Idealism as ending with dull yet dangerous empiricism. Despite his protests Ritschl had a metaphysics of his own, or a (neo-)Kantian/Lotzean epistemology. Such a dualism favours science to the exclusion of faith.[36] If Christ is anything significant, more than just a man, he is what he is to the intersubjective perception of faith.[37] Bavinck contends that by this method Mary could be as easily divine as Jesus.[38] Ritschlian religion begins with humans as a means of helping morality, with Christianity good at tying reconciliation and holiness together, allowing people to transcend themselves. Natural theology, contemplating ideas about God, creation, humanity–these have been a dead end. New Testament authors differed from pagans in having a Old Testament conceptuality and revelation is where they all agree with each other in developing that. It is good he uses the bible, admits Bavinck, yet his cavalier exegesis shows disrespect for the Book. Ritschl has followed his principles such that all we read in the bible gives us broad outlines of religion to follow, but no inner truth is contained therein. The heart of Bavinck's concern is summed up in a passage translated by Veenhof:

> Therefore, whereas salvation in Christ, was formerly considered primarily a means to separate man from sin and the world, to prepared him for heavenly blessedness and to cause him to enjoy undisturbed fellowship with God there, Ritschl posits the very opposite relationship: the purpose of salvation in Christ is precisely to enable a person, once he is freed from the oppressive feeling of sin and lives in awareness of being a child of God, to exercise his earthly vocation and fulfil his moral purpose in this world. The antithesis, therefore, is fairly sharp: on the one side a Christian life that considers the highest goal, now and hereafter, to be the contemplation of God and fellowship with him, and for that reason (always being more or less hostile to the riches of an earthly life) is in danger of falling into asceticism, pietism, and mysticism; but on the side of Ritschl, a Christian life that considers its highest

---

35 Ritschl, *Justification and Reconciliation* 3, p. 480; my emphasis.

36 'De Theologie van Albrecht Ritschl', *Theologische Studiën*, 6 (1888), 369-403 (p. 402).

37 Ibid., p. 380.

38 Ibid., p. 385.

> goal to be the Kingdom of God, i.e., the moral obligation of mankind, and for that reason, (always being more or less averse to the withdrawal into solitude and quiet communion with God), is in danger of degenerating into a cold Pelagianism and an unfeeling moralism. *Personally, I do not yet see any way of combining the two points of view, but I do know that there is much that is excellent in both, and that both contain undeniable truth.*[39]

The point is: Ritschl's overall concern is to free people from religious anxiety so as to get on with vocation and ethics, and while Bavinck elsewhere praises Ritschl's emphasis on this-worldliness of the gospel (4, p. 703), here he accuses him that this is to build the kingdom on sandy foundations, since there is insufficient attention paid to inwardness of an 'Augustinian' sort.

However, except for the odd comment, throughout this article Bavinck seems content to describe rather than take Ritschl on point-by-point. For that one must look in the *Dogmatics*, and the aid of Augustine.

As is well known, Calvin claimed 'Augustine to be wholly ours (*totus noster*)'.[40] Bavinck in turn seems to have found Augustine to be not merely an inspiration, but someone he could rely on in a battle. First, there is the insistence that the Church is the only fit setting for a Christian faith to work. Bavinck is far from embarrassed by Augustine's famous most catholic-sounding quote ('I would not believe in the Gospel myself if the authority of the Catholic Church did not move me to do so.' *Ep. Contra Mani*, pp. 5, 6), for Augustine really meant that he believed 'the gospel that is to be found in the Church as it preaches'. It is not for academics or the cultured elites to define what the gospel is. It is found in God's Church.

With Vatican I (1869-70) very much providing the context, Bavinck then quotes *Ad Faustum* 1, p. 32, 19, where Augustine tells Faustus that the Scriptures are to be his authority (1, p. 456). Yet it is less the issue of 'Scripture over against tradition' that one might expect, and more whether the object of faith is general (creation) or special revelation (Scripture). Belief, according to Augustine 'is the foundation and bond uniting the whole of human society. If people accepted the proposition "I ought not to believe what I do not see", all the ties of family, friendship and love would be ruptured', although Augustine's point in the *De fide rerum invis* 3 is to encourage faith in 'divine things'. (1, p. 567) Perhaps with Augustine the knowledge of physical nature was played down, but the kinship between ourselves as intellects and God as truth and goodness is important. There

---

[39] Ibid., p. 397, in Veenhof, *Nature and Grace*, p. 8.

[40] As in the title of J. M. J. Lange van Ravenswaay, *Augustinus totus noster: Das Augustinverständnis bei Johannes Calvin* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1990).

is order outside us, creatures are good by participation (as Bavinck confirms in 2, p. 131), such that there is a natural capacity to know God. In a move against a Ritschlian metaphysics-free theology, Bavinck finds himself here agreeing with Kleutgen, that erstwhile guardian of the faith at the German College in Rome, then at Vatican I. Faith is the starting-point. The church is then the place where grace and re-ordering within is to be found in a way that will correspond to the order of creation. Since 'faith and forgiveness are only temporal and provisional; from them Augustine immediately proceeds to love, sanctification, and good works...he replaced the aesthetic worldview with an ethical one. Thus Augustine has been and is *the* dogmatician of the Christian church' (1, p. 139). What one sees here is an approximation to Catholic establishment of something akin to a *sensus divinitatis* in the rational creature which is informed by a high view of creation, once faith in objective revelation has been kindled.

Second, Augustine's doctrine of divine immutability is important (*De ordine* II, 7): 'to claim that God has a new plan is absurd, not to say wicked' since God's ideas are in no way distinguishable from himself, and as *rationes* they act but are not acted upon (QQ. 83, 46; 2, p. 204ff.). Again a neo-Thomist could not fault this. God wills the agents of change to be inherent in creation. As for his own ideas, of which these are but reflections 'God's ideas are absolutely original; they arise from his own being; they are eternal and immutable. Indeed, they are one with his own being' (2, p. 206). Bavinck has said that for Ritschl however, 'the theologian's task is to proceed from the concept of love and to try to infer everything (creation, providence, reconciliation, justification) from that concept'. Ritschl would simply avoid discussion as to God's incommunicable attributes. Bavinck agrees with Ritschl that holiness is not an attribute in God any more than it is anything inherent in us, but rather is a relation between God and his people (2, p. 217). God is 'called holy...in connection with every revelation that impresses humans with his deity.' Yet the emphasis is on God's pure act leading to God's sole glory by the means of his power. That holiness means that God is consistent and is not merely reactive, as too much of an emphasis on grace as forgiving love might connote. 'Righteousness is not the same as favor, mercy or grace; neither is it something like "covenant faithfulness"' (2, p. 225).

Third, and in the third volume of Bavinck's *Dogmatics*, in which there are almost twice as many references to Augustine as to Calvin, he diagnoses Ritschl as siding with Pelagius on sinful *acts* preceding sinful states (3, pp. 44ff.), although Ritschl admittedly shares with Augustine the belief that there is some kind of common collective sinfulness.

> From this position Ritschl drew the false conclusion that sin has become known to us, not from the story of Adam and his Fall, nor from the law and the Old Testament, but solely from the gospel, which in Ritschl means from the person and teaching of Jesus. (3, p. 44)

Joel Geflin paraphrases this section of Bavinck.[41]

> The pantheism of Ritschl, for instance, devalues revelation prior to Christ to the point that only in Christ is the knowledge of sin made known. His view of humankind's original integrity and fall rejects the federalism of the Reformed in favor of the process of primitive man from the animal to the moral state. Sin is not objective guilt deserving punishment, Ritschl says, it is only an ignorance of God's love which has since been proclaimed by Christ.

There are two problems here. Bavinck never accused Ritschl of 'pantheism', and Ritschl was himself quite set against it, as he detects and detests it in the monism of the German mystical tradition passing through Jacob Böhme. Second, Ritschl is quite clear that to ignore Christ on the way to deliberate resistance to Him is sin, and he distinguished this from original ignorance. However, we are nevertheless responsible for that original ignorance, and have to deal with it when Christ shows it up. In other words, for Ritschl, the reality of sin affects our nature, and we become conscious of it when Christ is preached.

Bavinck is not quite finished with Ritschl yet and returns to the chase later in the same volume. Ritschl's point was that just as righteousness is communal, so too sin is communal, or even that one might speak of a sinful environment in the place of 'original sin'.[42] Ritschl preferred to say 'Christ died for the Church' so as to exclude any idea of a mystical one-to-One arrangement (3, p. 465).

He had spelled out Ritschl's position on sin more fully earlier in the volume:[43]

---

41 J. Heflin, 'Sin, the Menace to Certainty', ETS National Meeting, New Orleans, November 2009 <http://richardsibbes.com/_hermanbavinck/Heflin.pdf> [accessed 26 April 2011].

42 Bavinck, *RD* 3, p. 45f., n 41 seems to group along with Ritschl Julius Kaftan's *The Truth of Christian religion* (ET; Edinburgh 1894), pp. 246ff., Kaftan's *Dogmatik* (Tübingen, 1901) pp. 34, 38-40; F. Nitzsch, *Lehrbuch* (Tübingen: J. C. B.Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1902) and works by H. Siebeck and T. Häring.

43 *RD*, 3, p. 48. The unattributed citation comes from F. R. Tennant, *The Origin and Propagation of Sin*, Hulsean Lectures for 1901-2, 2nd edn (Cambridge: University Press, 1906), p. 95 and cf. his summary of Ritschl on p. 75. [Ed.]

> It was only oneness that arises as a result of their mutual connectedness and cooperation. There is still another and deeper kind of oneness, however, that underlies sins as a substratum. And it consists in a self-seeking animal nature that belongs to humanity in virtue of its origin and extends to all humans individually. Though this is not inherently sinful, it is nevertheless 'the raw material for the production of sins, as soon as these native propensities are brought into relation with any restraining or condemning influences.'

Ritschl seems here to morph into F. R. Tennant, or rather the popular Tennant is but a more articulate, consistent and perhaps noxious form of Ritschl, based on Kant and Schelling's view that sin was 'necessary' for human moral perfection, as moral consciousness was something humanity learned: Augustine is quickly summoned to correct any tendency to think that God willed sinning for our benefit. God willed the circumstances and especially the ordinances that pertain to the moral life (3, p. 60). 'He *willed* to permit it; and this willing can only be constituted to mean that sin now also occurs not by divine but by creaturely agency.'(3, p. 62)

Yet Ritschl never argued that sin was 'necessary' and was by no means an optimistic believer in 'progress'. He was clear that sin that counts as sin is something that arises from human will. If anyone's position is in danger of viewing sin as necessary, it is Bavinck, albeit on different grounds from those of Tennant, for Bavinck goes on to place 'sin' under the umbrella of a strong Providence, as part of his Doctrine of God. A few pages later Bavinck returns to Augustine (*Enchiridion*, 96); 'it is well that not only good but evil should exist', and he draws from the *City of God* XI, 18, 23 the famous 'shadows in painting' idea, closing with Thomas Aquinas (SCG III, 71 'if there is evil there is a God'). He then voices his own synthesis of this tradition: 'But it is true that also and even especially in God's government over sin his attributes are splendidly displayed.' (3, p. 65)

Augustine makes it clear that the good news shines out from the bad: God has made satisfaction for all people 'except those who of their free will are not saved' (*Ep.* 107; *Civ Dei* XIII, 23) and 'all people' of 1 Timothy 2:4 means 'chosen from all' (3, p. 456). As for Ritschl, he was a victim of 'cultural optimism' that allowed life and the sciences to be independent of the policing of theology. By helping to destroy the true nature of uniqueness of Jesus through emphasising his personality and the church as a religious special space of reconciliation as Bavinck diagnosed it (3, p. 464), Ritschl provoked a reaction in a return to metaphysics and personal mys-

ticism, in the theologies of Theodor Häring[44] and Wilhelm Herrmann.[45] In Bavinck's judgement Ritschl believed too much in justification without holiness on the basis of divine love, and ethics merely as sensible, communal life (3, p. 454).

CONCLUSION: CHRISTOLOGY AND THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Bavinck (3, p. 279) considered the view that the incarnation was determined before the fall, and only adapted to human sinfulness, only to resist it:

> On the basis of Augustine's standpoint, and more specifically on that of Reformed theology, however, there is no need for this entire hypothesis. There is but one plan and decree of God; with a view to the counsel of God, there is no room for any reality other than the existing one. Accordingly, however much sin entered the world by the will of the creature, it was nevertheless included in God's will from eternity and to him was not contingent or unforeseen.[46]

He was aware of those who had spotted that Ritschl's Jesus was not unique enough (3, p. 275), according to a personalism by which Jesus could have the value of God. Here indeed the Ritschlian love of 'value', which Orr also criticised, is apparent.[47] Bavinck likens Ritschl's Christology to Roman Catholic deification or the belief in the apotheosis of Mary (3, p. 281), a connection he had already made in the 1888 essay.

Yet the point for Ritschl is that God is not one who changes according to the only evidence we have of him is in his revelation as Love in Jesus. Bavinck holds to a covenantal continuity through the testaments only for the sake of insisting that God the Creator and God the Redeemer

---

[44] *RD* 3, p. 555, with reference to Theodor Häring: 'In welchem Sinn dürften wir uns immer noch 'Göttinger' heissen? Albrech Ritschls Bedeutung für die Gegenwart', *ZThK* 20 (1910), 165-96.

[45] *Der Verkehr des Christen mit Gott: im Anschluss an Luther dargestellt* (Stuttgart: J. G. Cotta, 1892).

[46] He adds in the same paragraph: 'Only Comrie— as a result of his rigorous supralapsarianism—arrived at the theory that the predestination of the human Christ was antecedent to that of the fall.' (cf. *RD* 2, pp. 361-8; 382-8.)

[47] James Orr noticed that it was all about Christ's value for us that mattered. 'In Ritschl's Theology we conclude to the reality of the object from the fact of its value for us' (James Orr, *The Ritschlian Theology and the Evangelical Faith* [London: Hodder, 1897], p. 247), which Troeltsch had rightly criticised as 'fantasist'. See *Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung* 3, p. 343.

are one and the same. Just like Augustine, Ritschl maintained that the Incarnation did not mean a change in God , nor did 'humanity' undergo change except in having a capacity added—that human beings now might receive revelation from God. Accordingly, although Ritschl did nor use these terms, the *pactum salutis* allows a distinction between what operates between the Father and the Son and between God and souls: these two moments are not to be fused into one idealist *Begriff*. The power of sin and the power of grace mean that the origin of the problem and its solution are conceived of in ethical categories for individuals to take hold of for themselves and in so doing influence others. The difference is not that only Bavinck thinks that sin at all levels is something humans choose, the difference is for Bavinck that, with Augustine, the exercise of divine sovereign power elevates and secures the precious order of creation, and gets it back to fitting the pattern of the original order. For humans this means sanctification to the fullness of the image of God and hence to some form of prayerful intimacy with him. Bavinck was guided by the first principles of his theology (God and creation, as helped by Augustine), while for Ritschl humans remain free in a 'covenantal' way analogous to God's freedom, as modelled in the God-Man, to go out and live for His kingdom, informed by revelation.

Herman Bavinck and His Reformed Sources on the Call to Grace: A Shift in Emphasis towards the Internal Work of the Spirit

Henk van den Belt

INTEGON, Heidelberglaan 2, Kamer 1309, 3584 CS, Utrecht, The Netherlands
H.vandenBelt@uu.nl

INTRODUCTION

The protestant theological *locus* of the divine call to grace is characterised by the cooperation of the outward proclamation of the Word and the inward work of the Spirit. Over against the radical reformation, the representatives of the magisterial reformation agreed that the work of the Spirit was inseparable from the external proclamation of the word of God. The way in which the relationship between word and Spirit was elaborated on, however, later became a bone of contention. The Lutherans stressed the indissolubility of word and Spirit, of the external and the internal. The Reformed, to the contrary, underlined that the work of the Spirit was not intrinsically connected to the word, but added to it. Given the fact that the relationship between object and subject, between the outward Word and the inward work of the Spirit, is so important for the theology of Herman Bavinck that the prolegomena of his *Reformed Dogmatics* are structured by the distinction, it is interesting to question how this relationship is elaborated on in the doctrine of the divine call to grace.[1] To find out how Bavinck relates to his Reformed sources, we will analyse three aspects of his discussion of the theme from the first and later editions of the *Reformed Dogmatics* and from his series of articles

1 H. Bavinck, *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*, 4th edn, 4 vols (Kampen: Kok, 1928-30) [henceforth: Bavinck, *GD*], 1, pp. 255, 466. Cf. H. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. by J. Bolt, trans. by J. Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003-8) [henceforth Bavinck, *RD*], 1, pp. 281, 495. In his prolegomena Bavinck leans towards subjectivism, at least when compared with his Reformed sources. H. van den Belt, *The Authority of Scripture in Reformed Theology: Truth and Trust*, Studies in Reformed Theology, 17 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 291-6.

on 'Immediate Regeneration,' later published in the volume *Roeping en wedergeboorte* (1903), recently translated as *Saved by Grace.*[2]

THE ORDER OF THE ORDER OF SALVATION

After Bavinck was appointed professor of systematic theology in Kampen at the age of 28 he started publishing his *Reformed Dogmatics* in four volumes from 1895 to 1901. The second and enlarged edition was published from 1908 to 1911, when Bavinck was a professor at the Free University in Amsterdam. The third edition (1918) remained unchanged and in the fourth edition only a few misprints were corrected. In effect, this means that there are only two versions of the *Reformed Dogmatics*, the first edition and the later ones. In the first edition Bavinck treats the *ordo salutis* at the end of the third volume.[3] At the beginning of this volume, issued in 1898, he excuses himself for not having been able to keep his promise to deliver the work in three volumes, but he expresses the hope that this will not disappoint subscribers and readers.[4] Bavinck subdivides the benefits the believers draw from Christ into three parts: calling and regeneration, faith and justification, and sanctification and perseverance.[5] Before, however, turning to the benefits themselves, he discusses the mutual relationship of the benefits or the right order of the *ordo salutis.*

Regeneration was first taken in a very broad sense as spiritual renewal and thus treated after faith. As witnesses Bavinck refers to Jean Calvin, Theodore Beza, Franciscus Junius and the *Belgic Confession of Faith.*[6] Quickly, however, the insight grew that the grace of regeneration must precede faith and thus regeneration was understood as infusion of the principle of life. To illustrate his point he refers to Amandus Polanus von Polansdorf (1561-1610), quoting him in Latin: 'the grace of regeneration is

---

2 H. Bavinck, *Roeping en wedergeboorte* (Kampen: Zalsman, 1903) [Henceforth: Bavinck *RW*]. H. Bavinck, *Saved by Grace: The Holy Spirit's Work in Calling and Regeneration*, ed. by J. Beach, trans. by N. Kloosterman (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008) [Henceforth: Bavinck, *SG*].

3 H. Bavinck, *Gereformeerde dogmatiek* , 4 vols (Kampen: Bos, 1895-1901) [henceforth Bavinck, *GD*^{1},], 3, pp. 425-572. In the second and following editions part of the discussion of the order of salvation is transferred to the fourth volume; the third volume closes with the introduction of the *ordo salutis* and the fourth opens with the paragraph on 'Calling and Regeneration'.

4 Bavinck, *GD*^{1}, 3, p. [2].

5 The final edition has four subdivisions: calling and regeneration, faith and conversion, justification, and sanctification and perseverance. Bavinck, *GD*, 4, pp. 1-257.

6 Bavinck, *GD*^{1}, 3, p. 479.

prior in us to faith, of which it is the effect'.[7] Polanus' *Syntagma Theologiae christianae* was influential for Bavinck's understanding of Reformed theology. The famous *Deus dixit* formula, for instance, also came from Polanus.[8]

This reference, however, is questionable to prove that regeneration was understood as vivification. Polanus equates regeneration with sanctification.[9] The point he makes in the quote is that faith cannot be the efficient cause of regeneration, because the *grace* of regeneration precedes faith.

Nevertheless, in general Bavinck is correct that in the development of Reformed theology the meaning of regeneration shifted from the renewal of the whole life to the start of new life. The result of this development was that regeneration was not only placed before faith, but also before the divine calling. This order was defended—Bavinck quotes Johannes Maccovius—because no one can savingly hear the word of God unless he is born again.[10] The Franeker theologian went even further than most of the other Reformed teaching eternal justification. Maccovius' idea's would become more and more important in the discussion on infra- and supralapsarianism and on presumptive regeneration in the following years.

In the footnote Bavinck also refers to Abraham Kuyper for this point. His colleague in Amsterdam had divided the work of grace into eight phases, of which the first was the implantation of the new principle of life and only the third the call through Word and Spirit, both outwardly and inwardly.[11]

---

7 Bavinck, *GD*[1], 3, p. 479. 'gratia regenerationis prior in nobis est quam fides, quae illius est effectus.' Cf. A. Polanus of Polansdorf, *Syntagma Theologiae christianae* (Hanover: Daniel & David Aubrios, 1625), p. 467.

8 In one of his early articles Bavinck refers to Polanus: 'We should always keep the beautiful word of Polanus a Polansdorf in memory: Principium, in quod omnia dogmata theologica resolvuntur, est: Dominus dixit.' H. Bavinck, 'Het dualisme in de Theologie', *De Vrije Kerk: Vereeniging van Christelijke Gereformeerde Stemmen*, 13 (1887), 11-39 (p. 39).

9 'Eadem etiam *sanctificatio* dicitur.' Polanus, *Syntagma*, p. 466.

10 Bavinck, *GD*[1], 3, p. 480. 'Verbum Dei nemo salutariter audire potest, nisi qui sit regenitus' J. Maccovius, *Loci communes theologici* (Franeker: Johannis Arcerius, 1650), p. 710. Next to Maccovius, Bavinck also refers to Voetius, who denies that the Word of God can be savingly heard prior to conversion. G. Voetius, *Selectarum Disputationum Theologicarum*, 5 vols. (Utrecht: Joannes Waesberge, 1648-69) 2, p. 445.

11 A. Kuyper, *Het werk van den Heiligen Geest*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam: J.A. Wormser, 1888-9), 2, p. 129. For Kuyper's view on regeneration cf. A. van Egmond, 'Kuyper's dogmatic theology', in *Kuyper Reconsidered: Aspects of His Life and*

Very important for the understanding of Bavinck's own development is, however, that he regretted this development in Reformed theology. He distanced himself not only from Maccovius's concept of eternal justification, but also from the idea that regeneration preceded the divine call. When he carefully explains his own position, he admits that from the perspective of the eternal mystical union with Christ all the benefits, including justification, precede the divine call. In the first edition of the *Reformed Dogmatics*, however, Bavinck still underlines that all the benefits of Christ only become the possession of believers through the actual calling by Word and Spirit.

> As God performed creation in this way, so He also performs recreation. Many have placed this calling after regeneration and, no doubt, this benefit precedes the call in all the children of the covenant who are born again young. But taking these instances as a general rule is as dangerous as the opposite.[12]

Bavinck adds five reasons for this warning: (1) There has always been a difference and liberty among the Reformed about the time of regeneration: before, during or after baptism. Scripture is not clear enough to decide the issue. (2) In many cases it is very difficult to assume that those who have lived in sin for many years were born again as little children; even Voetius found this difficult.[13] (3) Supposing that regeneration precedes the call on the mission field separates Word and Spirit. (4) The order of the persons in the Trinity and of the works in creation and recreation show that the Word precedes the Spirit and that Christmas and Easter precede Pentecost. (5) The calling must be taken in a much broader sense than possible when it is placed after regeneration; there is a universal and general call next to the special call.

In the later editions Bavinck maintains that '[c]alling, the preaching of the gospel, precedes all other benefits, for as a rule the Holy Spirit binds himself to the Word'.[14] This is nuanced by the remark that all benefits are organically interconnected. He no longer says that it is dangerous to hold that regeneration precedes the call as a general rule. In the later editions

---

Work, ed. by C. van der Kooi and J. de Bruijn (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 1999), pp. 85-94.

12 Bavinck, *GD*[1], 3, p. 483. The thought that both creation and recreation are performed through Word and Spirit is also the opening phrase of the chapter on 'Calling and Regeneration.' Bavinck, *GD*[1], 3, p. 485. The thought is and is maintained in the later editions, but no longer as an argument that calling precedes regeneration. Bavinck, *GD*, 4, p. 1.

13 He refers to Voetius, *Selectarum Disputationum* 2, p. 410.

14 Bavinck, *GD*, 3, p. 602; cf. Bavinck *RD* 3, p. 593.

he only admits that calling precedes regeneration in the logical sense and that therefore the divine call in Reformed theology generally took the first place in the order of salvation.[15]

In the first edition Bavinck is critical of the development in which regeneration was placed before the call, although he says that regeneration took place during, after or sometimes even before the call.[16] In the later editions he says that it must be considered that 'the internal calling of regeneration in order undoubtedly always precedes the saving hearing of the Word of God, as Maccovius correctly asserted'.[17] In the later editions Bavinck no longer says that there is no regeneration without calling by the gospel of Christ. Moreover, he deletes the paragraph on calling and regeneration in which he discussed their mutual relationship.

In the context of the *ordo salutis* Bavinck also discusses the moment of regeneration. According to Roman Catholics and Lutherans it occurs in baptism, but the Reformed hold that the grace of regeneration is granted to the children of the covenant either before, or during, or after baptism, or without further specification, before, during or after baptism.[18]

At the synod of 1905 exactly this phrase pacified the views *pro* and *contra* presumptive regeneration in the Reformed Churches.[19] Therefore it is interesting to ask where the phrase comes from. In the first edition of the *Reformed Dogmatics* Bavinck gives three references, to Gijsbert Voetius, Herman Witsius, and Martinus Vitringa. The expression closest to Bavinck is found in Witsius's discussion of the 'Effectiveness of Baptism on Infants'. He states that it is very difficult to tell the exact time of regeneration. There are four opinions. According to the first, regeneration can take place 'either before, or in, or after baptism'.[20] The other three opin-

---

15 In a footnote Bavinck refers to the authors mentioned in his *Calling and regeneration*. Bavinck, *GD*, 3, p. 585 n. 3; cf. Bavinck *RD* 3, p. 580 n. 234.

16 Bavinck, *GD*[1], 3, p. 505. He refers to Voetius, *Selectarum Disputationum* 2, p. 461.

17 Bavinck, *GD*, 4, p. 55; Bavinck, *RD* 4, p. 80.

18 Bavinck, *GD*[1], 3, p. 479; cf. Bavinck, *GD*, 3, pp. 587-8; Bavinck, *RD* 3, p. 582.

19 The formula was used to settle the dispute on presumptive regeneration. 'God fulfills his promise sovereignly in His own time, whether before, during, or after baptism.' For the complete text see J. Schaver, *The Polity of the Churches*, 3rd edn (Chicago: Church Polity Press, 1947), pp. 2, 34-7.

20 'Nonnulli regenerationem diversis temporum articulis dispensari putant, aliquando ante, aliquando in, aliquando post Baptismum.' H. Witsius, *Miscellaneorum Sacrorum Libri Quator*, 4 vols. (Herbornae Nassoviorum: Andreae, 1712), 2, p. 627. I could not find a similar expression on the pages Bavinck refers to in Voetsius disputation on 'The State of the Elect before Conversion' Voetius, *Selectarum Disputationum* 2, p. 408. I was not able to trace the refer-

ions advocate one of the three possibilities. The formula would become important in later discussions of presumptive regeneration.

EXTERNAL CALL AND INTERNAL CALL

A second aspect of the doctrine of the divine calling is the distinction between the external and the internal call. After an extensive discussion of the external call through law and gospel, including a defence of the general offer of grace, Bavinck says in the first edition of the *Reformed Dogmatics*: 'Scripture and experience testify, however, that all these workings of external calling do not always and in every case lead people to a sincere faith and salvation.'[21] If the ultimate cause of this difference is the human free will, then the distinction between the external call and the internal call becomes superfluous. 'Augustinians, Thomists, and Reformed theologians, therefore, located the reason why in one person the calling bore fruit and in another it did not in the nature of the calling itself.'[22] The Augustinians said that a 'triumphant delight' was present with the call and made it efficacious. The Thomists spoke of a 'physical predetermination' or a 'physical act of God', but the Reformed distinguished a *vocatio interna* from the external call through law and gospel.

Bavinck refers to Augustine's *Treatise on the Predestination of the Saints*, and to Calvin's *Institutes*, to his *Commentary on Romans*, and to his critical book on the *Acts of the Council of Trent*. The church father says that when the gospel is preached, some do and others do not believe. 'They who do believe at the voice of the preacher from without, hear of the Father from within, and learn; while they who do not believe, hear outwardly, but inwardly do not hear nor learn; that is to say, to the former it is given to believe; to the latter it is not given.'[23] Bavinck may be right that this and other phrases from Augustine are the source of the Reformed

---

ence to Martinus Vitringa. His father Campegius Vitringa (1659-1722) issued a systematic theology in aphorisms. C. Vitringa, *Aphorismi quibus fundamenta sanctae theologiae comprehenduntur* (Franeker: J. Gyselaar, 1688). The book was enlarged by his son Martinus who made many remarks on the propositions, resulting in nine volumes. K. Vitringa, M. Vitringa, T. Scheltinga, *Doctrina christianae religionis, per aphorismos summatim descripta*, 9 vols (Arnhem: Joannes Henricus Möelemannus, 1761-1789). This is the work to which Bavinck refers.

21 Bavinck, *GD*[1], 3, p. 495; cf. Bavinck *GD*, 4, p. 10; Bavinck, *RD* 4, p. 41.

22 Bavinck, *GD*[1], 3, p. 497; cf. Bavinck, *GD*, 4, p. 11; Bavinck, *RD* 4, p. 42.

23 'Cum igitur Evangelium praedicatur, quidam credunt, quidam non credunt; sed qui credunt, praedicatore forinsecus insonante, intus a Patre audiunt atque discunt; qui autem non credunt, foris audiunt, intus non audiunt neque

vocatio interna, but the church father does not speak of external and internal calling, but of external and internal hearing.

Calvin does not use the words internal and external vocation either in the *Institutes*. Explaining the saying of Jesus that many are called but few chosen (Matt. 22:14), the reformer distinguishes a *duplex vocatio*. Through the universal calling in external preaching, God invites all equally to himself. 'The other kind of call is special, which he deigns for the most part to give to the believers alone, while by the inward illumination of his Spirit he causes the preached Word to dwell in their hearts."[24] Thus, in the *Institutes* the Reformer does not speak about an internal call, but about an inward illumination accompanying the external call.

The commentary on Romans 10:16, however, does use the phase *interior vocation*. When Calvin explains that although the word always precedes faith, as the seed precedes the corn, this does not mean that the seed is always fruitful; 'there is no benefit from the word, except when God shines in us by the light of his Spirit; and thus the inward calling, which alone is efficacious and peculiar to the elect, and is distinguished from the outward voice of men'.[25] The reference to the *Acts of the Council of Trent: With the Antidote* (1547), is less exact; there Calvin explains that there is 'this difference in the calling of God, that he invites all indiscriminately by his word, whereas he inwardly teaches the elect alone'.[26]

Thus, the distinction goes back into the Reformed and even into the catholic Christian tradition. Still, Bavinck seems to give a special interpretation to the distinction. He equates the internal call with the effectual or efficacious call. This was less common in Reformed Orthodoxy than is often supposed. Van Mastricht, for instance did not equate the internal

---

discunt: hoc est, illis datur ut credant, illis non datur.' Augustine, *A Treatise on the Predestination of the Saints*, VIII.15.

[24] J. Calvin, *Institutes* 3.24.8. J. Calvin, *Opera Selecta*, ed. by P. Barth and W. Niesel, 3rd edn, 5 vols (Munich: Christian Kaiser, 1967), 4, p. 8. Cf. J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. by J. McNeill, trans. by F. Battles, The Library of the Christian Classics, 20-21 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1967), p. 974.

[25] 'significat enim non aliter exstare verbi profectum, nisi dum spiritus sui luce Deus affulget, atque ita ab externa hominis voce distinguitur interior vocatio, quae sola efficax est et solis electis propria.' J. Calvin, *Joannis Calvini Opera quae Supersunt Omnia*, ed. by E. Cunitz and E. Reuss, 52 vols. (Brunswick: Schwetschke and Sons, 1863–1900), 49, p. 206.

[26] 'Hoc enim interest in Dei vocatione, quod omnes promiscue invitat verbo suo: electos autem solos intus docet.' Calvin, Calvini Opera Omnia, 7, p. 480.

call with the efficacious call, because the Holy Spirit sometimes speaks to the heart, without bringing saving change within it.[27]

One of Bavinck's favourite sources for Reformed Orthodoxy was the *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae* from four professors who taught in Leiden shortly after the Synod of Dordt. During his pastorate in Franeker, Bavinck had published a new edition. This book had quite an influence on his theological views, as he admitted to a friend.[28] But even in this work the internal call is not necessarily efficacious, because also the universal calling by nature has an internal side, and because the external and the internal call can go together in the hypocrites.[29]

Bavinck admits that the external call also is accompanied by a certain working and witness of the Spirit.[30] He also says that the twofold calling originally was referred to by other terms in the Reformed tradition, such as the material and formal call, the common and the particular call, and the universal and special call. Nevertheless, the distinction external and internal gained the upper hand and gradually replaced the others. Bavinck probably followed Polanus on this point. The *Syntagma* divides the external call into an efficacious and an inefficacious call and equates the efficacious with the internal call, without making further distinctions or reservations. [31]

Bavinck must have been aware of the nuances among the Reformed orthodox authors. However, he systematises and somewhat simplifies the Reformed tradition. Bavinck not only equates the effectual with the internal call, he also tends to equate the effectual internal call with regeneration. Already in the first edition he states that the call—taken in the Pauline sense of the word—stands in the closest relationship to what is elsewhere called regeneration.[32] Regeneration is the internal word, the call of the gospel, planted in the heart as a seed. 'Internal call and regenera-

---

27 P. van Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, new edn (Utrecht/Amsterdam: Sumptibus Societatis, 1715), p. 650. Cf. E. van Burg, 'Extern en intern: Uitwendige en inwendige roeping bij Petrus van Mastricht (1630-1706)' (unpublished master's thesis, Utrecht University, 2010), p. 24. The thesis is available at <http://igitur-archive.library.uu.nl>.

28 H. Bavinck and C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Een Leidse vriendschap: De briefwisseling tussen Herman Bavinck en Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje 1875-1921*, ed. by J. de Bruijn and G. Harinck (Baarn: Ten Have, 1999), p. 100.

29 J. Polyander, A. Rivet, A. Walaeus and A. Thysius, *Synopsis purioris theologiae*, ed. H. Bavinck (Leiden: Donner, 1881) p. 298-9.

