

## *Dr. Herman Bavinck (1854-1921)*

### *A Short Sketch of a Reformed Theologian, Pastor, Churchman, & Statesman*

#### *Introduction*

I have the privilege and honor of talking to you today about a man that I believe was one of the best—if not *the* best—theologians Holland ever produced: Dr. Herman Bavinck (1854-1921). In the brief amount of time we have today, I want to present an outline of his life and theology, focusing on Bavinck as a pastor, theologian, churchman, and statesman. By virtue of time constraints, I will have to skate lightly. I have provided much more information on these sheets than I will ever be able to cover, but I encourage you to take these back home with you and read them more carefully.

Lord willing, my Bavinck biography (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co.) will be out this year or next and you can fill in the gaps of what we will not cover here.

#### *The Importance of Bavinck in Holland & the Reformed World*

Bavinck was a child of a movement known as the *Afscheiding*. It began in 1834, when a number of conservative pastors grew weary of the liberalism in the Dutch State Church (*Hervormde Kerk*). Their desire was to return to the Three Forms of Unity, biblical preaching, catechizing the children, a right view and administration of the sacraments of the Church, and liturgical prayers and singing. In short, they wished to worship the Lord in spirit and in truth.

Bavinck's father, Jan, was a pastor in the Separatist/Secessionist churches in the Netherlands. Bavinck grew up in a household that loved the Lord and his Word. He was catechized formally (at church) and informally (at home) by his parents, but by his father in particular. He grew up to be a precocious student, but shocked the Secessionist world when he chose to attend the liberal Leiden University instead of the theological seminar of the Secessionist churches in Kampen.

After a short time as a pastor in Franeker (see below), Bavinck was appointed to teach Systematic Theology and Ethics at the Theological Seminary in Kampen. It was in this rural, bucolic setting that Bavinck continued his intense studies of ST, Ethics, and Philosophy. Bavinck was also an impeccable exegete in both Old and New Testaments. It was during this early stage of his theological career that Bavinck began to gather the materials for his *magnum opus*, the *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek (Reformed Dogmatics)*. His inaugural address set the tone and the stage for what would be a stellar professorship both in Kampen as well as in Amsterdam. (See Appendix A) Bavinck remained in Kampen twenty years, although during that time Abraham Kuyper attempted to draw him to the Free University a number of times.

#### *The Relationship between Bavinck and Kuyper: Moving Out from the Shadow*

Since I have mentioned Kuyper, now would be a good time to say a few words about these two men and to set the record straight. It is an undeniable truth that Kuyper was a

very remarkable and gifted man. The two names: Kuyper and Bavinck are often used together and in that order. Dutch historian George Harinck writes,

When mentioned together, we take the names of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck as a brand name. Kuyper and Bavinck belong together like Goldman and Sachs or Mercedes and Benz. And, like in these brand names, we always mentioned their names in the same order and rank. Bavinck follows suit, but Kuyper comes first. This is not accidental. The rank reveals a hierarchy. Abraham Kuyper was the architect of neo-Calvinism and the leader of the Dutch neo-Calvinist movement, or, more to the point: the general. He was Abraham the Great, the first in rank, the dare devil and the great Consoler, and he was served by a myriad of warrant officers. As a student, Herman Bavinck was his admirer. This changed over the years. He took over Kuyper's position at the Free University and became a theologian in his own right, but he never became Kuyper's equal. It was always Kuyper and Bavinck, and never: Bavinck and Kuyper.... A Dutch theologian, Karel Heiko Miskotte, stuck to the military vocabulary and, comparing Bavinck to Kuyper, presented him as [a] man in military uniform, not as a General, however, but as a "medical orderly in the field" or as a Red Cross worker.<sup>1</sup>

Today, however, I want to suggest that the historical order and rank is incorrect, especially when it came to theology. There were far too many times when Kuyper would move off into speculation or be carried along by his supralapsarianism. More than once, Bavinck issued corrections to Kuyper's theological constructions. Both men were highly competent theologians, but Bavinck outstripped Kuyper being a settled Reformed theologian. Moreover, in Kuyper's works *Pro Rege* and *De Gemeene Gratie* Kuyper moved off into discussion of common grace as it applied to society that stretched biblical truth.<sup>2</sup> He also entertained views of justification by faith from eternity and presumptive regeneration in baptism that led him and the unified Reformed Church in Holland into more speculation. Bavinck wrote a long series of articles that was eventually put into book form (*Roeping en Wedergeboorte*; English: *Saved By Grace*). In a very real sense, Bavinck's efforts were too little too late and Kuyper's views were taken to an extreme that led to a church split in 1944.

### *Recent Developments in the "Bavinck Forshung"*

John Bolt has done yeoman's work editing Bavinck's *RD*. In addition, the book *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, a collection of Bavinck's writings on various

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<sup>1</sup> George Harinck, "Herman Bavinck and Geerhardus Vos," Paper presented to the Herman Bavinck Conference in Grand Rapids, MI in September, 2008, p. 2. Harinck observes that the fathers of these two great theologians—Herman and Geerhardus—"belonged to the founding families of this free church and they knew each other well. Geerhardus's and Herman's fathers received their theological education in the same vicarage in Hoogeveen in the Netherlands, both became ministers in the Seceded/Separatist Church (*Afgescheidenen*) and started their careers in the same congregation of Uelsen (Germany)." Obviously, they did not serve at the same time!

<sup>2</sup> See Jochem Douma, *Algemene Genade*. Uiteenzetting, vergelijking en beoordeling van de opvattingen van A. Kuyper, K. Schilder en Joh. Calvijn over "algemene genade." (Goes, Holland: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, B.V., 1976<sup>3</sup>).

topics has been released by Reformation Heritage Books<sup>3</sup> as well as Eric Bristley’s guide to the writings of Bavinck.<sup>4</sup> Our translation team (international) met last September in Grand Rapids for a Bavinck Conference and we are in the process of translating more of Bavinck’s occasional writings from his book *Kennis en Leven*.<sup>5</sup> One of the articles in this work is Bavinck’s assessment of John Calvin’s doctrine of the Lord’s Supper. This is a seminal article for a number of reasons.

First, we know that the *RD* went through a number of changes and modifications internally—nothing major, but there were some changes that were significant and qualify as more than mere “cosmetic” changes. Bavinck’s jettisoning of the notion of innate ideas is one such example. Of note is that Bavinck’s chapter on the Lord’s Supper was never changed in any way. What he learned from Calvin became the bedrock of that chapter (*RD4*, Chapter 10, Paragraph 59).

Second, confessionally, the Lord’s Supper plays an essential, indispensable, and highly spiritual role in the Christian’s life. Reformation Heritage Books has released a book by Willem van ‘t Spijker, a church historian from the Netherlands, with the translated title *The Church’s Book of Comfort (Troostboek van de kerk)*.<sup>6</sup> Van ‘t Spijker reminds us that the Heidelberg Catechism was intended to function as both a booklet of instruction as well as a confession. Moreover, “It contained a road map for the implementation of the Reformation...”<sup>7</sup>

Van ‘t Spijker pinpoints the importance and significance of the Heidelberg Catechism in this manner: “The Catechism of the Palatinate represents a significant component of the church order, a set of regulations that governed doctrine and preaching in the church. This church order could not have been implemented without the Catechism.... The church and academia joined hands in the conviction that the theology of the Heidelberg Catechism was not merely an academic matter: it emerged within the church, served the church, *and could only function properly within preaching, baptism, and the Lord’s Supper, through which the church of Christ reveals herself in this world.*”<sup>8</sup>

Finally, one of the most exciting discoveries in Bavinck research has come from Dr. Dirk van Keulen.<sup>9</sup> Van Keulen is a church historian and has located Bavinck’s handwritten lectures on Reformed Ethics. I am privileged to be on the team that helps with the necessary work of collation, harmonization, and translation. When completed, this work will represent Bavinck’s twenty years of teaching on the subject of Ethics.

### *The Rise of Neo-Calvinism and the Christian Worldview*

One of the greatest boons that emerged from Bavinck’s association with Abraham Kuyper and other likeminded theologians, pastors, and statesmen was the rise of what the Dutch call Neo-Calvinism. Bavinck’s goal from the outset was to present Holland—both

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<sup>3</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, (John Bolt [ed.] & Harry Boonstra & Gerrit Sheeres [trans.]), (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008). This is a translation of a volume of collected works by Bavinck that bears the Dutch title *Verzamelde Opstellen*.

<sup>4</sup> Eric D. Bristley, *Guide to the Writings of Herman Bavinck*, (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Kennis en Leven*. Opstellen en artikelen uit vroegere jaren. (Kampen: Kok, 1922).

<sup>6</sup> Willem van ‘t Spijker (ed.), *The Church’s Book of Comfort*, (Gerrit Bilkes [trans.]), (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 97. Emphasis added.

<sup>9</sup> See his doctoral dissertation, *Bijbel en dogmatiek*. Schriftbeschouwing en Schriftgebruik in het Dogmatisch Werk van A. Kuyper, H. Bavinck en G.C. Berkouwer, (Kampen: Kok, 2003).

Christians and non-Christians—with a biblical life and worldview. He strove in virtually everything he did to present what Scripture teaches regarding God, man, society, knowledge, truth, and ethics.

Bavinck's intent was not only that the Christians in the Netherlands would come into possession of a biblical worldview, but that his influence would permeate into society in general. This explains, in part, why Bavinck was involved in so many enterprises and undertakings, including being elected to what would be comparable to a U.S. Senator.

### *Points to be Discussed: Bavinck as Pastor, Theologian, Churchman, & Statesman*

In the short time we have today, I want to introduce you to Herman Bavinck and, hopefully, whet your appetite to get his *RD*, if you don't already have them and then to digest them. As one of my colleagues from Anaheim quipped recently upon reading Bavinck, "Reading him is a feast!"

Of all the theologians Holland has produced, Bavinck is the finest. Jim Packer's blurb on the dust cover sums it up well: "Like Augustine, Calvin, and Edwards, Bavinck was a man of giant mind, vast learning, ageless wisdom, and great expository skill, and to have his first volume now in full English, with a promise of the other three to come, is a wonderful enrichment. Solid but lucid, demanding but satisfying, broad and deep and sharp and stabilizing." Bavinck's magisterial *Reformed Dogmatics* remains after a century the supreme achievement of its kind." In the meantime, the promised three volumes are also available.

I want to introduce Bavinck to you today in the functions of pastor, theologian, churchman, and statesman. I will then discuss his later years, leading up to and including his death. We will ask and answer the question: Did Bavinck change his Reformed principles in later years?

### *Pastor*

Bavinck's father, Jan, was a much-loved and highly gifted pastor. In addition, Jan was a scholar in his own right, making corrections to Bavinck's editing of the *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae*.<sup>10</sup> As we progress in this section, Jan Bavinck's "hand" will be evident in his son's life.

In this section, I'll be describing Bavinck's only stint in the pastoral ministry. It was short-lived for a variety of reasons, not least of which was his church's dire need for a fully competent Reformed theologian to teach at the Theological Seminary in Kampen, founded the year of Bavinck's birth. Jan Bavinck was appointed to teach at that school, but declined in an unusual manner, as we shall observe in a moment.

### *Bavinck's Only Pastorate: Franeker*

Bavinck accepted the call to the Friesian city of Franeker as his first and only pastorate. On March 13, 1881 he was ordained as pastor of the Christian Reformed Church (*Afscheiding*) by his father. Even though this was Bavinck's first pastorate, it was not as though he was totally bereft of experience, since he had grown up as the son of a pastor.

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<sup>10</sup> Herman Bavinck, (ed.), *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae*, (Amsterdam: Donner, 1881).

There was also a rich theological heritage in Franeker. In 1622, the famous Puritan, William Ames, had lectured at the now-defunct University of Franeker.<sup>11</sup> The two previous pastors of the congregation in Franeker had caused a great deal of unrest; one being a sometimes-closet Arminian and the other an open drunk.

What were Bavinck's assets and liabilities as pastor in Franeker? Let's look at them.

### *I Get by with a Little Help from My Dad*

As noted, Jan Bavinck was a gifted expositor of the Word of God as well as a pastor who could explain the contents of the Heidelberg Catechism to his congregation. His abilities were so noteworthy that his exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism was put into book form.<sup>12</sup> Thus, Bavinck was accustomed to listening to solid biblical exposition from a father, who, in one sense, "broke the mold" of Dutch pastors of his day.

In order to understand why this is case, we need to take just a moment to examine Jan Bavinck's background.

### *Jan Bavinck's Spirituality*

In Jan Bavinck's autobiography (*Korte Schets van Mijn Leven*), he summarizes his life in 76 pages.<sup>13</sup> He was born in the German village of Bentheim and was raised by God-fearing parents who took him to the Reformed Church. Bentheim was a rarity in that the indwellers spoke German, but school and church was conducted in Dutch. In this small village of 1,000, Jan Bavinck attended church with the father of Geerhardus Vos!

Jan Bavinck was born on February 5, 1826. He was the only son of Hermanus and Fenna (nee Niehaus) Bavinck though he had five older sisters.<sup>14</sup> Ten days after his birth, he was baptized in a little Dutch Reformed Church in the village. When Jan was only three years old, this well-ordered family suffered a dramatic and shocking setback. Hermanus Bavinck died unexpectedly at the young age of forty-nine, leaving his family behind. Fenna was only thirty-three. As a young widow, she assumed the full responsibility of caring financially for her six children, ranging in age from twelve years to only a few months. Hermanus' sudden death was a great and painful event in Fenna's life. Though she had opportunity to remarry more than once, she never did. Instead she dedicated herself to her children's needs and frugally managed her home on funds that her immediate family willingly and generously gave her.

As an adult, Jan summarized his thoughts by writing that he was raised to be a good decent, respectable (*fatsoenlijk*) citizen and Christian, but also explains that his training in his youth did not introduce him to the necessary spiritual exercises that belong to the inner life of the Christian and the experience of faith that is discovered by those who are truly children of God.<sup>15</sup> "As far as I remember," he says, "I was never exhorted to faith

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<sup>11</sup> It was at Franeker that Ames wrote his famous *Marrow of Theology*. Ames' most famous pupil was Johannes Cocceius (1603-1669). His ongoing theological battles with Maccovius poisoned the atmosphere in Franeker, while the Dutch weather took its toll on his health. See William Ames, *A Sketch of the Christian's Catechism*, (Todd Rester [trans.]), (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008) & *The Marrow of Theology*, (John Dykstra Eusden [trans.]), (Durham, NC: The Labyrinth Press, 1968).

<sup>12</sup> Jan Bavinck, *De Heidelbergsche Catechismus in 60 Leerredenen Verklaard*, Deel I & II, (Kampen: Kok, 1903 & 1904, respectively.)

<sup>13</sup> This is a typewritten manuscript and, as far as I know, I have the only extant copy in North America. Jan Bavinck, "Korte Schets van mijn leven." Hereafter *JBA*.

<sup>14</sup> Jan Bavinck, *JBA*, 4.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*.

and repentance and I was never awakened to the need to bow my knees before Jesus and to seek and to desire him as my Savior and Redeemer.”<sup>16</sup>

Jan’s strong mother remained a positive influence throughout his life, but because he lacked the presence of a father in his home, he relished time with the men of his extended family, especially his uncle Harm Niehaus. Harm had an interesting background. As a younger man, Harm had walked away from the church and distanced himself from God. For several years he fully embraced a worldly lifestyle. Then for reasons that were never fully explained, Harm returned to his spiritual roots as a transformed man of God. In the absence of Jan’s father, this transformed man played an important and integral role in Jan’s mental and spiritual development.<sup>17</sup>

When Jan was sixteen years old, Harm took him to hear a dynamic pastor who preached in the open air named Jan Berend Sundag. Sundag, a compelling and powerful preacher, embraced “alt-reformirten” principles of faith.<sup>18</sup> The worship services were held on a nearby farm. Jan described these events as *simple yet profound*. Hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ preached with such purity stirred Jan Bavinck’s young soul.<sup>19</sup> All his life, Jan remembered the first captivating sermon he heard Sundag powerfully proclaim the truth. He even recalled the text and the name of the farm where the service was held.<sup>20</sup> That worship service was a compelling spiritual catalyst that accelerated a growing desire within Jan to become a minister of the Word of God.

As Jan’s connections to Sundag became more known in the village, his friends began to distance themselves from him. They were quite comfortable with their “formal” faith and religiosity and equally not at all interested in making any changes in their pursuit of their “youthful adventures”<sup>21</sup> However, Jan continued to listen to Sundag and attend his services. He ably combined what he was learning about the authentic Christian life and what he had learned as a child from the Heidelberg Catechism about his sins and misery, his redemption in Christ, and the thankfulness toward God he was called to exhibit.<sup>22</sup> He soon became convinced that the Separatist position in the Dutch ecclesiastical strife with the State Church was correct. He also supported their reasons for separating from the Dutch State Church.

### *Jan Bavinck and God’s Providence*

Briefly, I want to describe two remarkable acts of God’s providence in Jan’s life early on. First he became convinced that he should pursue becoming a minister of the Word of

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 9. On page 10, Jan Bavinck writes, “Under the leading of my uncle, I become ever-increasingly aware not only of my own deep depravity, but also of the deep depravity of the entire human race and the salvation that exists in Christ Jesus.”

<sup>18</sup> Eventually, because of his desire to preach the gospel, Sundag would be convicted of violating the State law against another church other than the Hervormde Kerk and would be imprisoned thirty-two times, at times for periods extending to eight to ten weeks. Comp. Valentine Hepp, *Dr. Herman Bavinck*, (Amsterdam: W. ten Have, 1921), p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> Hepp writes that it was during this time that the Lord led Jan Bavinck in wondrous, saving ways. He came into contact with people he deemed to be bona fide children of the Lord, who spoke a spiritual language that resonated in his heart (*DHB*, 10).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. The text was 2 Corinthians 5:17 and the service was held on the farm of “dumb and stupid” Wegkamp.

<sup>21</sup> On p. 5, of *JBA*, Jan Bavinck describes in somewhat detail what he and his friends did on Sunday in Bentheim. Comparatively, their escapades seem innocent enough, although it is true that what they did could also be described as “worldly.” It seems that even during these times, however, that he had a guilty conscience about participating with his friends. He writes that often upon returning to Bentheim from a Sunday afternoon of entertainment, he would pray, confess his sins, and ask God to forgive him.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 12.

God. Eventually, he told his mother about it. Although his mother gave him a sympathetic ear, the state of the family finances posed an enormous obstacle.<sup>23</sup> As a widow with a large family to support, Fenna had no monetary resources to offer to her son. The pressing desire to become a minister on the one hand and the very obvious lack of the necessary financial means to reach that goal on the other hand created a conflict and an obstacle for which Jan saw no solution. Clearly, if he were to pursue theological studies, something very unusual would need to happen to resolve the problem for him. Nothing short of divine intervention was needed.

Seeing no answer to the financial dilemma, Jan took an apprenticeship position in a nearby village to help pay the bills and feed the family. Three years would pass before God would intervene.<sup>24</sup> The opportunity Jan had been patiently waiting for came very unexpectedly on January 17, 1845, and it was a monumental event in his life.<sup>25</sup> Eventually, Sundag took Jan under his wing and saw in him a promising young man. Besides, Sundag was in dire need of some rest from his arduous labors for the churches. At a Classis meeting in Brandlegt, Pastor Sundag informed the brothers that he could no longer physically bear the arduous preaching responsibilities alone and asked the classis to appoint a candidate from the churches to receive instruction in theology with a view to preparation for service in the pastoral ministry.<sup>26</sup> After many years of faithfully preaching to numerous congregations, Sundag was in desperate need of rest.

Though sympathetic to Sundag, the classis hesitated in granting his request. They were unsure about their ability to find a suitable candidate. They decided to vote on the matter of moving forward with Sundag's request. When the vote was tallied, there was a tie—eleven to eleven! The men then knelt in prayer and asked the Lord's guidance in casting a lot to decide the matter. They called in one of the girls who was helping to serve and prepare meals into the room and asked her to draw the lot.<sup>27</sup> The slip of paper she drew read, "For." With the decision made, the men of the classis began to discuss their choice of a candidate.

Five candidates had informed the classis they were interested in theological studies.<sup>28</sup> Even though there was a great need for pastors, the classis decided to limit their considerations to the appointment of only one candidate. Three of the candidates were eliminated during further discussion in the meeting. Two candidates remained: Frederik Huisken and Jan Bavinck.

After more intense discussion and detailed interviews of both candidates, the classis moved to a vote concerning the choice of the candidate. Once again, the vote was a tie—eleven to eleven. The young woman from the kitchen appeared again to break the tie by lot. Our "mysterious young lady" chose the slip of paper on which was written the name "Bavinck"!

This act of God's Providence carried out by a simple, young woman from the kitchen whose name has remained unknown<sup>29</sup> gave Jan Bavinck the opportunity he had been waiting and longing for. It opened the door for him to begin his theological studies. It was

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Hepp, *DHB*, 11.

<sup>28</sup> In alphabetical order, they were Jan Bavinck, G.J. Dalink, F. Huisken, B.H. Kaptein, & J.H. Reurik.

<sup>29</sup> *JBA*, 22.

an event that would *profoundly* affect the course of Dutch church history. He studied theology at the manse of Pastor W.A. Kok in Ruinerwold. Jan Bavinck had a particular propensity for languages and language study remained a life-long interest. Hebrew and Latin were his favorite subjects. His studies progressed apace and Jan was an especially precocious student.

Early in 1848—and this is the second instance of providence—, twenty-three year old Jan Bavinck completed the “candidate’s phase” of his theological study and was eligible for a call to the pastoral ministry. At that time, Germany and Denmark were at war. Once again, like the obstacle of finances present at the beginning of his studies, another unexpected obstacle tested the direction of Jan’s life at the completion of his studies. Germany needed men to fight the war and many young Germans were receiving letters of conscription requiring them to report for military duty. Jan was among the young men who received just such a letter. He was told to report for a physical on Easter Sunday.<sup>30</sup> At that moment, it seemed that the very thing he had longed for and was convinced God had called him to do was once again slipping from his grasp. But Jan Bavinck was an honorable man, so he traveled to Lingen, near Bentheim, to take his place among the other recruits.

When he arrived and in keeping with military procedures,<sup>31</sup> he waited outside in a long line until it was his turn to be examined.<sup>32</sup> When stepped up in front of the doctor, he simply looked at Jan Bavinck and said, “Put your clothes back on, we have enough men. You are free to go.”<sup>33</sup> Once again, an unexpected, but providential happenstance opened up Jan’s opportunities to proceed with his goal of pastoral ministry. God confirmed his call.

This is a thumbnail sketch of the man who had such a profound influence on Herman Bavinck’s life.

### *Herman Bavinck & Preaching, Catechism, Visitation, & Administration*

What did Herman Bavinck do while he was a minister of the Word of God? We might tend to think or want to think that all he did was to continue in the same path he started at Leiden. That would have been, no doubt, tempting, but that was not his immediate call. Bavinck learned about the importance and centrality of preaching from his father. Speaking concerning the Heidelberg Catechism Dutch historian, Willem van ‘t Spijker makes this valid point: “The concepts of doctrine and order are closely related. Doctrine has to do with preaching, the proclamation of the gospel.”<sup>34</sup>

The point here is simply that Bavinck fully comprehended the necessity and indispensable nature of preaching. As he began in Franeker, his primary emphasis was on preaching two biblical sermons every Sunday. In the morning he preached from Scripture and in the afternoon service, he expounded the Heidelberg Catechism for the congregation, using many scriptural texts to support what the catechism taught.

He was also saddled with teaching catechism to the youth. Unlike today when pastors with congregations over 100 think they need an assistant or youth pastor, Bavinck had a large congregation, but taught all the catechism classes himself. In addition to

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<sup>30</sup> *JBA*, 29.

<sup>31</sup> Better known as the “hurry up and wait” military syndrome.

<sup>32</sup> Some things in the military do not change. Fortunately, he wasn’t living in Iceland.

<sup>33</sup> *JBA*, 31. “Ziehen Sie euch wieder an, wir haben schon Mannschaften genug. Sie sind frei. Sie können gehen.”