30 Bavinck, *GD*[1], 3, p. 488; cf. Bavinck *GD*, 4, p. 3; Bavinck, *RD* 4, p. 34.

31 Polanus, *Syntagma*, p. 448.

32 Bavinck, *GD*[1], 3, p. 500.

tion relate to each other as seed and plant."[33] In the later editions Bavinck emphasises this point, stating that regeneration is just another word for the efficacious call (*vocatio efficax*).[34] The internal call is understood as an infused *habitus* or inseminated seed of the grace of regeneration.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NATURE AND GRACE

A third aspect of Bavinck's concept of the divine call is the relationship between nature and grace. This aspect is typical for his theology and the way in which he elaborates on the Reformed tradition shows how he was both a faithful student and an independent representative of that tradition. In line with Reformed Orthodoxy, Bavinck distinguishes between the *vocatio realis* and the *vocatio verbalis*. The general call by nature, history and personal experience is insufficient for salvation, but, nevertheless, it is very useful. Bavinck refers to the Leiden *Synopsis* and to the authors Petrus van Mastricht, Herman Witsius, Johannes Marckius and Bernhard de Moor.[35]

Most of the cited authors are very concise on the issue. Bavinck gives the tradition a neo-Calvinistic turn by interpreting the universal call as a feature of common grace and by connecting it with special grace. 'The covenant of grace is sustained by the general covenant of nature.'[36] This general call paves the way for the special call of the gospel. As the Logos, Christ prepares his own work of grace through all kinds of means and ways. Thus God performs both creation and recreation by his Word and Spirit. The special call does not replace the general call but incorporates it into itself, confirms it and transcends it. This is quite similar to the way he dealt with the relationship between general and special revelation in his prolegomena. Later on, in the *Magnalia Dei* (1909) he makes the connection between revelation and the divine call. In the chapter on the divine call in that book he states that special revelation makes the use of words

---

33 Bavinck, *GD*[1], 3, p. 505.

34 Bavinck, *GD*, 4, p. 51, Bavinck, *RD* 4, p. 77.

35 Bavinck, *GD*[1], 3, p. 487. Polyander, Rivet, Walaeus, and Thysius, *Synopsis*, p. 294. Van Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, p. 651. H. Witsius, *De oeconomia foederum Dei cum hominibus*, 4 vols (Leeuwarden: J. Hagenaar, 1685), pp. 241-5. Cf. H. Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man: Comprehending a Complete Body of Divinity*, trans. by W. Crookshank (Edinburgh: Thomas Turnbull, 1804) pp. 349-54. J. à Marck, *Christianae theologiae medulla didactico-elenctica* (Philadelphia: J. Anderson, 1824), p. 170. De Moor's work was not available to me in the preparation of this paper.

36 Bavinck, *GD*[1], 3, p, 486. Cf. Bavinck *GD*, 4, p. 2; Bavinck, *RD* 4, p. 33.

necessary, because the historical content of salvation-history can only be communicated verbally, whereas the general or universal call because of its a-historical character does not need words.[37]

The relationship between nature and grace is also at stake when Bavinck discusses the character of grace in regeneration. He rejects the Thomist interpretation of grace as 'a physical act of God' accompanying the external call. Bavinck rejects this Roman Catholic idea, because it makes grace a surplus of nature. According to Bavinck, the Reformed refused to describe the internal calling as something physical. Of course, the divine call is more than a moral advice, but does not bring any new substance into creation, as the Manichees and Anabaptists teach. According to Bavinck, 'grace never creates, it recreates'.[38] The use of the word regeneration for the renewal of the whole creation in Matthew 19:28 helps Bavinck to explain the character of spiritual renewal. In the new birth the continuity of the self is maintained. 'Christ is not a new; a second Creator, but a Re-creator, a Reformer of all things'.[39] Thus regeneration not only brings nothing new into creation, it also does not deprive it of anything essential, because sin does not belong to the essence of creation. Sin is not a substance, but only affects the form of creation; therefore recreation is a renewal of the form, or a reformation of creation. Grace is not a physical force; it does not suppress, but it restores nature. Without giving the reference, Bavinck cites a Latin phrase: '*non tollit sed restituit et perficit voluntatem.*' It is not clear from which source Bavinck copied the phrase, but it was not uncommon in Reformed orthodoxy. Francis Junius, for instance says that grace perfects nature and does not destroy it.[40] Bavinck

---

37 H. Bavinck, *Magnalia dei: Onderwijzing in de Christelijke Religie naar Gereformeerde Belijdenis*, (Kampen: Kok, 1909), pp. 464-5 = *Our Reasonable Faith* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1956), pp. 411-12.

38 'De genade schept nooit, zij herschept.' Bavinck, *GD*[1], 3, p. 509. The whole concept of recreation is essential to understand Bavinck. J. Bolt, 'Editor's Introduction', in Bavinck, *RD* 2, 11-23. On p. 18 Bolt refers to J. Veenhof, *Revelatie en inspiratie: De openbarings- en schriftbeschouwing van Herman Bavinck in vergelijking met die der ethische theologie* (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 1968), p. 346. Veenhof in turn refers to E. Heideman, *The Relation of Revelation and Reason in E. Brunner and H. Bavinck* (Assen: Van Gorcum, Prakke & Prakke, 1959), pp. 191, 195.

39 Bavinck, *GD*[1], 3, p. 509. The second edition is slightly different: 'Christ, accordingly, is not a second Creator, but the Redeemer and Savior of this fallen creation, the Reformer of all things that have been ruined and corrupted by sin.' Bavinck, *GD*, 4, 69; Bavinck, *RD* 4, 92.

40 'Nam gratia naturam perficit, non autem abolet.' F. Junius, *Opuscula Theologica Selecta*, ed. by A. Kuyper, Bibliotheca reformata, 1 (Amsterdam: Fred.

also uses this quote to characterise his concept of organic inspiration.[41] He must have known that the phrase originates with Thomas Aquinas, but probably he did not want to mention that, because he was refuting Thomism here.

The claim that the Reformed do not call grace something physical is incorrect. Van Mastricht and Voetius for instance do call the work of grace physical over against a concept in which grace is merely a moral persuasion of the will.[42] For Van Mastricht the essential difference between the efficacious divine calling and regeneration lies in the fact that the second is physical, while the first is moral.[43] Voetius calls God's way of operating in regeneration physical, because it produces and introduces a new creation.[44] Bavinck probably sensed this; at least he seems to have discovered it, because he is much less outspoken on the issue in the later editions of the *Reformed Dogmatics*. Regarding the physical nature of grace, Bavinck maintains his position that grace restores nature, but in these editions he is much more careful about the Reformed sources. He no longer claims that they absolutely deny that grace has a physical character. This might be due to a more careful study of the sources, but it may also be caused by a stronger emphasis of Bavinck on regeneration as an immediate act of the Holy Spirit, over against his former emphasis on the word as an indispensible means of grace.

The three issues show a development in Bavinck's thoughts. The emphasis shifts towards the antecedence of regeneration in the *ordo salutis*, towards the equation of the internal call with regeneration and towards a certain openness for a physical understanding of the grace

---

Muller, 1882), p. 343. Cited by T. Sarx, *Franciscus Junius d.Ä. (1545-1602). Ein reformierter Theologe im Spannungsfeld zwischen späthumanistischer Irenik und reformierter Konfessionalisierung*, Reformed Historical Theology, 3 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), p. 140, n. 386.

41 Bavinck, *GD*[1], 3, p. 509. For the use of the phrase for organic inspiration, cf. Bavinck, *GD*, 1, p. 414; Bavinck *RD* 1, p. 443. Thomas Aquinas says that grace does not cancel out nature, but perfects it (*gratia naturam non tollit sed perficit*). T. van Aquino, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q1, a8, ad 2. For a historical survey of the development of this axiom cf. J. Beumer, 'Gratia supponit naturam. Zur Geschichte eines theologischen Prinzips', *Gregorianum*, 29 (1939), 381-406, 535-52.

42 Van Mastricht calls both saving grace and regeneration physical. Van Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, pp. 643, 660. Cf. Van Burg, 'Extern en intern', pp. 22, 27.

43 Van Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, pp. 650. Cf. Van Burg, 'Extern en intern', p. 223.

44 Voetius, *Selectarum Disputationum* 2, p. 449.

of regeneration. It would be wrong to suggest that the changes are very strong. Bavinck does not deny positions that he first held, but still the shift in emphasis is striking. The overall picture shows that Bavinck's interest moves from the outward Word as a means of grace towards the inward work of the Spirit in the heart. This shift may have been caused by a discussion on the character of regeneration in the Reformed Churches. We will turn to Bavinck's contribution to that discussion in order to trace possible influences.

IMMEDIATE REGENERATION

In 1892 the churches of the Secession and of the Doleantie came together in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. The desire to merge the seminary in Kampen and the Free University in Amsterdam remained a bone of contention in the united the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. Bavinck was a strong advocate of the merge and when it failed he decided to move to Amsterdam in 1902. The most important doctrinal differences regarded regeneration and baptism.

Within the churches from the Secession many had strong feelings against the Kuyperian idea of supposed regeneration as foundation for infant baptism. At the Synod of Utrecht (1905) a committee stated that it was not necessary to make definitive pronouncements on the issue, because it was merely a divergence of opinion, nonessential to the confession and foundation of the church.

The synod accepted a formula that placed the different approaches beside one another. In short it said that on the one hand the seed of the covenant must be held to be regenerated and sanctified in Christ, by virtue of the promise of God, until, upon their growing up, the opposite should become apparent. On the other hand, however, it maintained that it was less accurate to say that baptism is administered to infants on the ground of their presumed regeneration, since the ground of baptism is the mandate and the promise of God. Bavinck was the main author of this formula.

Bavinck's *Calling and Regeneration* was originally published as a series of forty articles on 'Immediate Regeneration'. The articles and the book must be seen as a preparation for the Synod. Bavinck aimed at doctrinally unifying the two streams in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. Therefore it is rather difficult to interpret his book.

At the beginning of the book, Bavinck refers to the discussion in the Reformed churches regarding the order of the benefits of the covenant of

grace and their relationship to each other.[45] The older and more common opinion was that calling preceded regeneration. The newer opinion—inaugurated by Abraham Kuyper and strongly advocated by some of his disciples who developed his concept of presupposed regeneration in a radical way—was that regeneration inseminated as a seed or principle of life preceded all the other benefits.[46] This reversion of the order of salvation formed the theological foundation of the idea that all the elect were born again before baptism and thus that presupposed regeneration could be the ground of baptism.

Abraham Kuyper, Jr (1872-1941) wrote a dissertation on Maccovius in 1899.[47] In his supralapsarian theology, passive justification from all eternity played a key role and was listed as the first of all the benefits in the order of salvation. The young Kuyper used this scheme to undergird his idea that all the elect were born again in infancy.

In the introduction of *Calling and Regeneration*, Bavinck refers to the 'brotherly controversy on Maccovius' whose supralapsarianism, eternal justification and immediate regeneration are rejected by some and defended by others. On a deeper level there are concerns regarding the preaching of the gospel. According to some, not only from the circles of the Secession churches, but also from the Doleantie churches, it seems 'that there are no unregenerate in the church any longer. It seems as though even when a person has continued living for years in an unconverted state, he still must be considered to be regenerated.'[48] In summary, the preaching is no longer searching or discerning, because the doctrine of presupposed regeneration robs the administration of the Word of its power and as a result many spiritually build on sand and deceive themselves for eternity.[49]

Bavinck understood and sympathised with these complaints, which mainly represented the tradition of the Secession, although they might also have been uttered in the churches that originated from the Doleantie. The necessity of heart searching or distinguishing preaching was characteristic for the Further Reformation (*Nadere Reformatie*), the Dutch form of Puritanism. This tradition was not only upheld in the churches of the Secession, but also remained present in the Dutch Reformed Church after the Secession (1834) and even after the Doleantie (1886).

---

45 Bavinck, *RW*, p. 7, Bavinck, *SG*, p. 3.

46 Cf. J. Veenhof, 'Discussie over het zelfonderzoek—sleutel tot verstaan van het schisma van 1944', *Theologia Reformata*, 45 (2002), 219-41, 223-4.

47 A. Kuyper, Jr, *Johannes Maccovius* (Leiden: Donner, 1899).

48 Bavinck, *RW*, p. 10, Bavinck, *SG*, p. 4.

49 Bavinck, *RW*, p. 10, Bavinck, *SG*, p. 5.

On the one hand Bavinck opposes the radical development of Kuyper's position. The book can be read as supportive of the criticism from the Seccesion circles. It is mostly seen as an independent voice next to Abraham Kuyper Sr.[50] On the other hand, however, Bavinck also nuances the criticism and tries to win the critics for the acceptance of Kuyper's doctrine of presupposed regeneration. He rejects that as the ground for baptism, but he does not deny that it is possible that infants are born again before being baptised and he emphasises that—according to the judgment of love—all children must be regarded as regenerate until the opposite appears. On the one hand he rejects harsh supralapsarianism and the idea of eternal justification, on the other hand he states that the idea of immediate regeneration is truly Reformed and even blames those who reject immediate grace, of Pelagianism.[51] All depends upon the right interpretation of the term *immediate*. Bavinck seemingly criticizes 'immediate regeneration' but in fact he makes the terminology acceptable by stressing the immediacy of grace that does not exclude but presupposes the use of means.

In order to arrive at the 'truly Reformed' position, Bavinck first fences it off from Pelagianism, by stating that the work of the Spirit is immediate in the sense that nothing stands in between the Spirit and the soul. Secondly, he demarcates this position from enthusiasm by claiming that the power of the means of grace must be maintained. Finally, he distinguished the Reformed from the Roman Catholic and Lutheran positions by declaring that grace is not bound to the Word or to the sacraments.[52] These three topics correspond with the chapters of the book.

In the first of the three mentioned chapters, titled 'The Immediate Work of the Holy Spirit', Bavinck argues that in the Reformed tradition starting with Calvin, the mystical union with the person of Christ from all eternity precedes all the benefits of Christ.[53] All the Reformed agreed that the external call came first, but that does not decide the question

---

[50] Bavinck's *Saved by Grace* is often interpreted as a critical alternative to Kuyper's views on regeneration. J. Mark Beach calls it 'a mildly 'anti-Kuyperian' work. J. Beach, 'Introductory Essay', in Bavinck, SG, pp. ix-lvi (p. xiv). According to Jan Veenhof, Bavinck treads a third path next to Kuyperianism and anti-Kuyperiansim, though he admits that this path is not easy to trace. Veenhof, 'Discussie over het zelfonderzoek', p. 235.

[51] Bavinck, *RW*, p. 22; Bavinck, *SG*, p. 15.

[52] Bavinck, *RW*, p. 17; Bavinck, *SG*, pp. 9-10.

[53] Bavinck, *RW*, p. 25; Bavinck, *SG*, p. 16. This seems to be a later development in Reformed orthodoxy tied up with the doctrine of the *pactum salutis*. Bavinck gives no references for the claim that Calvin already teaches an eternal mystical union with Christ.

where the internal work of the Spirit starts. Different answers were given to the question when this happened and originally the Reformed used several different names for this first beginning, like internal call, repentance, faith, conversion, regeneration and active grace. Nevertheless, all agreed completely regarding the fact that this beginning was not human, but divine. In the work of salvation human beings are receptive and passive.

With Augustine, the Reformed confessed the internal, hidden and effectual grace. 'Nothing stands in between this work of grace and the person that is born again, no word, no sacrament, no church or priest, no act of the mind or of the will.'[54] The Holy Spirit works directly, immediately and irresistibly. Thus Bavinck equates immediate grace with irresistible grace. No concerned church member fostering the tradition of the 'Nadere Reformatie' would dare to object to irresistible grace. Bavinck reduces the issue at stake between the different parties to the question of whether this work of the Spirit can or cannot be called immediate without misunderstanding. This reveals that he is trying to win the concerned members of his own churches for the acceptance of the Kuyperian position.

In the second chapter Bavinck argues that this immediate work of the Spirit includes the use of means. In this chapter he criticises 'immediate regeneration' if it excludes the Word as a means of grace.[55] To prove that the original meaning of the word 'immediate' did not exclude the use of the means he not only refers to Augustine whose doctrine of grace was combined with a high view of the church, but also to the *Heidelberg Catechism* (Lord's Day 25) and the *Belgic Confession of Faith* (article 24), where true faith and regeneration are said to be wrought through Word and Spirit. He acknowledges that regeneration there refers to the whole life of faith and sanctification, but, according to Bavinck, this whole also includes the beginning.

He also refers extensively to Reformed orthodox sources. He admits that it is true that later on the distinction was made between regeneration in a strict sense and conversion, but nowhere is this distinction explained in a way that suggests that the first was effected without and the second through the Word.[56] Bavinck demonstrates that the Synod of Dordt main-

---

[54] Bavinck, *RW*, p. 27; Bavinck, *SG*, p. 17.

[55] Bavinck, *RW*, p. 47, Bavinck, *SG*, p. 34. He adds that 'many today hold the view that the immediate operation of the Holy Spirit in regeneration constitutes a contrast with the mediate operation....' Bavinck, *RW*, p. 48; Bavinck, *SG*, p. 34.

[56] Bavinck, *RW*, p. 58; Bavinck, *SG*, p. 41.

tained over against the Remonstrants that the irresistibility (or rather invincibility) of grace did not exclude the use of the word as means of grace. Thus the *Canons of Dordt* explicitly confess that 'the supernatural work of God by which he regenerates us in no way rules out or cancels the use of the gospel, which God in his great wisdom has appointed to be the seed of regeneration and the food of the soul'.[57]

The Reformed defended the immediateness of grace over against the Remonstrants and later over against the school of Saumur. To illustrate the first point Bavinck translates and summarises a part of Franciscus Gomarus comments on Matthew 23:37 where Jesus complains that he wanted to gather the children of Jerusalem as a hen her chickens under her wings, but that they did not want this. The Leiden professor confutes the error of the Remonstrants, who used this text to prove their ideas regarding free will by vindicating the meaning of Jesus words and asserting the orthodox doctrine.[58] Indeed, part of this primarily exegetical source is devoted to the question whether the work of the Spirit can be called immediate, but Bavinck overemphasises this point in his presentation.

Gomarus distinguishes between the *habitus* and the *actus* of faith. 'God both requires the act of believing externally of a person through the Word and must grant him the *habitus* of believing internally through his Spirit, making him able to believe, and by the hearing of the word and his help excites him to the act of believing.'[59] In the treatise the word 'immediate' is brought up from the Arminian side to accuse the Reformed of making the use of the means superfluous. Bavinck gives the impression that Gomarus calls the *habitus* of faith immediate, while in fact Gomarus only refutes an Arminian misunderstanding.

Bavinck adds many other Reformed sources to underline the immediacy of grace or of regeneration both against Arminianism and against the theology of Saumur, where—following John Cameron—regeneration was merely understood as illumination of the mind.[60]

---

57 Bavinck, *RW*, p. 61; Bavinck, *SG*, p. 43.

58 The explanation of this text, titled 'Vindicatio fententiae Christi Matt. 23. V. 37. ubi prolix erroris Remonstrantium, de gratia conversionis & libero arbitrio confutatio, & doctrinae orthodoxae asserio' is part of a collection of exegetical remarks on the gospels. F. Gomarus, *Opera theologica omnia* (Amsterdam: J. Janssonius, 1664), pp. 85-126.

59 'Quare hunc credenda actum Deus & mandat homini verbo exterius, & interius per suum Spiritum donando fidei habitum, ad credendum, idoneum reddit; & audito verbo, suoque auxilio ad credendum actu excitat.' Gomarus, *Opera*, p. 104. Cf. Bavinck, *RW*, p. 64; Bavinck, *SG*, p. 45.

60 In order to analyse Bavinck's relationship with Reformed orthodox theology more carefully, all his sources should be traced and checked, but in general

The ambiguousness of Bavinck's position lies in the fact that he on the one hand defends the systematic and logical order of the *ordo salutis* in which calling precedes regeneration, while at the same time he keeps repeating that it is possible that regeneration precedes calling and even that this is mostly the case with those born within the covenant. Bavinck even states that the idea of regeneration in its narrow sense as vivification is present in seed form in Calvin.[61]

> [W]ith respect to many children of believers Calvin accepts a form of regeneration apart from the preaching of the gospel. But when he formulates the general rule and indicates the order of the benefits of salvation, then he always places calling before regeneration, the preaching of the Word before the operation of the Spirit.[62]

After discussing Calvin, Bavinck makes the same point for Maccovius, the hero of radical Kuyperians. In passing, Bavinck states that the real problem with the Polish theologian was that his way of life was everything except Christian, that he was blamed of living like a beast and that it was no wonder that pious men like Sibrandus Lubbertus and William Ames sought a connecting between this wrong life and a wrong doctrine. But even Maccovius does not call regeneration immediate in any sense that excludes the use of the means. Bavinck concludes: 'So Maccovius also subscribed to the doctrine that the call—as a rule even the external, but in any case the internal call—precedes regeneration.'[63] Following Maccovius, Voetius, Van Mastricht, Alexander Comrie and the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1645) are also cited to prove the same points. Calling logically precedes regeneration, but regeneration may temporarily precede calling. The solution towards which Bavinck is arguing is that the internal call coincides with regeneration.

In the second part of the chapter Bavinck mentions three reasons for maintaining the logical order of calling and regeneration: (1) because of the doctrine of the covenant, (2) because of the uncertainty regarding the time of regeneration related to baptism, (3) to avoid Anabaptist dualism. Still, his real point is to create space for the alternative chronological order in which the divine call follows the preceding immediate grace of regeneration.

---

the Reformed orthodox quotations that call regeneration immediate are not particularly convincing, because the phrase is often used in a polemical context.

61 Bavinck, *RW*, p. 77; Bavinck, *SG*, p. 56.

62 Bavinck, *RW*, p. 79; Bavinck, *SG*, p. 57.

63 Bavinck, *RW*, p. 86; Bavinck, *SG*, p. 62.

After describing the different views on the chronology of baptism and regeneration and placing the view of Voetius against that of a rather unknown Dutch theologian, Jesaisas Hillenius—concludes: 'People did not accuse one another of heresy, however, and never considered criticizing each other before the church public as being less reformed.'[64] This sounds like a warning of the concerned Secession brethren.

In the final chapter of the book, Bavinck explains the connection between the immediate operation of the Spirit and the use of the means. Bavinck, in short, concludes that regeneration precedes the saving hearing the Word of God. For the act of saving faith, the Word is absolutely necessary. But then the word is the means through which the capacity (*habitus*) of faith progresses into the act of faith.[65] The infusion of the capacity of faith in regeneration precedes any act of faith. 'So regeneration occurs *under* the Word, *by* the Word, *with* the Word, but it does not occur *through* the Word.'[66]

At first glance the articles are polemical against Kuyper and especially against his radical epigones. Most of the readers of *De Bazuin*, the periodical of the theological school in Kampen, belonged to the camp that criticised Kuyperian theological renewal. Between the critical lines, however, Bavinck tried to ease the consciences of the concerned members of the church by showing that—if interpreted correctly—nothing was essentially wrong with the position they attacked.[67] Perhaps the strongest argument that *Calling and Regeneration* was not intended as an attack of Kuyperianism lies in the silence of Abraham Kuyper himself.[68] He would never have accepted an attack by Bavinck so peacefully. Although Kuyper did not agree with Bavinck on all points, he must have noticed that his colleague was moving in his direction compared to the first edition of the *Reformed Dogmatics*. Kuyper did not feel attacked, because he understood that Bavinck was trying to win the concerned members of the

64 Bavinck, *RW*, p. 129; Bavinck, *SG*, p. 90.

65 Bavinck, *RW*, p. 217; Bavinck, *SG*, p. 150.

66 Bavinck, *RW*, p. 220-21; Bavinck, *SG*, p. 152.

67 Instead of attacking Kuyper, Bavinck links up his discussion of immediate grace with Kuyper's view of Calvinism whose essence lies in the 'high thought that God, superior in majesty above all creatures, still holds immediate communion with the creature through his Holy Spirit.' Bavinck, *RW*, p. 28; Bavinck, *SG*, p. 18.

68 This silence is interpreted negatively by those who read Bavinck's *Saved by Grace* as anti-Kuyperian. 'We cannot trace Kuyper's reaction to this beautiful book of Bavinck. *De Heraut* remains dead silent about it.' R. Dam, B. Holwerda, C. Veenhof, and D. Vollenhoven, *Rondom '1905": een historische schets* (Terneuzen: Littooij, [1944]), p. 28, n. 46.

Secession churches for the acceptance of the theological differences with the Doleantie churches.

CONCLUSION

The three issues in the *Reformed Dogamtics*—the order of the *ordo salutis*, the relationship between the external and internal call, and the physical character of grace—show that Bavinck's thoughts developed towards a stronger emphasis on the internal work of the Spirit instead of his original emphasis on the external Word. It also shows the growing influence of the later phases of Reformed theology on Bavinck's thought; in his early years he was more critical of that development from the perspective of the reformation. Bavinck tends to interpret his sources from a modern object-subject scheme and sometimes his quotations even seem to lay other nuances then he does in his elaboration on them. The analysis of his thoughts on immediate regeneration in *Roeping en Wedergeboorte* show that this development was strengthened by his desire to mediate between the positions of the Secession and the Doleantie on assumed regeneration and eternal justification. Although he did not consent to the radical Kuyperian position, he pleaded for acceptance of that position by stressing the immediate character of divine grace.

Bavinck wrestled with the subject-object dilemma. He wanted to remain faithful to the Reformed tradition, because for him it was the purest form of true biblical theology. Therefore Scripture and not the Reformed tradition should have the final word. It seems to me that due to his concern for the pastoral questions and for the unity of the church in a later stage of his life he leaned more heavily on the later developments in the Reformed tradition regarding regeneration then at the beginning, where he was more critical of the later development. This shift of emphasis runs parallel to a general tendency in his theology to take his starting point in the human subject.

THE RELIGIOUS CHARACTER OF MODERNISM AND THE MODERN CHARACTER OF RELIGION: A CASE STUDY OF HERMAN BAVINCK'S ENGAGEMENT WITH MODERN CULTURE

GEORGE HARINCK

VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT AMSTERDAM/HDC, DE BOELELAAN 1105 (KAMER 1B-30),
1081 HV AMSTERDAM, THE NETHERLANDS
g.harinck@ubvu.vu.nland

INTRODUCTION: MODERNISM AND RELIGION

The theology of Herman Bavinck is usually considered as a unity, built up coherently and well balanced in his *Reformed Dogmatics*. There have been discussions about the central importance of the theological discipline in his Amsterdam years, when he published more on pedagogy and psychology, and there are several dogmatic topics he took up again after having finished his *Dogmatics*, because he was not satisfied with the results of his thinking. In this regard his ideas did not change much. Rather, in his later years he became more careful in making final judgments on topics like Scripture or the ethical theology.[1]

Whoever has read crisscross in Bavinck's works will get the impression that Bavinck could hardly have done his dogmatics in another way than coherent and balanced. His publications show a remarkable poise and present an equilibrium, and time and again in his books and articles he points at the disunity and lack of balance in the thinking of his contemporaries. To Bavinck dualism and inconsistency together formed a key feature of the modern culture in which he lived. His response to it was clear: he proposed a world- and life-view that would overcome these weaknesses and represent unity. Christianity represented this unity and was the answer to the problems of modern culture, and his *Reformed Dogmatics* may be read as a specimen of this all encompassing and balanced view.

Presented in this way, Bavinck's world- and life-view and his theology resemble the image of a spaceship with a crew of aliens (alias Christians) entering this rotten world, and witnessing there a fresh, balanced way of living, very different, and yet within reach. This image is not as strange as

[1] According to V. Hepp, *Dr. Herman Bavinck* (Amsterdam: Ten Have, 1921), pp. 325-6.

it may seem, for many sympathisers with Bavinck's ideas, especially those from his own Seceder background, have looked at his work and deeds in this way. They were critical of modern culture, to say the least, and expected Bavinck's work to support and nurture an antithetical attitude. They appreciated the Herman Bavinck who opposed Christian politics to neutral politics,[2] who opened his inaugural address with a characterisation of modern theology as leading to the secularisation of God and religion (that is to the death of theology)[3] and who called upon his ethical colleague de la Saussaye not to seek for reconciliation of Christianity and culture in a higher synthesis, but instead to strive after the isolation and purity of Christian principles.[4]

This was not just the view of the common Reformed people in Bavinck's days, but this antithetical way of looking to him and his work, and to neo-Calvinism in general, has been dominant in the historiography on this movement as well. As far as Bavinck was more open towards culture than other neo-Calvinists, he was (according to the church historians) deviating from the main line.[5] In the history of the Dutch church, religion, politics and culture, neo-Calvinism has been depicted as a closed system, opposing and challenging other opinions or worldviews.

However well-known this view of neo-Calvinism and of Bavinck's theology as a self-sufficient system may have been, qualified by its unity, coherence and balance on the one side, and antithesis, exclusiveness and refutation on the other side, this was not what Bavinck had in mind. If anything, Bavinck deplored the dichotomy of Christianity and culture, and appreciated the endeavours of Modernist and Ethical theologians to bridge this gap. He was very much interested in the international cultural developments of his age. He not only read theological literature, but also discussed the most recent novels with his Kampen students,[6] and

---

2 H. Bavinck, *Christelijke en neutrale staatkunde. Rede ter inleiding van de deputatenvergadering gehouden te Utrecht op 13 april 1905* (Hilversum: Witzel & Klemkerk, [1905]).

3 H. Bavinck, *De wetenschap der h. godgeleerdheid. Rede ter aanvaarding van het leeraarsambt aan de Theologische School te Kampen, uitgesproken den 10 jan. 1883* (Kampen: G.Ph. Zalsman, 1883), pp. 5-6.

4 H. Bavinck, *De theologie van prof. dr. Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye. Bijdrage tot de kennis der ethische theologie* (Leiden: D. Donner, 1884), p. 97.

5 O. de Jong, *Nederlandse kerkgeschiedenis*, 3rd edn (Nijkerk: G.F. Callenbach, 1972), p. 377; A. Rasker, *De Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk vanaf 1795. Haar geschiedenis en theologie in de negentiende en twintigste eeuw*, 2nd edn (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1981), pp. 197-8.

6 I. Van Dellen, *In God's Crucible: An Autobiography* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1950), pp. 39-40.

read and reviewed publications of modern scientists and philosophers. More importantly, he digested the ideas presented in his publications and reflections on Christianity and culture. Not many of the scientists, novelists or philosophers he discussed in his publications ever reacted to his publications, but he (from his side) was constantly trying to connect to the world around him.

In this article I will propose a different view of Herman Bavinck and modern culture than we are used to. I will not depict him as a well-balanced opposition leader against aggressive modern culture, but in the first place as a participant of modern culture. In his thinking he was part and parcel of modern culture and contributed to its character and direction. I believe we will get a more proper understanding of who Bavinck was and what neo-Calvinism was, when we overcome antitheses that historiography and tradition have presented us, like those between neo-Calvinism and modern theology, or between Christianity and culture.

In order to do this we first have to make some remarks on modern culture or modernism. Modern is in the first place a historical term, the definition of Western culture since the French revolution. Modern then refers to practices: the introduction of freedom, democracy, development and progress. Defined in this way, everyone agrees that neo-Calvinism was a modern movement: it proclaimed a free church in a free state, it was democratic, made use of the new and faster printing techniques, profited from the development of a railway network and promoted education. However, there is a disadvantage in this definition. According to this definition of modernism as practice, both the pope and the ultraorthodox Calvinists can be called modern. As such, there is no anti-modernism and this makes the definition empty.

The techniques and infrastructure of modern culture were indeed adopted by Christianity, sometimes Christians were even pioneers in this regard, like Thomas Chalmers with his parish system in Glasgow or Abraham Kuyper with the founding of the first political party in the Netherlands. It seems clear, though, these modern means were used to oppose or adjust the program of modernism. It was anti-modernism with modern means. The modernism Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck are said to have rejected does not concern the practice but the program of some of the modernists: the emancipation from the pre-modern worldview and the implementation of the worldview of the French revolution, with at its core the rejection not just of the church, but of God and religion.

This definition would mean that modernism is incompatible with religion *per se*. As a historian, I have some problems with this view. This incompatibility may be true in theological or philosophical constructions, but it has hardly ever been true in history. Recent historical research has

pointed to the irrational and religious elements in modernism.[7] Neither modernism was monolithic. There was anti-religion, but there were also other attitudes towards religion and to some modernism was the new face of religion. If we exclude religion from the definition of modernism, we would take its aim for the result and mutilate the history of modernism, and overlook its complexities in favour of a simple dichotomy. Peter Gay is aware of the complex character of modernism and limits his description of modernism to two characteristics: a preference for non-convention, and a rigid introspection.[8] It was modernism that created the possibility to develop and realize the classic idea of the catholicity of Christendom.[9]

As regards religion, this had to be anti-modernist by definition in this simple view of modernism. However, Christianity was part and parcel of all Western cultural developments until the French revolution positioned Christianity on the wrong side of history. In the popular view, Christianity since then seen as was out and rigid, and modernism was in, and was perceived to be dynamic. This view may have been the aim of the Jacobins in Paris, but as a matter of fact this never happened. Christianity adapted to the modern situation as it had always done to cultural changes and as such, it deeply influenced modernism by adding notions like conversion and femininity to Western modern culture.[10] Within Christianity there have been many different attitudes towards modernism. True, many church historians consider orthodoxy in the nineteenth and twentieth century as having missed the boat of modern culture, while modern adaptations of Christianity are hailed as the indispensable adjustments without which Christianity would have lost its credibility. Such a view, however, is biased. It is dominated by confessional preferences and not by historical facts about the relationship of Christianity and modern culture.

---

7 Bavinck's modernist professor L. W. E. Rauwenhoff did not give up his anti-supranaturalism, but qualified modernism in 1880 disappointedly as 'idealism without an ideal', see: P. Slis, L.W.E. Rauwenhoff (1828-1889). *Apologeet van het modernisme. Predikant, kerkhistoricus en godsdienstfilosoof* (Kampen: Kok, 2003), pp. 169-73, 296.

8 P. Gay, *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy, from Baudelaire to Beckett and Beyond* (New York: Norton 2008), pp. 3-4; cf. C. Wilk, 'What was modernism?', in *Modernism: Designing a New World*, 1914-1939, ed. by C. Wilk (London: V&A Publications, 2006), pp. 11-21.

9 Gay, *Modernism*, pp. 27-30, mentions the presence of religion in modern culture, but his attention moves away too soon from Christianity to sectarian religious groups and expressions.

10 C. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularization*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2009), chapters 3 and 4.

I prefer a dealing with modernism that is more historical in character, that includes religion and that does not oppose Christianity and Enlightenment as if Europe ever made such a clear cut choice. In this article I take Bavinck as a case study to show how Christianity was part of the make-up of modernism.

THE STARTING POINT: AMBIGUITY

Bavinck's starting point as a theologian was at Leiden University, the centre of modern theology. In his family and church he had been warned against this theology not so much because it was a worse alternative to reformed theology, but because he might lose his faith. The opposition in Seceder circles against modern theology was existential: modern theology was darkness and death. While Bavinck lived and worked with the modern theologians in Leiden, he developed a more nuanced view on the antithesis between modern and reformed theology, but when he started his career as a professor at Kampen Theological Seminary in 1883, he did confirm the dichotomy: according to modern theology, he said, all theology should be secularised, in line with the revolutionary principle that aimed at a world without God or Christ. Over against this view he positioned his own Kampen seminary: 'We should realise as deeply as possible, that he who believes in Jesus Christ does not just have some opinions that differ from the world, but really is another, a new man, that the congregation of Christ has a life and a conscience of its own, its own language and science. If this is true, and who among us would deny this, then reconciliation, transaction or '*Vermittlung*' between church and world, reformation and revolution, the old and the modern worldview is impossible.'[11]

Modernism was described by Bavinck programmatically as a breach forged by the French Revolution between the Christian and the human conscience.[12] Following this, his inaugural address took a different note: these are modern times in which Christianity is excluded, he said. That was the negative activity. There is also a positive one: anyone who wants to obey Scripture was now able to separate himself from the common ways of thinking, is able to step out of the common structures and show clearly and distinctively what Christianity is about. Before modernism this was a nonexistent possibility. The effect of the profound character of the French Revolution was that a totally new era had started, in which everything

[11] Bavinck, *De wetenschap der h. godgeleerdheid*, p. 7.