<sup>34</sup> Van ‘t Spijker, *Comfort*, 95.



understanding what the Reformation taught about preaching, he had a very high view of catechizing the youth. One night a week was spent teaching the Heidelberg Catechism to various age groups, typically starting at the age of twelve. In general, the churches of the *Afscheiding* divided the catechism instruction into age ranges from twelve to eighteen, eighteen being considered preparation for one's public profession of Jesus Christ and admission to the Lord's Supper. Bavinck took this labor very seriously and prepared himself well to instruct each age grouping at a level that was both challenging as well as stimulating.

Home visitation played a key role in Bavinck's ministerial labors. His Elders visited the members of Franeker's congregation yearly and quite often Bavinck went along with them. When a member was hospitalized, Bavinck visited them. Obviously, he also visited those who experienced a death in the family and those who received children from the Lord in order to instruct them in their covenantal parental duties.

I want to add to this that Bavinck was keenly sensitive to those with special needs. He had a family in his congregation that had special mental and physical handicaps. Bavinck made special arrangements for them to be close to the pulpit to hear the word and made special visits to them.

One of Bavinck's least favorite aspects of the pastoral ministry was administration. Having said that, we should not take away from this that he procrastinated and put it off. Rather, he conducted his administrative affairs meticulously, keeping impeccable records of his sermons, visits, and catechisms. He was also meticulous in keeping records of his book purchases, so we also get the idea that Bavinck did not give up reading theology simply because he was a pastor. He kept well abreast of what was afoot in the theological, philosophical, political, and ecclesiastical worlds. It was also during this time that he became the editor of his church periodical, *The Free Church (De Vrije Kerk)*.

### *The Pastor as Student & Writer*

It is essential to note that Bavinck remained an avid student of theology while in Franeker. Moreover, it was a time when he began seriously putting his thoughts on paper. He developed his writing style and began commenting on pertinent theological, ecclesiastical, and philosophical issues. He was convinced that scholars best place was in the pulpit, particularly, and in the pastorate, generally.

This notion was partially facilitated by the fact that he grew up in a country where pastors were expected to be scholars and leaders in their respective communities. The members of his congregation looked to him, as an expositor of the Word of God, for direction regarding biblical teaching and both personal and social ethics and morals. The Dutch respected their pastors, although they did not always agree with them. In Bavinck's case, they had a man who was willing to lead in his allegiance to biblical preaching and ecclesiastical issues/matters.

Getting into the habit of writing early in his theological career paid huge dividends for Bavinck later. One piece of advice I received early on as a pastor I pass on to you: always be writing and always be reading one book that is too hard for you.

### *Conclusions and Summary*

Even though short-lived, Bavinck's time in Franeker was very fruitful and productive. It was a year in which he matured greatly and was forced out of the purely academic

mold and pressed into service as Christ's minister of the gospel. He responded well to the challenge. Within one-half year, a large congregation in Amsterdam called him as their pastor. Showing great spiritual maturity, Bavinck declined this call. He had been in Franeker far too short a time and believed that God had called him to serve his people in Friesland. Although Amsterdam would have been, no doubt, a "feather in his cap," he decline fame for service.

There were other aspects of the pastor's life that shaped Bavinck as well. He had an ease with people and genuinely liked ministering to them. In Franeker, he learned to love God's people even more; even more deeply. Teaching the Heidelberg Catechism taught him the value of this confession of the Church first hand. Having been a student in catechism class, Bavinck now was the instructor and his students were not theological students from Leiden, but children of farmers and merchants. He was forced to "easify" the material and make it age-appropriate.

His visitations gave him extra opportunities to explain Scripture and to bring comfort to his flock. He learned the value of Scripture reading and prayer at each visit as well as how and why it was necessary to exhort and, at times, admonish some who were sloppy in their spiritual disciplines.

In all, however, Bavinck was a loving pastor and the congregation in Franeker loved him in return. The Lord had blessed them with a wonderful, gifted, and talented young man for a year. They were sorry to see him leave because the congregation flourished under his preaching and teaching and they were in the midst of plans to expand the sanctuary when he left. Simultaneously, they were aware that he had been called to teach Dogmatics at the Theological Seminary in Kampen, and no one among the Separatist church was more qualified than Herman Bavinck.

### *Herman Bavinck the Theologian*

This is the area where those who have read Bavinck know the most about him. He was certainly one of the best if not *the* best dogmatician Holland ever produced. He had extensive contacts throughout the world and, gradually on, became recognized as Holland's premier theologian and the logical and natural successor of Abraham Kuyper in the chair of Dogmatics/Systematic Theology at the Free University in Amsterdam.

He shocked his conservative theological world and went to liberal Leiden expressly to learn modern theology and while there imbibed deeply and heavily of liberal theology, both reading their works and being taught by their best. Nevertheless, he remained Reformed throughout his time there. The more he trafficked in Reformed circles, the more convinced he became that the tenets of the Reformation were correct. He was fully convinced on his position, which meant that he was not fearful of contacts with those who thought differently.

Abraham Kuyper recognized Bavinck's abilities and offered him numerous appointments to the Free University after Bavinck became professor in Kampen.

### *Bavinck's Inaugural Address*

Rather than take time to explain the contents of Bavinck's inaugural address in Kampen, I have included it as Appendix A.

## *The Relationship of Dogmatics to Ethics and Methodology*

Just prior to his chapter on theological method (Chapter 1, *The Science of Dogmatic Theology*), Bavinck sets the stage for what he will expand on in both his teachings on Dogmatics as well as Reformed Ethics. He writes,

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 on 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 the 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. The two disciplines, far from facing each other as two independent entities, together form a single system; they are related members of a single organism.<sup>35</sup>

This gives us a summary of how Bavinck thought about the relationship between Systematic Theology and Ethics. When we arrive at Chapter 2 (*The Method and Organization of Dogmatic Theology*) it is clear that Holy Scripture provides the material for constructing one's theology. Simultaneously, Bavinck draws from the teaching of the Church as well as Christian experience to provide a "balanced" approach in theological methodology. As John Bolt comments, "All knowledge is rooted in faith, and for faith to be real it must have an object that is knowable. This requires a divine revelation that is more than a fulfillment of subjective desire. Religion must be true and provide its own distinct path to knowledge and certainty. Christian theologians must place themselves within the circle of faith and, while using church tradition and experience, take their stand in the reality of revelation."<sup>36</sup>

In Bavinck's own words, "By the method of dogmatics, broadly speaking, one must understand the manner in which the dogmatic material is acquired and treated. Three factors come into play in this acquisition: Holy Scripture, the church's confession, and Christian consciousness. *Depending on whether or not any one of these factors is used, overestimated or underestimated, and how it is positioned in a modified relation to the remaining two, the starting point of dogmatics as well as its development and content will differ.*"<sup>37</sup>

In each chapter of the *RD* Bavinck provides the reader with a wealth of material on the history of dogma, the Roman Catholic position, the Lutheran position, the Anabaptist stance, and the Reformed view. The footnotes are extensive and the descriptions

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<sup>35</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. 1, (John Bolt [ed.] & John Vriend [trans.]), (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), p. 58. My friend, Dr. Jochem Douma, emeritus professor of ethics at the Theological Seminary on the Broederweg in Kampen, wrote, in a similar vein, "Dogmatics without ethics is empty; ethics without dogmatics is blind." See Jochem Douma, *Responsible Conduct*, (Nelson Kloosterman [trans.]), (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 2003), p. 41.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:59.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:61. Emphases added.

masterful and fair. In almost every chapter, the reader will find Bavinck combating Schleiermacher, Roman Catholicism and his two least favorite philosophies: Deism and Pantheism.

This quote manifests what Bavinck thought of the relationship between Systematic and Biblical Theology, hermeneutics, the Bible and Christ's Incarnation, and human creativity in theology:

Scripture is not designed so that we should parrot it but that as free children of God we should think his thoughts after him. But then all so-called presuppositionlessness and objectivity are impossible. 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. Whoever isolates himself from the church, i.e., from Christianity as a whole, from the history of dogma in its entirety, loses the truth of the Christian faith. That person becomes a branch that is torn from the tree and shrivels, an organ that is separated from the body and therefore doomed to die.... For just as the Son of God become truly human, so also God's thoughts, incorporated in Scripture, become flesh and blood in the 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.<sup>38</sup>

In short, "A good dogmatic method...needs to take account of all three factors: Scripture, church, and Christian consciousness."<sup>39</sup> What this means, *in concreto*, for the dogmatician is the following: "It is not apart from the existing churches but through them that Christ prepares for himself a holy, catholic church. Nor is it apart from the different ecclesiastical dogmas but through them that the unity of the knowledge of God is prepared and realized. In the same way the dogmatician will best be able to work fruitfully for the purification and development of the religious life and the confession of his church.... This significance of the church for theology and dogmatics is grounded in the link that Christ himself forged between the two."<sup>40</sup>

In the introduction (*Voorbericht*) to the first edition of *GD1*, Bavinck gives us more insight into how he viewed the material for a good theological method. After saying a word of thanks to his theological forebears, he mentions that the reader will find more references to patristic and scholastic theology in his volumes than they would with other Protestant theologians.<sup>41</sup> He mentions men like Irenaeus, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas as examples of men who are in the category of "fathers and doctors" to whom the Church owes an obligation.<sup>42</sup> He pinpoints his particular stance by informing the reader that his true debt is to the theology of the Reformation, especially as it manifested itself in Switzerland. Bavinck considered Calvin and his work one of the purest expressions of biblical truth.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 1:83.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 1:84.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 1:85.

<sup>41</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, Dl. I, (Kampen: Bos, 1895), p. iii.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., iv.

He puts matters into perspective when he writes, “To love the old simply because it is old, is neither Reformed nor Christian. And dogmatics does not describe what has been valued, but what must be valued. It roots itself in the past, but it labors for the future.”<sup>44</sup> For these reasons, Bavinck desired that his dogmatics would “bear the stamp of its time.”<sup>45</sup>

### *The Centrality of the “Unio Mystica”*

As I studied Bavinck, it became my settled conviction that virtually the entirety of his theology is impossible to understand apart from the “in Christ” motif or the *unio mystica*. (To this end, I have forms whereby you can order a copy of my doctoral dissertation: “The Doctrine of the *Unio Mystica* in the Theology of Dr. Herman Bavinck.”)

Suffice it to say at this point that the *unio mystica* is a golden thread that runs through the entire *RD*. In my dissertation, I spend time giving the history of dissertations written on Bavinck and then move on to an overview among Reformed theologians of the *applicatio salutis*. From there, I outline the importance of the *unio mystica* in five key aspects of Bavinck’s theology: “organic” thinking, the covenant, justification by faith alone, sanctification, and his use of the phrase “religious-ethical.” The remainder of the work is devoted to explicating how Bavinck works this out in his sacramentology, especially with a view to the Lord’s Supper.

### *Christianity & Culture (The Philosophy of Revelation)*

In the academic year 1908/1909, Dr. Herman Bavinck delivered the L.P. Stone Lectures at Princeton.<sup>46</sup> Of the eight lectures, only six were actually delivered, excluding his lecture on God’s revelation and culture. The English translation was performed by Bavinck’s lifelong friend, Geerhardus Vos, as well as Henry Dosker and Nicholas Steffens.

At the outset of the chapter “Revelation and Culture,” Bavinck outlines the situation historically. He writes, “When Christianity entered the world, it was immediately called on to face a difficult problem. Christianity, which is based on revelation, appeared in a world which had long existed and led its own life.”<sup>47</sup> The problem of autonomy remains today and vigorously refuses to be tamed. Secularists scream about Christians ramming their values down their throats and the reaction of some members of our culture to the rule of law is evident in the recent outbursts and threatened lawsuits in the Proposition 8 measure in California. In this sense, what Christianity initially experienced has not greatly changed in our time. The problem is still, although somewhat altered, pretty much the same. One of the changes, however, is that far too many Christians are not sure what the Bible says on any given issue or how to apply what Scripture says to the postmodern world in which we live. Since many Christians aren’t certain what the Bible says and a representative number of them believe truth is relative, these Christians are somewhat different from their early Church forebears. The other problem, however, which is autonomy, is the constant in the equation.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid. “Het oude te loven alleen omdat het oud is, is noch gereformeerd noch christelijk. En dogmatiek beschrijft niet wat gegolden heft, maar wat gelden moet. Zij wortelt in het verleden, maar werkt voor de toekomst.”

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Wijsbegeerte der Openbaring*, (Kok: Kampen, 1908); E.T.: *The Philosophy of Revelation*. For this section, I will naturally use the English translation.

<sup>47</sup> Bavinck, *TPR*, 242.

Of course, orthodox Christians take the reality of sin into account whereas many modern Christians from either the mega-church or Emergent church movements deal with leaders who refuse to use the word sin for fear it will “turn off” the “seeker.” McLaren despises the word sin, Osteen promises not to use it as does Schuller. (The young Schuller might use it of his father now that dad has fired him.) Hybels knew that if he used it, unchurched Harry and Harriet would walk out. So we have more than one generation of evangelical who must ask the question: Saved from what?

So, says Bavinck, when Christianity appeared on the scene there was already an established order, the arts and sciences had been practiced and perfected, morals and habits had assumed a fixed form and conquests had been undertaken. The Gospel found itself in this type of setting. “And thus the question was inevitably raised how the relations between the two should be adjusted.”<sup>48</sup> That is precisely the question that demands a clear and in depth answer today.

Bavinck is aware that this question may be put in various forms because of its importance and extent, but, he adds, “the problem always remains the same.”<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, how Christians engage culture is not a merely theoretical matter that belongs to scientific or philosophical thought, but rather one that “forces itself upon every man in his every day life.”<sup>50</sup> Therefore, Christians are to be involved as much as possible in the arts, but simultaneously he must realize that engaging the culture is a 24/7, mundane task. That being the case, the primary step for any Christian in this sphere is to be thoroughly grounded in and acquainted with the contents of Scripture. It is conceivable that Christians—especially in this time when we have neglected the arts for so long—can become so enamored of culture and can look so kindly upon it that they fail “to do justice to the rights and requirements of the Christian confession.”<sup>51</sup>

Bavinck’s belief was that first and foremost Christians are to do justice to the rights and requirements of the Christian confession, which would entail no watering down of the truth. This clearly doesn’t mean that we should “rub it in the face” of the non-believer, but at the same time, we should not sugarcoat the gospel or walk on eggshells around non-believers so that they’ll think we’re nice guys and girls.<sup>52</sup> Without a doubt, we are discussing competing and opposite worldviews. Therefore both parties need to acknowledge at the outset of the discussion what their respective worldviews are. The manner in which a non-believer thinks about God, man, society, truth, knowledge, and ethics is, as often as not, one-hundred-and-eighty degrees out of phase with the Christian life and worldview.

Bavinck also noted that there were those who suggested that “Christianity has had its day, and can no longer live with our present-day culture.”<sup>53</sup> Why would someone come to such a conclusion? Clearly, there are a wide variety of reasons why (progressive) secularists and philosophers would hold such an opinion, but it is more disconcerting that those who claim to be theologians of the Christian faith would follow suit. Usually,

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 243.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 244.

<sup>52</sup> Referring to God’s wisdom, J.I. Packer makes the following pertinent comment: “God’s wisdom is not, and never was, pledged to keep a fallen world happy, or to make ungodliness comfortable.” Cf. J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 91.

<sup>53</sup> Herman Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation*, (Henry Dosker; Nicholas Steffens; & Geerhardus Vos [trans.]), (Scarsdale, NY: Westminster Discount Book Service, n.d.), p. 247.

Bavinck writes, such a “paradigm shift” occurs slowly, almost without perception. That is to say, it is usually a gradual process where what are offered as “legitimate questions” are raised. Whereas the *loci* of theology may not be attacked as a whole, Bavinck’s concern is that Christians are aware that the “most unkindest” attack of all is in Christology, since this *locus* is pivotal, essential, and indispensable for our understanding and comprehension of the other *loci* of theology.

Responding to the cultural despisers of Christianity in his time, Bavinck notes that in “the estimate of the person of Jesus an important change has slowly taken place.”<sup>54</sup> Ironically, that shift in his day has interesting parallels to our time. Influential thinkers such as Ernst Renan (philosopher),<sup>55</sup> Heinrich Holtzmann (theologian),<sup>56</sup> and David F. Strauß (philosopher/theologian)<sup>57</sup> “took indeed a humanitarian view of the life of Jesus.”<sup>58</sup> How can the propositions of these men best be summarized? In the first place, using higher critical methods, these men denuded Christ of his deity. He was not truly the Son of God, but remained “the true, ideal man, who established the pure religion by his word and deed.”<sup>59</sup> To their collective minds, Jesus desecrated ceremonial worship, purified morals from all legalism, “who as a human man shared in all the pleasures of life, and presented a moral ideal which deserves our admiration and imitation to-day.”<sup>60</sup>

One of our problems in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is that few are stepping forward with a clear and precise definition of what this “animal” is that many are suggesting Christians “engage.” Bavinck supplies us with a simple, starting working definition to get us moving on the right track. “Culture in the broadest sense...includes all the labor which human power expends on nature.”<sup>61</sup> His historical investigation led him to explain that the word “culture” was a product of the eighteenth century and arose concomitantly with the related terms “civilization,” “enlightenment,” “development,” and “education.” Each of these terms lent themselves to an understanding of “general cultivation, improvement, and [they] always presuppose an object which must be improved.”<sup>62</sup>

What is that object that must be improved? What is its name? In our time, Mother Earth might be appropriate. In Bavinck’s day, from a secular standpoint, it was usually called “nature,” but in the Christian scheme of things it is called “creation.” It ought to be clear that all three of these names conjure up very different meanings of life and a totally different life and worldview. Contrary to so many of our modern ecclesiastical leaders who desire to make “church” comfortable for the pagan, Bavinck’s desire was to engage the non-believer and to present what has come to be called the Neo-Calvinistic worldview. Both Bavinck and Kuyper were champions of all of life being formed and informed by Scripture. In that regard, both were active in politics, education, and a host of other related areas. Their occasional writings and speeches manifest a remarkably

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> See *Evangelisches Kirchen Lexicon*, Bd. III, (Heinz Brunoth & Otto Weber [hrsg.]), (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1958), pp. 627-628.

<sup>56</sup> *EKL*, II, 195-196 & *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, (Kurt Galling [hrsg.]), (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1959), pp. 435-436.

<sup>57</sup> *EKL*, III, 1172-1173; *RGG*, VI, 416-417; Helmut Thielicke, *Glauben und Denken in der Neuzeit*, Die großen Systeme der Theologie und Religionphilosophie, (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1983), pp. 16, 68, 120, 393.

<sup>58</sup> Bavinck, *TPR*, 247.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Bavinck, *TPR*, 249.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

broad “Renaissance” approach to life. At the same time, however, they never considered jettisoning their distinctive Reformed way of life to achieve their goals in culture.

That is due, in part, to the fact that Bavinck analyzed “nature” from a twofold perspective. First, “it includes not only the whole visible world of phenomena which is outside man,” but, second, it also includes “in a wider sense, man himself; not his body alone, but his soul also.”<sup>63</sup> What Bavinck means with this distinction is that the faculties and powers which man possesses have not been acquired by him, but are given to him by God; they are a gift of nature, and these gifts are a means for cultivating the external world, as well as an object which must be cultivated.

Culture, its norms, measures, and standards are not derived autonomously, but are given by God. It’s one thing for the non-Christian to be ignorant of this truth because of the blindness of unbelief, but it is quite another thing for Christians to be confused about it. For all who are “cultural warriors,” there is a standard, which is God’s standard and every individual is required to operate by God’s standard and they are held responsible for not living in accordance with that standard. They are, in a word, without excuse (Rom. 1:20). Lamech, Jabal, Jubal, and Tubal-cain might have done something to advance “culture” as they understood it, but they misunderstood it in their desire to live autonomous lives and not to glorify God in it. The good folks in the land of Shinar suffered under the same delusion.

In 1941, Pitirim Sorokin wrote a thorough analysis of culture entitled, *The Crisis of Our Age*.<sup>64</sup> His sentiments were echoed by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, when he said, “Men have forgotten God.” Today, we seem to have forgotten that men have forgotten God. If the progressive secularists/humanists have long since forgotten God, modern evangelicals have long since forgotten the importance of biblical truth (read: doctrine) for modern Christians. There is little wonder, therefore, that many who call themselves evangelicals have either moved away from the faith altogether, or “will become full-blown liberals.”<sup>65</sup>

The liberal approach was not shared by Bavinck, who insisted that the Christian’s worldview be built upon the foundation of Scripture. He also believed that Christians ought to be concerned about various aspects of culture and society. As case in point is his recently translated work, *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*. The interested reader will find articles in that work on “Christian Principles and Social Relationships,” “On Inequality,” “Trends in Pedagogy,” “Of Beauty and Aesthetics,” and “Ethics and Politics,” just to mention a few of the most salient.<sup>66</sup> That aside—but needing desperately to be addressed in our time—the questions that must be asked as we engage culture are: *Whither culture?* and *What are our aims or goals as we engage culture and the culture despisers of Christianity?* Bavinck was convinced that “nobody can say whither modern culture will lead us; one can surmise, guess, speculate, but there is no certainty at all.”<sup>67</sup> There might be voices of criticism with a view to where modern culture is heading or taking us. Concerned voices might be raised about the immorality of modern culture and

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Pitirim A. Sorokin, *The Crisis of Our Age*, (NY: Doubleday, 1941). The work went to a second edition in 1956.

<sup>65</sup> David Wells, *The Courage to Be Protestant*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), p. 2.

<sup>66</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, (Harry Boonstra & Gerrit Sheeres [trans.], (John Bolt [ed.]), (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008). This work is a translation of Bavinck’s *Verzamelde Opstellen op het gebied van godsdienst en wetenschap*, (Kampen: Kok, 1921).

<sup>67</sup> Bavinck, *TPR*, 252.



its relativism, existentialism, postmodernism, and nihilism, but precisely where it's heading—and taking many Christians in its maelstrom—is at best a crap shoot.

By way of brief review, then, Bavinck designated culture this way: “Culture in the broadest sense...includes all the labor which human power expends on nature.”<sup>68</sup> This “nature,” in turn, has a twofold aspect: “[I]t includes not only the whole visible world of phenomena which is outside man, but also, in a wider sense, man himself; not his body alone, but his soul also. The faculties and powers which man possesses have not been acquired by him, but are given to him by God; they are a gift of nature, and these gifts are a means for cultivating the external world, as well as an object which must be cultivated.”<sup>69</sup>

So what are we dealing with, according to Bavinck, when we discuss the culture and how to engage it? It's his contention that “modern culture is an abstract name for many phenomena, and forms no unity at all. Not only are there innumerable factors which have contributed to its development, but it is also in the highest degree divided in itself.”<sup>70</sup> He goes on to say, “everywhere, and in all domains, in *politics*, social economy, art, science, morals, instruction, education, there are parties, tendencies, and schools which stand in opposition to one another; the realms of justice and culture, church and state, faith and science, capital and labor, nomism and antinomism, combat each other, and proceed on different principles.”<sup>71</sup>

The focal point in the discussion/dialogue between Christians and non-Christians is supernaturalism, “which in point of fact forms the point of controversy between Christianity and many panegyrist of modern culture.”<sup>72</sup> Viewed in this light and from this perspective, there is a clear divide that needs to be set forth from the outset. Bavinck writes, “Christian morals lay stress upon sin and grace, the ethics of evolution proclaims the natural goodness of man; the former regards man as a lost being, who needs salvation, the latter sees in him the one creature who can reform and save the world; the first speaks of reconciliation and regeneration, the second of development and education; for the one the new Jerusalem comes down from God out of heaven, for the other it comes slowly into being by human effort; there divine action moves history, here evolution is the all-directing process.”<sup>73</sup> The upshot of this is that “if the gospel is true, then it carries with it its own standard for the valuation of all culture.”<sup>74</sup>

When Nietzsche challenged the Christian faith,<sup>75</sup> he ultimately failed to pinpoint the standard by which these morals of free men might be verified and evaluated. This leads Bavinck to say, “Now as soon as culture wishes to be ethical culture, not in name, but in fact and in truth, it loses all ground for accusing the gospel of enmity against it, and it cannot do itself greater service than by honoring the gospel as the chief and highest power making for culture.”<sup>76</sup> This closes the deal for Bavinck and requires the

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 249.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 251.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. Emphasis added.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 256.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 249. Bavinck writes, “Nietzsche has endeavored...to reverse all its (Christianity's—RG) values. Instead of the morals of slaves which Jews and Christians have introduced, he wished to restore to honor the original morals of free men; his system may be called a *logical aristocratic anarchism*.” Emphasis added.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 259.

acknowledgment and recognition that “it is historically proved that culture has not had an independent origin and development, but from its first commencement is bound up with religion in the closest way.”<sup>77</sup>

Therefore, while Christians should be actively involved in culture it is also true that “All culture, whatever significance it may have, just as all education, civilization, development, is absolutely powerless to renew the inner man.”<sup>78</sup> This means that “the true, and the good, and the beautiful, which ethical culture means and seeks, can only come to perfection when the absolute good is at the same time the almighty, divine will, which not only prescribes the good in the moral law, but also works it effectually in man himself. The heteronomy of law and the autonomy of man are reconciled only by this theonomy.”<sup>79</sup> In all efforts in culture, only Christianity takes the sinfulness of man seriously, which places culture and its value in sharper relief. It is the gospel that “goes back in the past to creation, and even to eternity, and stretches forward to the farthest future.... The resurrection is the fundamental restoration of all culture.”<sup>80</sup> In short, “The Christian nations are still the guardians of culture.”<sup>81</sup>

### *Herman Bavinck the Churchman*

Throughout his life, Bavinck remained a committed churchman. This is exceedingly important for us to remember. I wish to discuss this particular section under the heading of the church union of 1892, Bavinck’s participation as General Synods, his realization that you cannot win them all, and an egregious mistake that he made, which, I trust, will serve as a “teaching moment” for all of us.