[12] Bavinck, *De theologie van Chantepie de la Saussaye*, p. 8.

had to be re-orientated and re-defined, including Christianity. Kampen Seminary and the VU University owe their existence to this new era.[13]

Kampen Seminary, he said, was founded to preserve and present Christian religion in this new age as it truly is: not as just another opinion, but as a force bringing about a new humanity. This was not a message the Reformed community was used to hearing: the Revolutionary age was a threat, yes, but also an opportunity. This new era had created space for an explicit Christian position, independent of the state, independent of whatever authorities. The Reformed people who had founded Kampen Seminary in 1854 should no longer be hiding from a revolutionary storm, but should rather use their freedom and claim a place for Christianity in modern times. By rejecting Christianity, modernism in fact invited Christianity to be independent and self-conscious. Bavinck did not give up modern culture because it was the result of the French Revolution or because Christianity had been excluded on principle by this culture, but he accepted the challenge modernism offered to provide a theology as a fruit of the times, but in the form and in front of the present times.

By simultaneously qualifying modernism negatively as an anti-religious program and positively as an opportunity to develop an independent Christianity in all domains of life, some ambiguity crept into Bavinck's thinking on modernism. The recognition of this ambiguity is essential for understanding his cultural position. To Bavinck the anti-religious character of modernism was an assault to Western culture and time and again he critiqued the state of modern culture in order to calculate the danger and sense the depth of its anti-religiousness. He was a respected watcher of modern culture and well informed about changes in the anti-supranatural character of modernism and about the weaknesses in its position and reasoning, as many of his publications show. This is the one side of his ambiguity. The other side is that because of this alertness he was also aware of the weaknesses of the Christian position, and he often had to encourage his fellow believers to look more intently, to think with greater rigour and to make better arguments. It was both the program of modernism and the program of Christianity that interactively had to change for the better. Bavinck's reflection oscillated between these two aims and this ambiguity resulted in dynamic intellectual positions regarding both Christianity and modern culture over the years.

The tension between Christianity and culture was described by Bavinck as a painful conflict, manifesting itself as a tension between religion and theology, life and knowledge, the common and the learned people. This situation was untenable. Something had to be done to overcome these

[13] Bavinck, *De wetenschap der h. godgeleerdheid*, p. 7.

false antitheses.[14] But how? He agreed with the ethical or mediating theologians of his day that reconciliation should be the aim, because the culture of the nineteenth century had something to say that should be digested by theology.[15] He was, however, disappointed when in matters of politics and education, the Ethicals supported the modernist anti-supranatural program and opposed an orthodox development of Christianity in the public domain[16] (thus helping to create the image of Christianity being something sectarian[17] and to hardening the face of modernism). Bavinck used strong words to describe this intolerant modernism:

> Secularisation was the cry of the century. The ties that bound men to eternity had to be broken; and here on earth a paradise for man should be created. The supranatural character of God and religion were the enemies of the human race. *Le supernatural serait le surdivin.* Nature was God. Art, science and industry were the gods that had to be honoured. Culture abolished cult. Hygiene took the place of morality. The playhouse replaced the church.[18]

The reason that Bavinck appreciated the Seceders and Abraham Kuyper so much was that they had not been impressed by this intolerant fury and had a more independent attitude towards this modernist program. They had indeed made use of the freedom modernism offered, not to give up their convictions, but to develop them as building stones for a modern society. In 1897, when the twenty-fifth anniversary of Kuyper's daily *De Standaard* was celebrated, Bavinck stressed that Kuyper had dared to make use of the freedom modernism presented to society, more so than the modernists themselves. In politics and society, the modernist liberals had claimed their principle was the only road to happiness, but it was Kuyper who had walked that road, and had pressed the intolerant liberals to accept the consequence of their idea of freedom of external author-

---

14 H. Bavinck, *Godsdienst en godgeleerdheid. Rede gehouden bij de aanvaarding van het hoogleeraarsambt in de theologie aan de Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam op woensdag 17 december 1902* (Wageningen: Vada, 1902), pp. 12-13.

15 Bavinck, *Theologie van Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye*, p. 95.

16 H. Bavinck, *Het vierde eener eeuw. Rede bij gelegenheid van het vijf en twintigjarig bestaan van de 'Standaard'* (Kampen: J.H. Bos, 1897), pp. 10-11.

17 H. Bavinck, *De katholiciteit van christendom en kerk. Rede gehouden bij de overdracht van het rectoraat aan de Theol. School te Kampen op 18 december 1888* (Kampen: G.Ph. Zalsman, 1888), p. 41.

18 H. Bavinck, *De algemeene genade. Rede gehouden bij de overdracht van het rectoraat aan de Theol. School te Kampen op 6 december 1894* (Kampen: G.Ph. Zalsman, 1894), p. 34.

ity, and grant open access to the public domain, which the liberals had reserved for themselves:

> She [De Standaard] does not lag behind, but she looks forward and walks ahead. Leaning on the Bible has she in our country dared to accept the freedom, like no Catholic or liberal, no conservative or irenic had dared to write in his program or dared to practice in life. She asks nothing but justice, justice for all, justice also for ourselves. She does not ask support from the state, or a privilege for the church, no preference for any religious conviction. What she asks is freedom alone; freedom in society to combat the revolution on principle with no other moral weapons than the gospel.[19]

By nullifying the exclusive liberal claim on modernism neo-Calvinism stepped in as partaker of modernism. Modern society had to be a project shared by orthodox and modernists alike. The ambiguity almost disappeared in Bavinck's enthusiastic speech at this celebration. This is hardly surprising, because the results of the struggle the orthodox protestants had waged in politics and society were impressive.

This was not the only front that had defended and expanded their position. They had been successful in abolishing the dictatorship of anti-supranatural modernism in politics and society, but in science and higher culture the conflict was more complicated. For modernism itself had become stuck in its anti-religious fury. Its own descendants started to deny that modernism would create the happy world it promised: 'The great expectations built on culture were dashed to the ground. Hope turned into despair. Optimism changed into pessimism',[20] Bavinck concluded in 1894. He referred to Friedrich Nietzsche[21] and Henrik Ibsen, and to the Dutch poet Willem Kloos as examples of those who rejected the positivistic kind of modernism as superficial. Its shallow worldview and deadening uniformity cried for passion, enthusiasm and inspiration:

> Far stronger than the protests which Da Costa dared to express in 1823, are the attacks on the revolution by its own children at the end of the nineteenth century. All opinions on religion and morality, on science and art, that have ruled for more than half a century with almost unrestricted power, are subjected to a criticism that does not spare the most critical. All the gods the civil people burnt their incense for, like: freedom, equality, brotherhood;

---

19 Bavinck, *Het vierde eener eeuw*, p. 46.

20 Bavinck, *De algemeene genade*, pp. 34-5.

21 Bavinck's first reference to Nietzsche is in the first volume of *Gereformeerde dogmatiek* (1895) where he refers to his book *Der Antichrist* (1888).

> enlightenment, civilisation, tolerance; reason, education, objectivity: one by one they are taken from their base and broken to pieces.[22]

For Bavinck the question now was: what does this shift in appreciation for the revolution and its result mean for the Christian view of culture?

THE CATHOLICITY OF CHRISTENDOM

But first: what had been Bavinck's own answer to the anti-religiousness of modernism? In his analysis of modernism the main target of his critique was the exclusion of religion from culture. To Bavinck this exclusion was a weakness. He presented Christianity as including all aspects of life, and without inner contradictions. His worldview, he stressed, was an all-encompassing unity. Secondly, he held that excluding religion was a critical mistake, since history showed that culture was rooted in religion.[23] It was the oxygen of culture. Excluding religion was taking the soul out of the culture. Bavinck disqualified the heyday of this modernism, which was marked by scientific materialism, moral utilism, aesthetic naturalism and political liberalism, as the 'age of Renan'.[24] There is anger in this qualification, but Bavinck understood very well that a strong critique would not be sufficient. He would have to claim modernism for himself.

A first step towards claiming modernism was choosing the opposite position. While anti-supranatural modernism downplayed Christian religion as something sectarian, Bavinck expanded on the broadness of the Christian religion, for example in his rectoral addresses of 1888 and 1894, on the catholicity of the church and on common grace.[25] At first this may seem a reaction that defended the classic, pre-modern position of Christianity, but the themes of these addresses were the result of a new, modernist approach of Christianity. Since Christianity at the end of antiquity and the early Middle Ages had become the religion of the West the church had embodied the public order. The public sphere was Christian, and there had been no need to choose for Christianity, or to claim room for Christianity. There simply was no choice, and there simply had been no need for defending the broadness of Christianity. It was not restricted by

---

22 H. Bavinck, *Hedendaagsche moraal* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1902), p. 55.

23 Bavinck, *Godsdienst en godgeleerdheid*, p. 41.

24 H. Bavinck, *Christelijke wereldbeschouwing. Rede bij de overdracht van het rectoraat aan de Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam op 20 october 1904* (Kampen: J. H. Bos, 1904), p. 6; H. Bavinck, *Het christendom*, Groote godsdiensten, II/7 (Baarn: Hollandia-drukkerij, 1912), p. 56.

25 Bavinck, *De katholiciteit van christendom en kerk*; Bavinck, *De algemeene genade.*

anything. This changed in the eighteenth century, and by and by Christianity as the warp and woof of the public sphere made way for a public of Christians.[26] The structure of society could no longer be qualified as Christian, and Christians had to realise they were just a segment of society, a group amidst of other groups. Differently from the United States or Great Britain, in the Netherlands this resulted in a public sphere that excluded orthodoxy. According to modernism, this old fashioned Christianity should be excluded from science, politics and public life.

In his rectoral addresses, Bavinck made the modern claim that in an era where the public sphere was not Christian, Christianity had a public face, and also an agenda for the public sphere, and aimed at keeping the public sphere strong and vibrant. So, instead of giving up the public sphere, as the Ethicals did, Bavinck claimed access to the public sphere as a logical result of his orthodoxy. This was a modern act of Bavinck. By this position he showed the liberals that modernism meant more than just a change of regimes. According to many modernists reason had taken the place of religion, belief in humanity had replaced the belief in God, and secular aims had changed position with the focus on the eternal. The public sphere was no longer Christian but liberal.

However, modernism (according to Bavinck) meant something else, something more profound: the public sphere had not just changed in terms of ownership, but had itself changed in character. The public sphere was no longer uniform in character, that is either Christian or non-religious, but plural, that is: the domain of both theists and atheists, of orthodox Christians and modern Christians alike. The public sphere was free, open, non-defined, the arena of the battle of principles.[27] Modernism meant more than a changing of ideologies in the public sphere: 'We are facing a totally new state of affairs'—Christians were also modern in that they had a more positive evaluation of earthly life, a higher appreciation of earthly goods, laid a stronger accent on material goods and in general on the quality of life.[28] In this context the time had come no longer to concentrate on saving individual souls, but to realise the full program of the Reformation: 'a methodical, organic reformation of the whole, of the cosmos, of the land and of the people'.[29] This realisation of this sixteenth century ambition was now possible thanks to modernism. It was modern-

[26] Cf. the concise characterisation of this change by P. van Rooden, 'Bilderdijk en het moderne onderzoek naar godsdienst', *Het Bilderdijk-Museum*, 18 (2001), 7-11.

[27] Bavinck, *Het vierde eener eeuw*, p. 47.

[28] Bavinck, *De katholiciteit van christendom en kerk*, p. 41.

[29] Bavinck, *De katholiciteit van christendom en kerk*, p. 44.

ism that created the possibility to develop and realise the classic idea of the catholicity of Christendom. The struggle in the contested public sphere was not about just regaining this domain and getting the modern influences out. No, we are part and parcel of modernism, Bavinck claimed, and that is why we aim at transforming the public sphere into a sphere in which truths were tested and questioned, a sphere that was not the property of just one worldview:[30] 'If the right and the freedom is given, then she [*De Standaard*] dares to enter the battle. Then she neither fears Romanism nor liberalism. She believes in the victory of the Reformation, in the history and future of our people, in the power of our principle, in the authority of God's Word.'[31]

The impact for the Christian worldview was huge. The battle was no longer about how to prepare for heaven, but how to live on the Christian life on this earth. Bavinck's rectoral addresses functioned in this context. They are moves in a public battle, and the fact that Bavinck was effectively engaged in this battle meant that he had adopted a more modern worldview. He knew that he was entering new ground. In the 1888 lecture on the catholicity of church and Christendom, he measured the distance between his position and traditional Christianity. He considered his new position as an important step forward from a more or less ascetic and pietistic worldview, in which the saving of souls out of this wicked world was dominant, to a more systematic and organic reformation of total reality. Bavinck told his audience that there was no principal difference with the pre-modern Christian worldview, but at the same time he admitted that 'things present themselves in a very different light'.[32] It was the task of theology to bridge the gap between church and culture.[33]

A second step underlined that modernism and Christianity were not two entities, but that Christianity was by nature intertwined with modern culture. This aspect was introduced by Bavinck after having made room for religion in culture. He already had stressed the more worldly oriented attitude of Christian religion as an aspect of modernism, but now he expanded on the nature of this worldview as being organic. He qualified anti-supranatural modernism in 1904 as mechanical, unable to bear the yoke of its 'levelled worldview and its deadening uniformity'.[34] Now that Christianity was more strongly oriented in this world, it had to account for the variety of created reality, in a way that would leave room for the

30 H. Bavinck, *Christelijke wetenschap* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1904), p. 30.

31 Bavinck, *Het vierde eener eeuw*, p. 47.

32 Bavinck, *De katholiciteit van christendom en kerk*, p. 43.

33 Bavinck, *Godsdienst en godgeleerdheid*, pp. 58-59.

34 Bavinck, *Hedendaagsche moraal*, p. 55.

free acts of humans as well as for freedom of God to operate within this world.[35] This idea was caught in the notion of the organic.

I will not expand on this notion, but rather will close this section with two conclusions. First, Bavinck claimed that religion was an intrinsic aspect of human nature and thus of culture, and that modernism was not about excluding religion from culture, but about including creation (science, man, art, culture and society) more consistently in world- and life-views. Secondly, he applied the word 'mechanical' not only to the pre-modern view of Scripture, but also to anti-supranatural modernism. The variety of this reality, the plurality of worldviews was acknowledged for in the freedom guaranteeing notion of the organic.

IS THERE STILL ANY AUTHORITY AND LAW?

Bavinck presented a modern Christian worldview of which the catchword may be labelled as 'catholicity', but was his worldview also consequently organic in the sense that he had fully accepted plurality as a characteristic of modernism? I think Bavinck at about 1890 still had the expectation that these battles, this conflict of principles with liberalism would ultimately be won by one of these, and that this would result in the end of plurality and a new equilibrium. Even in his Stone lectures he still believed that the Christian worldview would never disappear, because modernism, materialism or pantheism would never meet the needs of the heart.[36] The plural character of modernism seemed to him a kind of interregnum, a period in between two reigns. In 1894 he complained about modernism as a time of unrest, disharmony[37] and time and again stressed the unity of the Christian worldview as if he was addressing a pre-modern audience. However, modernism and modern man were no longer particularly interested in unity.

A second phase in Bavinck's understanding of modernism started around 1890, when the modernism in its mechanical, anti-supranatural make-up was collapsing and the 'age of Renan' came to an end. This was a change Bavinck was sensitive to and dealt with extensively in his publications. In his rectoral address on common grace of 1894 he for the first time expanded on the cultural change that according to him had started in recent years. The optimism of positivism had disappeared and pessimism was now the dominant mood. This was what James Bratt called

---

35 Bavinck, *Christelijke wereldbeschouwing*, p. 85.

36 H. Bavinck, *Wijsbegeerte der openbaring. Stone-lezingen voor het jaar 1908 gehouden te Princeton N.J.* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1908), p. 15.

37 Bavinck, *De algemeene genade*, p. 36.

'the new modernism'.[38] The world was a rotten place, not the creation of a god, but the outcome of some blind will. Science had not produced freedom, human knowledge was restricted to the visible things only. Life is not about facts and thoughts, but moods. Among those who had happily abandoned supranatural Christianity and had welcomed positivism, suddenly there was attention for the supranatural again, Bavinck noted: 'The victory of rationalism was not complete, or mysticism was already claiming a position.'[39] In 1901 he concluded that the anti-supranatural modern worldview was totally bankrupt, morally and spiritually.[40] Three years later he detected the resonance of this change nationally in the rise of his own neo-Calvinist movement in the church, then in politics and science. Internationally he placed the rise of neo-Thomism in the Roman Catholic Church in the broader context of the preference in philosophy of Leibniz and Hegel over Hume and Comte: 'Everywhere a return from empiricism to idealism is discernible', he wrote. 'Now we witness how many of the most excellent scientists return from atheism to theism, from mechanism to dynamism, from materialism to the energetic, from causality to teleology.'[41]

Also in this phase Bavinck was ambiguous towards modernism. He was relatively mild on the demoralised generation of the *fin de siècle*, because he viewed them as victims of the positivistic worldview of their predecessors[42] and as the heralds of the return of theism. He appreciated the fact that they had effectively ended the modernistic phase in which religion had been rejected right out. Even when he criticized Nietzsche, 'the genial-foolish interpreter'[43] of this shift, for blaming Christianity as the cause of the optimistic celebration of rationality in the culture of the nineteenth century, he showed some sympathy. To a large extent Christianity agrees with the complaints of Schopenhauer, Von Hartmann, Nietzsche and Ibsen about 'revolutionary uniformity', he wrote: 'It is really not Scripture alone that judges hard on man.'[44]

Bavinck welcomed their aesthetically-based criticism and the return of the spiritual, but he did not really engage with them. He correctly analysed that sympathisers of Nietzsche, who rejected justice and law in the

---

38 J. Bratt, 'The Context of Herman Bavinck's Stone Lectures: Culture and Politics in 1908', *The Bavinck Review*, 1 (2010), 13-14.

39 *Idem*, p. 36. Bavinck, *Christelijke wetenschap*, p. 7.

40 H. Bavinck, *Schepping of ontwikkeling* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1901), p. 54.

41 Bavinck, *Christelijke wetenschap*, p. 7; Bratt, 'The context', pp. 15-16, gives examples that illuminate this cultural change.

42 Bavinck, *Hedendaagsche moraal*, pp. 54-5.

43 Ibid., p. 43.

44 Ibid., pp. 73-4.

name of the will to dominate and subjugate, were not interested in grace either, and that Christianity was nothing but a religion of grace.[45] Bavinck had rightly seen that the early modernism had wanted to replace this religion of grace by a religion of reason. The modernism of the age of Renan and its ideal of replacement still had been a kind of mimicry of Christianity: the exchange one uniform worldview for another. More than anyone else, Nietzsche saw the consequences of this replacement: chaos. Outlawing God meant a departure of any coherent worldview, a departure also of the moral aims of religion and anti-supranatural modernism alike. With Nietzsche, Bavinck wrote, 'the whole idea of nature has gone. The world is a chaos to him, without order, without law, without idea.'[46] On this point, Bavinck fully agreed with Nietzsche.[47]

Bavinck, however, was not very sensitive to the consequences of the Nietzschean view, because in the end he believed that humans would always return to the metaphysical.[48] There had to be a supranatural standard, otherwise there would be no nature, no history.[49] He considered the ideas of Nietzsche and others as a first step in the right direction: 'In wide circles a longing can be discerned to a more or less positive Christian faith. One is tired of doubt and uncertainty.'[50] He followed the new modernism in its shift of premises from philosophy to psychology, but only half way. While the new modernism explored life in its provisional and fragmented character, he did not give up on religion and worldview.[51] He turned away from the fact that the new modernism did not bridge the gap between the modernists and his Christian position in any way, but as a matter of fact was only widening it.

Bavinck did not engage himself with the consequences of the Nietzschean position 'beyond good and evil'. To him this was a dead ally. Bavinck never engaged with the new modernism as he had with positivistic modernism. He departed from his ambiguous position towards modernism and took the new cultural shift mainly as a possibility to unite Christians of all kinds on the common denominator of the objectivity of God's Word and law: 'The question at stake is, formulated as principal as

45 Ibid., p. 73.

46 Bavinck, *Christelijke wetenschap*, p. 105.

47 Cf. H. Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1953), p. 260; Gordon Graham, 'Bavinck's *Philosophy of Revelation*', *Calvin Theological Journal*, 45 (2010), 47.

48 Bavinck, *Christelijke wetenschap*, pp. 7, 8.

49 Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation*, pp. 132-3.

50 Bavinck, *Christelijke wetenschap*, p. 8.

51 See on Bavinck's relation to the new modernism also: Bratt, 'The context', pp. 19-24.

possible, if there still is any authority and any law, to which man is bound. This is the "*Umwertung*" we are all witnessing.'[52] In the 'age of Nietzsche' he did not search for inner strengths or weaknesses of the new cultural stand and did not challenge its claims, as he had done in the 'age of Renan', but just took it as a fact, or better, as a justification for his stress on the need for religion and for a Christian university. This meant that he in fact accepted the new atheism as part of modern culture he could not reach anymore. He had started by accepting the plural character of modernism until the time the battle of principles would finish, but for the moment he accepted there would also be a more or less permanent coexistence of different principles, principles that did not cross roads anymore.

It was here, with Nietzsche, that Bavinck's neo-Calvinistic project started to falter. He had presumed that all the principles he had to combat shared the same goal: they wanted to liberate and bring light, civilisation, progress, freedom and truth. Darwinism still matched with these presumptions: it was a mix of religious and positivistic ingredients, just like early anti-supranatural modernism. Nietzsche, however, rejected the religion-like ideals of early modernism. For Nietzsche life was not about the moral progress of the modernists, or about Darwin's survival of the fittest, it was about sheer domination. At the turn of the century these Nietzschean ideas became *en vogue* among the European elites, who had never admired the modernist project and would rise to power in the 'thirty years war' of the twentieth century (1914-1945).[53] Bavinck had encountered several modernist cultural trends, but this one was beyond his scope. He missed the tools—the language, but also conceptions to deal with Nietzsche—and let him go. Earlier on Bavinck had blamed the pietists and Anabaptists for giving up culture as alien territory, but now it was Bavinck's turn to admit that at least the Nietzschean ideals were out of his reach. He had to leave that part of modern culture to itself and concentrated instead on uniting Christians.

A THEISTIC COALITION

Bavinck considered Nietzschean ideals as impotent and did only focus on the trends Christianity could address (to religion or its substitutes).

---

[52] Bavinck, *Christelijke wereldbeschouwing*, p. 91; Graham, 'Bavinck's *Philosophy of Revelation*', p. 50, describes Bavinck's Christian engagement with Nietzsche rightly as a 'place to begin'. Bavinck himself never made a next step.

[53] A. Mayer, *Dynamics of Counterrevolution in Europe, 1870-1956: An Analytic Framework* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971) and W. Martynkewicz, *Salon Deutschland. Geist und Macht 1900-1945* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 2009).

This was his major misjudgement, but the return of the spiritual into the discourse of modern culture was more important to him than the rise of a brutal, destructive atheism. Bavinck was not alone in his misjudgement, the project of Enlightenment had embarked on the idea liberation and progress and also been shipwrecked on the Nietschean rock.

Though Christian supranaturalism had been rejected by the positivists and the new idealists alike, some common ground between modern culture and religion seemed to have been created, now that the strong positivistic impulse of modernism had been weakened. So, while Bavinck agreed that the religious and moral foundations had been undermined, and European culture actually was running towards an abyss, he was positive, and expected a lot of a Christian impulse to the development of Western culture: 'God is busy doing great things in these days.'[54]

In the first decade of the twentieth century Bavinck paid a lot of attention to the position of those who were disappointed in the anti-supranatural character of modernism and were returning to Christian religion in one way or the other. It irritated him that their attitude towards orthodoxy did not change. Did not they see that, if Nietzsche claimed that without God there was no moral code, no truth or virtue, then all who adhered to religion and metaphysics had something in common to defend?[55] In the end there were only two worldviews: the atheistic or the theistic, it was about the priority of deed or word.[56] It was the Nietzschean alternative that had opened his eyes for this choice and made him reach out to modern theologians.

But modern Christians who agreed on paper that all religions had a common structure and common features, in practice kept on opposing orthodoxy.[57] Bavinck required from his modernist colleagues that they would be consistent like he was and express that formally spoken there was no difference between modernism and orthodoxy. He expanded on this issue most prominently in his rectoral address of 1911 at the VU University on *Modernism and Orthodoxy.*

In order to create this theistic coalition[58] Bavinck was searching for words and constructions to express what Christianity in all its diversity

---

54 H. Bavinck, *Modernisme en orthodoxie. Rede gehouden bij de overdracht van het rectoraat aan de Vrije Universiteit op 20 october 1911* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, [1911]), p. 11.

55 Bavinck, *Christelijke wetenschap*, p. 41.

56 Bavinck, *Christelijke wereldbeschouwing*, p. 44.

57 C. van Driel, *Dienaar van twee heren. Het strijdbaar leven van theoloog-politicus B.D. Eerdmans (1868-1948)* (Kampen: Kok, 2005), pp. 310-25.

58 Bavinck, *Het christendom*, pp. 61-2.

had in common.[59] He tried to find a formula on which all Christians could unite, starting with the belief that there exists a personal God, who revealed Himself and could be known by humans.[60] The Bible could not serve as a starting point, for 'the world of ideas of Scripture is not compatible anymore with our thoughts... All of Christianity...does not speak anymore to the present generation and is separated from the modern conscience by a deep abyss.'[61] That is why he turned to philosophy as a new common ground. There he could argue with arguments formulated in common language, accessible for all kind of Christians, that modern culture presupposed religion and was sustained by it. This common ground also might serve as meeting point of atheists and theists. A synthesis of religion and culture was still attainable, he wrote in 1912: 'If truly God has come to us in Jesus Christ and he also in this century is the maintainer and governor of things, is it [a synthesis between Christianity and culture] not only possible, but also necessary and will she be uncovered timely.'[62]

This reaching out to modern theology was an important sign for his students at the VU University, who sensed that the historical context in which neo-Calvinism had been developed was vanishing and were worried about the growing distance between their tradition and culture. These students would not succeed in executing Bavinck's program of reconciling modern and orthodox theology, but he did teach them that faith and culture had to be related.

However, Bavinck failed in creating a theistic coalition, and religion in general became a side track in modern culture. Bavinck himself realised at the end of his life that his enterprise to relate Christianity (as a unified, organic worldview) to modern culture had to be adapted anew. He knew that the dynamics of modernism had washed away the neo-Calvinist principles and that it either had to withdraw from modern culture and join the pietists, or had to become more modern, that is accepting the consequences of an organic worldview by giving up the unity of the Christian worldview and keep on adapting to the times.[63]

---

59 Ibid., p. 5.

60 Bavinck, *Christelijke wetenschap*, pp. 77-9.

61 Bavinck, *Christelijke wereldbeschouwing*, p. 8.

62 Bavinck, *Het christendom*, p. 60.

63 G. Harinck, 'Twin sisters with a changing character. How neo-Calvinists dealt with the modern discrepancy between Bible and natural sciences', in *Nature and Scripture in the Abrahamic Religions: Vol. 2. 1700-Present*, ed. by J. van der Meer and S. Mandelbrote (Leiden/Boston: E. J. Brill, 2008), pp. 317-70.

CONCLUSION

Looking back on what we found we have to conclude there were different phases in Bavinck's engagement with modern culture: an early phase in which he criticised modernism for its anti-supranatural character, and transformed the Christian worldview into an all-encompassing worldview oriented on this world and organic in character. This phase turned out to be successful when anti-supranatural modernism vanished, even sooner than Bavinck had expected. However, while Bavinck concentrated on new openings for a modernism with a religious character, he lost track with the Nietzschean development in modern culture that turned away from the dichotomy of religion or its substitutes, and stressed the provisional character of life and reality. Bavinck's engagement with modern culture after the turn of the century concentrated on uniting all Christians in a theistic coalition, an enterprise that failed. Bavinck's reorientation in his last years and his questioning of the relevance of neo-Calvinist principles seem to reveal that he wanted to re-orientate once more. If modernism included religion, religion should include modernism, but he had not yet figured out how when he died in 1921.

Bavinck has often been praised for his engagement with modern culture. Seen from the angle of this article the first phase in which he adapted the Christian worldview to modernism, seems to have been most fruitful. Neo-Calvinism should indeed be qualified as modern. In relation to Bavinck's drive to engage with modern culture, we should consider this adaptation as a phase of preparation for the engagement with the new modernism. This engagement, however, never happened in his life time.

HERMAN BAVINCK ON THE IMITATION OF CHRIST

DIRK VAN KEULEN

PTHU, POSTBUS 5021, 8260 GA KAMPEN, THE NETHERLANDS
dvankeulen@pthu.nl

HERMAN BAVINCK: DOGMATICIAN AND ETHICIST

Herman Bavinck is well known as a reformed dogmatician. His four volume *Reformed Dogmatics*, which was recently translated into English,[1] is widely considered as a masterpiece of dogmatic thinking. It is much less well known that Bavinck has also presented himself as a reformed ethicist. In addition to his dogmatics, he also had a deep, career-long interest in (Christian) ethics. This can be illustrated by many documents and examples.

In 1880 he received his doctoral degree for a thesis on *The Ethics of Ulrich Zwingli*.[2] In the following years (1881-83), when he worked as a pastor in the Christian Reformed Church (*Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk*) at Franeker, he did not have much time to study. In letters to his friend Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje he complains about this lack of time.[3] This did not prevent him, however, from publishing a new edition of the *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae* (1881).[4] In his letters to Snouck he also writes: 'When I have time to study, I work on ethics. I have resolved and I have started to investigate for myself the most important ethical issues'.[5] In February 1881 he delivered a lecture to students at Kampen on the kingdom of God, notably from an ethical perspective.[6] In the same year he

---

1 H. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. by J. Bolt, trans. by J. Vriend, 4 vols (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003-08); hereafter abbreviated as *RD*.

2 H. Bavinck, *De ethiek van Ulrich Zwingli* (Kampen: G. Ph. Zalsman 1880).

3 See for instance: J. de Bruijn and G. Harinck, eds., *Een Leidse vriendschap. De briefwisseling tussen Herman Bavinck en Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, 1875-1921* (Baarn: Ten Have 1999), pp. 88, 92f., 95.

4 *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae, Disputationes quinquaginta duabus comprehensa ac conscripta per Johannem Polyandrum, Andream Rivetum, Antonium Walaeum, Antonium Thysium*, Editio sexta curavit et praefatus est H. Bavinck (Lugduni Batavorum: Didericum Donner 1881).

5 de Bruijn and Harinck, *Een Leidse vriendschap*, p. 95: 'Als ik werk, werk ik nog ethiek. Ik heb mij voorgenomen en ben ermee begonnen om de voornaamste kwesties daarin eens voor mijzelven te bestudeeren'.

6 H. Bavinck, 'Het rijk Gods, het hoogste goed', *De vrije kerk*, 7 (1881), 185-92, 224-34, 271-77, 305-14, 353-60; also in *id., Kennis en leven. Opstellen en*

wrote an article on human conscience.[7] During his years as a professor at Kampen (1883-1902), Bavinck was not only responsible for the education in dogmatics, but also in ethics. Two years ago I discovered in the Bavinck Archives an extensive, but unfinished manuscript entitled '*Reformed Ethics*' (*Gereformeerde Ethiek*).[8] Bavinck used it for his lectures in ethics. I am convinced that this *Reformed Ethics* was intended as a companion to his *Reformed Dogmatics*.[9] Later in his career Bavinck published several times on ethical issues, for instance small booklets and articles such as *Present-Day Morality* (1902), *The Problem of War* (1914), *Ethics and Politics* (1916), and *The Imitation of Christ and Modern Life* (1918).[10]

Examples like these and many others[11] make clear that it would be a biased opinion to consider Bavinck only as a Reformed dogmatician. He has presented himself as an ethicist as well. As far as I know, only John Bolt has paid attention to this.[12]

THE IMITATION OF CHRIST—DOGMATICALLY OR ETHICALLY?

The manuscript of Bavinck's *Reformed Ethics* resembles his *Reformed Dogmatics* in several ways. In both works, for instance, Bavinck describes the relationship between dogmatics and ethics in exactly the same way:

---

artikelen uit vroegere jaren (Kampen: J. H. Kok, n.d. [1922]), pp. 28-56.

7 H. Bavinck, 'Het geweten I-II', *De vrije kerk*, 7 (1881), 27-37, 49-58; also in: *id., Kennis en leven*, pp. 13-27.

8 H. Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Ethiek*, in Bavinck Archives, box 13/32; no. 186 (hereafter abbreviated as *GE*). Since the pages are not numbered, I will refer to the paragraph numbers, followed by page numbers where necessary (e.g. *GE*, §1, p. 1). For each paragraph the page numbers will restart at 1 (e.g. *GE*, §2, p. 1).

9 D. van Keulen, 'Herman Bavinck's *Reformed Ethics*: Some Remarks about Unpublished Manuscripts in the Libraries of Amsterdam and Kampen', *The Bavinck Review*, 1 (2010), 25-56.

10 H. Bavinck, *Hedendaagsche moraal* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1902); *id., Het probleem van den oorlog* (Kampen: J. H. Kok 1914); *id.*, 'Ethics and Politics', *id., Essays on Religion, Science and Society* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics 2008), pp. 261-78; *id., De navolging van Christus en het Moderne Leven* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, n.d. [1918]).

11 Cf. J. Bolt, 'Christ and the Law in the Ethics of Herman Bavinck', *Calvin Theological Journal*, 28 (1993), 45-7.

12 See besides the article referred to in the previous note also: J. Bolt, 'The Imitation of Christ Theme in the Cultural-Ethical Ideal of Herman Bavinck' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of St. Michael's College, Toronto, 1982).

> Dogmatics describes the deeds of God done for, to, and in human beings; ethics describes what renewed human beings now do on the basis of and in the strength of those divine deeds. In dogmatics human beings are passive; they receive and believe; in ethics they are themselves active agents. In dogmatics, the articles of faith are treated; in ethics, the precepts of the Decalogue. In the former, that which concerns faith is dealt with; in the latter, that which concerns love, obedience, and good works. Dogmatics sets forth what God is and does for human beings and causes them to know God as their Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier; ethics sets forth what human beings are and do for God now; how, with everything they are and have, with intellect and will and all their strength, they devote themselves to God out of gratitude and love. Dogmatics is the system of the knowledge of God; ethics is that of the service of God.[13]

Furthermore, both works are structured in the same way. In both works, Bavinck argues, the same method should be used: the point of departure is God's revelation; Holy Scripture is its principle of knowledge (*kenbron*) and its norm (*norma*).[14] Three steps should be distinguished in the method of approach: (1) collecting and systematising biblical data; (2) describing how these data have been adopted in the church; and (3) developing these data thetically with a view to our own time.[15]

Bavinck also carefully divided the subject matter between his *Dogmatics* and his *Ethics*. A good example of this can be seen in his doctrine of sin. In *Reformed Dogmatics* he writes on the nature, guilt and punishment of sin.[16] In his *Reformed Ethics* he designs a detailed system of sins. He distinguishes three types of sin: selfish sins, sins against one's neighbour and sins against God. Each can be divided into sensual (*zinnelijke*) and spiritual (*geestelijke*) sins.[17] This makes clear that Bavinck's ethical doctrine of

---

13 H. Bavinck, *RD*, 1, p. 58; cf. *GE*, §2, p. 5: 'In de dogmatiek: wat doet God voor, in ons? Hij is daar alles. De dogmatiek is een woord Gods aan ons, van buiten, boven tot ons komende; wij passief, luisterend, ons latende bewerken. In de Ethiek: wat wordt er van ons, als God ons zoo bewerkt, wat doen wij voor hem? Wij actief, juist door, op grond der daden Gods aan en in ons, wij psalmzingend en lovend en dankende God. Dogmatiek: God tot ons afdalend. Ethiek: wij tot God opstijgend. Dogmatiek: Hij de onze. Ethiek: wij de zijne. Dogmatiek: zij zullen zijn aangezicht zien. Ethiek: Zijn naam zal op hun voorhoofden wezen. Dogmatiek: uit God. Ethiek: tot God. Dogmatiek: Hij heeft ons liefgehad. Ethiek: daarom hebben wij hem lief.' Cf. van Keulen, 'Herman Bavinck's *Reformed Ethics*', pp. 33f.

14 *GE*, §4, p. 4.

15 *GE*, §4, p. 5.

16 *RD*, 3, pp. 25-190.

17 *GE*, §§10-12.

sin is a supplement to his dogmatic doctrine of sin, and that his *Reformed Ethics* was intended as a companion to his *Reformed Dogmatics*.

Something similar can be seen in his views on the imitation of Christ. The imitation of Christ could have been an important theme in his doctrine of sanctification. However, when we read the fourth volume of his *Dogmatics*, in which he writes on calling, regeneration, faith and conversion, justification, sanctification and perseverance, the issue of the imitation of Christ is almost completely absent. Only three times does Bavinck touch upon it. In compiling a list of biblical data he writes: 'But a person obtains such perfection only by conversion, faith, regeneration (Mark 1:15; John 3:3), leaving everything behind for Jesus' sake, taking up one's cross, and *following him* (Matt. 5:10ff; 7:13; 10:32-39; 16:24-26)'.[18] A few lines further we read: 'Those who wanted to rally to Jesus' side and *follow* him had to be prepared to give up everything: marriage (Matt. 19:10-12), the love of family members (10:35-36), their wealth (19:21), indeed even their lives (10:39; 16:25)'.[19] At the end of the section on sanctification, again in a listing of biblical data, Bavinck writes: 'As beloved children, they [the believers] must be *imitators* of God' ([Eph.] 5:1)'.[20]

In his doctrine of sanctification Bavinck starts off with an analysis of the relationship between justification and sanctification. In justification 'the religious relationship of human beings with God is restored'. In sanctification human nature 'is renewed and cleansed of the impurity of sin'. Although they are distinct from each other, according to Bavinck justification and sanctification may not be separated. Both are given to us in Christ.[21] Further on he elaborates broadly that sanctification does have passive and active aspects. Sanctification is first of all a work and a gift of God. It is 'a process in which humans are passive just as they are in regeneration'. However, based on this work of God, sanctification also has an active side: 'people themselves are called and equipped to sanctify themselves and devote their whole life to God'. In his analysis of the active and passive sides of sanctification Bavinck carefully seeks a balance. Justice must be done to both sides.[22] Finally he writes about the nature of good works and rejects perfectionism.[23]

The issue of the imitation or following of Christ thus hardly plays a part in Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*. From this we may not conclude

[18] *RD*, 4, p. 233 (italics added).
[19] *RD*, 4, p. 233 (italics added).
[20] *RD*, 4, p. 256 (italics added).
[21] *RD*, 4, pp. 248f.
[22] *RD*, 4, pp. 252-6.
[23] *RD*, 4, pp. 256-60, 260-66.

that it was not important to him. According to Bavinck it should be dealt with in ethics. During his career he wrote three texts on this. Two texts date from the very beginning of his academic career. The other text was written almost at the end of his life. In the following sections I will discuss these three texts.

THE FIRST TEXTS ON THE IMITATION OF CHRIST

In 1885-86, two years after his appointment as a professor at Kampen, Bavinck published a series of three articles entitled 'The imitation of Christ' (*De navolging van Christus*) in *The Free Church* (*De Vrije Kerk*)—a journal of the Christian Reformed Church.[24] In the same years he wrote his *Reformed Ethics*, which contains a section on the imitation of Christ.[25] I think that both texts are likely to be at least partly a fruit of his studies in ethics in the parsonage at Franeker.

Reading both texts, we immediately understand that they belong together. Many ideas and arguments are similar. Sometimes sentences are even literally identical. However, differences can also be observed. In the series of articles Bavinck offers in particular a historical survey of how Christian thinking on the imitation of Christ has developed over the centuries. By the end of the third article he describes some biblical foundations and briefly indicates his own ideas about the imitation of Christ. Nowhere in the articles, however, does he refer to literature which he has used. In his Reformed Ethics the approach is in accordance with the method described before. He starts with a detailed overview of biblical mainlines. This is followed by a historical survey. Finally he develops his own view thetically.

In contrast to the articles, in his *Reformed Ethics* we find the literature which he has used. In the overview of biblical foundations we find one reference to the biblical-theological *Dictionary* of Hermann Cremer (1834-1903) and three references to a book on biblical theology of the New Testament written by Bernard Weiss (1827-1918).[26] He has probably also used a concordance to the New Testament. In the historical survey Bavinck heavily leans on the first volume of the *History of Christian Ethics* written

[24] H. Bavinck, 'De navolging van Christus', *De Vrije Kerk*, 11 (1885), 101-13, 203-13; 12 (1886), 321-33.

[25] *GE*, §21.

[26] H. Cremer, *Wörterbuch der Neutestamentlichen Gräcität*, 3rd edn (Gotha: Friedrich Andreas Perthes, 1883); B. Weiss, *Lehrbuch der biblischen Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, 4th edn (Berlin: Verlag Wilhelm Hertz, 1884).

by Wilhelm Gass (1813-1889).[27] The fact that this book was published in 1881 makes clear that Bavinck used the most up-to-date literature available at that moment.

Bavinck starts his section on the imitation of Christ in his *Reformed Ethics* with an analysis of the Greek verbs *mimeomai* and *akoloutheō* in the New Testament. This results in a distinction between three ways of imitation or following in the Bible: imitation of God, imitation of angels or men and imitation of Christ. In the articles he only mentions the former and the latter.[28] The imitation of God means that we should be holy, perfect, and merciful, as is our heavenly father. This kind of imitation is based on the fact that we are God's beloved children and bear his image.[29] Bavinck emphasises that the Bible speaks about the imitation or following of Christ far more frequently. He elaborates this extensively.[30] I can give here only a very brief summary. According to Bavinck, the following of Christ in its proper sense is literally the following or accompanying of Jesus on his path, as did the disciples. Following or imitation of Christ can also be interpreted in a metaphorical, spiritual sense. Both ways of imitation presuppose a 'spiritual community' (*geestelijke levensgemeenschap*) or a 'mystical union' (*mystieke unie*) with Christ, which is sealed by baptism and which is connected with self-denying and taking up one's cross. It ought to reveal itself in our lives, as becomes clear from the fact that we should follow or imitate virtues like Christ's humbleness and meekness, love and self-denial, holiness and patience.

In the historical survey, Bavinck shows how this has been adopted in the Christian church. After a few remarks on the pure imitation of the first Christians, he makes a very rough distinction between four models of imitation of Christ: (1) the martyrs of the early Christian church; (2) the monks (the hermits in the desert, the monks in the monasteries, and beggars like the Franciscans); (3) the mystics; and (4) the rationalists.

Bavinck's opinion on these four models[31] is nuanced: positive and critical remarks alternate. The martyrs of the early Christian church, for

---

27 W. Gass, *Geschichte der christlichen Ethik, I-II* (Berlin: Reimer, 1881-1887). Furthermore we find references to articles in the second edition of *Real-Encyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, to the works of seventeenth century theologians like Witsius, Pictetus, Buddaeus, Ridderus, Vitringa and Voetius, and to the works of Hans Lassen Martensen, Adolf von Harless and August Friedrich Christian Vilmar.

28 *GE*, §21, pp. 1-4; Bavinck, 'De navolging van Christus', pp. 327f.

29 *GE*, §21, pp. 1f.; Bavinck, 'De navolging van Christus', p. 327.

30 *GE*, §21, pp. 3-10; Bavinck, 'De navolging van Christus', pp. 328-31.

31 Cf. *RD*, 3, p. 377: 'In the Christian church, the martyrs, the monks, the beggars, the flagellants, were successively viewed as the true disciples of Jesus.

instance, may be admired on account of their profound belief, their courage and their perseverance.[32] Monastic life may be appreciated on account of its protest against the deconsacration of the church, its struggle against sin and its contributions to scholarship and society.[33] Medieval reform movements may be appreciated on account of their efforts to return to original Christianity, their 'high spiritualism' (*hooggaand spiritualisme*), their simplification of Christian doctrine and their emphasis on the 'holiness of life' (*heiligheid des levens*).[34] The mystics—Bavinck mentions names like Bernard of Clairvaux, Bonaventura, Tauler and Thomas of Kempen—may be appreciated on account of their 'deep mystical feelings' (*innige gevoelsmystiek*), combined with an ethical strength to follow Jesus in his meekness, modesty, mildness and love.[35]

However, all four models of imitation of Christ are also severely criticised by Bavinck. The rationalists fall short of the work of Christ and do not have a proper view on the situation of man. This has fatal consequences for the imitation of Christ: 'Those who do not know the need of Christ as a mediator and reconciler of sin, do not need his moral example either.'[36] Something similar can be said about mystics, who try to push back all means between God and man and strive after an immediate communion with God. According to Bavinck this leads to a biased opinion on the imitation of Christ: 'those things, which should be sanctified and renewed, are destroyed', and Christ is no longer seen as reconciler of sin but only as 'example of the mystical union with God'.[37] Martyrs who have consciously sought martyrdom, for instance to receive honour or merits, forget that it is not suffering in itself that turns someone into a martyr, but only the cause or reason for which one suffers (*causa non passio facit martyrem*).[38] The monks are criticised because they think that the imitation of Christ consists in duplicating Christ's way of living literally or physically, and because of their withdrawal from the world.[39] This criti-

---

Ascetism and self-torture were the preeminent Christian virtues. Following Jesus consisted in copying and imitating deeds and conditions from his life, specifically from his suffering'; *ibid.*, p. 508: 'Christian discipleship consisted in copying the life and suffering of Christ, which was vividly portrayed before people's eyes. Martyrs, ascetics, and monks were the best Christians.'

32 *GE*, §21, p. 11; Bavinck, 'De navolging van Christus', p. 104.

33 *GE*, §21, pp. 12ff.; Bavinck, 'De navolging van Christus', pp. 108ff.

34 *GE*, §21, pp. 12f.; Bavinck, 'De navolging van Christus', p. 205.

35 *GE*, §21, p. 19; Bavinck, 'De navolging van Christus', pp. 210f.

36 Bavinck, 'De navolging van Christus', p. 325; *GE*, §21, pp. 21, 23f.

37 Bavinck, 'De navolging van Christus', p. 323f.; *GE*, §21, p. 23.

38 Bavinck, 'De navolging van Christus', pp. 106f., 321; *GE*, §21, p. 11.

39 Bavinck, 'De navolging van Christus', pp. 322f.; *GE*, §21, pp. 12ff.

cism is also implicitly directed to the members of Bavinck's own denomination, as becomes clear from his lecture on 'The Catholicity of Christianity and Church' (1888) and from a letter to Snouck Hurgronje.[40]

Finally, several of these four models also show a 'double morality', one for all Christians, and one for those who have chosen to devote their lives to Jesus in a special way, such as monks. According to Bavinck such a double morality, which leads to a distinction between precepts or commands (*praecepta*) and counsils (*consilia*), must be rejected. It advances pride and trust in good works among those who strive for perfection, while on the other hand an average morality would be sufficient for ordinary people and the ideal of perfection and holiness is brought down to the level of practical ordinary life.[41]

Based on his analysis of the Greek verbs *mimeomai* and *akoloutheō* and in line with the results of his historical research, Bavinck develops his own view. First, he emphasises, imitation of Christ demands the recognition of Christ as a reconciler and mediator. This recognition is 'a condition for the imitation'. According to Bavinck this implies that Jesus Christ can only be an example to those who are born again. Our life can only be 'in accordance with Christ, if it is *from* and *in* Him'. Therefore the *unio mystica* is the foundation of the imitation of Christ.[42] Since the *unio mystica* is a gift of God and comes into being by the Holy Spirit,[43] this first step in Bavinck's argument is in line with what he argued in his *Dogmatics*, viz. that not only justification, but also sanctification is a gift of God and that sanctification incorporates passive aspects.

Secondly, imitation of Christ means that Christ must be reflected in our inner being. Again this is a work of the Holy Spirit: 'The Holy Spirit conforms us to Christ in his suffering, dying, resurrection and glorification'.[44] The image of God in us is restored. Again, this is in line with the passive aspects of sanctification. Finally, our lives must also be shaped in conformity with Christ in our outer appearance. This becomes manifest in virtues like righteousness, sanctity, love and patience.[45] This is the active side of sanctification.

---

40 Bavinck, 'The Catholicity of Christianity and Church', *Calvin Theological Journal*, 27 (1992), 220-51; de Bruijn and Harinck, *Een Leidse vriendschap*, p. 136.

41 Bavinck, 'De navolging van Christus', p. 112; *GE*, §21, p. 12.

42 *GE*, §21, p. 24.

43 *RD*, 4, p. 251.

44 *GE*, §21, p. 24.

45 *GE*, §21, pp. 25f.

However, we may not forget, Bavinck argues, that this process is only initiated during our earthly life. It will be completed in the eschaton.[46] Implicitly he rejects perfectionism in this way. Again, this is in line with what he has argued in his doctrine of sanctification.

By the end of the articles on the imitation of Christ, Bavinck summarises: 'From Him, our Saviour (*Heiland*) and Example together, a reforming, recreating, renewing power emerges, which conforms us to Himself and restores the image of God in us'.[47] Through these words two dominant motives of Bavinck's theology resound. The first is Bavinck's view that 'grace does not abolish nature, but affirms and restores it'.[48] The second is the idea of the gospel as a leaven, an invisible change agent that leaves nothing that it touches unaltered. This makes clear that Bavinck's thinking on the imitation of Christ is closely connected to the heart of his theology.

THE IMITATION OF CHRIST AND MODERN LIFE

In spite of this connection, Bavinck does not write again on the imitation of Christ for a very long time. Over thirty years later, however, he returns to the theme. In 1918 he wrote a small booklet entitled *The Imitation of Christ and Modern Life* (*De navolging van Christus en het Moderne Leven*).[49] One year after Bavinck's death this text was also included in the book *Knowledge and Life* (*Kennis en leven*), which was edited by Bavinck's brother, containing articles dating from the earliest years of Bavinck's career.[50] In this book it replaces the series of three articles on the imitation of Christ dating from the 1880s. Bavinck's brother thus suggests that the articles and the booklet are more or less equal.

When we compare all these texts, we do indeed find some similar views in *The Imitation of Christ and Modern Life*. In his 1918 booklet, Bavinck offers a very brief historical survey of Christian thinking on the imitation of Christ. Here we come across the same models of imitation as presented in the older texts.[51] Furthermore Bavinck offers an analysis

---

46 Bavinck, 'De navolging van Christus', p. 333.

47 Bavinck, 'De navolging van Christus', p. 333.

48 H. Bavinck, 'Common Grace', *Calvin Theological Journal*, 24 (1989), 62; *id.*, *RD*, 1, pp. 322, 443; *RD*, 3, p. 228.

49 Bavinck, *De navolging van Christus en het Moderne Leven* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, n.d. [1918]).

50 Bavinck, 'De navolging van Christus en het Moderne Leven', in: *id.*, *Kennis en leven. Opstellen en artikelen uit vroegere jaren* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, n.d. [1922]), pp. 115-44.

51 Bavinck, *De navolging van Christus en het Moderne Leven*, p. 3f.

of how the Bible speaks about the following of God or the following of Christ. In several ways this analysis resembles what he wrote on the verbs *mimeomai* and *akoloutheō* at the start of his career.[52] We do not come across his view on the necessity of the recognition of Christ as our Saviour and the *unio mystica* as the foundation of the imitation of Christ. But this view is presupposed, as Bavinck writes that it is principally Christ Himself who, by the Holy Spirit, reforms and conforms us into his image.[53] Bavinck also argues that the imitation of Christ should become manifest in virtues.[54] In the 1918 booklet, his views on the imitation of Christ are also linked to the same central motives of his theology, as was the case in the texts dating from the 1880s. He writes for instance: 'redemption is not annihilation but restoration of nature' and: 'grace presupposes and restores nature'.[55] We also see the leaven-terminology.[56] He furthermore rejects perfectionism.[57] Thus, continuity can be observed on more than one point between the older texts and the booklet *The Imitation of Christ and Modern Life*.

However, in the comparison of all texts discontinuity can also be observed. Three interrelated differences catch the eye. Firstly, Bavinck begins his 1918 booklet with some observations on the war question.[58] Several other publications from the same years make clear that Bavinck was deeply marked by the disastrous events of the First World War.[59]

---

52 Bavinck, *De navolging van Christus en het Moderne Leven*, p. 7ff.

53 Bavinck, *De navolging van Christus en het Moderne Leven*, p. 20: '[...] het was in de eerste plaats Christus zelf, die door zijn Geest de zijnen hervormt naar zijn beeld, naar datzelfde beeld hen verandert van heerlijkheid tot heerlijkheid, en ze eens naar lichaam en ziel zichzelven gelijkvormig maken zal, als ze Hem zien zullen, gelijk Hij is [...]'.

54 Bavinck, *De navolging van Christus en het Moderne Leven*, pp. 16, 20f., 30f.

55 Bavinck, *De navolging van Christus en het Moderne Leven*, p. 21: '[...] verlossing is niet vernietiging, maar herstel der natuur', and 29: 'de genade onderstelt en herstelt de natuur'; cf. *ibid.*, p. 23: 'de herschepping is op de schepping gebouwd [...] de genade onderdrukt immers de natuur niet, maar herstelt ze'.

56 Bavinck, *De navolging van Christus en het Moderne Leven*, p. 13: '[...] de discipelen van Jezus door hun macht en aanzien geen invloed oefenen op de wereld, maar zij moeten in hunne goede werken hun licht laten schijnen voor de menschen, en zullen dezen daardoor bewegen, om hunnen Vader in de hemelen te verheerlijken [...]'.

57 Bavinck, *De navolging van Christus en het Moderne Leven*, p. 27.

58 Bavinck, *De navolging van Christus en het Moderne Leven*, pp. 1-3.

59 Cf. D. van Keulen, 'Herman Bavinck and the War Question', in *Christian Faith and Violence*, ed. by D. van Keulen and M. Brinkman (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2005), 1, pp. 122-40.

When we watch him ponder the issue, we cannot but conclude that he struggled fiercely with it. In May 1915, he wrote to his friend Snouck Hurgronje that as a consequence of the war 'all ethical foundations are being overturned'.[60] At the end of *The Imitation of Christ and Modern Life* Bavinck comes back to the issue of the war question.[61] This issue is thus the specific reason for Bavinck to write on the theme of the imitation of Christ again after thirty years.

Closely connected with the issue of the war question is a second difference. In *The Imitation of Christ and Modern Life*, Bavinck offers a broader elaboration of his historical survey. He extends the lines to contemporary times by distinguishing three different views on the relationship between Christianity and culture:[62] (1) those who feel attracted by the Sermon on the Mount and strive to live their lives in accordance with the example of Jesus; (2) those who argue that Christianity can no longer play a part, because no reconciliation is possible between the demands of the Christian gospel and the obligations of modern culture; and (3) those who argue that Christian moral principles are insufficient for public life and should be limited to personal life. This makes clear that, compared with the texts from the 1880s, Bavinck's focus has widened.

The second and third positions are rejected by Bavinck. The Christian community may not withdraw from the world, but also has the task to reform and renew the world in accordance with, what he terms, 'the principles of Christianity' (*beginselen des Christendoms*).[63] For that reason—and this is the third difference between Bavinck's earlier texts and the 1918 booklet—he explicitly deals in *The Imitation of Christ and Modern Life* with the question of how we should interpret the Sermon on the Mount.

This question was especially urgent because several people at that time in the Netherlands argued in favour of pacifism on the basis of the Sermon on the Mount. A good example of this is a booklet entitled *War and Christianity: a Testimony* (*Oorlog en Christendom: een getuigenis*; 1914), written by the evangelist and publicist Hilbrandt Boschma (1867-1941).[64] This booklet also influenced members of the Reformed Churches, as can for

---

60 de Bruijn and Harinck, *Een Leidse vriendschap*, p. 179: '[...] alle zedelijke grondslagen worden omgewoeld'.

61 Bavinck, *De navolging van Christus en het Moderne Leven*, pp. 27ff.

62 Bavinck, *De navolging van Christus en het Moderne Leven*, p. 5f.

63 Bavinck, *De navolging van Christus en het Moderne Leven*, p. 19; cf. *ibid.*, pp. 11, 21.

64 A. Schravesande, 'Boschma, Hilbrandt', *Biografisch Lexicon voor de Geschiedenis van het Nederlandse Protestantisme* (Kampen: Uitgeverij Kok, 1998), 4, pp. 41-3.

instance be seen in the life story of the Frisian poet Fedde Schurer (1898-1968), who grew up in a reformed family. After reading Boschma's booklet and books by Tolstoy, he opted for pacifism.[65]

In his exposition on how to interpret the Sermon on the Mount, Bavinck carefully seeks a balance.[66] On the one hand, he argues, we may not spiritualise the texts of the Sermon on the Mount in such a way that they obtain a meaning opposite to what is literally written. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is not only concerned with the disposition of our heart.[67] On the other hand Jesus' words may not be read literally. Jesus used images which cannot be conceived or applied in a literal sense.[68] Bavinck seeks a middle course by arguing that the examples of the Sermon on the Mount offer a 'concrete' and 'practical' illustration of what is meant by the imitation of Christ.

> In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus unequivocally forbids his disciples to take a dispute to court, to repay evil with evil, to wreak vengeance, to hate an enemy, to swear an oath, to look at a woman lustfully, etc. In all of this Jesus means exactly what he says and says exactly what he means. He demands that his disciples not only be disposed to follow his instructions, but that they actually *do* as he says.[69]

Furthermore, according to Bavinck we must realise that New Testament morality reflects the situation of an oppressed and persecuted communion. This explains why the so-called 'passive' virtues are prominently emphasised (Bavinck mentions: truth, righteousness, holiness, purity, modesty, soberness, prayer, watching, fasting, faith, love, patience, loving one's neighbour, communion, hospitality, humility, meekness and tolerance) and why the disciples are never called to stand up for their rights or to improve their position in society.[70] Later when the church was no longer persecuted, Christians also saw it as their task to reform and renew the world. In that situation passive virtues were no longer sufficient and

---

65 J. Liemburg, *Fedde Schurer 1898-1968: Biografie van een Friese koerier* (Leeuwarden: Friese Pers Boekerij, 2010), pp. 44f.

66 Cf. J. Bolt, 'Christ and the Law in the Ethics of Herman Bavinck', pp. 64f.

67 Bavinck, *De navolging van Christus en het Moderne Leven*, p. 13: 'Want het gaat eenerzijds niet aan, om deze woorden zoo te vergeestelijken, dat zij het tegendeel bedoelen van wat er eigenlijk staat.'

68 Bavinck, *De navolging van Christus en het Moderne Leven*, pp. 14, 20.

69 Bavinck, *De navolging van Christus en het Moderne Leven*, p. 14 (translation: J. Bolt, 'Christ and the Law in the Ethics of Herman Bavinck', p. 65; italics by Bavinck).

70 Bavinck, *De navolging van Christus en het Moderne Leven*, pp. 14-18.

had to be supplemented with 'active' virtues.[71] As recreation is built on creation, Christians should respect culture, Bavinck argues, and should combat decay, which as a consequence of sin penetrated in it.[72] This has to be done by spiritual and moral means.

Considerations like these make clear that the booklet *The Imitation of Christ and Modern Life* reflects a growing awareness of the hermeneutical question.

CONCLUSION

From what I have argued I will draw three conclusions.

First, we have seen that at the beginning of his career Herman Bavinck develops his views on the imitation of Christ within his *Reformed Ethics*. These views, however, do not stand by themselves, but are closely connected to the doctrine of sanctification, which he develops in his *Reformed Dogmatics*. According to Bavinck both sanctification as well as the imitation of Christ incorporate passive and active aspects. Due to this, there is a close correspondence between Bavinck's (ethical) views on the imitation of Christ and his (dogmatic) views on sanctification. Bavinck also connects his views on the imitation of Christ with dominant motives of his theology, e.g. his thesis that grace does not abolish, but rather affirms and restores nature, his conviction that Christians may not withdraw from the world, but rather do have to fulfill a task in the world, and his use of the leaven-terminology. This is a fine illustration of the close relation in Bavinck's work between dogmatics and ethics. Because of this I fully agree with John Bolt when he argues that 'to do justice to Bavinck as a theologian and Christian thinker, he must be taken serious as an ethicist as well as a dogmatician'.[73]

Secondly, speaking about the active side of the imitation of Christ, it is striking that during his entire career Bavinck always put emphasis on virtues: humbleness, meekness, patience, purity, holiness, sanctity, righteousness, mercy, love, etc. From this we can conclude that Bavinck's ethics can be characterised as a theological ethics of virtues.

Finally, comparing Bavinck's texts on the imitation of Christ, we observe both continuity and discontinuity. As a Christian thinker Bavinck always works from the inner perspective of Christian faith. The texts dating from the 1880s are written from an ecclesiastical perspective and

71 Bavinck, *De navolging van Christus en het Moderne Leven*, p. 19ff.

72 Bavinck, *De navolging van Christus en het Moderne Leven*, p. 23f.; cf. p. 26: 'Over heel de linie van den strijd heen hebben de Christenen in de cultuur tusschen het goede en het kwade te schiften'.

73 Bolt, 'Christ and the Law in the Ethics of Herman Bavinck', p. 47.

are directed to a limited audience: members and students of his own congregation. The booklet *The Imitation of Christ and Modern Life* is written from another point of view and is directed to a broader audience.[74] The fact that the 1918 booklet begins and ends with the war question makes clear that Bavinck's perspective has been broadened from church and theology to culture and theology. As this move is characteristic of all of Bavinck's work, we can conclude that the developments in his views on the imitation of Christ reflect the development of his work as a whole. His considerations on how the Sermon on the Mount should be interpreted make clear that this also includes a growing awareness of the hermeneutical problem.

[74] Cf. Bolt, 'Christ and the Law in the Ethics of Herman Bavinck', p. 62.

HERMAN BAVINCK AND THE BASIS OF CHRISTIAN CERTAINTY

DONALD MACLEOD

FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND COLLEGE, THE MOUND, EDINBURGH EH1 2LS
dmacleod@freescotcoll.ac.uk

Let me begin with a caveat. Each of us reads Bavinck through our own eyes. I am Scottish, not Dutch; 20th century, not 19th; and very much inclined to have my own view on everything. Inevitably, then, I read Bavinck in the light of my own agenda. This means that there is always a risk of making him say the things I want to hear. There is also a risk of confusing his thinking with my own. I hope this will be taken as a tribute to Bavinck. He has got under my skin.

PRELIMINARY POINTS

And after the caveat, some preliminary points.

First of all, Bavinck regarded certainty as a matter of enormous importance. Religion, he argued, could not deal in probabilities. It must deal in certainties; and it must do so because it requires unconditional obedience and total self-surrender. Every believer is potentially a martyr, and only a faith which is fully persuaded can sustain such a commitment. This, according to Bavinck, was the mind-set of the Reformation. The Reformers were sure about God, sure about the scriptures and sure about their own salvation; and they were sure with a certainty which a man would go to the stake for.

At the same time Bavinck was fully aware that we are no longer living in the Reformation. 'Doubt,' he wrote, 'has now become the sickness of our century'; and theologians 'are the most doubting, vacillating group of all'.[1] In his hugely influential *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) Kant had argued that reason, as such, could know nothing of the *noumenon*, and his argument had seemed to many to administer the *coup de grâce* to the idea of theology as a science. A decade later he had struck a further blow against the certainties of the old rationalism in his *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1793). In the mid-nineteenth century, Darwin's version of the theory of evolution had seemed to make the Creator utterly

[1] H. Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, trans. by H. der Nederlanden (St Catherines: Paideia Press, 1980; repr. Potchefstroom: Institute for Reformational Studies, 1998; from *De zekerheid des Geloofs*, 1901), pp. 1, 2.

redundant, while Biblical Criticism, with ever growing confidence, had undermined the church's faith in the historicity of scripture. We are heirs to this scepticism, and it has been exacerbated by the dominance of post-modernism with its apparent denial of any meta-narrative and its associated argument that every written text is susceptible of an infinite variety of interpretations.

Yet Bavinck clung to the belief that even within this framework certainty is possible: not merely abstract theoretical certainty, but personal, existential certainty leading to discipleship, worship and, if need be, martyrdom. This certainty is not something additional to faith. It is the certainty of faith. Faith is certain. Believers may doubt. Faith never doubts.

Secondly, Bavinck repeatedly asserted that all knowledge rests on faith. At the back of his mind here was the common bifurcation of knowledge into two kinds, scientific and religious. The one rested on the sure foundation of proven facts; the other was based on faith. Bavinck did not accept this distinction. Yes, he agreed, religion is pre-suppositional. But so, too, he argued, is science, which 'would be in bad straits if it could reckon only with that which is demonstrable'.[2] All human knowledge rests on *principia*, or self-evident truths, which serve as axioms, and which in their very nature are unproven and un-provable. Science assumes, for example, the reliability of our senses: there really is something out there corresponding to the impression in our minds. Equally, it assumes the rules of logic and the law of causality: there must be a reason for everything because all events are linked in an inexorable causal chain. It also assumes, particularly in the case of geology, the principle of uniformity, believing firmly that geophysical processes have always proceeded at the same rate (and if you have ever argued with a Creation Scientist you will know how difficult this can be to prove). Above, all, science assumes that we live in a cognitively friendly environment. We assume both that the world around us is a world of order, and that our own cognitive faculties are competent to explore that order. As if all this were not enough, successive generations of scientists take on trust the great paradigms of their predecessors such as Newton and Einstein, Darwin and Mendel. These become 'basic beliefs', yet the vast majority of scientists never verify them for themselves. They are taken on trust, and verified, if at all, only by the fact that they 'work'.

These are considerable assumptions, and this is a considerable amount of trust. Behind all physics lies a metaphysic.

---

[2] H. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. by J. Bolt, trans. by J. Vriend, 4 vols (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003-2009), 1, p. 599.

Thirdly, Bavinck is constantly aware of the limited value of reasons and proofs. What Bavinck has in mind here is the generally Thomist approach, first of all proving the existence of God *via* Natural Theology (the theistic proofs) and then, *via* Christian Evidences (mainly the miracles and fulfilled prophecy), proving that the scriptures are a divine revelation, before finally arriving at specifically Christian theology. This means in effect that we must first of all prove various 'truths of reason' before proceeding to the truths of revelation.

Bavinck unhesitatingly acknowledged that such proofs and evidences had some value. Indeed, Jesus and the apostles used them. Fulfilled prophecy attested the prophets as God's spokesmen, and miracles attested the Messiah and his apostles. Even today, argument can be used to demonstrate that faith is not irrational and that Christians are not following 'cunningly devised fables'.

But still, in Bavinck's view, such proofs and evidences could never provide a basis for religious certainty. There were two reasons for this. One was the very nature of religious faith, which has at its heart the willingness even to lay down one's life for the object of one's devotion. No one comes to such a position by a process of mere logical argument; and even if this route could take us to God, it could be used only by the learned, able to assimilate, for example, the ontological argument. What we need, on the contrary, is a route for the unlearned: not for the wise and prudent, but for babes.

Bavinck's second reason for the inadequacy of theistic proofs and Christian evidences was that we are not arguing to neutrals, free of all prejudice. We are arguing to the phenomenon, Man: man as she is; fallen, blind, rebellious, hostile, and totally disinclined to have her liberty circumscribed by God. Humans want to be free to choose their own idols and to decide for themselves which Moral Law, if any, they will be subject to. The apologist, therefore, will meet with adamantine resistance to the truth.

This will not prevent people coming to a historical faith and 'assenting' to, for example, the truths of the Apostles Creed. But such *fides* or *assensus* can easily exist without *fiducia*. There can be intellectual or scientific belief where there is no trust or commitment, but this is not the faith that takes up the cross. On the contrary, it can easily co-exist with idolatry.

Yet the weakness is not in the arguments. The problem is that the sinner has a vested interest in the gospel's not being true, just as his colleagues and contemporaries had a vested interest in Galileo's discoveries not being true. It is this vested interest that presents the real obstacle to apologetics.

The fourth general point takes us to the heart of Bavinck's approach: only God can give certainty. He bears witness to himself, he bears witness to his word and he bears witness to his own love for us. This means that what believers enjoy is a divine certainty. God is its source, and God is its ground.

I want to explore this certainty in three main areas: the existence of God, the divine authority of the Christian scriptures, and the assurance we have of God's love for ourselves.

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

First, then, the existence of God. God bears witness to himself, and here, in essence, Bavinck follows Calvin, who in turn follows Paul's argument in Romans One; or indeed the approach of Genesis One, where God suddenly stands before us, without introduction, as the Almighty Maker of heaven and earth. No argument or proof of his existence is offered. He is simply presupposed, and instead of ascending from the Finite to the Infinite we descend from the Infinite to the Finite. In the language of Calvin, God has endowed every human being with a *sensus deitatis*, implanted within each one of us a knowledge of God and sown in very heart the seed of religion.[3] We are surrounded by revelation (Rom. 1:18-32), with the result that we know, and know with certainty, the eternal power and godhead of God. This is part of the mental equipment of every human being.

But is this not naked fideism? Are we simply to assume that everyone is by nature a theist and that there is no such thing as an atheist: 'beyond the *sensus deitatis* thou shalt not pass'?

One question that arises here is whether the *sensus deitatis* can sometimes malfunction. Suppose you live not under a Judean sky but in a concrete jungle where bird never sings, flower never grows and star never twinkles, are you still aware of the heavens declaring the glory of God? Leaving that question aside, do we have no apologetic except to repeat endlessly that God has engraved the knowledge of himself on every heart?

Curiously enough, this is not where Calvin left it. Having started from the premise that every heart is aware of God he goes on to trace the ways that 'both the heavens and the earth present us with innumerable proofs'; to adduce man himself as 'a rare specimen of divine power, wisdom and goodness'; and to point to the history of religions as proof of a universal divine revelation.[4]

---

[3] J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. by J. McNeill, trans. by F. L. Battles, 2 vols.; LCC (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), I.iii.1.

[4] Calvin, *Institutes*, I.v.2-3.