#### *The Union of 1892*

Bavinck’s church (*Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerk*) and Abraham Kuyper’s struggles within the State Church (*Hervormde Kerk* [U.S. counterpart: R.C.A.]) caused them to wonder what, precisely, was keeping them apart. They held to the same view of Scripture and of the Three Forms of Unity and church order from Dordrecht (1618/1619). (See Appendix B on the Afscheiding and Appendix C on the Kuyper-led Doleantie.)

For his part, Bavinck had a great deal of suspicion and distrust to overcome among the CRC<sup>82</sup> members as well as some of his prominent colleagues at the Theological Seminary in Kampen. Much of the distrust was concentrated on Kuyper, who sometimes ran far too far ahead of those who were in his camp. Another serious question centered around which school would be the school for the education of the ministers: the Free University or the Theological Seminary in Kampen.

After many meetings (some of them of the smoky “back room” variety), numerous speeches, a great deal of arm twisting, the spilling of much ink, and a little church politics, the union was finally a reality in 1892. The only issue that both parties did not resolve prior to the union was the “school question,” which the delegates believed could be easily taken care of after the union. They were horribly wrong.

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 263.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 269.

<sup>82</sup> I’m using this as the English translation of Bavinck’s church. It was not related then to the Christian Reformed Church.

Bavinck's efforts as a churchman in working towards a union between the two churches were, in a word, untiring. In addition to his teaching, speaking, and preaching engagements, Bavinck found (made) time to participate in the life of his church at all levels. It was not a question for him that he was too busy. He made time for this important aspect of his Christian life.

### *You Win Some; You Lose Some*

Even though he was an active and enthusiastic participant things did not always go his way. In fact, once he was assigned the burden of resolving the school question he found that he was dealing with a monster that took on a life of its own. Both sides dug in their heels insisting that *their* institution be the one where the ministerial candidates received their theological education. Bavinck worked day and night on a solution that was amenable to both sides—to no avail.

Finally, he decided to cut to the chase and make his proposal public. He did this without consulting with Kuyper. He believed that this was permissible since they had discussed the finer points of each item of his proposal in detail, repeatedly. Once Bavinck made this announcement, Kuyper's wrath came down on him hard. Their correspondence back and forth grew more intense with each letter. Initially, Bavinck was apologetic and overly respectful, but as the letter exchange continued Bavinck got right back in Kuyper's face.

It is not saying too much to assess that this issue was the undoing of their close friendship. Throughout their remaining days, they remained in contact, worked together, Bavinck campaigned for Kuyper when he ran for Premier of Holland, when Kuyper attempted a second term as Premier, but failed, and he eventually took Kuyper's chair of Systematic Theology at the Free University. Nevertheless, their friendship cooled substantially and never recovered from the blow it suffered from the "school question."

### *An Egregious Mistake: Abraham Kuyper & Baptism*

Kuyper was a great theologian, who sometimes took flights into speculation. His theology was also profoundly influenced by his supralapsarianism, even though he accepted the supra- position with certain reserves. Kuyper rejected the notions that God is the author of sin and that predestination and reprobation are equal, albeit opposite entities. If he were skeptical of certain aspects of supralapsarianism, he believed that infralapsarianism was fraught with even more difficulties.

Two areas where Bavinck and Kuyper ran into theological difficulties had to do with Kuyper's views on eternal justification and presumptive regeneration. The former Kuyper teaches in his work on the Holy Spirit and his exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism.<sup>83</sup>

Bavinck's criticism of Kuyper's usage of eternal justification was that while no doubt true in terms of the *pactum salutis*, "Scripture nowhere models this usage."<sup>84</sup> He goes on to explain that the Reformed have almost unanimously contested this doctrine. Certainly, Bavinck adds, justification is decreed from eternity, but that same sort of truth applies to everything that transpires in time; everything in the concrete history of this creation is

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<sup>83</sup> Abraham Kuyper, *Het Werk van den Heiligen Geest*, (Kampen: Kok, 1927<sup>2</sup>). ET: *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, (Henri De Vries [trans.]), (NY: Funk & Wagnalls, 1900) & *E Voto Dordraceno* (Kampen: Kok, n.d.)

<sup>84</sup> Bavinck, *RD*, 4:216.

decreed from eternity. There is nothing that escapes God's eternal counsel.<sup>85</sup> To bolster his argument, Bavinck cites how in Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 11, article 4, the best and most proper manner of speaking about justification in the fullness of time makes the most biblical sense. He also cites various renowned seventeenth century Reformed theologians, who opposed the doctrine.<sup>86</sup> Bavinck further explains that the proponents of Kuyper's position "lost sight of the difference between the decree and its execution, but the 'immanent' and the 'objectivizing' act."<sup>87</sup>

The second issue (Presupposed or Presumptive Regeneration) occupied much—but not enough—of Bavinck's time and attention. He penned a long series of articles in the ecclesiastical periodical *The Free Church (De Vrije Kerk)* refuting Kuyper's notion. The article eventually appeared in a book *Roeping en Wedergeboorte (Calling and Regeneration)* that says it all as far as Bavinck's position is concerned. Calling precedes regeneration. In Kuyper's scheme of things (presupposed) regeneration preceded calling.

Kuyper believed that given the divine promise, God is already efficaciously working salvation in the life of a covenant child. For the Church to baptize covenant infants without this assumption of faith, he taught is both mistaken and disobedient.<sup>88</sup> Kuyper taught what many believe to be true, namely that the essence of a sacrament consists in this joint activity of both the outward rite performed by the minister and the inward grace imparted by the Lord himself.<sup>89</sup> For his part, Kuyper believes that we ought to trust that God is acting in the sacrament, for sacraments function to nurture and confirm us in faith. Thus when the minister acts in administering the sacrament, we should believe that the Lord is likewise administering grace to the soul of the baptized child.<sup>90</sup>

Mark Beach writes, "Suffice it to say that, for the Reformed, the ground for baptism (including infant baptism), in decreasing order of importance, is typically and principally (1) the command of Christ (Matt. 28:19, 20; Acts 16:15, 33; 18:8; 1 Cor. 1:16); (2) the divine promise of the covenant of grace (Gen. 17:7; Acts 2:39; 10:47); (3) the analogy derived from circumcision (Col. 2:12)..."<sup>91</sup>

When Bavinck wrote his articles, he avoided mentioning Kuyper by name frequently, but everyone knew against whom Bavinck wrote in this matter. Bavinck was abundantly clear that he opposed Kuyper's doctrine of presupposed regeneration as the ground of baptism. For Bavinck, the right to baptism, for both adults as well as for children, is derived from the covenant of grace, to which they are parties. He states, "Not regeneration, faith, or repentance, much less our assumptions pertaining to them, but on the covenant of grace" forms the ground for baptism.<sup>92</sup>

But the most egregious error that Bavinck (and others) committed in this whole discussion and debate was not being more unbending about standing for the truth. Truly, Kuyper was a great man, but he was, like the rest, a man with clay feet. Here is just one

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 4:203.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 3:590-591.

<sup>88</sup> Abraham Kuyper, *Voor een Distel een Mirt: Geestelijke Overdenkingen bij den Heiligen Doop, het Doen van Belijdenis en het Toegaan tot het Heilig Avondmaal*, (Amsterdam: Höveker & Wormser, 1891), pp. 69, 72. Comp. *E Voto Dordraceno*, 3:9-12.

<sup>89</sup> *E Voto Dordraceno*, 2:535.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Saved by Grace*, (Mark Beach [ed.] & Nelson Kloosterman [trans.]), (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), p. xxxii.

<sup>92</sup> Bavinck, *RD*, 4:525.

instance where friendship clouded the importance and gravity of the situation. Kuyper was given a “pass” on a view that would later play an integral part in the dissolution of the Union of 1892. In 1944, Kuyper’s views were elevated to the position of apodictic truth. That is to say, candidates who deviated from or entertained objections to Kuyper’s view of presupposed regeneration would not pass their ordination exams at the Classis (Presbytery) level. There are some invaluable lessons to be learned from this time in Bavinck’s life.

### *Senator Herman Bavinck*

It is without question that his association with Kuyper also played a huge role in Bavinck’s expertise when it came to the application of biblical truth in the political sphere of life. Numerous forces had joined together and came together at the precise moment to thrust this mature and accomplished theologian onto the public scene, This does not mean, however, that his secular politician counterparts were pleased that Bavinck entered into their territory. The facts point in the opposite direction. The liberal parties in Holland rued the day that this formidable theologian entered into the fray. Kuyper and Rutgers were formidable enough without this precise dogmatician that spent so much of his life exegeting the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, asking what application they had both for personal faith and for the public square. From the outset, he was intrigued by what Scripture meant for public life. By becoming the equivalent of a U.S. Senator, Bavinck would have the opportunity of putting his academic studies into practical experience.

### *The “Citizen Politician”*

Bavinck conducted himself as a member of the First Chamber of the Dutch Parliament with dignity and integrity. He was what one might call a “citizen politician.” By that I mean someone who was not so much concerned with getting reelected (his election to the office took him by surprise), but with representing the people.

In his capacity as “Senator” Bavinck, he did not jettison his Christian principles, but rather allowed them to lead him and guide him in all that he did, wrote, and said. He respectively listened to his fellow senators, but equally respectfully disagreed with many of them.

His goal—along with his political party’s goal (The Anti-Revolutionary Party)—was to implement a Christian life and worldview in Holland. In this sense, Bavinck was not a theologian, nor was he post-mil. He was an optimistic proponent of amillennialism, holding to what A.A. Hoekema dubbed “realized eschatology.” To that end, Bavinck lived and worked every day as if Christ might return that day. If his Savior returned in his lifetime, Bavinck wanted to be found busy with the Lord’s work; busy with the work of the Kingdom.

Because he was so comfortable in his own skin and with his distinctively Reformed position, he was not threatened by either theological or political liberals. He stood his ground firmly, resolutely, yet gently. He was a formidable opponent in debate, but was also well loved and respected by his fellow-politicians, even those who disagreed with him.

### *The Notion of “Antithesis”*

One of the guiding notions Bavinck brought with him to the Dutch Parliament from Groen van Prinsterer, Abraham Kuyper, and the Anti-Revolutionary Party was the concept of the “antithesis.” This was closely related to his views on God’s revelation and culture.

While there is much in society that Christians can make good use of (cf. *Inst.* 3.9.3, pp. 714-715), the Christian must also be willing to acknowledge that there is much in culture that is detrimental and spiritually harmful. To that end, Scripture calls us to be discerning and, where needed, countercultural. Bavinck and others in his camp often spoke of this as the “antithesis” or “antithetical” confrontation of the Christian with culture. His belief was that the youth needed to be exposed to some of the things of the world by means of an “accompanied confrontation.” That is to say, that they are exposed to certain things under the guidance and leadership of a mature Christian adult.