Do such arguments have any value? Yes, but only within the framework of Anselm's principle, 'faith seeking understanding' (*Fides quaerens intellectum*).[5] The origins of faith do not lie in such arguments, but faith, once it exists, seeks to understand itself, in the sense of wanting to understand both *what* it believes and *why* it believes. It also seeks to explain itself to others. This means that Christian apologetics is always rooted in faith; and far from being a prelude to theology or independent of it, belongs firmly within it. Thus understood, and prompted by such revelation as Genesis One, apologetics is able, for example, to expose the bankruptcy of such alternatives to theism as thoroughgoing materialism. How can the loves and choices of the human spirit, and the achievements of the human imagination, be regarded as no more than re-arrangements of atoms? How can the mind itself be but the product of random evolutionary mutations? And how can the order all around us be explained as the haphazard fall-out from a primeval explosion?

But Christian apologetics, still standing on the rock of revelation, can also argue that faith in a personal Creator coheres with the nature of the world in which we live and enables us to understand why that world is as it is. In particular, it helps us understand why it is that, in the later language of Alvin Platinga, we live in an epistemically congenial and cognitively friendly environment.[6] The universe around us is a world of order, conforming to consistent laws and disclosing an astonishing variety of systems within systems. This is why it admits of logical analysis and precise mathematical description. At the same time, and no less remarkably, our own minds are adapted to this environment, enabling us to understand our universe and to trace the causal forces which link event to event.

Whence this astonishing accord? From the fact, according to Bavinck, that the world was created by the Logos, and that this same Logos indwells our human minds, its Light still shining even in the darkness of our fallen condition (John 1:5, 9). To this we owe the correspondence between the knower and the known, and between intelligence and intelligibility: 'it is the same Logos who created both the reality outside of us and the laws of thought within us and who produced an organic connection and correspondence.'[7] This correspondence, in turn, demonstrates that our faith is not mere fideism, as if the only warrant for what we believe is that

---

5 The title originally proposed by Anselm for what he later named *Proslogion*. See *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, ed. by B. Davies and G. Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 82-104.

6 A. Platinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 184, 189.

7 Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1, p. 231.

we believe it. The fact that we live in a cognitively friendly environment warrants the belief that everything that exists is the work of an almighty personal intelligence. The physical world is the product of thought.

THE DIVINE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

The second issue on which Bavinck explored the basis of certainty was the divine authority of the Holy Scriptures. We have to be sure, he insisted, that they are the Word of God. Otherwise it would be folly to accord them the reverence and self-surrender which they demand.

How can we be sure? Here again Bavinck has an ambivalent attitude towards 'proofs'. He repeatedly declares that they can never produce the requisite faith. Yet he is not prepared to dismiss them as of no value. On the contrary, he admits, as we have seen, that Jesus and the apostles sometimes used arguments to move people to faith. Besides, literary and historical arguments can be used to rebut the charges that the scriptures make false claims as to their authorship and are self-contradictory: and archaeology can be invoked to confirm the biblical narrative from external sources. In sum, considerable force of evidence can be deployed to demonstrate that belief in the Bible as the Word of God is not unreasonable or irrational; or, more positively, that the Bible is eminently credible.

Bavinck's approach here is reminiscent of that of Calvin, who, though he insisted that those 'who strive to build up firm faith in Scripture through disputation are doing things backwards',[8] yet went on to devote considerable space (the whole of Book I, Chapter viii) to an exposition of the external evidences for the divine authorship of scripture, developing a theme he had introduced in Chapter vii.4: 'if we wished to proceed by arguments, we might advance many things that would easily prove—if there is any god in heaven—that the law, the prophets and the gospel come from him.'

Bavinck, similarly, is fully aware that theology 'may not proclaim as truth what cannot survive the test of truth, no matter how rich it may be in comfort'.[9] Yet his prevailing emphasis is, once again, on the spiritual inadequacy of the proofs. One reason for this is his view of faith as involving a certainty far greater than any that can be produced by mere induction of evidence. Far from being less assured than (scientific) knowledge, religious faith is *more* assured: more intense, certainly, and virtually ineradicable. 'In terms of sheer power,' writes Bavinck, 'the assurance of

---

[8] Calvin, *Institutes*, I:vii.4.

[9] Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, p. 6

faith far exceeds scientific certainty.'[10] No mere induction of evidence can produce anything so unshakable. After all, 'Scientific certainty, no matter how strong and fixed, always remains based on human argument and can, therefore, always be overturned by further and better investigation.'[11] Curiously enough, this ties in with the relativism we associate with Post-modernism. No mere academic discipline, marshalling evidence and appealing to universal reason, can put us in touch with ultimate certainty. Whether in history, morals or physics our approximations to truth are always tentative and provisional. This is why Bavinck will have to lay religious certainty on a totally different foundation: one on which science as such can never stand.

But why do the 'proofs' fail to produce the requisite religious certainty? Bavinck suggests two reasons. One is the special character of the biblical revelation itself. It is not a word of mere historical narrative or a literature resourced only from human nature ('the flesh'). It is a word that goes forth from God to man, imperiously summoning us into fellowship with the divine. It does not present itself as ordinary literature to be responded to 'like any other book'. It has a unique standpoint, in that it is not addressed to academics and never invites assessment as mere literature, history or science. In fact, as Markus Bockmuehl points out, the scriptures 'represent second-rate literature in often third-rate linguistic terms', and therefore to view them as primarily literature is 'like using a stethoscope to examine a light bulb'.[12] The implied readers of scripture are believers; its human authors are believers; its ultimate author is God; its subject-matter is the plight of man and the redeeming grace of God; its opening chapter begins with the Creator God; its New Testament begins with the Virgin Birth. All of these present an instant, full-frontal challenge to so-called 'neutral' scholarship.

'You can't argue with someone who is principially opposed to you.'[13] This is a recurring theme in Bavinck. If we are to know God there must be an accord between the knower and the known; and if we are to appreciate scripture there must be a similar accord between the reader and the ultimate author. This is precisely the point made by Jesus in his rebuke to the uncomprehending Peter at Caesarea Philippi: 'you are not on the side of God, but on the side of men' (Mark 8:33, RSV).

---

[10] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1, p. 578

[11] Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, p. 9

[12] M. Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word: Refocusing New Testament Study* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), pp. 48-9.

[13] Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, p. 34.

The second reason that 'proofs' are insufficient to produce faith in scripture is that academic enquiry and scientific research 'only touch the facts externally and do not penetrate their heart and essence ... they lead us to the empty tomb but not to the living Savior'.[14] They can lead us to a historical faith, but this means no more than the conviction that the events narrated in the Bible actually happened. They cannot bring home to us that these events urgently demand life-changing choices. Christ rose; but life goes on.

But if religious faith cannot be laid on an academic foundation, neither can it be based, according to Bavinck, on experience. This negative, again, has two aspects. One is that Christian certainty cannot be based on *sense*-experience. The objects of science can be seen and heard, and weighed and measured, but this is impossible in the case of core Christian beliefs such as the incarnation, the resurrection and the atonement. From this point of view there is no place for (sense) experience in religious knowledge.

This takes us back to the basic Old Testament principle that God has no visible form. As pure spirit he is inaccessible to our senses. Yet this is not quite as straightforward as it appears. The invisible God may give himself a temporary visible form, as he did in the burning bush at Horeb (Exodus 3:20) and in the vision of Isaiah in the temple (Isaiah 6:1-13). God can also give himself audible form, as he did when addressing, for example, the child Samuel (1 Samuel 3:1-14). Similarly, God's mighty acts (such as the dividing of the Red Sea, Exodus 14:15-31) were visible and audible, as were the resurrection appearances of Jesus; and it was precisely to a sensory experience on the Damsacus road that the Apostle Paul traced the origin of his religion (Acts 26:12-19).

This means that Bavinck's dismissal of sense-experience needs some qualification. It is indeed true that for us today belief in the crucifixion and the resurrection can never be a matter of sense-perception. Yet this should not blind us to the fact that God did frequently give empirical verification of himself. The patriarchal, prophetic and apostolic testimony is neither more nor less than testimony to such empirical episodes: 'that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you' (1 John 1:3).

From this point of view, and despite Lessing, contingent truths of history can in fact yield necessary truths of reason. The resurrection, for example, yields eternal truth; and even the great paradigms of the natural sciences are verified by experiments which are themselves contingent events of history. Divine revelation does not consist of abstract truths of

[14] Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, p. 28.

reason, but (in the first instance) of epochal empirical events of which the prophetic and apostolic records are the divinely given explanations.

But what of certainty based on inner, religious experience? There was no shortage of claims to such experience as the various streams of European Christianity retreated in face of attacks from rationalism, natural science and biblical criticism (and also in reaction to dead orthodoxy). Schleiermacher found a basis for certainty in the feeling of absolute dependence, Kant in the Categorical Imperative and Pietism in Zinzendorf's dictum, 'It is so to me; my heart tells me so'.[15]

Bavinck was fully aware, of course, that religious truth produces experience. It inevitably has an emotional and affective impact. But he insisted on this order. It is the truth that produces the experience, not the experience the truth. In this, he would have been in entire agreement with Charles Hodge: 'Christian experience is only the effect produced by Christian doctrine on the soul'.[16] Bavinck insisted, too, that we have no experience of cardinal Christian truths such as are set forth in the Apostles' Creed. Doctrines such as the virgin birth, the crucifixion and the resurrection cannot be deduced from experience. They come to us from the outside, and we can know them only if someone tells us, or bears witness to them. This is even more true of such a doctrine as the trinity. It is not given in experience, and any theology which regards its task as being merely to elucidate the contents of the Christian consciousness will be forced, like Schleiermacher, to relegate it to an appendix.[17]

The argument from experience comes perilously close to suggesting that certainty itself is the basis of certainty, a position which Bavinck utterly repudiates. The truth brings certainty, but certainty is no guarantee of truth. After all, the Buddhist is certain, as is the Muslim. Time and again Bavinck insists that faith is not the source of truth or the norm of truth. Instead, it is the grace which apprehends the truth: truth which exists prior to faith and independently of faith. Faith cannot put its faith in itself.

This is why theology must not be allowed to degenerate into mere anthropology, limited to reporting selected aspects of the human consciousness. The object of theology is not religion, but God; and the presupposition of such a study is that God has revealed himself, at the same time exercising his own inherent right to determine the conditions on

---

15 Quoted in *The Certainty of Faith*, p. 33.

16 C. Hodge, *Princeton Sermons* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1879; repr. London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), p. 355.

17 F. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. by H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928), pp. 738-51.

which he may be known. But then, science too is limited. It cannot bend the universe to its will, but must accept it for what it is, and on its own terms.

Back, then, to our original question: What binds the soul of the believer to the Bible? Bavinck answers unhesitatingly, The witness of the Holy Spirit. It is he alone who can make a person inwardly certain of the divine authority of scripture. This is, of course, a commonplace of Reformed theology and Bavinck's discussion has its roots in Calvin and its parallels in Jonathan Edwards (though Bavinck takes no notice of Edwards in this connection) and Alvin Platinga.[18] It continues the theme that God alone can bear witness to himself. Just as he bears witness to his own existence so he bears witness to his word, attesting it as his very own. Bavinck is at pains, however, to distance himself from what he regards as misunderstandings of this inner witness. It is not a revelation of some previously unknown truth. Nor is it a special personal revelation to an individual that the Bible is the word of God. Nor again is it an inference from the marks of the Spirit's authorship impressed on scripture; nor, at the other extreme is it a mystical warming of the heart.

What, then, is it? We have to bear in mind (though this point is not laboured by Bavinck) that like all the works of the Spirit his inner witness to the scriptures is mysterious. We have little insight into the Spirit's *modus operandi* in the new birth and equally little into how exactly he operated in inspiring the prophets and the apostles. The Spirit blows where he pleases (John 3:8). We can see the effects, but we cannot tell how he produces them. The *testimonium internum* is no less mysterious. We know it produces certainty: 'a solid, full, thorough and effectual conviction of the great things of the gospel ... they are points settled and determined, as undoubted and indisputable'.[19] But how this certainty is produced, we know not. Once we have said that the Spirit operates by way of supernatural influence we have said virtually all we can.

There is, however, one clear analogy to the Spirit's inward witness to scripture: the way he operated on the hearts of those who were brought to faith through the preaching of the apostles. Paul refers to this in relation to the Thessalonian believers: 'our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with great conviction (*plerophoria*).' (1 Thess. 1:5) He repeats the point in 1 Thessalonians 2:13: 'we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of

[18] See Calvin, *Institutes*, I.vii; Platinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, pp. 290-323; and J. Edwards, *A Treatise concerning Religious Affections*, ed. by J. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), pp. 291-311.

[19] J. Edwards, *Religious Affections*, p. 291.

God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God'. What is important here is that the certainty was produced not by arguments designed to 'prove' the gospel, but by the gospel itself. The preaching, the *kerygma*, carried its own power to convince. Similarly, our full assurance of the divine authority of scripture is produced not by arguments in favour of scripture, but by the scriptures themselves, just as our assurance that the Mona Lisa is a work of genius is produced not by the arguments of art historians but by the painting itself.

Further insight is offered by the description of the conversion of Lydia in Acts 16:14: 'The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.' One notable point here is that Lydia was no out-and-out enemy of the gospel. She was already a devout God-fearer, yet her heart was closed against the apostolic message. This implies that one clear result of the *testimonium internum* is, as Platinga points out, that it repairs the cognitive damage done by sin.[20] This reflects the position described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:14, where he distinguishes between the soulish (*psuchikos*) person and the spirititual (*pneumatikos*) person. The soulish person does not receive the things of the Spirit. Instead, they are folly (*moria*) to him because he lacks the discernment to recognise them, like a philistine in the presence of the Mona Lisa. The only remedy is a radical change in disposition, converting the *psuchikos* into a *pneumatikos*. This, of course, is exactly what the new birth does: 'Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit' (John 3:6), and at the heart of this lies the gift of faith. This is precisely what Paul says in Ephesians 2:8: faith is the gift of God. The Westminster Confession (XIV:II) reflects this: faith is the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts by which 'a Christian believeth to be true whatsoever is revealed in the word'. With this Bavinck is in full agreement: 'It is the Spirit of God alone who can make a person inwardly certain of the truth of divine revelation.'[21] Or, in other words, he persuades and enables us to believe the great truths of the gospel.

But this is linked to something else. The Spirit's witness is to Christ (John 15:26) and his witness to scripture is bound up with his witness to the Saviour. The 'things of the Spirit' (1 Cor. 2:14) are the things relating to Christ, just as the human being's aversion to scripture is at bottom an aversion to Christ. This means that when the Spirit repairs the cognitive damage done by sin, what he does is remove the blindness which prevents us seeing the beauty of Christ. This is where salvation always begins: in the vision of Christ. 'God was pleased to reveal his Son in me,' declares

[20] Platinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, pp.280-81.

[21] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1, p. 578.

Paul in one of his accounts of his own conversion (Gal. 1:16). It is this Christ who is the glory of scripture, and the Spirit's witness to *it* is fundamentally his witness to *him*. He witnesses to Christ as the one than who a greater cannot be thought;[22] and he witnesses to Scripture as the bearer and deliverer of this unsurpassable Saviour. It is its witness to Jesus that binds the soul of the believer to the Bible.

Bavinck alleges that this doctrine of the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit gradually began to lose its place of honour even among Reformed theologians,[23] who began, instead, to link confidence in the authority of scripture to the marks of divinity impressed upon it by its divine author. This meant that faith was no longer connected directly to scripture, but to the 'marks'. At best, the Spirit illuminated these marks; at worst, rationalism dispensed with the Spirit altogether and rested the truth of scripture on historical proofs.

How are we to respond to this? We have to concede, once again, that confidence in the scriptures and in the gospel can never be a matter of simply building up a body of evidence and formulating a scientific conclusion: not because the conclusion is less than scientific, but because it is more. It is religious, laying a foundation for such faith as a soul would stake its life on.

At the same time, however, we have to avoid the danger of fideism, and if we are to do so faith must have good warrant. If certainty itself becomes the ground of belief, the Christian and the Muslim are at an impasse. Both are certain, and there can be no appeal beyond their certainty. However, as Bavinck himself repeatedly insisted, the Spirit is the source of faith, but not its ground. For example, he is the source of our faith in the resurrection of Christ, but the ground of that faith is the empty tomb and the post-crucifixion appearances of Jesus to his disciples. The ground of faith in scripture, according to Bavinck, is scripture itself. It is inherently the word of God and attests itself as such. But what if the Muslim claims to be similarly impressed by the Qur'an. 'The mere reading of it,' he says, 'convinces you that it is the word of Allah, communicated directly from heaven without any human admixture.'

What then? Though the marks are seldom, if ever, the road to faith, yet after we have come to faith they may serve, *a posteriori*, to explain our faith. Here again we may speak of *fides quaerens intellectum*. Faith seeks to understand; and to understand itself as well as its object. It asks not

[22] This is Anselm's invocation of God: "You are something than which a greater cannot be thought." (*Proslogion*, 2).

[23] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1, p. 584.

only, What do I believe? but, Why do I believe? But it is faith itself that is asking.

Alternatively, we may ask whether in coming to faith there is an instinctive, subconscious assessment of the 'incomparable excellences' of scripture. The conviction is not then drawn by way of inference from enumerated qualities, yet these qualities are there, and they may well be the ground of the faith of which the Holy Spirit is the source. Here it may be helpful to invoke once again the analogy of a great painting. It is the Mona Lisa itself which convinces us of its genius, and it convinces us in the very seeing of it. But it is still legitimate for the art critic to ask, What is it about this painting that makes it so extraordinary? What exactly is it about her smile, or her eyes? Listing its characteristics would not itself convince us that here was a work of unique genius; but it would help to explain and warrant our conviction that it is so.

Similarly, we must be able to give a reason for our belief that the New Testament is superior to the Qur'an: is, indeed, God's last word spoken not through a prophet, but through a Son (Hebrews 1:2). What can that reason be? The question brings us back again, surely, to Christ himself. He is the incomparable excellence of scripture: a deity and a prophet than who a greater cannot be conceived; God making himself nothing, becoming flesh, taking a servant form, washing feet, tasting death, becoming accursed for us; a man experiencing the whole range of our human emotions; dependent, yet all-conquering; living amid sin and squalor, yet undefiled; harassed, yet ever accessible; crucified, yet risen; entombed, yet now in the centre of the Throne. Could any greater story be conceived or holiness ever be more adorable?

The Christian scriptures are incomparable because they are the bearers of Christ. He is a wonder; and so, therefore, is the book that bears him.

ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

The third issue addressed by Bavinck is the believer's personal assurance of salvation. Here was something deeply prized by the Reformers. Bavinck even goes so far as to claim that the Reformation was 'born out of a deeply felt need for the assurance of salvation.'[24] It was certainly a matter of paramount importance. Luther never lost an opportunity to condemn the Roman Catholic view that no one can ever know with certainty whether he is in a state of grace: 'This wicked idea, on which the entire kingdom of the pope rests, is one that you young people should flee and regard with

[24] Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, p. 16.

horror as a dangerous plague.'[25] Instead, 'Let everyone accustom himself to believe for a certainty that he is in a state of grace and that his person with its works is acceptable to God.'[26]

Bavinck was firmly committed to this Reformation perspective: 'The certainty of truth is not enough for a Christian. He also needs the certainty of salvation. [27] He even insisted that these two certainties were so closely related that the one could not exist without the other. But he was also keenly aware that after Dort things changed. Faith gave way to orthodoxy; justification by faith to justification by doctrine. Bavinck passes a remarkable stricture on this: 'the Catholic righteousness by good works is vastly preferable to a protestant righteousness by good doctrine. At least righteousness by good works benefits one's neighbour, whereas righteousness by good doctrine only produces lovelessness and pride.'[28] This reliance on orthodoxy provoked two reactions: rationalism, which would subject faith to reason; and pietism, which replaced assurance with introspection, and even with the deliberate cultivation of doubt. Yet Bavinck was aware that the Reformers, too, could have their doubts. Even Calvin, who taught so plainly that assurance was the essence of faith, was also fully aware that the believer may be troubled by doubts. This arises from the imperfection of faith: the believing mind 'partly rests upon the promise of the gospel, partly trembles at the evidence of its own iniquity'.[29] As a result, 'we cannot imagine any certainty that is not tinged with doubt, or any assurance that is not assailed by some anxiety'.[30]

This has its own pastoral importance: doubts of themselves are not proof that we are not in a state of grace. Yet there was, Bavinck insisted, a clear difference between the Reformers and their later disciples. The Reformers did not feed or foster doubt: 'They saw no good in it and were not content to remain in doubt. They struggled to come out of doubt and they begged to be freed from it. The Reformers rose above it by the power of faith. Not doubt and fear, but steadfastness and certainty was the normal condition of their spiritual lives.'[31]

But how are we to attain to such certainty? As far as Bavinck is concerned, faith itself *is* certainty.[32] It is assured in itself. The believer may

---

[25] M. Luther, *Lectures on Galatians 1535* in *Luther's Work*, ed. by Jaroslav Pelikan, ed. (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), vol. 26, p. 377.

[26] Luther, *Lectures on Galatians 1535*, p. 379.

[27] Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, p. 39.

[28] Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, p. 15.

[29] Calvin, *Institutes*, III.ii. 18.

[30] Calvin, *Institutes*, III.ii.17.

[31] Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, p. 16.

[32] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1, p. 577.

doubt; faith does not doubt. Far from distinguishing faith from knowledge, Bavinck, aligning himself with the thinking of Lutheran as well as Reformed theologians, equates it with knowledge: 'a "certain knowledge," which excludes all doubt and uncertainty.'[33] In sum, then, faith is a knowledge (*cognitio*) of God's goodwill; it is a knowledge not merely of his goodwill in general but of his goodwill to *us*; and it is no wavering, floundering knowledge but a sure and certain knowledge. He writes: 'In the state and attitude of the soul which the Holy Scriptures call faith, certainty is included by its very nature—certainty first of all regarding God's promises given us in the Gospel, but also certainty that by grace we too share in these promises.'[34]

But what is the relation between such assurance and the witness of the Holy Spirit? Here, again, Bavinck's distinction between *ground* and *source* is useful. The Spirit is the *source* of our assurance, but he is not its *ground*. Nor is his witness external to faith. His witness is to faith, and given within faith. As he bears witness through the word to God's gospel promises he makes us sure and certain that God loves us. He causes us to trust the God who loves us, and the result is the joy and peace which are the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). The very fact that these graces are 'fruit' means that they flow spontaneously and organically from the internal witness of the Spirit who indwells us.

What of the role of 'the inward evidence of those graces unto which the promises are made' (Westminster Confession, XVIII.II)? And what of the so-called Practical Syllogism: 'All who believe in Christ are saved; I believe in Christ; therefore, I am saved.'

One thing is immediately clear: no one first puts her hand in the hand of God as a result of such a process of syllogistic reasoning. Besides, while on the face of things such 'marks' may warrant assurance that one is in a state of grace, all too often the result of self-examination and introspection is the very opposite. We see only the imperfections of our graces. This is the very point made by Calvin as we saw earlier: the believing mind 'trembles at the evidence of its own iniquity'. Introspection, then, is no road to assurance. On the contrary, we may say with King Lear, 'that way madness lies'.

We are in grave danger of inverting the biblical and spiritual order here. Precisely because our graces are the fruit of faith they are the consequences, not the causes, of assurance. We have too often neglected this. There can be no real joy, peace, patience, or taking up of the cross where there is no assurance. It is even unlikely that there can be any seri-

[33] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1, p. 575.

[34] Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, p .40.

ous evangelism. Our whole encouragement to obedience comes, as Paul reminds us, from the love of Christ (Phil. 2:1). What Wordsworth said of good poetry is thus true of all Christian service: it is the 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings'.[35] This is why all the great heroes of the faith, from Paul through Luther to Bonhoeffer have been sustained by the certainty that God loved them. What Bavinck says of Luther was true of them all: 'His faith was so firmly anchored and his hope so sure that with them he dared stand alone before all his opponents.'[36]

Which comes first: God's love for us, or our faith in him? It seems a simple question, but it is a momentous one. The Reformation (like the apostles) gave an unequivocal answer: God's love and grace comes first. That God loves us is not something we infer from our faith in him. It is what faith puts its trust in, from its very first breath. 'He loved me and gave himself for me'. That is what faith believes in; and from then on we and God walk hand in hand.

---

[35] From Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800). See *Lyrical Ballads: Wordsworth and Coleridge*, ed. by R. Brett and A. Jones, 2nd edn (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 246.

[36] Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, p. 16.

BAVINCK, BARTH, AND THE UNIQUENESS OF THE EUCHARIST

PAUL T. NIMMO

NEW COLLEGE, MOUND PLACE, EDINBURGH, EH1 2LX
paul.nimmo@ed.ac.uk

INTRODUCTION

Within Reformed circles, these are quite interesting times for understanding the Lord's Supper. On the one hand, the issue of the eucharist continues to be prominent in many ecumenical discussions. There is ongoing conversation about the reception of the *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* document of 1982,[1] conversation that has been reinvigorated by current ecumenical work towards a statement on 'The Nature and the Mission of the Church'.[2] On the other hand, though not unrelated, a number of important Reformed theologians over recent decades—including Thomas Torrance,[3] Alasdair Heron,[4] and (most recently) George Hunsinger[5]—have offered attempts to understand the Lord's Supper in a way that is both 'Reformed' and palatable to the wider ecclesial community.[6]

This article is part of a larger project which explores this sacramental terrain. The fundamental purposes of the larger project are twofold: first, to reflect on and cautiously critique existing attempts to move the Reformed tradition in an ecumenical direction; and second, to attempt to offer a constructive alternative which—in my view—is truer to the fundamental insights of the tradition yet which retains the potential of ecumenical promise. In this article, I explore the sacramental theology of two giants of the Reformed tradition: Herman Bavinck and Karl Barth.

---

1 *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Faith and Order Paper 111; Geneva: WCC, 1982).

2 *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement* (Faith and Order Paper 198; Geneva: WCC, 2005).

3 Thomas F. Torrance, 'The Paschal Mystery of Christ and the Eucharist', in *Theology in Reconciliation* (London: Chapman, 1975), pp. 106-38.

4 Alasdair Heron, *Table and Tradition: Towards an Ecumenical Understanding of the Eucharist* (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1983).

5 George Hunsinger, *The Eucharist and Ecumenism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

6 I leave to one side in this article the question of the criteria by which a theology might be adjudged to be 'Reformed' (or not).

In what follows, I first present the theology of the Lord's Supper as it is found in Bavinck and Barth; I then move to draw the two into conversation by way of the concept of the *uniqueness* of the sacrament; and I finally offer three brief concluding comments on some of the ground covered.

THE EUCHARISTIC THEOLOGY OF HERMAN BAVINCK

The obvious place to find Bavinck's doctrine of the Lord's Supper is in the *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, his four-volume work of systematic theology now happily translated by the late John Vriend. First published in 1895-1901, this monumental work went through successive editions and impressions. However, the doctrine of the sacraments contained in it remained almost identical throughout these iterations, with only 'cosmetic' or 'negligible' changes.[7]

Bavinck's doctrine of the Lord's Supper appears in the fourth, pneumatological volume of the *Reformed Dogmatics*, where it is located under a section headed 'The Spirit Creates New Community'.[8] In a series of chapters in this section, Bavinck unfolds what he refers to as 'The Spirit's Means of Grace': there are chapters on Proclamation, on the Sacraments in general, and then on Baptism and The Lord's Supper in particular.[9]

Bavinck on the sacraments

From the rubric alone, it is clear that at the heart of Bavinck's constructive position is an agreement with the claim of the Reformers that 'the Word and sacraments were the ordinary means by which God gave his Spirit and imparted his grace'.[10] So how does Bavinck understand these 'means of grace'?

---

7 R. N. Gleason, 'Herman Bavinck's Understanding of John Calvin on the Lord's Supper', online article <http://www.rongleason.org/PDFs/bavinck/Bavinck_Lords_Supper.pdf> [accessed 1 May 2011], p. 2, and R. N. Gleason, 'Calvin and Bavinck on the Lord's Supper', *WTJ*, 45 (1983), 274-275. Note also Bavinck's article 'Calvijn's leer over het avondmaal', to which Gleason refers: this first appeared in the Dutch church newspaper, *De Vrije Kerk* 13 (1887), and was later included in a book on Bavinck's early work entitled *Kennis en leven: Opstellen en artikelen uit vroegere jaren* (Kok: Kampen, 1922).

8 Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. by John Bolt, trans. by John Vriend, 4 vols (Grand Rapids: BakerAcademic, 2003-2008), 4, pp. 271-585. [Subsequent citations are indicated by *RD* together with volume and page number.]

9 Respectively chapter 8 (*RD*, 4, pp. 441-60), chapter 9 (*RD*, 4, pp. 461-96), chapter 10 (*RD*, 4, pp. 496-539), and chapter 11 (*RD*, 4, pp. 540-85).

10 *RD*, 4, p. 446, though it becomes clear on *RD*, 4, p. 448 that by 'Word' in this connection is meant 'proclamation': 'As a means of grace in the true sense

With the Reformed tradition—at least as he circumscribes it[11]—Bavinck agrees that the sacraments are

> visible, holy signs and seals instituted by God so that he might make believers understand more clearly and reassure them of the promises and benefits of the covenant of grace, and believers on their part might confess and confirm their faith and love.[12]

We will pause and reflect a little more carefully on this resonantly Calvinist definition in three aspects.

First, for Bavinck the sacraments are instituted by God: it is God who links the communication of grace with them;[13] it is God who administers them and is alone their 'efficient cause';[14] and it is God who has taken them as extraordinary signs from the created realm for 'the designation and clarification of invisible and eternal goods'.[15] There is no automatic or natural connection between the signs and the things signified,[16] but the relationship instituted between them is not arbitrary either, for it is according to 'an analogy performed by [God]'[17] and includes a 'most striking correspondence' between sign and signified.[18]

Underpinning this divine work is Bavinck's basic contention that

> God has obligated himself, where the sacrament has been administered according to his command, to grant the invisible grace by his Spirit. God and God alone remains the distributor of grace, and also in the sacrament, the

---

alongside the sacraments, the word of God only comes up for discussion in so far as it is publicly preached by the minister.'

11 The Calvinist definition suggests that Bavinck approaches the Reformed tradition from a relatively narrow Genevan perspective, which he considers to proceed by 'align[ing] ... as closely as possible with Scripture', *RD*, 4, p. 473.

12 *RD*, 4, p. 473.

13 *RD*, 4, p. 448.

14 *RD*, 4, p. 474. On baptism, see *RD*, 4, p. 533: 'The one who administers this baptism is Christ. ... But in administering baptism Christ employs people whom he charges with the distribution of the mysteries of God.'

15 *RD*, 4, p. 476. God rules both the realm of nature and the realm of grace, and consequently, according to Bavinck, we are able to understand the invisible world by way of the visible world, *RD*, 4, p. 481. Bavinck asserts, also on *RD*, 4, p. 481, that 'The natural is an image of the spiritual.'

16 *RD*, 4, p. 481.

17 *RD*, 4, p. 476.

18 *RD*, 4, p. 481.

> Christian depends not on the minister but on God alone and must expect all things from him.[19]

As the connection is established by divine institution, the liturgical words of institution are words of proclamation only and do not change the elements or unite the elements and the signified.[20]

Second, the sacraments are signs in the created realm—external, visible, perceptible.[21] Yet they are not *simple* signs,[22] but also seals: they do not simply bring the invisible and eternal goods to mind but validate and confirm them;[23] they act in 'guaranteeing the genuineness of persons and things or protecting them from violation';[24] and they are linked to the communication of the grace of Christ.[25] Indeed, for Bavinck, the 'internal matter' or 'heavenly substance' of the sacrament—that which is signified and communicated—is Jesus Christ Himself: 'the full, rich, total Christ, both according to his divine and his human natures, with his person and work, in the state of his humiliation and in that of his exaltation'.[26]

---

19 *RD*, 4, p. 482. This bond is unshakeable: Bavinck writes that 'the connection between the sign and the thing signified in the sacrament is neither different from nor less than that which exists between the word of the gospel and the person of Christ', *RD*, 4, p. 487. This bond will not perish, *RD*, 4, p. 487.

20 *RD*, 4, p. 481. Bavinck writes of the 'form' of baptism that it 'consists in a divinely forged link between a visible sign and an invisible spiritual benefit', *RD*, 4, p. 515, and that it is not the minister or the water 'but Christ who ... gives the thing signified', *RD*, 4, p. 519.

21 *RD*, 4, p. 448.

22 Cf. *RD*, 4, p. 475, where Bavinck writes that the sacraments are primarily *signs* that image and reassure us of the action of Christ, and are not—as the Lutherans held them to be—*actions*. Bavinck notes that the Reformed 'absolutely did not deny that in the sacrament there occurs an action. But this is the hidden invisible action of Christ, who inwardly confers grace in the hearts of believers through the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, ... the main thing is not the action of the minister ..., but in the sacrament's being a sign. ... Indeed, even the action of the administrator ..., though an action, is itself a significative action.' There are some rather odd distinctions indeed in operation here, certainly in Bavinck and possibly also in the tradition.

23 *RD*, 4, p. 476.

24 *RD*, 4, p. 477. It is not only the elements of the sacrament but also the accompanying ceremonial actions that have this signifying and sealing function, *RD*, 4, p. 477.

25 *RD*, 4, p. 448.

26 *RD*, 4, p. 477 ... and therefore not sanctifying grace, as—according to Bavinck—the Roman Catholics (and certain Lutherans) would have it, *RD*, 4, p. 478.

The relationship between the signs and the signified in the sacraments is not, for Bavinck, physical, local, corporeal, or substantial,[27] yet it is nonetheless 'objective, real, and essential'.[28] For Bavinck, grace is imparted in a *spiritual* manner and not in a *physical* manner that would profit nothing.[29] Thus the sacrament 'grants the same full Christ as the Word and in the same manner, that is, a spiritual manner by faith'.[30] Precisely as such, however, Bavinck acknowledges that 'the sacrament does not impart a single benefit that is not also received from the Word of God by faith alone'.[31] The content of Word and sacrament is identical—the same Mediator, the same covenant, the same benefits, the same salvation, the same fellowship with God; the mode of reception of Word and sacrament are identical—spiritually and by faith, not physically and by the mouth; but they deliver in a different manner—in the Word through the hearing and in the sacrament through the seeing.[32]

It should also be noted here that there is a typically Reformed hierarchy of Word and sacrament: the sacrament is 'an appendix' to the Word;[33] it cannot create faith but only serves 'to strengthen faith';[34] it is 'nothing' and has 'neither value nor power' without the Word.[35] Instead, together with the Word, it serves 'to direct our faith toward Christ's sacrifice on the cross as the sole ground of our salvation'.[36]

Third, in light of this, the sacraments are not 'inherently necessary': God did not have to ordain them, God's Word and promise are firm and

---

27 *RD*, 4, p. 481. Bavinck continues: 'The signs of water, bread, and wine are not miracles, remedies, schemes, vehicles, channels, or physical causes of the things signified.'

28 *RD*, 4, p. 482. On baptism, cf. *RD*, 4, p. 519.

29 *RD*, 4, p. 483, citing John 6.63. A physical communication would also be 'inconsistent with the nature of the Christian religion, the essence of grace, and the nature of re-creation', *RD*, 4, p. 483.

30 *RD*, 4, p. 483.

31 *RD*, 4, p. 479. It is a Reformation principle that 'Faith alone apart from any sacrament communicates ... all the benefits of salvation', *RD*, 4, p. 515. On baptism, see *RD*, 4, p. 521—'Baptismal grace exists and can ... exist in nothing other than in declaration and confirmation'. On the Lord's Supper, see *RD*, 4, p. 567—'in the Lord's Supper we indeed do not receive any other or any more benefits than we do in the Word, but also no fewer'.

32 *RD*, 4, p. 479.

33 *RD*, 4, p. 479.

34 *RD*, 4, p. 448.

35 *RD*, 4, p. 479.

36 *RD*, 4, p. 480.

sure without them, and God's salvation does not depend upon them.[37] However, Bavinck insists that they have great value:

> by seeing those signs we ... gain a better insight into his benefits, receive a stronger confirmation of his promises, and thus [are] supported and strengthened in our faith. The sacraments do not work faith but reinforce it ... . they renew the believers' covenant with God, strengthen them in the communion of Christ, join them more closely to each other, set them apart from the world, and witness to angels and their fellow human beings ... .[38]

Consequently, Bavinck posits that for 'maturing believers ... the sacraments do not gradually decrease in importance but continually gain in value'.[39]

Here too is perhaps the place to mention the profound corporate aspect of the sacraments apparent in Bavinck's theology. The sacraments are given by Christ to his church,[40] and in them there are united the action of God and the confession of believers.[41] Though the sacraments are not limited in Bavinck's theology to signs that witness to the faith of the community, they nonetheless do this also.

Bavinck on the Lord's Supper

In Bavinck's doctrine of the Lord's Supper, we see the three general aspects of the sacraments that we referenced above reach the level of particularity.

First, the Lord's Supper is an event of divine origin. He writes that 'God alone is the distributor of grace, and he alone can bind its distribution to the means ordained by him'.[42] For this reason, the eucharist reflects a matter of divine obligation on God—'to impart to those who believe his Word his fellowship in Christ and all the benefits associated with it'.[43] It is Jesus Christ who is its Mediator in His threefold office, not only inaugurating but also hosting and administrating the Supper.[44] Of primary importance in the Lord's Supper, then, is not what we do but what God

---

37 *RD*, 4, p. 489. On baptism, see *RD*, 4, p. 534.

38 *RD*, 4, p. 489-490.

39 *RD*, 4, p. 532: 'they are proof of grace received, a sign of God's faithfulness, a basis for pleading one's case in prayer, a supporting pillar for one's faith, and an exhortation to new obedience'.

40 *RD*, 4, p. 448.

41 *RD*, 4, p. 475.

42 *RD*, 4, p. 562.

43 *RD*, 4, p. 567.

44 *RD*, 4, p. 562.

does.[45] Its sacramental signs of bread and wine are not arbitrary, but are rather 'eminently suited to give us an impression of the spiritual food and drink that Christ in his death has prepared for our souls'.[46]

Second, Bavinck acknowledges that the bread and wine are signs for the community, but affirms that they are also 'seals for the exercise of communion with the crucified Christ'.[47] Indeed, he observes—in somewhat circular fashion—that if the Lord's Supper were 'only a memorial meal and an act of confession, it would cease to be a sacrament in the true sense'.[48] While it is indeed a sign, then, the Lord's Supper is 'first of all ... a message and assurance to us of divine grace',[49] which bonds the believer 'with Christ himself, just as food and drink are united with our body'.[50]

The particular form of that grace is 'an objective and real communication of the person *and* benefits of Christ to everyone who believes'.[51] His body and blood are spiritual refreshment,[52] and the mystical union of the believer with Christ[53] is here signed and sealed by the sacrament,[54] in which Christ 'offers his own crucified body and shed blood as nourishment for our souls'.[55] This union of Christ and believer is for Bavinck spiritual—not in the sense that it excludes the physical, but in the sense that it is effected by the Holy Spirit.[56] To achieve this, Christ does not come down from heaven: rather, 'we lift our hearts spiritually to heaven, where Jesus Christ ... is at the right hand of his heavenly Father'.[57] Beyond

45 *RD*, 4, p. 562.

46 *RD*, 4, p. 575.

47 *RD*, 4, p. 575.

48 *RD*, 4, p. 567.

49 *RD*, 4, p. 567. Or again, the Supper is primarily 'a gift of God, a benefit of Christ, a means of communicating his grace', *RD*, 4, p. 567.

50 *RD*, 4, p. 567.

51 *RD*, 4, p. 568. This is a communion 'not just with the benefits but above all with the person of Christ, both in his human nature and in his divine nature', *RD*, 4, p. 576.

52 *RD*, 4, p. 567. Bavinck draws here on John 6, though he acknowledges that this passage need not be interpreted sacramentally. *Contra* Zwingli and *cum* Calvin, Bavinck posits that eating the body and blood of Christ is not exhausted by believing: believing will in due course become seeing.

53 Gleason posits that 'Bavinck's doctrine of the *unio mystica* is *the* central motif of his theology,' in 'Bavinck's Understanding', p. 1, but this claim would require rather more careful and holistic assessment which is not undertaken here.

54 *RD*, 4, p. 568.

55 *RD*, 4, p. 575.

56 *RD*, 4, p. 577.

57 *RD*, 4, p. 576.

this, Bavinck writes that this communion is 'so intimate and unbreakable that it can scarcely be expressed in words and can only be somewhat made clear by images'.[58]

At the same time, Bavinck is careful throughout to maintain that this communion with Christ is not unique to the Lord's Supper. He notes that the Lord's Supper bestows the forgiveness of sins 'with an eye to our weakness ... in another manner' than the Word, but without adding 'a single new grace'.[59] Indeed, he is clear that in the Supper we receive no more and no fewer benefits than in the Word.[60]

Third, Bavinck describes the benefits of the Lord's Supper. He writes that those who believingly accept the sign accept the whole Christ with all His benefits and receive communion with Him.[61] He also writes that the Supper strengthens the communion of the believer with Christ, as the believer is 'ever more intimately united in soul and body with the whole Christ'.[62] The corollary benefit is eternal life, alluded to—though note, Bavinck acknowledges, in a sacramental context—in John 6.[63] The final effect of the Lord's Supper is to act as a confession of faith before the world and to strengthen the community of believers in so doing.[64]

---

58 *RD*, 4, pp. 576-77. The mystical union is certainly not a pantheistic or substantialistic oneness: Christ and the believer remain distinct, *RD*, 4, pp. 576-77. Gleason quotes Bavinck writing of the 'incomprehensible union' between Christ and the believer, in 'Bavinck's Understanding', p. 21, quoting *Kennis en Leven*, p. 174.

59 *RD*, 4, p. 579.

60 *RD*, 4, p. 567, cf. *RD*, 4, p. 577: the sacrament 'only strengthens and confirms that which has been received by faith from the Word'.

61 *RD*, 4, p. 577.

62 *RD*, 4, p. 578.

63 *RD*, 4, p. 579-580. Bavinck again uses this passage as illustration.

64 *RD*, 4, p. 580. As such, it is an *activity*, involving the faith and love of the partakers, *RD*, 4, p. 473. Cf. Herman Bavinck, *The Sacrifice of Praise: Meditations before and after receiving access to the table of the Lord*, trans. by John Dolfin (Grand Rapids: Louis Kregel, 1922), p. 56: 'First we are to consider by ourselves our sins and the curse due unto us for them, to the end that we may abhor and humble ourselves before God. Secondly, we are to examine, our own hearts whether we do believe this faithful promise of God, that all our sins are forgiven us, only for the sake of the passion and death of Jesus Christ and that the perfect righteousness of Christ is imputed and freely given unto us as our own. Finally, we are to examine our own conscience whether we purpose henceforth to show true thankfulness to God in our whole life, and to walk uprightly before Him. What a significant confession we therefore make when we come to the Lord's Supper!'

This last benefit leads us to consider briefly again the communal dimension. Bavinck observes that in the Lord's Supper, by Christ's example *and* command, Christ and the church come together, thereby testifying to their spiritual communion.[65] The Supper serves 'as the confession of our faith before the world and conduces to the strengthening of the communion of believers among themselves'.[66]

With this presentation—so deeply resonant of Calvin—clearly in mind, we now turn to the eucharistic theology of Karl Barth.

A EUCHARISTIC THEOLOGY AFTER KARL BARTH

Work on Barth's theology of the Lord's Supper is rendered rather complex by two factors: first, that his sacramental theology changed markedly during his life, and second, that the *Church Dogmatics* remained unfinished at his death. In respect of the first factor, my presentation is concerned with Barth's final position on the eucharist, as it is implied in volume IV/4 of the *Church Dogmatics*.[67] In respect of the second factor, Barth himself wrote in the preface to his doctrine of baptism, published in 1967, that 'intelligent readers may deduce from [it] how I would finally have presented the doctrine of the Lord's Supper'.[68] In what follows, then, I hope to offer a plausible reconstruction of Barth's eucharistic doctrine, carefully drawing out the implications of his doctrine of baptism towards a possible understanding of the eucharist.

As an overarching rubric to Barth's sacramental theology, one could perhaps cite the following quotation: 'here, if anywhere, I have learned to regard a cautious and respectful "demythologising" as expedient and practicable'.[69] A fundamental indicator of this sacramental 'demythologi-

---

[65] *RD*, 4, p. 562.

[66] *RD*, 4, p. 580.

[67] My presentation of this position contrasts starkly with the presentation of Barth's theology given in Paul Molnar, *Karl Barth and the Theology of the Lord's Supper: A Systematic Investigation*, Issues in Systematic Theology, 1 (New York: Peter Lang, 1996). Molnar is perhaps rather more convicted about the continuity of the later volumes of the *Church Dogmatics* with the earlier volumes than I would be.

[68] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, 4 volumes in 13 parts (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956-1975), IV/4, p. 9. [Hereafter indicated by *CD* followed by volume/part number, and page number.]

[69] *CD*, IV/2, p. p. xi, translating 'eine respektvoll umsichtige "Entmythologisierung"', in Karl Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik*, 4 volumes in 13 parts (Fifth edition; Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1947-1967), IV/4, p. IX. Barth comments that 'in the 16th and 17th centuries appeal was made to Christology in explanation and confirmation of a sacramental concept already presupposed

sation' is Barth's rejection of the idea that baptism—or indeed the eucharist—is a 'sacrament' or a 'mystery'. For him there is only one sacrament or mystery—Jesus Christ.[70] Baptism, and by implication the eucharist, respond to that mystery without co-constituting it.[71]

Writing of baptism, then, Barth posits that it 'is a basic human Yes to God's grace and revelation, but ... not a means of grace and revelation'.[72] A corollary of this position is that the clear distinction that Barth posits between what he conceives as the 'two elements in the foundation of the Christian life':[73] between baptism with the Spirit and baptism with water. Barth writes:

> On the one side is the action of God in His address to man, and on the other, made possible and demanded thereby, the action of man in his turning towards God. On the one side is the Word and command of God expressed in His gift, on the other man's obedience of faith required of him and to be rendered by him as a recipient of the divine gift.[74]

This clear distinction of the objective and the subjective elements of baptism is basic to Barth's structural decision to locate baptism—and the eucharist—within the *ethical* section of his doctrine of reconciliation.

On this basis, then, we would anticipate that in analogous fashion Barth's doctrine of the Lord's Supper would deny that the Lord's Supper was a sacrament, or a means of grace or revelation, and would posit a clear distinction between the divine feeding of the Christian with the body and blood of Christ and the human response of eating the bread and wine of the Supper.

---

to be legitimate. The only thing was that no one took the opportunity to ask whether the presupposed concept taken over from the Roman Church was really legitimate,' *CD*, IV/2, p. 55.

70 *CD*, IV/1, p. 296, see also *CD*, IV/2, pp. 54-55.

71 *CD*, IV/4, p. 102. Barth writes further of baptism at *CD*, IV/4, p. 105: 'what concerns us is the consensus [of Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed] that baptism is to be defined, described and explained as a mystery. This consensus needs to be demythologised. We oppose it.' He continues: 'Our objection to the sacramental interpretation of baptism is directed against this conjuring away of the free man whom God liberates and summons to his own free and responsible action' [*CD*, IV/4, p. 106]. Moreover, Barth stresses that 'the community is not made the body of Christ or its members members of this body ... by baptism and the Lord's Supper (as so-called "sacraments")', *CD*, IV/1, p. 667.

72 *CD*, IV/4, p. 118, see also *CD*, IV/4, p. 34.

73 *CD*, IV/4, p. 41.

74 *CD*, IV/4, p. 41.

To explore this concept of the Lord's Supper in a little more detail, and, paralleling the form of Barth's treatment of baptism, I want to explore how this 'demythologising' might work out in practice across three dimensions of the human action of celebrating Lord's Supper: its basis, its goal, and its meaning.

The basis of the Lord's Supper

For Barth, the simplest answer to the question of the direct basis of the Lord's Supper is purely and simply the dominical command of Luke 22.19: 'Do this in remembrance of me'.[75] Yet to stop here would be to do an injustice to Scripture. The justification for the ongoing eating of bread and drinking of wine is not simply based in a historical command without precedent or context, but in an immediate historical event which is framed by a number of different contexts. The Passover meal was part of the broader *Sitz im Leben* of the earthly ministry and teaching and action of Jesus, which regularly included table-fellowship with sinners. The Passover meal was also a festival of the Jewish people which looked back upon and celebrated a divine act of redemption.[76] Eschatologically, one might consider the context of heavenly banquet of the saints, which was a central aspect of Jesus' own preaching; protologically, one might look to the original divine act of election, in which context God graciously elected to be for humanity in Jesus Christ. The dominical command to participate in the eucharist is thus not a new thing for the disciples, but an explication and proclamation of the whole history of Jesus Christ, determined in eternity.[77]

Having considered this broad basis of the Lord's Supper, we move to consider how Barth would perceive its goal.

The goal of the Lord's Supper

In common with baptism, Barth would affirm that the goal of the Lord's Supper is transcendent and not immanent. The sacrament therefore looks beyond itself: beyond the capacities of the participants, the power of their common action, the particular character and effect of the action as a meal

---

[75] Or, alternatively, 1 Corinthians 11:24-25. Cf. *CD*, IV/4, p. 50 and its reference to Matthew 28.19.

[76] Further on these two contexts, it is interesting to note that, in his last years, Barth spoke explicitly of his desire to root his doctrine of the Lord's Supper in '[die] Sündermahlzeiten und [das] Passamahl Jesu', cf. Eberhard Busch, *Meine Zeit mit Karl Barth* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2011), p. 443.

[77] Cf. *CD*, IV/4, p. 52. It is clear that each of these contexts noted above deserves more detailed and more precise exposition, for which there is no space here.

together, and the properties and possible effects of the bread and wine used.[78] Instead, the sacrament looks to the same goal as baptism: 'God's act of reconciliation in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, God's act of judgement and grace, of salvation and revelation'.[79] The cross and resurrection are at the heart of Barth's understanding of baptism and the Lord's Supper. While baptism has as its goal these events as the divine change which forms the basis of the Christian life,[80] the Lord's Supper has as its goal these events as the divine action which nourishes and sustains the Christian life.

Given its transcendent reference, however, the goal of the Lord's Supper does not lie within its administration: 'its genuine goal, its truly divine goal ... lies before it, beyond the participants and their action and means of action'.[81] The divine action which forms the basis of the Lord's Supper does not in any way mean that 'the work of the Mediator, or even a part of His work as the Executor of divine grace and revelation, is to be ascribed to faith or [the Lord's Supper] as the instruments, channels, or means which He uses'.[82] By contrast, Barth insists of Jesus Christ that 'He is He, and His work is His work, standing over against all Christian action, including Christian faith and Christian baptism', and hence including also the Christian Lord's Supper.[83]

In face of this event, what is left for Christians to do is a human action, which 'has to acknowledge the work of God, to bear witness to it, to confess it, to respond to it, to honour, praise and magnify it'.[84] Above all, in the eucharist, this human action is to be characterised by *thanksgiving* for the divine action. As this is done, God can take up human words in the Lord's Supper and give them power to bear testimony to God.[85] But the human work itself is obedient work, modest work, humble work; it is to renounce any attempt to portray itself as divine speech or action.[86] What, then, is the meaning of this human action?

---

78 Cf. *CD*, IV/4, p. 69.

79 Cf. *CD*, IV/4, p. 72. Indeed, this reconciliation, and the perfect fellowship of Jesus and Christian which it represents, is 'celebrated, adored, and proclaimed' in the Lord's Supper, *CD*, IV/3, p. 542.

80 *CD*, IV/4, p. 72.

81 Cf. *CD*, IV/4, p. 71.

82 Cf. *CD*, IV/4, p. 88, text changed from 'baptism'.

83 *CD*, IV/4, p. 88.

84 Cf. *CD*, IV/4, p. 72.

85 *CD*, IV/3, p. 737.

86 Cf. *CD*, IV/4, p. 73.

The meaning of the Lord's Supper

Barth cautions clearly that an estimation of the meaning of the Lord's Supper is 'not served but fatefully damaged if the sanctity of this action is sought ... in a supposedly immanent divine work'.[87] To avoid such docetic dangers, Barth renders exceptionally clear at this point that the Lord's Supper 'is not itself ... the bearer, means, or instrument of grace' and that it 'is not itself ... a mystery or sacrament'.[88] By contrast, the earlier explorations of the basis and goal of the Lord's Supper suggest that the meaning of the observance 'has to be understood ... as the ethical meaning of an action which, though it comes from Jesus Christ and hastens towards Him, is still genuinely human'.[89] The *human* action of meeting to break bread and drink wine together is a genuinely free action of obedience, of thanksgiving, and of hope. The *free* nature of the action of participating in the Lord's Supper indicates that in the event of reconciliation in Jesus Christ God calls the individual to free and responsible human action.[90]

At stake in the action of the eucharist is the perennially required reorientation of the Christian life from the path of sin to the path of obedience. Barth writes that 'The whole of the further progress on the way which they plainly enter here [in baptism] can consist only in further responses to the Word of God which they accepted here, and hence in mere repetitions and variations of the grasping and exercising of this hope'.[91] The Lord's Supper represents perhaps the paradigmatic example of this grasping and exercising of hope, as the community strides forward in the direc-

87 Cf. *CD*, IV/4, p. 101.

88 Cf. *CD*, IV/4, p. 102.

89 Cf. *CD*, IV/4, p. 107. There would be room for significant exegesis of relevant New Testament passages at this point, as Barth does in respect of baptism at *CD*, IV/4, p.p 111-27. His conclusion on the final page of that section is: 'That some of the passages could be taken sacramentally we do not deny, though it is no more than a possibility. We have not come across a single passage that has to be taken thus.' Again, as per Barth's practice on *CD*, IV/4, p. 128-30, there would be room here to relate the work of Barth on the Lord's Supper to that of Zwingli. Barth's concludes on the last page of that section that his own work attempts 'to understand Zwingli better than he understood himself or could make himself understood'.

90 See further on this Paul T. Nimmo, *Being in Action: The Theological Shape of Barth's Ethical Vision* (London: T&T Clark Continuum, 2007), passim.

91 *CD*, IV/4, p. 198. Or again: 'A whole life, longer or shorter, attaches itself to baptism. ... In its continuities and changes, in its possibilities and failures, in its expansions and restrictions, it must repeat the choice which was made in baptism. ... The future has not to be merely a being after baptism; it must be a being from baptism. It must be, not a daily *reditus ad baptistum* (Luther), but a daily *conversio* and *progressio baptizati*,' CD, IV/4, p. 202.

tion of the Lord who will come again and thereby declares the great acts of God to the world.[92] The Christian strives always to move obediently towards Jesus Christ: to grasp the promise of His sustaining power and to be thankful for it. The divine empowering and sustaining of the Christian community thus summons the community to its regular[93] human confirmation in the Lord's Supper.[94]

As the Christian comes to the communion table in obedience and thanksgiving, so there is exemplified truly *human* action, in which all pseudo-human masks fall away and in which God is justified.[95] The human renunciation, pledge, and thanksgiving involved are wholly and utterly related to the renunciation, pledge, and thanksgiving of Jesus Christ'.[96] This human action is subject to the divine judgement, of course, but it is also an action that appeals to the divine grace, and thus it is carried out in both humility and joy.[97] Hence though the action of breaking bread and drinking wine are, as human actions, 'so unassuming, equivocal and irrelevant', nevertheless they become and are 'eternally important and significant' in relation to the divine act of nurturing and sustaining the community.[98]

And the fundamental, and even *saving* aspect of its action is prayer:[99] prayer for the inadequacies of our attention and the poverty of our motives in participating in the Lord's Supper and prayer for the fractured and broken nature of our communities—social and ecclesial and ecclesiastical—in the concrete midst of which it is celebrated. As this prayer, the Lord's Supper finds its ultimate meaning of human action in conform-

92 Cf. *CD*, IV/4, p. 199.

93 Barth strongly advocated in his later years that the Lord's Supper be celebrated weekly in Reformed churches, see Busch, *Meine Zeit mit Karl Barth*, p. 443.

94 This empowering and sustaining is not some general phenomenon, but rather pertains to the very particular God of Jesus Christ and to the covenant of grace elected and enacted by Him. There is a clear corporate dimension in view here: as the community of the covenant makes its way forwards, it does so as it looks at Him and is aware of Him, in confidence in, and orientation to, the history of reconciliation between God and the world and thus in faith. Cf. *CD*, IV/4, p. 150.

95 Cf. *CD*, IV/4, p. 143: 'truly human action is evident ... when a man is reduced to justifying God'.

96 Cf. *CD*, IV/4, p. 158.

97 Cf. *CD*, IV/4, p. 144.

98 Cf. *CD*, IV/4, p. 135.

99 Cf. *CD*, IV/4, p. 208.

ity to God and thus, in this carefully qualified sense, a good and saving human work.[100]

BAVINCK AND BARTH ON THE UNIQUENESS OF THE EUCHARIST

Though there are many ways in which one might approach an analysis of the above material, I here use the heuristic lens of the uniqueness of the eucharist in the hope that this will shed light on some of the broader dynamics at stake in these two construals of the Lord's Supper.

Let us begin with Bavinck. On one level, the Supper is for him very unique indeed. As we have seen, it is a divine institution, commanded and exemplified by Jesus Christ. But over and above this, it is an action in which God is the principal agent: God has bound Godself to operate in a certain way in response to faithful performance of this sacrament. In this sense, it is truly a means of grace.

There is an interesting dynamic which results here in respect of understanding 'a means of grace'. On the one hand, Bavinck also describes the church itself as 'the great means of grace that Christ ... uses to gather his elect'; but is clear that the church is not a means of grace alongside Word and sacrament but only as it is entrusted with and in turn administers them.[101] On the other hand, Bavinck posits that not only the Word preached and the sacraments administered are means of grace, but also 'faith, conversion, the struggle against sin, and prayer'; yet he cautions that the latter are more appropriately referred to as 'fruits of grace' as they are 'subjective conditions' rather than 'objective institutions'.[102] This objectivity—and thus the uniqueness—of the sacraments as means of grace thus seems to depend on their tangibility and on their ecclesiality: they are visible, perceptible, and external, and they are institutions given over to the ministry of the gathered community.

At the same time, the sacraments achieve nothing different than the Word. In good Reformed fashion, there is no grace to be found here that is not available elsewhere, no uniqueness of content or result. Bavinck recognises that Christ can call 'either apart from or through the Word and

[100] Cf. *CD*, IV/4, p. 210.

[101] *RD*, 4, p. 447.

[102] *RD*, 4, p. 447. Indeed, he writes that if the Supper were only a memorial meal, it would no longer be a sacrament or a means of grace, and could only be—like prayer—'obliquely and indirectly' a means of grace, *RD*, 4, p. 567. Whether the words 'objective' and 'subjective' are entirely apt to characterise the distinction between the different types of 'means of grace' in view here is another question.

sacraments'.[103] But this means that Bavinck struggles—as Calvin did—to articulate on this level the necessity of the sacrament on the plane of grace. The sacrament offers grace, but Bavinck admits that 'the grace which is granted unto us in this sacrament is no other than that which constantly accompanies the Word of the Gospel and feeds us day by day'.[104] Bavinck does cite Calvin's position: that though the communion of Christ with the believer 'does not come into being first of all by the Supper, ... it is nevertheless granted "more distinctly" in the Lord's Supper and sealed and confirmed in the signs of bread and wine'.[105] He writes himself that the Supper 'bestows the same grace in another manner in order that we may firmly believe and be healed of all doubt'.[106] But these statements still fall short of asserting any sense in which the sacrament is unique.

The result is that Bavinck falls back—as Calvin perhaps ultimately does as well—upon the divine institution and command in terms of specifying the uniqueness of his doctrine of the Lord's Supper. This is the divine will: that this Supper be celebrated in the Christian community and that the Supper represent a normative means for God to offer the grace of an opening and a strengthening of communion with Christ.

When we turn to Barth, of course, we find a radically different position indicated. The question of 'means of grace' is not something which is in any way relevant. The Lord's Supper is not a divine action, but a human action, and as such stands alongside all other human actions without any ontologically or objectively distinguishing qualities. As an ethical action, the Supper can be parsed as an encounter of the community with the Word of God as Law and Gospel: there is a command laid upon the community by Jesus to perform this action and when it does this, the community responds in faith and obedience. In the particular case of the Lord's Supper, the command of repetition is most immediately based in the dominical institution at the Last Supper.

At the same time, it is clear that Barth would strive to say more than this. Even for him, the Lord's Supper is not simply another human action. This is an action with—on the human plane at least—a resonance and importance which goes beyond the immediate, limited context of divine command and obedience. The resonance is with the open and non-condemnatory table fellowship with sinners; the resonance is with the Passo-

[103] *RD*, 4, p. 448, though he stresses that the calling of Christ is always 'through the internal calling of the Spirit', *RD*, 4, p. 448.

[104] Bavinck, *The Sacrifice of Praise*, pp. 56-57.

[105] *RD*, 4, p. 557.

[106] *RD*, 4, p. 579. Sacraments, according to Bavinck, differ only in the external form, in the *manner* in which they offer the *same* Christ to us, *RD*, 4, p. 479.

ver feast of the Jewish people; the resonance is with the eschatological banquet feast of the Kingdom of God; the resonance is with the eternal and gracious divine act of election. The importance of the Supper is what it indicates: that in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, reconciliation has come between God and humanity; that the consequence is that we are commanded to leave behind the way of sin and to enter upon the way of righteousness; that we are called to respond with thankfulness and hope to the election revealed to us in the covenant of grace.

Is this a uniqueness of the Lord's Supper, then? It is certainly not a qualitative uniqueness: such resonances and consequences are not confined to the Lord's Supper, even if they are particularly aptly reflected in it. Perhaps the most we can say about any uniqueness of the eucharist resides in the particularity of the dominical command that is to be followed by His community.

For all their differences, then, there is at least the possibility that the way in which Bavinck and Barth conceive the *uniqueness* of the Lord's Supper is ultimately the same: its foundation in the instruction and example of Jesus. And this raises a broader question for Reformed theologies of the Lord's Supper: can they ever say more than this? In his desire to avoid Lutheran and Roman Catholic 'magical overvaluation' of the sacrament, Bavinck tries to chart a path that also avoids the 'mystical undervaluation' of the sacrament.[107] The question remains, however, whether that path is, or can be, anything other than a slippery slope.

Bavinck occasionally gives evidence of slipping not *down* that slope but of gliding *up* it into a rendering of the Lord's Supper that portrays it as indeed somehow qualitatively different from the Word.[108] Bavinck writes on one occasion that

> The Word already offers and grants Christ to us, but the Lord's Supper does this more clearly (*illustrius*). In the Lord's Supper the fellowship with Christ is established and increased. For—and this is what we read in the Genevan Catechism—even though Christ is given to us both in Baptism and in the Gospel, yet we do not receive him totally, but only partially.[109]

[107] The descriptors are Bavinck's, *RD*, 4, p. 444.

[108] This point is raised by Gleason, 'Bavinck's Understanding', p. 11, who refers to a 'tension' in the work of Bavinck here.

[109] Bavinck, *Kennis en Leven*, pp. 170-1, quoted by Gleason, 'Bavinck's Understanding', p. 11.

This position is unsustainable given what Bavinck writes elsewhere on the Lord's Supper,[110] but deserves two further brief comments. First, I would suggest, this gliding up the slope is counter to the historical trend of many Reformed theologies to move down the slope. If anything, it seems to me that more churches Reformed in theology have moved away such an elevated conception of uniqueness than towards it. Second, I would suggest, however, that this gliding up the slope finds echoes in many of the contemporary Reformed attempts to offer a revised Reformed theology of the Lord's Supper for ecumenical consumption. Whether this is a good thing or not must for now remain an unanswered question.

CONCLUSION

There are many other features of these views on the Lord's Supper—besides the important question of the uniqueness of the sacrament—which space precludes examining in greater detail here. I will very briefly mention but three which may merit further exploration in future work.

First, there is the issue of the divine freedom. For Bavinck, God has exercised the divine freedom to bind Godself to these created means of grace. It is clear for Bavinck that nothing compelled God to do so; rather this decision of God to do so is part of the covenant of grace. For Barth, no such binding of God—beyond the decision for incarnation—seems possible. God does not put either the being of God or the grace of God at our disposal, not even in the church.[111]

Second, there is the issue of the divine election. For Bavinck, the doctrine of election determines who will receive the sacrament of the Lord's Supper efficaciously: though many receive bread and wine, fewer receive

[110] And, at the same time, it is not clear that Bavinck's approval of Julius Müller's statement that 'the flesh of Christ [is] life-giving because from its substance life flows forth into our souls', *RD*, 4, p. 578, is in any way sustainable in the context of Bavinck's Reformed Christology, though in this inconsistency he is arguably in the fine company of Calvin.

[111] Barth writes that '[Jesus Christ's] own movement towards us, His reconciling being among us and with us and in us—where does the New Testament ever say anything to the contrary?—is always His movement, which we may expect and hope for with certainty and joy, but for which we have always to pray. It is His affair,' *CD*, IV/4, p. 88. There is a Christological echo here of Barth's pneumatologically grounded denial that the [divinely given] apostolicity of the church is tied to the [humanly mediated] laying on of hands in episcopal ordination: see *CD*, IV/1, pp. 714-16. For Barth, then, we can never make Jesus Christ move to us: we can only pray for this to happen.

Christ and His benefits.[112] For Barth, however, the doctrine of election structures his entire understanding of the dynamic of Gospel, Law, and covenant which undergirds his view of the Lord's Supper as a human response to the prevenient divine Word.

Third, there are the rather different ecclesiologies in view at this point. For Bavinck, 'God freely binds the distribution of his grace to the church of Christ'.[113] As such, the means of grace cannot be separated from the church as organism and institution.[114] For Barth, the reference to the community is also central, but it is framed always in terms of its gathering, upbuilding, and sending, rather to any particular dispensations that it may have over grace.

In exploring these divergences, one could look for a measure of explanation in analysing the different contexts within which Bavinck and Barth were writing. Yet even if this were to be done, there remains a profound theological distance between them in respect of each of these points. At this juncture, the only possible course of action would be turn back to the ongoing theological task of wrestling with Scripture. And both Bavinck and Barth would agree on that.

[112] Bavinck asserts that grace, according to Reformed theology, is 'the personal living Christ ... who imparts himself in the Supper as spiritual food to those who believe in Him', *RD*, 4, pp. 577-8.

[113] *RD*, 4, p. 447, though the rule is explicitly said to be 'for those who reached adulthood'.

[114] *RD*, 4, p. 448, nor from the person and work of Christ.

Reviews

Herman Bavinck: Pastor, Churchman, Statesman, and Theologian. By Ron Gleason. Philipsburg: P&R, 2010. ISBN 978-1-59638-080-6. 512 pp. £22.99.

In its access to Bavinck biographies, the anglophone world has historically had to make do with a selection of short works. Each edition of *Reformed Dogmatics* is introduced by a brief, helpful summary of Bavinck's life; Bristley's *Guide to the Writings of Herman Bavinck* also contains a useful, concise biography; various journal articles have given biographical overviews and so on. In the past, those who sought longer biographies had no choice but to learn Dutch and read the works of Valentijn Hepp (*Dr. Herman Bavinck*, 1921) and R.H. Bremmer (*Herman Bavinck en Zijn Tijdgenoten*, 1966).

Ron Gleason's English biography is to be praised for making a vast amount of information accessible to Bavinck's anglophone readership. While many of these historical tidbits will simply serve to delight a small band of über-Bavinckophiles, some of the information yielded is of considerable significance to the development of his theology: his teenage experience of less-than-compassionate theological conservatism in Kampen prior to his scandalous switch to the modernist Leiden Faculty is a prime example. In its most important points, however, this material presents little new that one could not already find in Hepp and Bremmer.

The critical distance between the biographer and his subject is, of course, crucial. Although Gleason is far from the outright hagiography of Henry Elias Dosker's 1922 biography (in which one learned that Bavinck's *de facto* perfection seemingly extended even to his physical attributes), it is hard to find instances where Gleason was open to asking hard questions. While Kuyper is given a firm, critical reading, Bavinck is spared this rigour. If Bavinck was ever at fault, it seems, it was only for minor indiscretions, and for these, he was merely a child of his time.

However, for those who admire Bavinck's commitment to Reformed orthodoxy in the face of his Leiden education, surely the most interesting questions centre on how his orthodoxy survived in the classrooms of Scholten, Kuenen and Rauwenhoff. This is the case particularly in the light of his well publicized crisis of faith while at Leiden (a crisis which, incidentally, receives no mention in this book). It is unfortunate that this period receives so little attention in Gleason's work. While he does ask 'Did Bavinck have to struggle with keeping his faith intact?' (p. 48), the answer (in summary) that, 'he survived because his parents taught him to believe the Bible, he went to a good church and knew his Catechism'

underplays the gravity of Bavinck's situation at this time. Although his upbringing, local church involvement and confessional commitments played an enormous part in his theological interactions with the Leiden school, the lack of explanation as to *how* these factors were used to engage with Scholten *et al.* represents a missed opportunity for Reformed theologians to examine one of their own entering (as Gleason terms it) 'the Lion's Den' and emerging with his orthodoxy intact.

It is written in a somewhat folksy style. As such, in places it is beset by inelegance of language and inaccurate choice of wording. Within the genre of intellectual biography, the biographer also makes the rather unusual choice to include his own jokes. It is claimed, for example, that amongst the initial expenses in Bavinck's move into the pastorate were monies for furniture, books and bottles of gin left by the previous (alcoholic) minister (p. 76—Gleason alerts the reader in a footnote: 'This is true, except for the gin part. I just couldn't resist.') Telling jokes in written form is always a risky venture, and one suspects that in this instance the comedic effect is less than successful.

One cannot help but read this biography as written for an American market. Dutch distinctives are consistently explained with reference to their American equivalents, and the regular excursions into various current ecclesiastical issues are also (one assumes) of primary interest to American, rather than European, readers.

Those interested in Bavinck's theology and life should read Gleason's work. It offers various important insights into a fascinating set of life circumstances which, in turn, produced a remarkable theologian. However, while this is a worthwhile effort, one hesitates to say that this is the definitive Bavinck biography.