Since this concept went hand-in-hand with Bavinck’s worldview, it should not surprise us to find it as part of his “package deal” in the political arena as well.

### *Summary & Conclusions*

What can we take away from the life and work of Herman Bavinck? In short, each of us is called to do his part and to play his role in the capacity of pastor in Christ’s Church. This includes being a theologian, a pastor, a teacher, a churchman, and a citizen politician.

Before we get to those conclusions, however, I want to take a moment and address an accusation or query that is made or raised, respectively, about Bavinck’s relationship to Dogmatics later in life. In particular, I want to address the question: did he change after leaving Kampen for Amsterdam in 1902? The answer is Yes and No.

Yes, he left the environs of Kampen where he was a whale in a small pond. He left the bucolic setting of Kampen for the cosmopolitan Amsterdam, where although he was still well known, he was substantially less well known than in Kampen. Bavinck was what we would call today a “famous” man. It was not unheard of for him to have audiences with then Queen Wilhelmina. Once he moved to Amsterdam, however, he did not receive the same deference he received in Kampen. In a very real sense, Bavinck cherished the amount of anonymity that came along with the move to the much larger Amsterdam.

But the answer is No with regard to his view of Dogmatics. His first two biographers, Hepp and Bremmer concur that after he moved to Amsterdam Bavinck expanded his vistas and stood on much broader terrain than he did in Kampen where the preponderance of his labors were directed to and focused upon ecclesiastical life.<sup>93</sup> Once he moved to Amsterdam, however, his involvement in the political arena gave him invaluable insights into what was coming in the educational realm as well.<sup>94</sup> It is as if all of his preparation in the rustic setting in Kampen suddenly funneled his expertise and insights into other spheres of life. This is not to say that Bavinck wasn’t interested in these spheres previously, but it is true that in Amsterdam he had a substantially better opportunity to develop those interests.

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<sup>93</sup> R.H. Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck en Zijn Tijdgenoten*, (Kampen: Kok, 1966), p. 243; Hepp, *DHB*, 315ff.

<sup>94</sup> Bremmer, *HBZT*, 243; Hepp, *DHB*, 316.

### *Did Bavinck Abandon Dogmatics?*

In a certain sense, October 20, 1911 marks Bavinck's "farewell" to Dogmatics, at least in terms of him not writing anything specifically related to Systematic Theology. It was on that day that he delivered his Rector's speech at the Free University entitled *Modernism and Orthodoxy*.<sup>95</sup>

One of the key questions that Bavinck's biographers and followers have raised over the years was this: Did he change his theology after he left Kampen? That is to say, when he left the somewhat secluded confines of Kampen and was exposed to a cosmopolitan city like Amsterdam, were the changes and pressure so great that he capitulated and abandoned what he had always held near and dear? Did Bavinck remain true to the Reformed doctrines of grace or did he compromise them later in his life? Without a doubt there was a shift in his interests from Dogmatics *per se* to a wider range of topics such as politics, education, and psychology.<sup>96</sup> In this sense the answer to the question is Yes there was a shift in his focus.

Even with all these events, Bavinck did not change if by change what is meant is that he moved away from solid Reformed views. As we shall see, he kept the faith and remained unashamedly Reformed until he was taken home to his promised eternal inheritance. First, it is important to note that between 1906 and 1911 the second edition of the *RD* appeared. (1906 [Vol. 1]; 1908 [Vol. 2]; 1910 [Vol. 3]; and 1911 [Vol. 4], respectively). This is significant because this and subsequent editions of the *RD* remained unchanged.

Second, Bavinck told Hepp personally that all his study leading up to and including the *RD* had given him the solid basis upon which he believed that he didn't need to add anything different to what he had already said.<sup>97</sup> The *RD* was left as it was because Bavinck was convinced that he had said what he needed to say in the four-volume work.

Third, his previous occasional writings and addresses had also served as the "groundwork" for his Dogmatics, Ethics, and a Reformed Christian life and worldview. After having laid the foundation, all that was really needed was to respond from this solid base to the theological, political, and cultural issues that presented themselves to Bavinck, the Reformed Churches, and to his native land. Some questions were somewhat new and difficult, but we find no admissions from Bavinck either in his writings, or his speeches, addresses, or in his diary that we should have valid reasons to believe that he no longer embraced and championed those Reformed principles that had been so near and dear to his heart previously. For example, when World War I broke out, Bavinck, like many of his colleagues, was shocked and surprised. That event did not, however, cause him to despair or to believe that what he wrote previously was of no use or help. What we discover, rather, in Bavinck is a man who until his last breath was an advocate for what has come to be known as Calvinism.

It is also patently true that leading up to the publication of *Modernism and Orthodoxy* Bavinck had been contending with many of the popular theologians both in Holland and in Europe. For example, in 1912 in a relatively little known work entitled *Christendom*, post-dating his diatribe against modernism, Bavinck defended orthodoxy over against the

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<sup>95</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Modernisme en Orthodoxie*. Rede gehouden bij de Overdracht van het Rectoraat aan de Vrije Universiteit op 20 October 1911, (Kampen: Kok, 1911).

<sup>96</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Bijbelsche en Religieuze Psychologie*, (Kampen: Kok, 1920).

<sup>97</sup> Hepp, *DHB*, 317-318.

writings of von Harnack.<sup>98</sup> In 1909 he delivered a paper celebrating the 400<sup>th</sup> year of Calvin's birth wherein he outlined the significance of the Reformed for government and society.<sup>99</sup> If it is remembered that Bavinck wrote his doctoral thesis on Zwingli's view of the State, then it will be clear how the relationship between Church and State intrigued Bavinck throughout his life.

Bavinck was always a man with many varied interests and his move to Amsterdam only served to facilitate his keen interests in many matters and other disciplines. From 1904-1908 we observe a trend in this thinking that combined theology and philosophy. In successive and logical steps he wrote about *Christian "Science"* (*Christelijke Wetenschap*), *The Christian Worldview* (*Christelijke Wereldbeschouwing*), and the culmination of those two studies his Stone Lectures on *The Philosophy of Revelation* (*Wijsbegeerte der Openbaring*).

Many great men are misunderstood and Bavinck is no exception. While holding firmly to historical Reformed theology Bavinck wrestled with how to apply those truths in his contemporary setting without compromising them. He was a man of many and varied talents. Without a doubt he was a great theologian, perhaps the greatest Holland ever produced. As a philosopher/theologian, he strove against the positivistic Materialism of the nineteenth century and, as a confessor of the Reformed faith, he refused to get caught up in the maelstrom of the secularization of faith and theology. Given all the "hats" that Bavinck wore, Meijers is quite correct when he says that he ably walked the fine line between objectivity and existentiality—and that in a thoroughly Reformed manner.<sup>100</sup>

### *"Life is Strange; Death is Stranger"*

The pressure and lifestyle eventually caught up with Bavinck. Kuyper had previously suffered two, if not three, nervous breakdowns, due to his excessive work ethic. Bavinck attended the General Synod of Leeuwarden for a full week and while there, made many important and significant contributions to the work of the delegates, as there were very delicate matters that required attention. One of the most significant arguments he made was against the "new school" in favor of the maintenance of the confessional standards.<sup>101</sup> While he was open to the possibility of expanding them somewhat, he was equally convinced that it would serve no good purpose to dispense with them in favor of newer, more contemporary explanations of the Christian faith.<sup>102</sup> There were newer, younger theologians who were questioning the wisdom of their elder pastors/teachers/theologians. A growing number of these young men saw the Three Forms of Unity as antiquated beyond usefulness and desired either to jettison them completely or to modify them significantly. Bavinck was opposed to both.

After a week of intense discussions and debates, Bavinck made the return trip to Amsterdam. He was exhausted.<sup>103</sup> It would become evident rather quickly that his fatigue

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<sup>98</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Het Christendom*, in the series *Groote godsdiensten*, (Baarn: Hollandia-drukkerij, n.d.).

<sup>99</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Johannes Calvijn*, (Kampen: Kok, 1909), p. 33. Kuyper responded kindly and favorably to Bavinck's little work on Calvin. (Kuyper to Bavinck, 11.9.1909, *Bavinck Archives*.)

<sup>100</sup> S. Meijers, *Objectiviteit en Existentialiteit*. Een onderzoek naar hun verhouding in de theologie van Herman Bavinck en in door hem beïnvloede concepties, (Kampen: Kok, 1979).

<sup>101</sup> *Acta Leeuwarden 1920*, pp. 152-154.

<sup>102</sup> Bremmer, *HBZT*, 266.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*



was not entirely due to stress. Friday, August 27<sup>th</sup>, Bavinck returned to Bussum feeling quite ill. He had rented a cottage in Bussum, but felt so poorly that he stayed at his daughter's house instead.<sup>104</sup> The next day, Saturday, August 28, 1920, the entry in his diary read, "Very tired."<sup>105</sup> Only with difficulty and shortness of breath was he finally able to walk the short distance from Central Station to his house.<sup>106</sup> He had to stop repeatedly to rest and to catch his breath. The next day he suffered a heart attack and had trouble breathing.<sup>107</sup> It was the beginning of his transition from this life into the next. His diary informs us that the doctors who visited Bavinck prescribed rest, believing that their patient would improve.

The doctors' prescription for bed rest did not produce the desired effects. Bavinck did not improve as predicted. There were moments when it appeared that the doctors were right, especially when Bavinck would "rally" slightly. Certainly, the Reformed community in the Netherlands was in fervent prayer for his full and speedy recovery. In the last analysis, however, the illness was preparation both for Bavinck and all those who loved him.

All of the Christian life is a preparation for glorification. God chooses, however, in his time and in his way how each of his children will be transported to him. The Lord's "exit strategy" for Bavinck involved a rather prolonged and protracted illness. After so many years of intensive labor in lecturing, writing his *Reformed Dogmatics* as well as a host of other books, preaching, lecturing, being involved in politics, and being the quintessential churchman, the heart attack had taken a heavy toll. The effects of his labors could be read in the unmistakable deep lines drawn in his face and in his demeanor. Walking became shuffling and now he looked old beyond his years.

There was hope, however, that Bavinck would recover fully from the heart attack. The desire of his family, friends, colleagues, and students was that the Lord would spare Bavinck for the Church. Humanly speaking, there was still so much to do and even by the standards of his day, Bavinck was still a relatively young man. And there were glimpses, indications that he would rebound from this setback and take up his labors again at the Free University and in the vineyard of Christ. On October 2, 1920 he descended the stairs of his home and manifested the old, recognizable desire to work and study to those around him. This was an encouraging sign. The man who meant so much to Christ's Church in Holland was dearly loved and admired. Everyone wanted the best for him; everyone wanted him to be back to his old self. After coming downstairs and indicating his desire to get back to his work, he also ate a hearty meal.<sup>108</sup>

The recovery process appeared to be moving in the right direction, much to everyone's delight. Unfortunately, his "recovery" was short-lived at best; merely an appearance that he was back on the road to good health. After a brief time, when everyone's hopes were running high, Bavinck was once again easily exhausted and had to stop all work completely. Those around him were forced to contemplate what this meant. His last entry in his diary is an interesting one and reminds us that his condition was so precarious that for approximately the next eight months he made no more entries. It is

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<sup>104</sup> Hepp, *DHB*, 338.

<sup>105</sup> Diary, 8.28.1920.

<sup>106</sup> Hepp, *DHB*, 338.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Hepp, *DHB*, 338.

dated November 8, 1920.<sup>109</sup> It reads very succinctly, “Monday. 6:30p.m. Dr. A. Kuyper died. November 12, Friday, burial of Dr. A.K.”<sup>110</sup> Given his own condition, the arrival of the news of Kuyper’s death must have seemed to Bavinck like a harbinger of what the Lord had prepared for him.

The cold, dreary, and wet Dutch winter arrived. The ubiquitous rain and drizzle made its daily appearance. By the time winter arrived, Bavinck was confined to his bed. Long months of suffering awaited him.<sup>111</sup> Moreover, Hepp, who visited him on numerous occasions, notes that “the sickness clamped onto his life and drained him of any strength that was left in it.”<sup>112</sup> In addition to the delicate situation with his heart, Bavinck had also contracted uremia, which was a clear indication that he would not recover. His sickbed became his deathbed.