For those who have read *Reformed Dogmatics* and wish to find a good introduction to Bavinck's life, this book is useful. Biography is, however, a subjective genre: the fact that Bavinck had two *primary* Dutch biographers (whose accounts differ on many significant points), between whom Gleason's biography moves, is a case in point. The presence of a longer English language biography does not free the most serious Bavinck-readers from their obligation to read the likes of Hepp and Bremmer for themselves. *Ad fontes!*

James Eglinton, Theologische Universiteit Kampen, Broederweg

Christ and Caesar: The Gospel and the Roman Empire in the Writings of Paul and Luke. By Seyoon Kim. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008. ISBN 978-0-8028-6008-8. 228 pp. £16.99.

Seyoon Kim's work *Christ and Caesar* is a timely contribution to the discussion of the impact of imperial Rome on New Testament authors' thought. Kim argues that neither Paul nor Luke actively encouraged political resistance to imperial ideology or cult. However, he does agree that Christians today in liberal democratic countries might take a more active political role. The book's first section is comprised of five chapters and focuses on Pauline material. After surveying the arguments that Paul writes with an anti-imperial focus, Kim addresses the assumptions and methodological weaknesses of this reading. The second section launches into a similar critique of the Luke/Acts material. Kim concludes by pointing to the Revelation of John as an example of direct anti-imperial speech.

Kim argues that Paul's imminent eschatology and political realism charted his course; Paul promotes a salvation that is 'transhistorical and transcendental' (p. 67). Kim finds only a few general anti-imperial claims in Paul's works (Phil 3:20-21; 1 Thess 5:1-11; 1 Cor 6:1). Overall, Paul does not address directly the imperial cult, the Roman military machine, or the Empire's exploitation or despotism, nor does Paul imagine the church replacing the Roman Empire. In most cases, Kim does justice to the arguments of his interlocutors' (among whom exists diversity of opinion). In his analysis of N. T. Wright's position on Paul's argument in Philippians, however, Kim perhaps reads too much into Wright's claims. Specifically, he suggests that Wright sees Paul establishing revolutionary cells throughout the Roman Empire. Although Wright does use the term 'cell' in speaking of the local churches, he explains them as groups that model Christian values and stand fast in the face of persecution.

Kim contends that nowhere in Luke does Jesus encourage specific acts or attitudes of direct resistance to Rome. He accepts that Luke both creates an *inclusio* between Luke 2:1-14 and Acts 28:30-31 that highlights the backdrop of oppressive Roman rule, and that in several places he also makes implicit contrasts between Caesar's rule and Christ's reign (Lk 4:18-19; 19:41-44; 21:20-24; Acts 10:36-43). Yet Kim maintains that Jesus' redemption was not deliverance from Roman power; instead, he asserts that Christ's salvation delivers individuals from the realm of Satan through the forgiveness of their sins. Jesus' healings are symbolic of the eschatological promise of God's kingdom, not a direct assault against imperial Rome.

Kim points to the strong anti-imperial stance of Revelation as an example of a New Testament author's resistance to the demands of the imperial cult. He concludes that the various approaches to the imperial cult seen in the New Testament provide different models for today's churches. For example, because many Christians at present do not hold to the imminent *parousia* and are not small minorities in their countries, these new circumstances might allow for a more active role in the political arena. He suggests that Christians can 'help materialize the redemption of the Kingdom of God politically as well as in other spheres of existence' (p. 201). The church must recognize the provisional nature of its political engagement, and not reduce salvation to a this-world-only reality.

Kim is well read in the field and interacts with current major theories, including, for example, those of Karl Donfried, Neal Elliott, Richard Horsley, and N. T. Wright. Kim anticipates the reader's questions and methodically lays out his arguments with sufficient detail. Those interested in the questions, methodologies, and assumptions surrounding the debate over the New Testament's engagement with the imperial cult and the Roman Empire will greatly benefit from Kim's *Christ and Caesar.*

Lynn H. Cohick, Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL USA

Martin Luther's Understanding of God's Two Kingdoms: A Response to the Challenge of Skepticism. By William J. Wright. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010. ISBN 978-0-8010-3884-6. 208 pp. £14.99.

William Wright, a careful and thorough historian, offers in this work a historically situated account of Luther's doctrine of God's two kingdoms that self-consciously stands in contrast to two particular theological proposals on offer. It is, in other words, a work that operates in the mode of *response.*

In the first place, Wright responds to heirs of John Dillenberger who argued that 'Luther did not bother to suggest even the minimal lines for a new philosophical view of the world' (p. 14). *Pace* Dillenberger, Wright contends that the doctrine of the two kingdoms is not only foundational for the whole of Luther's theology but also comes into being due to a deep struggle for *certitude* within the context of late medieval humanism. And this philosophically contextualized Luther is precisely what Wright gives us, most directly in chapters 2 and 3. Wright contends that the 'threat to certainty' posed by the humanists (particularly in Erfurt) can be bifurcated into two primary streams: the first originating with Valla, searching for 'an original dynamism' in the texts of Scripture, and emphasizing appeals to the heart in religious matters; the second being a uniquely Florentine brand of Neo-Platonic thought seeking to 'synthesize classical and Chris-

tian ideas'. Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms, Wright argues, was born within the creative tension of these two patterns of thought. Using Valla's new rhetorical epistemology, Wright tells us, 'Luther developed what amounted to a new understanding of reality for the Christian in his time' (p. 80). The concept of God's two kingdoms, therefore, cannot be reduced to any singular feature of Luther's thought; it must be understood as 'his basic premise about the nature of reality' (p. 114).

Wright's work also stands squarely against those who have understood the doctrine of the two kingdoms persistently and inaccurately as a *political* doctrine—as a subset of Luther's social ethics—rather than the philosophical underpinning of his entire theological scheme. Just how this foundational theme of Luther has become politicized is therefore the subject of the first chapter, wherein Wright gives a detailed and magisterial account of the evolution of Luther's original thought into a 'spurious' political doctrine. Of note in this account is the discussion Wright offers of early twentieth century political debates surrounding Luther, particularly the pre-war debates between Paul Althaus and Karl Barth. Unsurprisingly, the narrative surrounding this political reading of Luther centres first and foremost on Troeltsch and Weber at the turn of the century and the rarely contested status of Niebuhr's reading of Luther in mid-century America. Later, chapter 4 is a reading of various Luther texts that seeks to demonstrate how, in fact, the doctrine of the two kingdoms is present in a variety of 'diverse contexts' within Luther's corpus.

In the final analysis, there is much in Wright's work on this oft-discussed aspect of Luther's theology: most notably the historical eye with which Wright approaches the topic and Wright's demonstrated facility with a wide range of debates outside of the anglophone world. But Wright's contribution extends beyond the careful and learned account that it undeniably is; moral theologians, church leaders, reformation historians, and laypersons alike can all utilize Wright's work with great profit.

Philip A. Lorish, University of Oxford

Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought. By David VanDrunen. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009. ISBN 978-0-8028-6443-7. 512 pp. £23.99.

David VanDrunen seeks to reclaim the doctrines of natural law and the two kingdoms as the particular legacy of Reformed social and political thought against neo-Calvinists who see these as inimical to the tradition. While often a valuable gadfly to historical studies, such polemical histories do run the risk of forcing the history onto a Procrustean bed. Unfortunately, such seems the case here.

VanDrunen claims that not only were the doctrines of natural law and of the two kingdoms deeply embedded in the Reformed tradition from the beginning, but the Reformed can also take credit for integrating them through the larger theological framework of the two covenants (of grace and of works) and the two mediatorships of Christ. According to this synthesis, human existence is divided into two kingdoms, the civil and the spiritual, corresponding to Christ's mediatorships over creation and over redemption, respectively. As such, these two kingdoms direct distinct dimensions of our lives and function according to fundamentally different and seemingly incompatible principles. The civil kingdom, administered by the Son as Creator according to natural law without need of special revelation, is only for the provision for humanity's physical, cultural, and social needs; it serves no eschatological or particularly Christian goal, and thus cannot and should not be 'Christianized'. The spiritual kingdom, ruled by Christ as Redeemer according to Scripture alone, concerns human redemption from sin and attainment of eternal life; pertaining mostly to things invisible and eternal, it is thus largely irrelevant to temporary civil communities. The dualism of ends and standards means that the two kingdoms are separate and that neither realm has the competence to interfere with the other.

This looks suspiciously like modern liberalism, and seems hard to square with the blurring of religious and civil matters that we find in Calvin's Geneva or the Puritans. But VanDrunen is not so much interested in past Reformed political practice (which he is forced to admit was 'inconsistent' and compromised) but in the revolutionary significance of their doctrines, which it took the Reformed centuries to implement. Indeed, it was not until the Enlightenment-assisted rejection of Christendom around the time of the American Revolution that VanDrunen sees the Reformed beginning to properly act out the implications of their theory. However, even up through the current century, VanDrunen seeks in vain to find a theologian unalloyed with the inconsistency of allowing that there might still be *some* spiritual dimension to civil affairs that the Church might feel called upon to address. The supposed legacy of Calvin thus remains tantalizingly out of reach throughout this narrative.

Every finite theology is plagued with inconsistency. But when the same inconsistencies arise over and over it raises the question whether the problem lies with the sources or with the interpretive grid. Here, the latter seems likely. Chapter after chapter, VanDrunen begins with a fairly abstract account of the relevant theological paradigms and only then turns to consider how each theologian applied it to his conception of culture and politics. When faced with what he perceives as a disconnect, VanDrunen repeatedly sides with the ideas, as the true spirit of Reformed

social thought, and marginalizes the practice as an unimportant husk that the tradition overcame in time. But surely this is not the fidelity the historian owes to his subject.

As it is, these doctrines as VanDrunen presents them are far from clear. VanDrunen gives us only the barest definitions of 'natural law' and 'the two kingdoms' at the outset, and they become only more vague. With the second term, VanDrunen seems at least to recognize the ambiguity, though without ever properly resolving it. For instance, he is keen to equate the civil kingdom more or less with the state, with political life, and yet he seems to also want to subsume under this heading all 'cultural' dimensions to human life, indeed, everything that pertains to humanity as created. The spiritual kingdom, on the other hand, often seems to be something of an invisible kingdom, and yet it is also equated with the visible church. But where does something like marriage—intended to manifest the relationship of Christ and the Church—fit into this schema? Where, indeed, is the domain for Christian holiness and ethics, if so much of human life is classified as 'civil' matters that should not be 'Christianized'?

With 'natural law,' the terminological vagueness is even more frustrating, because VanDrunen does not even seem aware of it. He generally appears content merely to demonstrate that a theologian appealed to *something* called natural law, or even just appealed to 'extra-Biblical sources,' without ever resolving some of the thornier questions that any doctrine of natural law must address: just how much epistemological authority does natural law carry, versus special revelation? How detailed are the prescriptions of natural law? How knowable is natural law by fallen humanity? etc.

Most troublesome, though, is the junction between these two doctrines, a point upon which VanDrunen lays particular stress as the chief contribution of the Reformed. As mentioned above, VanDrunen suggests that natural law, the common possession of believers and unbelievers, governs life in the civil kingdom, while Scripture alone governs the spiritual kingdom. Yet such a sharp separation of these two standards is strikingly absent from his sources. While they certainly support the contention that natural law was a resource for life in the civil kingdom, they do not seem to say that it was even the most authoritative resource, much less the *only* resource. For the early Reformed, Scripture clearly remains the chief authority in political theology, a far cry from the liberal separation of church and state (to which VanDrunen's narrative leads us). Moreover, 'natural law' was simply not separable from Scripture; indeed, it was summarized authoritatively in the Decalogue. Thus it was that civil authorities, governing by the *natural law*, could prosecute idolatry.

But, despite these historical difficulties, does VanDrunen offer us a compelling theological paradigm to employ today? Here too several obstacles appear.

First, we might ask what VanDrunen means when he tells us that a key distinction between the spiritual and civil kingdoms for the Reformed is the 'redemptive character' of the first and the 'non-redemptive character' of the second (p. 73). To say that the civil kingdom is 'not redemptive' for him appears to mean that it is 'not redeemed'; it is the realm of creation, *not* redemption, and the civil kingdom merely 'preserves the creation order' (p. 312). But isn't the creation order fallen and in need of redemption (Rom 8:18-23)? VanDrunen doesn't appear to think so, and indeed repeatedly criticizes the use of a 'creation-fall-redemption motif,' since it falsely attributes eschatological significance to the civil kingdom. Rather, any eschatological destiny for creation was lost at the Fall, and our 'eschatological destiny—the spiritual kingdom of Christ—is reserved in heaven for believers, and present participation in this kingdom occurs only *in the (visible) church*' (p. 383).

Christ thus brings a new creation not in the sense of a *renewed* creation (as in Rom 8:18-23), but in the sense of *ex nihilo*, a spiritual creation. Redemption does not, it appears, restore this world, but takes us away from it, and our eschatological destiny appears to ultimately entail the abandonment of creation. Calvin is thus applauded when he 'lifts his readers' eyes away from present earthly existence toward a future, heavenly life' since 'everything which is earthly, and of the world, is temporary, and soon fades away' (p. 77). What thus begins in VanDrunen as an apparent affirmation of the integrity of creation and the natural law that governs it ends in a renunciation of a creation that, not to be redeemed, is ignored by the 'spiritual kingdom' of the church.

This gulf between creation and redemption has, for VanDrunen, a Christological root: the doctrine of the dual mediation of Christ, which he considers a cornerstone of Reformed social theory. VanDrunen connects this doctrine with the so-called *extra Calvinisticum*, the notion that when the Son became incarnate, his divine nature was not confined to his humanity, but continued to exist even outside of his flesh, upholding the universe even while he was stretched on the cross. This doctrine means, as VanDrunen approvingly quotes John Bolt, that 'as mediator, the divine Logos is not limited to his incarnate form even after the incarnation. He was mediator of creation prior to his incarnation and as mediator continues to sustain creation independent of his mediatorial work as reconciler of creation in the incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus of Nazareth' (p. 75).

This surely introduces deep tension into the heart of the Christian creed. As long as one merely draws a heuristic distinction between Christ's rule over creation and his rule over his church, all is well. But when one asserts that the two kingdoms he rules are essentially unrelated and even incompatible, then the unity of Christ's work, and thus of his person, begins to fragment. We are told 'that the Son of God rules the temporal kingdom as an eternal member of the Divine Trinity but does not rule it in his capacity as the incarnate mediator/redeemer' (p. 181) and the converse also seems to be claimed. So rigid is this distinction that VanDrunen argues that we cannot rightly attribute the name 'Christ' to the Son as mediator over creation—'Christ' is mediator over the church, but only 'the Son' is mediator over the world (pp. 314-15). Such language almost implies a duality of persons within the second person of the Trinity; and unquestionably, it puts a sharp rift between the immanent and economic Trinity. The Scripture doesn't seem to share VanDrunen's hard bifurcation of the Son: 1 Corinthians 15, for example, describes the whole creation being put under the feet of the incarnate and resurrected *Jesus*.

Despite inviting such serious concerns, VanDrunen's study is not without merit. Contra many forms of contemporary neo-Calvinism, VanDrunen clearly establishes that natural law theory is an integral part of the Reformed tradition. Moreover, he suggests in the Introduction that various contemporary movements—Radical Orthodoxy, Hauerwasianism, and the Emergent Church—have been much more consistent than neo-Calvinism. Deeming the pacifism of these movements unacceptable, he urges neo-Calvinists to resolve their inconsistency in his two-kingdoms direction, happily affirming the other-worldly peacefulness of the church *and* the this-worldly violence of the state. Unfortunately for VanDrunen, however, few readers are likely to prefer his solution.

W. Bradford Littlejohn, University of Edinburgh

Christian Attitudes to War, Peace and Revolution. By John Howard Yoder; edited by Theodore J. Koontz and Andy Alexis-Baker. Grand Rapids: Brazos 2009. ISBN 978-1-58743-231-6. 480 pp. £14.99.

The War of the Lamb: The Ethics of Nonviolence and Peacemaking. By John Howard Yoder; edited by Glen Stassen, Mark Thiessen Nation, and Matt Hamsher. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009. ISBN 978-1-58743-260-6. 240 pp. £15.99.

The posthumous publication of these two books significantly deepens our understanding of the nuances of John Howard Yoder's views regarding both peace and war, both 'nonviolence' and 'violence'. (The scare quotes

denote that these two pairs are not, for Yoder, semantic equivalents.) Each book offers acute insight into the nature, interrelations, and distinctions of these realities from one of 20th century theology's best social ethicists. While it would be too artificial to divide these books into two genres or types of analysis, it is fair to say that *War of the Lamb* (hereafter *TWL*) foregrounds the 'systematic' theological task of conceptually clarifying a given topic by discussing scripture, doctrine, and other texts or events in relation to the gospel of Jesus Christ, whereas *Christian Attitudes* (*CAWP*) has a more explicitly descriptive-historical approach.

The genre of these texts is, of course, not unrelated to their originating contexts. *TWL* is comprised of various essays that materially revolve around a singular (set of) concern(s), and its structure largely follows Yoder's own plan for publication. *CAWP*, however, emerged out of a survey course in historical theology that Yoder taught from 1966-97, first at the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary and later at the University of Notre Dame. Yoder's lectures were transcribed in the early '70s, and the present volume of *CAWP* is based upon a manuscript Yoder last redacted in 1983. Despite slight (and seemingly well-informed) changes in content, which are dutifully recounted in the editors' prefaces, the most substantive revision to either text is *CAWP's* narrowing by nearly 40% of its manuscript length—an editorial labour that most readers of the still-400 page work will greatly appreciate. Yoder organized the course from which *CAWP* derives as a critical survey of Christian ethical thinking about non/violence, one carried out in dialogue with English church historian Roland Bainton's classic *Christian Attitudes to War and Peace*—the increasing unavailability of which was one reason Yoder expanded and considered publishing his own manuscript (see p. 10).

Yoder believed 'objectivity' in historical study to be a disciplinary goal rather than a presupposition, and was equally aware that a 'history of ideas' can only capture in part the reality under investigation. Thus the modest aim of *CAWP* is simply to present what Yoder took to be the most serious moral positions concerning the legitimacy of political violence. The emphasis falls less on the statistics of Christian (non-)involvement in military proceedings than on the different *logics* of state-violence one finds in the church's intellectual tradition—their theological coherence or conflict with one another and with the gospel. The resulting chronology is a narrative that hinges upon the foundational alternatives of either a kind of 'just war' or 'pacifist' position—with the caveat that both are judged to be and analytically explored as decisively *theological* commitments.

After an opening chapter clarifying his 'Typology of the Ethics of War', Yoder spends roughly the first third of *CAWP* evaluating the mean-

ing of the church's shift from the baseline of a nonviolence critical of empire to an increasing theological alliance with 'Constantinianism'. It is not overstatement to say that this set of binaries—a kind of 'pacifism' tied to early Christian anti-imperialism, coupled with an emerging 'just war' rationale undergirding Christendom—besets the history of *CAWP* all the way through the Protestant reformations and into the various modern movements and impulses Yoder treats. Readers must judge for themselves their sympathy with or criticism of this approach, but for this reader it was especially illuminating to see just how much insight into and leverage against the whole range of *modern* sentiments about war and peace Yoder's narrative is able to provide. Even as an exercise in 'descriptive' historical theology, the constructive theological payoff is clear especially in the last third of the book, as Yoder brings his analysis to bear upon those positions—e.g., the Niebuhrian 'realist' legacy, democratic humanism, concern for political 'liberation' and 'revolution'—that remain live options for so many today.

TWL nicely complements the survey undertaken in *CAWP*, offering a host of essays that argue in various ways for a theological commitment to, as the subtitle has it, an 'ethics of nonviolence and peacemaking'. The second of the book's three sections—'The Dialogue with Just War: A Case for Mutual Learning'—convincingly displays many of the intellectual moves crucial to understanding the pacifist/just-war alternative driving *CAWP*. This 'dialogue' is couched between two sets of essays that demonstrate both the wide range of conceptual resources from which Yoder's theology of peace is derived and its relevance to a variety of practical concerns. Just like the 'historical' work of *CAWP*, each section's essays are thoroughly theological, yet the first most closely approximates the tenor and rationale of Yoder's most popular published works (e.g., *The Politics of Jesus*). While most chapters interweave the various modes of theological reasoning, essays such as 'A Theological Critique of Violence', 'Creation, Covenant, and Conflict Resolution', and 'Politics: Liberating Images of Christ' foreground doctrinal considerations; 'Gospel Renewal and the Roots of Nonviolence' is a fascinating analysis of what '*radical* reformation' has meant throughout Christian history; and 'From the Wars of Joshua to Jewish Pacifism' is an excellent overview of what is perhaps Yoder's most original contribution to biblical studies, which involves the question of the increasing normativity of prophetic (specifically Jeremianic) 'exile'—as opposed to imperial ('Davidic') stability—as the most fitting witness of God's people to God's liberating grace. It is one of the great strengths of *TWL* that readers are able to see Yoder's skills as dogmatician, biblicist, historian, and interdisciplinarian, all deployed in fine-grained analysis of

the theological roots and historical possibilities of Christian peacemaking.

A final word on what is perhaps the most central theme of *TWL*. As Glen Stassen notes in his introduction, *TWL* convincingly overturns one dominant caricature of Yoder's thought—namely, that it opposes believers 'faithfulness' to Christ and 'effective' involvement in the secular world morally prioritizing the former at the expense of the latter. That stereotype, whose predominance in mainstream Christianity finds grounding in Troeltsch's 'sect'-type and later in Niebuhrian 'realism', is with respect to Yoder's own work at least superficially entertainable, since there are instances where Yoder's church-world dichotomy appears to play off such a contrast. But the previously attentive Yoder-reader will have already known what this volume now makes especially clear: Yoder's theology is concerned with resisting *not* the identification of (Christian) discipleship with (secular) social involvement, but rather a certain way of construing the biblical and theological foundations of discipleship that in fact severs fidelity to Christ and neighbour, precisely by isolating these foundations from a morally normative account of 'the way things are' in human history and society. Only once a fundamental opposition between love and justice—between Christ's call to neighbour-love and proper attention to material, socio-political needs—takes root does the logic of 'effectiveness' take on a life of its own, functioning as an authoritative criterion in its own given sphere. It is precisely this 'givenness' that Yoder's work queried, and these two books together serve as excellent introductions to the precedence in history, scripture and Christian tradition for Yoder's lifelong presumption against socially effective violence.

Scott Prather, University of Aberdeen

Powers and Practices: Engaging the Work of John Howard Yoder. Edited by Jeremy M. Bergen and Anthony G. Siegrist. Scottdale: Herald Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-8361-9447-0. v + 187 pp. £16.00.

A mere decade after his death, the American Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder's influence is growing rapidly. This collection of ten essays offers an overview of how young scholars are receiving and transforming Yoder's legacy. Most of the essays are from a broadly Anabaptist perspective, but all are engaged with the ecumenical and biblical concerns that so occupied Yoder. The reflections on violence, politics, gender, theological method, and doctrinal issues will be of interest to a variety of evangelical readers.

Glen Stassen, a former friend and colleague of Yoder's, provides a foreword that acts as a sort of blessing of the new generation's quest to extend

Yoder's thought into new areas. Chris Huebner's introductory chapter concurs with Stassen, albeit reflecting more on the necessarily critical dimensions of reception. Though largely appreciative of Yoder's theology and ethics, these essays are unflinchingly critical of his shortcomings. Some of those shortcomings concern Yoder's use of scripture in developing a constructive theological program.

Nekeisha Alexis-Baker draws on womanist theology to provide a defence and corrective of Yoder's reading of the household codes as 'revolutionary subordination'. Philip Stoltzfus and John Nugent explore the relative merits of Yoder's treatment of Jesus' nonviolence in relation to other parts of the Bible, especially holy war passages. Whereas Stoltzfus calls for an expanded doctrine of a nonviolent God, Nugent is concerned to show the limited validity of a Christocentric interpretation of the Old Testament.

Paul Martens also takes issue with Yoder's relation of the testaments, but his essay is decidedly more negative than the others. In a reversal of the standard critique of Yoder as a sectarian, Martens sees Yoder's late efforts to identify Jeremiah as a forerunner of Jesus as the abandonment of Christian particularity. Far from cultural withdrawal, Martens depicts Yoder as urging an assimilative Social Gospel.

The rest of the essays are more positive about Yoder's refusal of sectarianism, even as they challenge his followers to strengthen the case for socio-political participation. Branson Parler contends that Yoder's Christocentric hermeneutic of the creation narratives can support an engaged critique of culture and the State. Parler's essay will be of special interest to readers of this journal, as it argues for a rapprochement between Anabaptist and Reformed theologies of creation. Similarly, Richard Bourne fills out Yoder's eschatological and exilic account of Christian witness to the state with a Barthian doctrine of election; such a doctrine, according to Bourne, heightens the missiological impact of Yoder's understanding of the voluntary, nonviolent church. Andy Alexis-Baker offers a systematic rebuttal of advocates of 'just policing' who enlist Yoder in their cause. A proper Yoderian response to global disorder finds more creative resources in the church. Finally, Paul Heidebrecht responds to Yoder's sharp contrast between social engineering and doxological participation in God's transformation of the society. Heidebrecht rehabilitates the role of the engineer, demonstrating its compatibility with doxology.

In the remaining essay, Andrew Kaethler raises questions about Yoder's caricature of Aquinas and Protestant scholasticism—Yoder's own insistence on dialogical patience would urge a more careful, irenic portrayal. This methodological point indicates the larger tension in Yoder's work witnessed to by this collection of essays, that between potential and ful-

filment. Yoder stands at the forefront of twentieth-century theologians who attempted to construct a biblical, Christ-centred ethic. These essays sketch directions and raise questions for a new century of construction.

Jamie Pitts, University of Edinburgh

The Politics of Discipleship: Becoming Post-material Citizens. By Graham Ward. London: SCM, 2009. ISBN 978-0-3340-4350-8. 304 pp. £25.00

Graham Ward issues a challenge at the outset of his new book. He says his is not a polite book but one that invites and encourages contestation. I shall endeavour to take up this challenge. But I want to preface my remarks by saying how much I appreciated this book and the masterful way in which it traverses the intersection between theology, social theory, and political thought while displaying a deep passion for the Christian faith and the question of how to respond to the dilemmas and difficulties of the contemporary context. I should also say that I am in wholehearted sympathy with the intention of the book, and while my position may differ from Ward's on specific points and on the theological rationales I might deploy, there is a synchronicity and common aim shared across our respective approaches. What I propose here should be read as an attempt to extend rather than oppose what Ward argues for.

A constructive way to read this book is as a theological response to Carl Schmitt and both his antecedents (notably, Hobbes and Spinoza) and his contemporary interlocutors from Johan Baptist Metz to Georgio Agamben and the increasing array of post-modern critical thinkers who have engaged with Schmitt's work. As a constructive theological answer to the challenge Schmitt's work poses the book helps diagnose the nihilism at the heart of much contemporary culture and social theory. However, in responding to Schmitt the book is somewhat enthralled by the darkness of modernity and, while Ward is seeking a way beyond Schmitt, what he proposes seems locked in a reaction largely determined by modernity's critics and outriders. So, for example, the first three chapters spell out a declension narrative of depoliticisation in which contemporary politics is a realm without hope or substance. Within the account of the conditions of political life Ward develops it is impossible to make sense of such things as the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, or other such moments of democratic insurgency. In turn, the book's proposals are more defined by what they are against than what they are for.

What is strange for a book bearing this title and which gives an account of what Christian action entails is the absence of any systematic engagement with either resources within the tradition of Christian political thought that set out accounts of what faithful political witness

involves; or with strands of modern political theory that attempt to give accounts of what constructive public action for the common good might entail; or with any actual forms of contemporary Christian political witness. One can read this book and have an excellent overview of various debates about metaphysics, enjoy fascinating and insightful ruminations on such cultural phenomena as Harry Potter and *American Psycho*, and be edified by profound meditations on Scripture, but still have little idea of what in practice a politics of discipleship might involve or demand. Given the stated aim at the outset of the book is not just to interpret the world but to change it and the emphasis throughout on the importance of embodiment and the threat of dehumanization and dematerialisation, this is a serious flaw.

Ward does not want to tell people how to vote but there is much to say before one gets to that point. We can contrast Ward here with Jacques Maritain's account of Christian democracy, Niebuhr's Christian Realism, John Howard Yoder's advocacy of pacifism, Oliver O'Donovan's upholding Christian liberalism and natural rights over and against their apostate modern corruptions, or even the hints we have of John Milbank's 'blue socialist' theo-political vision. In each of these cases we have a sense of what the thinker is for and by what criteria one might evaluate practice. It is difficult to discern what constructive vision Ward is articulating by which we might guide the pilgrim's journey through our contemporary Babylon.

As Ward himself says: 'To avoid becoming too abstract, too amorphous, too liquid, we need to return to specifics' (p. 258). But where might we find these specifics? Moreover, Ward is exactly right: 'If we cannot act politically, then we cannot counter the enemies either of dehumanization or of dematerialization?' (p. 262). But if, as Ward contends, 'to act is fundamental to being political' (p. 261) what constitutes constructive forms of Christian political action and how might we account for them? Ward is too nervous about action, too *polite* perhaps, to suggest what should be done.

I detect the disabling stasis in an over-emphasis on the apocalyptic in Scripture combined with a heavy investment with post-modern tools of criticism. As a way of unveiling 'what is the case' or 'what is really going on' under the shimmering surfaces of the post-modern city and beyond the all-enveloping clamour of the entertainment industry such a combination is a powerful and prophetic mode of description. Yet, while this combination of the apocalyptic and the post-modern might be very revealing, it leaves us with little scope for concrete public action and long-term, mutually responsible forms of association (and the building of the kinds of institutions that can sustain them) that are central for any real

Christian politics. Moreover, the apocalyptic is not the only genre in the Bible. Indeed, it is used rather sparingly in Scripture. To emphasize the Bible's apocalyptic voice as against its other modes of address is to do a disservice to the Canon.

On Ward's account (and here his work is at the forefront of an increasingly common move by those engaging in political theology), the combination of the apocalyptic and the post-modern limits faithful politics to modes of cultural production. But such a move is too abstracted and, I would suggest, is itself a form of depoliticisation because it reduces the political into the aesthetic thereby leaving the political utterly vulnerable to dissolution through the commodification of dissent. Without risking any concrete prescriptions we do not end up with bodies 'full of meaning' but anemic and lifeless bodies. Beyond description we need reception, both of the gifts our neighbours have to give us and, ultimately, of the gift of God's presence.

Luke Bretherton, King's College London

The Theological Origins of Modernity. By Michael Allen Gillespie. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-2262-9346-2. 400 pp. £15.50.

Michael Gillespie argues that certain theological ideas, long since masked and transformed into non-theological guise, undergird contemporary cultural conflicts between East and West. To truly understand these conflicts is to uncover the theological origins that shape them; this is the task Gillespie sets for himself.

In chapters 1-2, he begins by taking a well-trodden path. He locates the roots of modernity within the nominalist revolution. This revolution famously denies that God's intellect guides God's will; God neither creates nor moves creation through a predetermined set of universal forms. Each creature, accordingly, bears a unique design, a *novum* which God relates to individually. From this ontology emerges two important traditions, the humanist and the reformational, both of which are outlined in chapters 2-5.

The founder of humanism, Petrarch, redescribes ethics in individualist terms. This grounds the humanist tradition in a confidence concerning the ethical capacities of human beings. One of Petrarch's northern successors, Erasmus, utilizes this same confidence in terms of Christian salvation. Though Erasmus certainly does not believe quite so manifestly in human nobility as Petrarch, he still moves theologically in a semi-Pelegian to Pelegian direction, believing that the will is effectual for attaining *aspects* of salvation. Erasmus thus conjures the wrath of Luther.

Luther and reformational thought looks not toward the power of humanity but divinity. Reflecting on the nominalist's notion of a *potentia absoluta*, God is understood as moved by nothing beyond Godself, meaning there is no action that can earn humanity salvation. Accordingly, Luther is convinced that, as a *Deus Absconditus*, God predestines some for salvation and others damnation, controlling the processes of history in terms of that goal. The only comfort Luther finds is located in the revelation of Christ, the one who, as the *potential ordinata* is revealed as the means through which God mercifully justifies sinners.

It is in chapters 6-8 that Gillespie really begins to develop a novel and penetrating analysis. He claims that Descartes and Hobbes are the symbolic successors of Erasmus and Luther. Thus the possibilities contained within the very ideas that spawn both humanist and reformational thought—newfound human power and an unpredictable God—are also those which extend the humanist and reformational debate into distinctly modern horizons.

As Gillespie correctly notes, the horizons of these early modern goals are naturalistic. But early naturalism wants nothing more than to alleviate humanities' contemptuous and miserable place in nature. It does so by focusing on natural causation, whose study helps humanity exert mastery over the natural order. A problem remains: in order to focus on nature, previous concerns about God and God's potentially volatile will must be put to rest. So, by redefining infinity, Descartes tames God's will, reducing it to the blind forces of nature subject to human mastery through Descartes' new science. In the case of Hobbes, a hard conception of divine providence makes God's will irrelevant for daily affairs. What will happen in terms of an afterlife will take place regardless of humanity's own machinations; therefore, humanity's immanent goal ought simply to be one of understanding anthropological mechanisms to limit social conflict.

As Gillespie develops in chapter 8, the relative successes of each of the above projects leads modernity down a path of simultaneous progress and despair. While Western humanity certainly gains some control over both nature and human social orders, it also places itself in an ontological position once reserved for God. But the contradictions of this position surface even as early as Kant, who struggles explicitly with nature and freedom in his Third Antinomy. According to Gillespie, much of modern intellectual history is a working out of this Antinomy, more often than not, toward positions implicitly reifying human divinity. This surfaces an important problem.

The particular will of a human is unable to act with the same disinterested justice as the universal will of God; as particular, the human can order neither nature nor society apart from any one human's particular

desires. Combined with its universal aspirations and a concealed belief in its divinity, Western humanity has believed the opposite, something which has lead not only to such abortive attempts at social and natural ordering as France's post-revolutional Reign of Terror, but also the disorders of the World Wars, and now, indirectly, 9/11. This latest travesty especially is Gillespie's direct concern. With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the global export of the Western free-market, history was perceived as coming to a close. All ideas and cultures were to be subsumed under the economic majesty of the invisible hand undergirding Western economies. 9/11, symbolized as Islam's 'no,' called this self-proclaimed divinity into question. Islam would not be subsumed in the West's implicit idolatry.

With this summary in mind, what should one do with this book? It is well-researched, well-written, well-argued. Also, at least this reviewer agrees with Gillespie's main arguments: (1) that an honest understanding of the West's intellectual and cultural history is necessary for sorting out the causes behind, say, a 9/11, even if such an understanding can (2) only help in creating a more *honest*, though not necessarily less violent, relationship with Islam.

What remains less clear is what comes next; when and *if* the modern West is ever honest about its theological roots, it does not seem as though much would change in terms of its current cultural trajectories. Perhaps there would be more humility in terms of the West's machinations—economic, environmental, and otherwise—but much of the immanent joys experienced by individuals in the West depend *directly* on this humanism turned naturalism (a tough, but I believe, necessary pill to swallow).

Then again, maybe some humility would go a long way? A bi-condition of affirming oneself as divine is the impossibility of seeing that one's machinations lack perfection; it holds, too, that an affirmation of humility is a denial of one's divinity. It is not clear, then, that a fully *theological* understanding of the West's hubris is necessary when a simple 'we are imperfect' might do, unless Gillespie believes that sin is only known in light of the Gospel; I, at least, would be interested in hearing Gillespie out on this point.