It was there on his deathbed that Bavinck would wage a battle of the trial of faith against the forces of death. Hepp recalls a particular visit to Bavinck where he had to gasp for almost every breath. Still, he managed to say these few provocative words: “Life.... is.... strange...., but.... death.... is.... stranger.”<sup>113</sup> Bavinck was ill, in the throes of death, but even in this last great struggle of his life, his ability to think, ponder, and meditate did not escape him. In his mind, even though his struggle was formidable and would be waged until he drew his last breath, the outcome was certain. He knew that when his life ended he would be with his Savior, Jesus.<sup>114</sup>

Biographer and student, J.H. Landwehr characterizes this time of suffering in Bavinck’s life as “testing, battle, and victory.”<sup>115</sup> To Landwehr’s mind, Bavinck was a churchman who had spent himself for the good of Christ’s Church and who, even on his deathbed (*legerstede*), occasionally spoke about how he still might benefit God’s people.<sup>116</sup> How strong was the pull actually to continue to do something for the people of God? There were times during his illness that Bavinck actually considered writing something about the testing of his faith he was enduring, but that never materialized.<sup>117</sup> He wanted to pass on something to God’s people about the process of dying he was experiencing and so encourage and strengthen the Church in how close the Lord was to those who were in the throes of death. The will was present, but the strength to perform what he desired was lacking. Even reading, his joy and delight, was difficult for him. Though he was still a relatively young man and, humanly speaking, still had a great deal that he wanted to do, in this time and place, Bavinck learned to give himself completely over to God’s guidance and will.

In these intense and complex last months on earth, trusting solely in God’s grace, he committed himself to the Lord and rose above the struggle.<sup>118</sup> Landwehr records that it was precisely during this time of rest and quiet that the power of faith manifested itself most clearly in Bavinck.<sup>119</sup> There were “themes” and “phrases” that he repeated to his

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Diary, 11.8.1920.

<sup>111</sup> Hepp, *DHB*, 339.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> J.H. Landwehr, *In Memoriam*, (Kampen: Kok, 1921), p. 77.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

visitors. One of those he most often repeated was “I have kept the faith.” This short sentence served as a summary of his life. In spite of all the theology and philosophy he read, he kept the faith; in spite of all the trials in the CRC and unified churches, he kept the faith; in spite of setback in politics, he kept the faith; in spite of losing close friends, he kept the faith; and in preparation for the next life, he kept the faith once contended for and passed on to the Church.

As the illness took its course, something else, something deeply spiritual, was going on within Bavinck that was preparing him for his eternal inheritance. Landwehr describes it as Bavinck being filled with the peace of God that surpasses all human understanding, the sweet rest of faith, and the glorious knowledge that he was the Lord’s child.<sup>120</sup> At times, Bavinck longed to depart this life and be with the Lord, but for divine reasons, the Lord tarried. Landwehr writes that he heard Bavinck express one wish that he could not leave out of his record. Bavinck wished that once he had entered the glories of heaven that he might be permitted to return to earth just long enough to witness to God’s people and world just how glorious heaven was.<sup>121</sup> Bavinck knew, of course, that this desire would never be granted.

Slowly but surely Bavinck’s “outer tent” wasted away. Sunday after Sunday, from pulpits and in households, God’s children prayed that this servant might be brought to his heavenly home. Bavinck himself asked on occasion and petitioned God with the plaintiff cry, “How much longer, Lord?”<sup>122</sup>

Fearing that the end was truly near, many filed in and out of Bavinck’s house to visit him. By the end of February Bavinck was entirely bedridden and could no longer care for himself. Yet he could still joke with his nurse saying that at least now all the commission work at classis and General Synod was done for him.<sup>123</sup> His own pastor, Dr. B. Wielenga, visited Bavinck frequently during those months. In an article that appeared in *The Reformation* in September, Wielenga wrote that at the end of each visit, he would ask Bavinck what they could pray together about. Bavinck’s answer was always the same: “Thanks! Thanks for everything!”<sup>124</sup>

In the family archives, we find witness to what a strength Hanny Bavinck was to her beloved husband during this time. She remained a faithful Christian wife in health and in sickness. As she cared for her husband, Hanny jotted down comments that he made to her. One such comment went like this: “It is certainly true that dying contains enormous puzzles!”<sup>125</sup> On the evening of February 8, 1921 she noted that Herman received a special blessing from Psalm 16:11, “You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”

In the summer of 1921 the end—or the new beginning—finally came. On May 21<sup>st</sup> Hanny noted that Herman was sad and troubled, but was encouraged by Psalm 86. On June 2<sup>nd</sup> he told her that all the psalms were beautiful and asked her to read Psalm 103 to him. He added, “There is so much comfort and encouragement in the psalms!”<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>123</sup> Bremmer, *HBZT*, 268.

<sup>124</sup> *De Reformatie*, 9.30.1921.

<sup>125</sup> Bremmer, *HBZT*, 268.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

The day before Wielenga had visited and read to him from Psalm 8. Indeed, Bavinck had pondered the question asked in this psalm both in his study and in the classroom: “What is man that you are mindful of him?” Now he was wrestling with that very question in the most existential manner on his deathbed. When Wielenga read the psalm, Bavinck had an answer: man is a sinner, saved by the grace of Jesus Christ.

Bavinck’s journey in this life came to a quiet and peaceful end on July 29, 1921. At 4:30a.m., in full trust in the Lord and in great peace, he passed from earth into heaven. The struggle had been long and, at time, arduous, but God’s grace saw him through to the end and allowed him to realize what it means to keep the faith. It was appropriate for a quiet and peaceful man to be translated to heaven in a quiet and peaceful manner. Bavinck had been one of God’s gifts to the Church of Jesus Christ. He gave a man who was the consummate scholar, but also one who was gentle, humble, and approachable. He was the scholar in the classroom, a man of international allure, who was equally at home with a peasant in a small fishing village or with one of God’s “special” covenant children. As he lived and moved among God’s people he was a scholar, a politician, a churchman, a husband, a father, and a friend. The country of Holland would miss this man.

It was a hot summer that year in Holland. Hepp records that the day of the funeral was exceedingly hot. A large number of people that would have attended the funeral were away in other countries on vacation.<sup>127</sup> Also, because of the unbearable and oppressive heat, the funeral speeches had to be kept to a bare minimum.<sup>128</sup> The result was that many who would normally have attended did not. The Dutch are not accustomed to hot temperatures, but rather their climate is usually cool to cold and damp. Wearing black clothing in sweltering heat was practically “virgin territory” for many in attendance.

Some of Bavinck’s former students carried his casket out of his house and onto the Singelgracht in Amsterdam on the afternoon of August 2, 1921. Whereas thousands had lined the streets for Kuyper’s funeral, hundreds lined them for Bavinck’s. The number of public mourners does not mean, however, that Bavinck was less significant to Holland than Kuyper was. Quite the contrary is the case. Bavinck meant substantially more in terms of solid Reformed theology than his elder friend and colleague did. On the cardinal points of the Reformed faith, Kuyper and Bavinck were very close.<sup>129</sup> It is equally true, however, that “the elaboration Kuyper gives of some themes is more romantic and speculative than that of Bavinck.”<sup>130</sup> Where Kuyper tended towards speculation at times, Bavinck was more the man of precision and exact exegesis.

Old friends and new made their way to Amsterdam for the occasion and Leiden University was represented by Bavinck’s lifelong friend, Snouck Hurgronje. Pastor Brussaard from Bloemendaal led the funeral service both at Bavinck’s home as well as at the grave site. Wielenga had bid farewell to Bavinck earlier and by a mutual agreement Wielenga went on vacation. At the graveside, Bloemendaal had those gathered sing from Psalm 84:6: “The LORD His goodness had revealed: He is to us a sun and shield; For He bestows renown and favor. And when the upright seek His face, the Lord will not withhold His grace; His faithfulness endures forever. O LORD of hosts, how blest is he who puts his hope and trust in Thee.” At the conclusion of the singing, the funeral

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<sup>127</sup> Hepp, *DHB*, 340.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid. Hepp also notes: “Bavinck’s body, which had not been embalmed, was rapidly decomposing in the summer heat; the time for speeches from the many notable guests who attended was shortened.”

<sup>129</sup> Veenhof, *RI*, 132.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

director nodded and Bavinck's body descended into the grave. Spontaneously, someone among those gathered that hot August day began to sing from Psalm 72:11, and since the Dutch memorize the psalms, all present began to sing the words, "The king, whose name we are professing, shall like the sun endure. In him all nations find their blessing; Make Thou his throne secure! Blest be the Lord, for He so glorious alone does wondrous things. O God, in all the earth our chorus with 'Amen, Amen' rings." With songs of praise to God, Bavinck's body was committed back to the earth. Surely Lord's Day 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism was on everyone's mind.<sup>131</sup>

That day, the Reformed buried one of their noblest and greatest sons and theologians. He was loved in life and he was revered in death. Slowly, the grave site emptied and when the last person walked out of the front gate, God closed a chapter in the book of the history of his Church in Holland and in the world.

### *Herman Bavinck, Abraham Kuyper, & B.B. Warfield*

The ways of the Lord are truly inscrutable. He sovereignly raised up three theological giants for the edification of his Church: B.B. Warfield, Abraham Kuyper, and Herman Bavinck, who all were taken from the Church within an expanse of time of less than a year. Kuyper died near the end of 1920, on November 8, B.B. Warfield died on February 16, 1921, and in the summer of 1921 (July 29<sup>th</sup>), even though he was Kuyper's junior by a number of years, Bavinck would be taken home as well. These men had labored long and hard in and for the Church. Each, in his own respect, had known marvelous times of joy and, simultaneously, deep valleys. They had lost loved ones, been disappointed by close colleagues, and, in the case of Warfield, cared for an invalid wife.

### *The Necessity of Studying Bavinck Today*

I have given you today just a small glimpse into a truly great Reformed theologian. It is my hope and prayer that if you do not yet have the *RD* that you will get all four volumes as soon as you get home. We are talking of a man who is on par with Augustine, Calvin, Luther, Bullinger, Olevianus, Ursinus, Owen, Manton, Turretin, Edwards, Warfield, Kuyper, and Dabney.

In the four volumes of the *RD* you will receive a feast of solid exegesis, the history of dogma, the history of philosophy, a description of Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Arminian thought, and a beautifully balanced explanation of Reformed theology. Even though the work is somewhat dated, simply because Bavinck is so conversant with Scripture, his writings retain a certain "young freshness" about them.

As in both the Westminster Shorter Catechism and the Heidelberg Catechism there is a particular *Amen!* that must be pronounced. After focusing on God, the final question in both documents focuses on our response. The certainty of our response that God has heard our prayers is not based on our feelings or experiences. Our *Amen!* is a matter of our trust in God; in the promises of the covenant of grace that are solidly situated on God's trustworthiness and faithfulness. These remain when all other certainties vanish.

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<sup>131</sup> Q. *What is your only comfort in life and death?* A. That I am not my own, but belong with body and soul, both in life and in death, to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from all the power of the devil. He also preserves me in such a way that without the will of my heavenly Father not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, all things must work together for my salvation. Therefore, by his Holy Spirit he also assures me of eternal life and makes me heartily willing and ready from now on to live for him.

Bavinck knew this and lived this. His “only comfort” deals explicitly throughout with the greatest certainty. The Reformation retrieved the ultimate security that man can find in life: in Scripture alone, in grace alone, in faith alone, and all this especially in Christ alone. The *RD* is nothing but the confession of a Reformed theologian of what Christ has done, does, and yet will do, until he has completed his work and we come to promised perfection after this life.

## Appendix A

### “The Science of Holy Divinity”

#### Bavinck’s Inaugural Address

##### *Bavinck’s Introductory Remarks*

On January 10, 1883, Herman Bavinck delivered his inaugural address entitled “The Science of Holy Divinity” (*De Wetenschap der Heilige Godgeleerdheid*).<sup>132</sup> His opening words cited one of his Leiden professors, Lodewijk Willem Ernst Rauwenhoff.<sup>133</sup> One of Rauwenhoff’s assertions was that there was a deep and abiding necessity for theology to be “secularized.” What led him to make such a statement? This liberal theologian had come to believe that for theology to take its proper and rightful place in the wide gamut of disciplines taught in the universities, it would need to take on a less confident and arrogant position as Queen of the Sciences and to become more modest, listening to the tenets and discoveries of other disciplines. Rauwenhoff was concerned to create a “new life” among the upcoming generation. In order to effectuate this goal, Rauwenhoff suggested the secularization of theology.