Eric Hall, Claremont Graduate School, Claremont, CA USA

The Hebrew Republic: Jewish Sources and the Transformation of European Political Thought. By Eric Nelson. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010. ISBN 978-0-6740-5058-7. 240 pp. £20.95.

The traditional secularization narrative claims that in the aftermath of the Wars of Religion, Europeans sought to secularize the public square. Despite a recent barrage of criticisms and alternative narratives (whether

from strident modernity critics like William Cavanaugh or more ambivalent voices like Charles Taylor), it still holds sway in many circles.

Eric Nelson, through a focused study of seventeenth-century political Hebraism, takes another whack at the foundations of this paradigm. When it comes to Western political thought, argues Nelson, the secularization narrative gets it almost precisely backward. The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, he says, under the dominance of Renaissance humanism, 'generated an approach to politics that was remarkably secular in character'; while in the seventeenth century, 'political theology reentered the mainstream of European intellectual life', as political discourse appealed more and more frequently to Scripture and called for contemporary societies to conform themselves to the image of the 'Hebrew Republic'—the constitution of OT Israel. In this quest, Nelson shows, Protestant political theorists began to rely heavily on rabbinic writings, and to deploy them in political debates. What's more, says Nelson, they did this at precisely the points in their political thought that are most *modern*, and thus most often regarded as products of a secularizing impulse.

After a fascinating and lucid narrative of the rise of Hebraism in the period, Nelson explores three of these Hebrew-inspired political developments, devoting a chapter to each: the rise of republican exclusivism, the notion that governments have a duty to redistribute wealth, and the concept of religious toleration.

In the first chapter, Nelson argues that John Milton and his contemporaries got the idea that monarchy was idolatrous and republicanism was the only legitimate form of government by reading Midrashic rabbis on 1 Samuel 8. Both his exegesis and the resulting political theory were completely novel in the Christian political tradition, but both proved immensely influential.

Chapter 2 is equally surprising, particularly to Christian conservatives accustomed to seeing wealth redistribution as the diabolical brainchild of the Enlightenment. In fact, shows Nelson, those who first argued for the imposition of 'agrarian laws' that would regulate wealth distribution and ensure relative equality among citizens did so in explicit imitation of ancient Israel's law, again following rabbinic sources.

The argument of the third chapter is the most interesting and complex, and aims to show that an Erastian constitution was not, as is commonly assumed, inimical to religious toleration, but was in fact the basis for it. Seventeenth-century political theorists deployed Hebraic sources to argue both for state supremacy over church affairs and for religious toleration in all matters that were not of civic import. Even toleration, then, that poster-child of secular modernity, arose from a self-conscious fusion of Scripture and politics.

Surprising as many of these claims may at first appear, Nelson weaves a compelling narrative, one that benefits not merely from its close and incisive analysis of texts, but from lucid and graceful writing that keeps the tale from bogging down under barrages of bloc quotations. Best of all, Nelson succeeds, like the best historical writing, in using a narrow and focused set of phenomena to shed light on very broad and deep interdisciplinary questions.

However, it is worth asking whether Nelson attempts too much in too little space. It is doubtful that Nelson has done enough (yet, at any rate) to overturn the traditional narrative of early modern political thought, though undoubtedly he has complicated it and opened up some important new debates. Aside from strengthening his case, a more thorough treatment could have helped in at least two ways:

First, substantial discussion of Protestant political thought in the sixteenth century would have provided helpful context for his survey of the seventeenth century. Second, more attention ought to be given to the transition from the thoroughly biblical seventeenth century into what Nelson admits was a much more secular and naturalist eighteenth century. As it is, a defender of the traditional narrative might object that all Nelson has done is push the narrative back a few decades.

Nonetheless, Nelson's work is sterling as far as it goes. He has laid excellent groundwork for future inquiry and provides a model of thorough but accessible historical scholarship.

W. Bradford Littlejohn, University of Edinburgh

The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict. By William T. Cavanaugh. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-19-538504-5. 285 pp. £32.50

A reconsideration of modernity is underway on several fronts. Within the guild of theology, there has followed from John Milbank's landmark *Theology and Social Theory* a trend of works that demythologize the historiography of its emergence against the chaos of confessionalism. In this book, the focus is on debunking the common complaint that religion is prone to violence, which Cavanaugh sees as a founding myth of modernity. Importantly, this is not another iteration of the claim that 'secular' institutions are just as capable of violence as 'religious' ones. Rather, it disputes that such a distinction can be meaningfully made. This isn't petty semantics. The effect is disastrous, according to Cavanaugh: the *hallowing* of violence done in the name of the state.

The first of four chapters explores arguments that violence inheres religion. He identifies three types and examines three scholars for each:

religion spawns violence because it is (1) absolutist (John Hick, Charles Kimball, and Richard Wentz); (2) divisive (Martin Marty, Mark Juergensmeyer, and David Rapoport); and (3) irrational (Bhikhu Parekh, R. Scott Appleby, and Charles Selengut). In each case, Cavanaugh reveals how a definition of religion either eludes these thinkers or cannot exclude 'secular' enthusiasms like nationalism, patriotism or military vows. Despite this, these scholars continue to classify certain phenomena as 'religious' and blame them for violence.

Such persistence suggests the categories of 'secular' and 'religious' are ideological rather than analytic. Thus in chapter 2 Cavanaugh inspects the history of the term 'religion'. Looking at figures like Nicholas of Cusa, Herbert of Cherbury, and John Locke, Cavanaugh finds it wasn't until the early modern era that 'religion' is distinguished from 'secular'. This distinction, he argues, was wrought to authenticate both the ascent of the modern state and colonialism. His examination of the latter, particularly the treatment of British occupation of India and the invention of Hinduism as a religion, is quite forceful and shows how labeling certain things 'religious' often served to validate colonization and suppress impediments to Westernization.

Chapter 3 looks at the so-called Wars of Religion. Cavanaugh presents a catena of details that problematize the impression that the wars were fought along religious lines. There are significant occasions on which 'members of the same church fought each other and members of different churches collaborated' (p. 150). In fact, through a dialogue with numerous notable historians, Cavanaugh finds that these wars must be seen in the larger dynamic of the emergence of the modern state and its absorption of the church's power. Not power only, the state accumulated Christian rituals and symbols as well, such that one could say the state wasn't secularized but sacralized.

The final chapter explores how the myth has been deployed in the domestic and foreign policy of the United States. In this chapter too, Cavanaugh criticizes New Atheists Sam Harris and Christopher Hitchens who use the myth to advocate violence against Muslims.

In sum, an important and highly interesting work, perhaps in need of more substantiation, but compelling enough to make one doubt the modern dogma of religious violence and be alert to its ideological function in the West.

James R. A. Merrick, University of Aberdeen

Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies. By David Bentley Hart. London: Yale University Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-300-11190-3. xiv + 253 pp. £14.99

In seventeen curt yet keen chapters, Hart responds to the so-called New Atheism. This is not a typical work of apologetics, however. He does not counter the arguments of Dawkins, Dennett, Harris or Hitchens. Nor is he concerned with validating belief. Instead Hart undercuts the rationale for their cultural crusades by exposing as mythology the historiography of modernity as the great saviour of Western humanity from the darkness of Christendom. This demythologization proves fanatical the New Atheism's antagonism towards Christianity and its dream of a purer modernity.

Two lines of argument generally recur: First, Hart unveils the spuriousness of the history, whether simplistic, simply conjectural or blatantly skewed. He takes Ramsay MacMullen to task, for example, for misrepresenting a report of Jerome's concerning the trial of a woman charged with adultery and citing it both as evidence of Christian disdain for women and as an illustration of the moral regress Christianity introduced into antiquity. MacMullen's account is wrong in almost every detail. First, Jerome's letter is manifestly not the approval of the trial's proceedings that MacMullen takes it to be. It is actually 'a long, poignant, even somewhat mawkish denunciation of the injustice of the trial, and of the sentence passed upon the accused woman, as well as a celebration of the 'miracle' by which she was ultimately spared' (p. 151). Moreover, the laws that mandated torture and death for women adulterers 'were of pagan provenance, and long antedated Christian custom in the empire' (p. 151). Hart highlights a number of Christian reforms of pagan legislation that significantly dignified and protected women.

Second, when there are genuine instances of the church's mistake, Hart interprets them as general human depravity not as consequences of Christian faith. To consider a classic case—Galileo's censure by the church—Hart establishes that it was not the church suppressing free inquiry and natural science out of irrational superstition but a clash of two men's egos aggravated by the anxiety of the times. In truth, Galileo was an inheritor of a long Christian tradition of astronomy, mathematics, and physics from which modern science was born and which overturned faulty Greek cosmology that could be said to have inhibited scientific discovery, did not offer adequate evidence for his view, and routinely alienated his colleagues. Page after page, Hart disabuses readers from modernity's soteriology, shows how in fact Christianity did not introduce an intellectual stupor into antiquity but advanced classical learning all the

while supplanting much of the brutality of ancient society and effecting profound change in Western humanity's moral consciousness.

Indeed, finding modernity to be parasitic on Christian morality is the other burden of this book. Here we are treated to some explorations of what Hart calls the 'Christian revolution,' its transformation of the human imagination, and reflections on whether modernity can sustain the values currently residual from Christendom. Modern sensibilities such as progress, charity, personhood, human equality and dignity all seem intuitive to us today only because we live in a culture shaped by the Gospel.

Hart casts this book as an essay, and it is best read as such. It's argument, even in its most thorough and devastating moments, is never more than suggestive. Yet, *Atheist Delusions* is possibly the best kind of response to the New Atheism. For it shows that without Christianity this atheism wouldn't be possible, wouldn't have appeal to begin with. A provocative work, vigorous, humorous, erudite.

James R. A. Merrick, University of Aberdeen

Faith and Its Critics: A Conversation. By David Fergusson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-19-956938-0. 195 pp. £17.99

Originally the 2008 Gifford Lectures delivered at the University of Glasgow, this book enters into dialogue with so-called New Atheism. Unlike most respondents (e.g. David Bentley Hart), Fergusson thinks this movement is serious and, indeed, that Christians have much to learn from it. He occasionally remarks how he has benefited from Dawkins as well as how theology stands to profit from certain fields (e.g. evolutionary psychology) utilized by New Atheists. Thus Fergusson does not leave readers with a sense for New Atheism's implausibility, only its inadequacy.

His goal is to mark the limits of the various discourses they employ while also arguing for the necessity of different modes of description, with faith being one. In essence, he finds that faith is not invalidated by but compatible with the claims of New Atheists since reality is multivalent and thus capable of multiple explanations. I suppose the book is a sort of polite protest against hard materialism and scientism.

Fergusson interacts with a variety of sources. This is indeed a 'conversation', more exploratory than apologetic.

James R. A. Merrick, University of Aberdeen

Reason, Faith and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate. By Terry Eagleton. London: Yale University Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-300-15179-4. xii + 185 pp. £18.99.

Terry Eagleton has a deserved reputation as one of the most influential of British literary critics and cultural commentators who has developed over his many publications a highly effective communicative style. This book is no exception. What is unusual about it perhaps is the extent to which he allows himself to be identified here with a sophisticated though also uncompromising commitment to the value of religious belief.

Eagleton comes from an English Catholic working-class background with Irish roots. He combines a long-term passion for the politics of social justice with what he himself calls a 'papist, semantic-materialist style' (referring to Robert Bolt's *Thomas More*, p. 130). This fosters a literary approach which flourishes in a colourful and pugnacious polemics, in this case against the influential modern detractors of religion Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens (unceremoniously combined under the persona 'Ditchkins'). As with most sustained polemics, there is amusement and caricature here, and much debunking, but also the uncertainty as to who the intended readership is. Is this an educational, cathartic or dialogical polemics (Eagleton would be the first to recognize that dialogue here is the least likely outcome!)?

Where the book breaks new ground is in chapter 3 with its discussion of faith and reason. Eagleton knows his way around the different philosophical accounts of reason and, with his literary background, has a superb understanding of its different social, cultural and personal contexts. In several memorable pages he sets out a immensely generous understanding of how faith and reason overlap and combine in ways that reflect not just the humanity of religion but also the way that human beings are already embedded in contexts of relation and presupposition, gift and risk, before reasoning ever resolves into questions about itself. Against such a vibrant picture of the fundamental unity of mind and body, of reasoning and materiality, in an irrepressibly fertile cross-over of sensibility and meaning, wherever human life is lived in depth, specious oppositions between religion and reason seem to be inconsequential scratchings on the surface of things. The real opposition that comes into view is one between reasoning which is openly embedded in life and relationship on the one hand and reasoning which is closed against life on the other, with the further distinction that the former can never become objectified to itself except as continuing discovery, while the latter is always objectified to itself as something impenitently self-sufficient.

There is a great deal here that readers from different backgrounds will find informative. It is a polemical book, but the deeper sense of the polemic is the subtle and multi-formed argument that what is at stake here, in the distinction between religious and secularist values, is actually a way of being alive. As Eagleton powerfully states, faith is never about the superficial use of reason, which might allow someone to renounce their faith in the event they are persuaded of the force of a new idea (as a die-hard conservative can be persuaded to a revolutionary perspective under circumstances). There is simply too much at stake in faith for this to be the case: 'It is just that more is involved in changing really deep-seated beliefs than just changing your mind. The rationalist tends to mistake the tenacity of faith (other people's faith anyway) for irrational stubbornness rather than for the sign of a certain interior depth, one which encompasses reason but also transcends it' (p. 139).

Oliver Davies, King's College London

God and the New Atheism: A Critical Response to Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens. By John F. Haught. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-664-23304-4. xvi + 124 pp. £11.99.

John Haught, senior fellow at Georgetown University's Woodstock Theological Center, seeks to dismantle the core assumptions of the 'new atheism' as inaugurated by the works of the three listed in the subtitle. He begins by summarizing the arguments shared by these 'soft-core' atheists who share the assumption of strict naturalist materialism (e.g., that there are only 'natural' or 'scientific' explanations for events in the universe). Haught then responds with a series of questions whose answers throw doubt on the validity of this new atheism. He closes by proposing a positive response on the part of Christian theology to its critics.

Haught first asks what exactly is 'new' about the 'new atheism'. Worse still, it is a particularly shabby version of atheism, as comparison with the much more consistent atheism of, say, Friedrich Nietzsche reveals. It is, according to Haught, an atheism that is not particularly atheistic, but merely a 'cosmetic correction' to contemporary life, conveniently silent about the fact that genuine atheism is impossible to live out and requires 'exacting standards' for behaviour (pp. 20, 24). Haught also makes much of the fact that these recent critics of faith do so in the absence of any substantive dialogue with 'serious' theologians (Barth and Tillich—despite being strange bedfellows—are repeatedly offered up as examples). The new atheism's ignorance of 'serious theology' means it attacks a straw man or the weakest target, particularly evident when it admits only a rigidly literalist reading of the Bible.

Haught further questions whether God can even be a scientific hypothesis. Attempts to reduce the divine to such betray a woefully thin understanding of knowledge, one that defines knowledge as that which is open only to scientific or perhaps better a 'scientistic' understanding. This leaves mysterious but very real and fundamental things like love outside the bounds of knowledge. Haught highlights the impossibility of strictly materialist (evolutionary biological) explanations for morality. This is betrayed by the new atheist's repeated though perhaps unconscious appeals to very un-materialist explanations for morality. Haught finally questions the new atheist distaste for a personal God. He locates this discomfort precisely in a commitment to physicalist explanatory monism. They reject the notion of a personal God because it would make such an explanation impossible.

Haught's positive reply to atheism is that Christians embrace the embodied, incarnate particularity of their faith in a personal God. Earlier in the book Haught identified the oddly 'Gnostic' quality of modern scientism which reduces the complexity of human being to natural processes precisely to contain and control it, ostensibly due to some embarrassment at the way it actually is. Christianity, Haught insists, eschews such bizarre anti-worldly thinking in favour of a theologically robust acceptance of creation and its relation to a loving, personal God.

God and the New Atheism succeeds on a number of levels. Its material critique, while not particularly unique, is clearly articulated and in places devastating. Its brevity makes it convenient for busy clergy or laypersons seeking guidance in responding to this popular trend. If there are any weaknesses they lie with Haught's unilateral rejection of 'literalist' readings of the Bible. Sure, 'serious theology' is immune to many of the cheap charges that the new atheists level against Christianity. But the fact is, most Christians are not serious theologians, most are more or less literalists. Does Haught therefore take down with his opponents those he's seeking to defend? Furthermore, his repeated implication that first year theology students are more sophisticated than the atheist critics seems petty, farfetched, and contributes nothing to the overall work. Ultimately, this book works best as a critique, less so as a substantive proposal. Coupled with readings in 'serious theology' it will aid all who wish to have an answer to the hot air of new atheism.

Beau Pihlaja, University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, TX USA

Contending with Christianity's Critics: Answering New Atheists & Other Objectors. Edited by Paul Copan and William Lane Craig. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009. ISBN 978-0-8054-4936-5. viii + 293 pp. $19.99.

This collection is an attempt to respond to some of the more prominent issues that recent atheist literature presses, but also to a number of other contemporary challenges to traditional Christian doctrines. It follows in the footsteps of the editors' earlier *Passionate Conviction* (2007); both are the fruits of the Evangelical Philosophical Society's annual conferences. Neither volume is a popular work (the literature with which the authors interact is often quite sophisticated, and there are no lists of recommended works for further study), but both are clearly tailored for the educated lay reader (technical details are kept to a minimum and the authors make an obvious effort to avoid jargon).

The book has three parts: 'The Existence of God', 'The Jesus of History', and 'The Coherence of Christian Doctrine'. Each part has six chapters, and the range of topics covered is remarkable: There are papers on everything from evolutionary explanations of religious belief (Michael Murray) to Bart Ehrman's sceptical line on the transmission of the text of the New Testament (Daniel Wallace). This breadth has obvious advantages, but it does mean that criticisms from the New Atheists and their ilk are not covered as thoroughly as one might have expected (e.g., Sam Harris' popular—albeit hopeless—contention that religious belief inevitably leads to extremism). This is not a reason for complaint, of course, but it is illustrative of the fact that the book is not as occasional as one might infer from its title.

There are three standards by which one can evaluate a volume like this one: the significance of the topics covered, the quality of the arguments, and the accessibility to the intended audience. How does this volume fare?

The answer is quite well. Though I have quibbles with some of the arguments that are advanced, I think that there is, on the whole, little not to praise. Mark Linville offers a searching critique of evolutionary theories of morality, Gregory Ganssle makes short work of Richard Dawkins' main argument against theism, Michael Wilkins soundly thrashes revisionary reinterpretations of Jesus' self-understanding. The book even contains well-wrought (if all too brief) arguments for the coherence of the Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement (the first two by Copan, the third by Steve Porter). Gary Habermas' contribution is particularly delightful; he argues that even current critical scholarship supports early dates for the reports of the resurrection, providing further evidence that the indi-

viduals who testified to its occurrence genuinely believed that they were eyewitnesses. It is slightly odd that the editors include a piece on Open Theism (by David Hunt), since this strikes me as an in-house debate, not an apologetic issue. But given the furor over the topic, a defence of the traditional view is not wholly out of place.

It is easy to take potshots at volumes that try to make the best apologetic material accessible to non-specialists. The contributors to this volume surely know that they have glossed over details that they would not spare their colleagues. For what it is, though, this is a fine collection, and Copan and Craig are to be commended for assembling it.

R. W. Fischer, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL USA

People and Place: A Covenant Ecclesiology. By Michael S. Horton. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008 (UK: Alban Books). ISBN 978-0-6642-3071-5. 325 pp. £23.99.

There is much to admire in this book, the ecclesiological installment of a series that began with *Covenant and Eschatology* (2002), and includes a volume on christology (2005) and another on soteriology (2007). As he has in previous volumes, Horton aims to overcome misleading polarizations, such as that between participationist and forensic soteriologies, and between the church as 'purely passive recipient of grace' and as 'active bearer of that grace'. Horton's series has much to offer, but it is precisely in his efforts to overcome dualisms and dichotomies that we encounter habits of mind that rob Horton's project of a significant portion both of its theological energy and of creativity, not to mention its ecumenical potential. The problem is this: While Horton uses covenantal categories to sublate dichotomies on specific issues, in his fundamental theological system all remains dichotomous. The deep structure of Horton's theology is thoroughly binary.

For Horton, the primary structuring dichotomy is an eschatological one, that between the 'now' and the 'not yet'. That is a useful emphasis, since it places the basic duality of Christian theology on a temporal rather than a spatial axis. 'Now'/'not yet' is not a dichotomy at all. The 'not yet' indwells the present by the Spirit of the Risen Christ, so that all who are in Christ are new creations and the power of the age to come operates in this age. In Horton's telling, however, this complex, quasi-perichoretic distinction becomes dichotomous.

It emerges early on, in the course of what is mainly a salutary reminder of the 'real absence' of Christ in the present age. Horton wants the church to take Christ's transcendence seriously, to recognize in Christ's departure and his promised return a sign of our place in the *middle* between the

already of resurrection and the not yet of final judgement. Ascension and Pentecost go together, but the Spirit, in Horton's view, is not a 'replacement' for Jesus and does not 'fill the gap between the Jesus of history and our history' but instead 'both measures and mediates the eschatological difference' (p. 22). Rather, where the Spirit is, there is the eschatological tension; not an overcoming of the gap between glorified head and earthly body, but its sometimes anguishing intensification. Horton later qualifies his emphasis on the real absence of Christ, urging that Jesus' coming in the Spirit is 'a real coming'. In fact, the Spirit is so 'closely identified' with Christ that it is possible to say 'wherever the Spirit is said now to be present, Christ is present'. Only the second coming of Jesus in the His exalted flesh at the end will bring Him 'immediately' present to us (p. 29). On the very same page, however, he recognizes that 'in one sense . . . the Spirit makes Christ more present than he was even to his disciples'. So, the Spirit's presence is Christ's presence, and an 'immediate' presence, more intimate than his bodily presence to the disciples.

A similar habit appears in the pervasive discussion of *totus Christus* ecclesiology. Early on, Horton charges that *totus Christus* ecclesiologies conflate Christ and the church, ignore the Spirit, turn human into divine action, immanentize the eschaton. It comes as something of a surprise when at the end of chapter 1, Horton briefly concedes that the Spirit 'secures and guarantees the genuine yet often empirically ambiguous unity of the *totus Christus*' (p. 34). How exactly does this view differ from that of Zizioulas, which Horton rejects? Horton's only explanation is that Zizioulas's is an 'overrealized eschatology'. In this end, this only means that Zizioulas makes more of the 'now' than Horton does, which leads Horton to think he is minimizing the 'not yet'.

Horton's habits of mind are, I suspect, the habits of a certain kind of confessional Reformed Protestantism. Though he criticizes some manifestations of Reformed theology and church life, what Horton regards as 'classic Reformed' theology is simply assumed. Horton's arguments often amount to little more than the repeated assertion that 'my dichotomy is better than yours'. Horton has the theological resources at hand both to make an important Reformed contribution to contemporary theology and to expose Reformed theology to a healthy leavening from the broader church. If he was more open to the latter possibility, he would more thoroughly fulfil the promise of the former.

Peter J. Leithart, New Saint Andrews College, Moscow, ID USA

The Emergence of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities. Edited by Michael A. G. Haykin and Kenneth J. Stewart. Nottingham: Apollos, 2008. ISBN 978-1-8447-4254-7. 432 pp. £19.99.

This volume considers the origins of evangelicalism in light of David Bebbington's thesis in his monumental book *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (Unwin Hyman, 1989). There are two primary issues with Bebbington's analysis that underlie the essays. The first is whether the evangelical movement had more in common with expressions of Christianity in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries than had previously been thought. The second is a question of the impact of the English and Scottish Enlightenment in shaping the opinions, beliefs, and behaviors of eighteenth-century evangelicals.

In the section 'Regional Perspectives', five authors address the main issues noted above. Andrew McGowan and Joel Beeke both advance the idea that, contrary to Bebbington's thesis that the Enlightenment altered the evangelical notion of assurance, there is indeed a strong degree of continuity between their doctrine and that of their Reformed forebears. The remaining three authors, Densil Morgan, David Jones, and Thomas Kidd, argue that Protestants in Wales, England, and New England, respectively, displayed new revivalist tendencies, and, though Bebbington overstates the discontinuity of eighteenth-century evangelicalism from earlier forms of Protestantism, there were enough distinguishing marks (new networks of communication, emphasis on conversion and outpourings of the Spirit, for instance) to suggest that evangelicalism did indeed constitute a new religious movement.

The second part, 'Era Perspectives', is arranged chronologically and contrasts the theology of several sixteenth-century Reformers and various seventeenth-century Puritans to that of Calvinistic evangelicals in the eighteenth-century. The majority conclude that the evangelicals held many of the same beliefs as the Reformers and Puritans and thus it cannot be said that evangelicalism was a novel movement in the eighteenth century. An additional essay explores nineteenth-century perceptions of the relationship between the Reformation and the Evangelical Revival, arguing that these figures viewed the eighteenth century revivals as a 'renewal, or restoration, of what had gone before in the Reformation and Puritan eras' (p. 317). One essay in particular gets at the nub of the issue by pointing out the fact that Puritanism itself is 'a rather artificial construct' and that seventeenth-century 'Puritanism' was much more fractured and doctrinally diverse than most historians have heretofore been willing to acknowledge. This reality leads the author to convincingly argue that there is a greater degree of continuity between eighteenth-century evan-

gelicalism and seventeenth-century Puritanism—loosely and broadly defined. Yet, the author goes on to suggest that new developments did emerge in eighteenth-century Protestantism, particularly through a new clerical and lay passion for revival and the use of practical methods to promote religion.

Under 'Evangelical Doctrines', four authors explore four doctrinal topics important for evangelicalism: salvation/conversion, assurance, eschatology, and biblical inspiration. Bruce Hindmarsh argues that evangelical conversion was indeed a new and distinctive mark of Christian experience in the modern period but that this mark appeared in the middle of the seventeenth century rather than in the early eighteenth (as Bebbington suggests). Through an examination of Bebbington's quadrilateral more broadly and the doctrine of assurance more specifically, Garry Williams concludes that the Reformation and Puritanism were actually evangelical movements. Crawford Gribben describes the variety of eschatological views that existed among evangelicals and Puritans and suggests that the discontinuities between the two cannot with certainty be linked to the Enlightenment. Lastly, Kenneth Stewart takes issue with a heretofore less debated argument within Bebbington's book, contending that a new preference for verbal inspiration within Victorian evangelicalism did not represent a more strict view of biblical inspiration.

A few significant qualifications emerge in Bebbington's response. The first concerns the doctrine of assurance. Bebbington acknowledges that there was more uniformity of opinion between Puritans and evangelicals concerning the doctrine, and that the form it took in the eighteenth century cannot be so strongly linked with the Enlightenment but, rather, with the Christian past. A second qualification is that for the movement as a whole the revivals formed a greater 'thread of continuity between the periods before and after the appearance of Whitefield and Wesley as travelling evangelists' (p. 431). These qualifications lead him to remark that 'there is a higher degree of continuity with the Puritans than the book of 1988 recognized' (p. 427) and that 'the chronology of the early stages of evangelicalism needs to be extended in both directions' (p. 428). They do not, however, lead Bebbington to discount the significance of the discontinuities, and he concludes his essay by arguing that 'evangelicalism did represent a revolutionary development in Protestant history' (p. 432).

This work is an excellent contribution to the discussion of the nature and historical origins of evangelicalism that advances our knowledge of those figures who and the ideas that contributed to the movement. There are a few ways in which it could have been improved, however. The most superficial is that the volume as a whole would have benefited from a good trimming, allowing several similar chapters to be condensed into one.

As a second improvement the authors should have placed greater emphasis on examining, as one contributor puts it, 'the innovativeness of evangelicalism as a social and cultural movement' (p. 112). It seems to this reviewer that an inordinate amount of focus was placed on the transmission of ideas, as if the social and cultural surroundings in different periods and regions had little changing effect on those ideas. Furthermore, is one supposed to believe that scholars' and ministers' views were shared by all religious-minded folk occupying the pews? I suspect an examination into these areas would have drawn out more of the discontinuities Bebbington has highlighted.

A third improvement would have been to ensure there was more doctrinal objectivity throughout the volume. It is troubling to see a few authors allow their theological agendas influence their scholarship to such a degree that it leaves the impression that evidence was distorted. One contributor writes, for instance, that if Bebbington's dating of evangelicalism to the 1730s is correct

> it leaves us with the impression that Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley are the fathers of evangelicalism. The result of this controversial position is that Wesley's Arminianism could then no longer be viewed as aberrational theology within a solidly Reformed movement (p. 168).

While some of the contributors challenge Bebbington's thesis it does appear that, notwithstanding some minor qualifications, a majority agree that eighteenth-century evangelicalism was a new religious movement which, while advancing doctrinal positions similar to the Reformers and Puritans, formulated theological emphases of their own while developing new techniques and organizational structures for spreading the gospel.

Andrew Tooley, Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals, Wheaton College

J. I. Packer and the Evangelical Future: The Impact of His Life and Thought. Edited by Timothy George. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009. ISBN 978-0-8010-3387-2. 253 pp. £12.99.

The book reviewed here, a *Festschrift* honoring James Innell Packer, does not explicitly address the much-debated question of what evangelicalism is. Yet, because of Packer's stature and decades of contributions the essays, taken collectively, do offer insight into the issue, albeit largely reflective of Packer's interests and theological commitments.

Some affirm and commend Packer (e.g., Edith Humphrey, Mark Dever, Paul House, and a tribute by Gary Parrett); others engage in thoughtful

critique (e.g., Don Payne, and Dever); and some of the essays only minimally engage Packer's work, focusing rather on some facet of evangelicalism (e.g., Bruce Hindmarsh, and Carl Trueman) or Christianity more generally (Richard Neuhaus).

The thirteen essays are not organized around a selected few themes. (In its own way, this might be ironically, though certainly not intentionally, symbolic of the disappointment of some people with the fact that Packer never devoted himself to crafting a comprehensive systematic theology.) Rather, the topics engaged are reflective of both the influences and sources on which Packer has drawn and the rather diverse topics and causes to which he has devoted himself. Thus, they include Packer's engagement with 'The Great [Christian] Tradition' (Alister McGrath, and Humphrey), his theological 'journalism' (David Neff), his theological method (Payne), his view of Scripture (House), his debt to the Puritan tradition (Dever, and Charles Colson), eighteenth century evangelical spirituality (Hindmarsh), the English non-conformist tradition (Trueman), Christianity and culture (Neuhaus), and knowing God (James Massey). The editor summarizes lessons he has learned from Packer, and the book concludes with reflection and response from Packer himself. There is also a bibliography of Packer's works, through August 2008.

With no pretense of attempting a comprehensive, synthetic analysis of the essays, I will simply and more modestly offer four brief observations among others which emerged for me as I looked through these varied, Packer-shaded lenses. First, theology matters. And, the church matters. Packer has devoted a large portion of his life's work to writing for the church and for 'lay' Christians. And, they have responded with appreciation. If those who are 'professional' theologians (Packer describes himself as 'a catechist') truly believe that theology matters, our work will also reflect that the church matters. Second and extending the preceding observation, theology and 'the Christian life' are intimately related. One of the ways in which theology serves the church is by attending—directly and explicitly—to life lived in and for the Triune God. And, the living of life *coram deo*—not for theology, but for God—is a fundamental context and foundation for doing theology. Third, good theology is historically informed. Packer has never hesitated to acknowledge that he stands on the shoulders of giants, and neither should anyone else who presumes to do theology, at whatever 'level'. Fourth, theology's service to the church is advanced by ecumenical conversation carried-out with informed, thoughtful conviction in a Spirit-enabled irenic spirit.

Like most collections of essays, this one does not present either a vision or an argument. And, like many tributes it is proscribed by the limitations and contributions of its honoree. For those interested in evangelical the-

ology, this book does, however, offer occasions for reflection on where it can and should go as prompted by the work of a significant contemporary voice.

W. David Buschart, Denver Seminary, Denver, CO, USA

Inside Story: The Life of John Stott. By Roger Steer. Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2009. ISBN 978-1-84474-404-6. 288 pp. £12.99.

John Stott has been a fixture in evangelical circles. Roger Steer's warm and well-constructed biography of Stott does a grand job of revealing why as it opens windows on a life well lived, in service to God and humanity.

Although I knew Stott through his many influential books, I found that I really didn't know the kind of life he lived. From his persistence in his calling in spite of early parental opposition, to his signal cooperation and abiding friendship with Billy Graham, his fast-tempo teaching trips to scores of climes and cultures, his long involvement with the Keswick and Urbana conventions, and his foundational role in the Lausanne Movement, almost every page of Steer's book reveals nuggets that illumine not only this individual life, but also the state of the evangelical arm of the Church of England over a span of 60 years.

There are two aspects of Steer's work that I especially appreciate. *First*, the revealing of some of Stott's personal habits and foci imparts wisdom that I and many other ministers would do well to take to heart: his commendable hospitality; his love for the spiritually lost and the materially and mentally disadvantaged; his commitment to training his parishioners for evangelism; his commitment to evangelical unity; his monthly 'quiet day' for reflection and renewal; his starting each day with an orienting, Trinitarian prayer; and his daily post-luncheon HHH, 'horizontal half-hour'! *Second*, Steer effectively and nearly seamlessly weaves synopses of two of Stott's most important books into the fabric of this book. Steer masterfully sketches *I Believe in Preaching* and *The Cross of Christ* such that the reader is left wanting more. If more biographers did this sort of thing, the ongoing impacts of the lives they depict would be compounded.

My only criticism is Steer's overuse of the word 'unique' on the last two pages of the text. In so far as unique literally means 'one of a kind', I bristle at the suggestion that Stott is actually unique in so many ways, especially 'in generating love through his endearing blend of humility and mischievous humour', 'in his commitment to the cause of the gospel', and even 'in his ability to relax'. Stott may indeed be remarkable or even exemplary in these things, but unique?

Happily, and in spite of the foregoing criticism, this book is not a hagiography. Stott reportedly instructed his first biographer, Timothy Dudley-

Smith, that any biography prepared about him should be 'warts and all' (p. 20); Steer's account is noteworthy because it is just that; on page after page there is testimony to the fact that 'Uncle John' has his share of foibles and weaknesses. Moreover, this 'life' makes it eminently clear that Stott is a man who sees himself in ongoing need of the Gospel that he preaches.

As would be expected from an experienced chronicler, this biography has all of the features that are standard to the genre—the obligatory parts about childhood, family, education, avocations (Stott's foremost being bird-watching!), vocation and contributions. But what Steer presents remarkably well is the practical, principled, focused life of a man to be emulated primarily because he has taken Christ as his own model (cf. 1 Cor. 11:1). In fact, Steer reports that in 2007 Stott, sensing that he was approaching the end of his earthly pilgrimage, thus summarised God's purpose for His people: 'God wants His people to become like Christ. Christlikeness is the will of God for the people of God' (p. 271).

Steer's book ably demonstrates that Stott has, by all accounts—with his long life of generosity, preaching, teaching, leadership, writing and practical service—been steadily becoming like Christ. I unreservedly recommend this rich volume not just because it commends Stott, but more importantly because it commends Jesus Christ.

Steven K. Mittwede, Ankara, Turkey

BOOK REVIEWS