Bavinck’s comments on Rauwenhoff’s proposal point in the following direction: Given the dominating theological climate in Holland, it is little wonder that Rauwenhoff’s words received such a warm welcome. The State Church universities (Groningen, Leiden, and Utrecht) had long since jettisoned orthodox theology for a “kinder, gentler” far-left theological liberalism. In his introduction, Bavinck traces the secularization process that began in lower education and then proceeded to infiltrate the local churches via the state seminaries.<sup>134</sup> The indomitable spirit of secularization would not rest until it affected one’s view of God and how he wished to be worshiped. The aim of this approach was to make everything look, think, and act like the world. As Bavinck well knew, this was already the case among the State churches (*Hervormde Kerk*). The result of secularization on this magnitude was tantamount to leaving people without Christ, without God, and without hope in the world.<sup>135</sup>

Speaking to his audience, which was comprised of Separatists, by and large, Bavinck reminded them that their churches as well as the Theological Seminary were born out of a Herculean spiritual struggle from God’s truth and the Three Forms of Unity. The State Church had been the antagonist at every turn in that enormous struggle. In a rare predictive moment, Bavinck postulates that like it or not, the time of “State” theology and of the State Church was over.<sup>136</sup> Anyone and everyone, Bavinck contended, that wishes to

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<sup>132</sup> Herman Bavinck, *De Wetenschap der H. Godgeleerdheid*, Rede ter aanvaarding van het leeraarsambt aan de Theologische School te Kampen, (Kampen: Zalsman, 1883).

<sup>133</sup> Rauwenhoff was professor of Church History, History of Dogma, and Philosophy of Religion at Leiden University. Arguably his most famous work was written on the subject of the philosophy of religion. Rauwenhoff sought the origin of religion in the “poetic imagination (*verbeelding*)” of man. What Bavinck shared with Rauwenhoff was a deep interest in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant.

<sup>134</sup> Bavinck, *DWHG*, 5.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

maintain the principles of the Holy Scripture purely and without worldly mixture and influence is *obligated* to separate from the world rather than join it.<sup>137</sup>

Admittedly, Dutch Christianity was at low ebb. The deleterious effects of the State universities and State churches had decimated the Dutch Protestant church-goers. In 1883, the Christian population no longer allowed itself to be ruled by him, by whose name they were called.<sup>138</sup>

Another salient topic that Bavinck delineated in the introduction to his address was the concept of “revolution.” There are those in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Christianity who still find “revolution” an acceptable term when describing what the Church should be about. This begs the question: What is the problem with using the term? One of Bavinck’s fellow-countrymen, Groen van Prinsterer, had written an influential work with the translated title *Unbelief and Revolution (Ongeloof en Revolutie)*. Groen’s thesis was that the term “revolution” was associated with the godless tenets of Enlightenment thinking. Protestant Christians had spoken, rather, of “Reformation” rather than Revolution.<sup>139</sup>

Over against Enlightenment thinking, true Christians opted for the biblical and confessional tradition that had been passed on to them. The Separatists churches as well as the Theological Seminary were privileged to be recipients of such a rich tradition. Bavinck reminded his listeners/readers that it cannot be strongly enough emphasized that whoever believes in Jesus doesn’t merely have different opinions from those of the world, but is also truly a new man and that the Church of Christ possesses, by grace, a different worldview and conscience and therefore had its own scientific language, which is not identical with that of the world.<sup>140</sup>

There is no possibility of a realistic reconciliation between Reformation and Revolution given their respective axioms; the ancient and the modern view of the world. There is—in spite of what Albrecht Ritschl asserted—no *Vermittlung* possible.<sup>141</sup> In order for Christians to be effective (cf. 2 Pet. 1:8), they must possess a Christian life and worldview. This entails, in no small measure, breaking with the ways of secular society. What, then, according to Bavinck, is the remedy? Negatively, the answer is not to be found in secularizing the Church, but rather—positively—to be sought in a holy maintaining (*heilighouding*) of that which is biblically holy.<sup>142</sup> It is biblical holiness that will spell the maintenance of healthy theology.

From these introductory remarks, Bavinck moved on to inform his audience that he intended to explain precisely what a true “scientific” divinity might look like. In typical form, Bavinck divided his speech into three main points: First, he planned to discuss the *principle* from which a true scientific method is derived; second, the *content* that theology unfolds; and third, the *end* or *goal* that theology envisions.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid. Emphasis mine.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 8.



### *The “Principle” from which a True Scientific Theological Method is Derived*

Bavinck began this section of his address by stating the obvious: The word “theology” is not taken directly from either the Old or New Testament. Its origin can be located among ancient Greek authors, who spoke of theology as “the doctrine of the gods.”<sup>144</sup> The “matter” or “substance” that the Church Fathers described when they employed the term “theology,” however, was in full agreement with the Old Testament and apostolic notions of “lifestyle wisdom” that was in keeping with the Old Testament Wisdom Literature idea of *chokma*.<sup>145</sup> In other words, what the Church Fathers intended was biblical truth that included both an ethical and practical life.<sup>146</sup>

God’s revelation to man, in his redemptive-historical dealings with his people, was *progressive* in nature. What is central for Bavinck’s concept of progressive revelation is the notion that even in the Older Covenant the knowledge of God was planted in the hearts of men by the Word.<sup>147</sup> All of God’s revelation prior to the advent of Christ was designed specifically to prepare the way for Messiah’s coming. All the centuries were predictive of him, who is the turning point of all time.<sup>148</sup> It was in his discussion of God’s revelation pointing to and leading up to Christ that Bavinck introduced another facet of his theological method that would form an integral part of all his theological undertakings: the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit. This pneumatological emphasis would be clearly evident in the *RD* as well as his occasional writings. According to Bavinck, it was the task of the Holy Spirit to prepare a place for the Son among mankind.<sup>149</sup>

The coming of the Son in the flesh was a parallel event to the fulfillment of the Word of promise, and that, in turn, was the driving force behind the ages and times pointing and moving inexorably towards Christ.<sup>150</sup> The Incarnation and the canonization of the Holy Scriptures ushered in a new and different spiritual epoch that was characterized and typified by the *complete* and *sufficient* revelation of God.<sup>151</sup> At the first Christian Pentecost, the character or nature of the times changed. Prior to the Incarnation God’s revelation prepared the way for Christ; now, since Pentecost, everything is derived from him.<sup>152</sup> In other words, the Old Testament looked forward to the cross as the center of history and since that time the Christian Church has looked back, understanding the cross as the culmination and summary of all that the Church is meant to be and to do. If we desire to understand doctrine (*credenda*) and ethics (*agenda*) and the relationship they bear with one another, we must derive that from Christ.

In this vein, Bavinck delineates to key notions regarding Christ and the Church, both of which concentrate on a biblical redemptive-historical description. First, Christ is the Head of the Church; second, the Church is the “body of Christ.”<sup>153</sup> Bavinck’s theological

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid. It would seem that these ancient philosophers and writers had more insight than some modern pastors and teachers.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid. Emphasis mine.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 10.

expertise is coupled with his pastoral warmth in this inaugural address as he begins to outline an exposition of the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit in conjunction with what the Heidelberg Catechism teaches about his relationship with the Father and the Son.<sup>154</sup> He explained to those who were well-versed in the Heidelberg Catechism that with the closing of the canon, the Father's work continued through the mediation of the Holy Spirit, only along different lines. According to the teaching of the Catechism, the Church participates in all the benefits of Christ as the Holy Spirit takes everything from the risen and ascended Head of the Church and imparts those spiritual treasures to believers.<sup>155</sup> In other words, the Spirit brings the riches of the Word to the heart and conscience of the Church.<sup>156</sup> Furthermore, the Spirit causes the treasure of Christ's wisdom and knowledge also to dwell in the Church. The particular work of the Spirit is to take everything from the total Christ<sup>157</sup> as he is revealed in Scripture, to add nothing new or different to that revelation, and to apply the completed work of the Son to our soul.<sup>158</sup>

It is at this point in his address that Bavinck introduces a term that he will employ in a description of this theological methodology later in the *RD*. That word is *principium*. He used it to describe the *principle* from which a truly Christian approach to a scientific method could be derived. It is noteworthy that Bavinck never used *principium* in a sterile, rationalistic fashion, but rather employed it in the sense of “the only source of knowledge.”<sup>159</sup> In truth, all true theology that is worthy of the name, is taken from Holy Scripture under the leading of the Holy Spirit and is built upon that foundation. Any attempt to introduce reason, feeling, or theological councils into the mix rather than aiding theology actually militates against theological science, denies the character of the New Testament era in which the Christian Church lives, touches—negatively—the work of Christ, and moves from that which constitutes Reformed theology into Roman Catholic territory.<sup>160</sup> The Protestant confession—in differentiation to the assertions of Roman Catholicism—is that the Word is sufficient, complete.<sup>161</sup> Protestants concur that if Scripture has not completely sufficiently described the work of God, then faith is void of all ground.<sup>162</sup> In this further description of what he envisions when he speaks of *principium*, Bavinck makes the following comparison: What nature is to the natural scientist, the Bible is to theology.<sup>163</sup>

Having then established his definition of the term, Bavinck was then prepared to apply it to other biblical scientific concepts. The first logically is the *principium essendi*. What did Bavinck understand by this term? For theology, the *principium essendi* is God himself. “Our theology, provided that it is true, is nothing more than an imprint and

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<sup>154</sup> In Q/A 53 (*What do you believe concerning the Holy Spirit?*), this answer is given: “First, that he is true and coeternal God with the Father and the Son; secondly, that he is also given to me, to make me by true faith, *partaker of Christ and all his benefits*, that he may comfort me and abide with me forever.” Emphasis mine.

<sup>155</sup> Bavinck, *DWHG*, 10.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> Bavinck utilizes the words “total Christ” often in his writings to describe Christ as he is for his people in his death and resurrection; in his humanity as well as in his deity; and in both his active and passive obedience.

<sup>158</sup> Bavinck, *DWHG*, 10.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

reflection in our conscience of that knowledge which God has of himself and of which he has decided to inform his creatures."<sup>164</sup>

In his inaugural address, Bavinck also speaks of a *Theologia Naturalis* that is evident in Creation that is evident and repeated in Scripture.<sup>165</sup> When he spoke of the *principium essendi*, however, he understood that a scientific theology would be little less than a reproduction and mirror-image in our conscience of the knowledge of God.<sup>166</sup> God has freely revealed himself and his will for our lives adequately, sufficiently. This fact leads Bavinck to his second use of *principium*, which is the *principium cognoscendi*. This is where we receive our knowledge of God: exclusively from Scripture.<sup>167</sup> Herein lies an important and fundamental difference between Roman Catholicism and Protestant theology. According to Rome, the Scripture is *insufficient* and must be complemented by an ongoing tradition.<sup>168</sup> Roman Catholicism argues that an intimate interaction exists between the Bible and this ongoing tradition, but it cannot extricate itself from the ultimate reality of parallel authorities.<sup>169</sup> This was one of a number of errors exposed by the Reformers.

Nevertheless, according to Bavinck, a part of Protestantism doesn't escape unscathed from the criticism of dual—at times contradictory—traditions. In certain sectors of Protestantism in Bavinck's day an unwritten tradition existed as well. These Protestants might have rejected the Bible/tradition schema of Roman Catholicism, but fell prey to their own parallel authorities: Scripture and reason. In the late nineteenth century, scriptural thinking deferred to reason in matters pertaining to the worship of God and true biblical authority. Reason often took a place alongside Scripture and was also frequently critical of it.

Whether it is Roman Catholicism or Protestant Rationalism, both undermine theology and falsify its *principium*. In both, the biblical divinity has lost its true character and principle. Moreover, Rationalism *must* end with a bankrupt theology.<sup>170</sup> Bavinck lamented the fact this "his time" (*Onze Eeuw*) was still infested with Rationalism, albeit in a somewhat altered form. While it is true that theological Rationalism still embraced a personal, transcendent God the influence of the philosopher Spinoza was pervasive. His brand of Rationalism led to Deism, which *always* morphed into Pantheism.<sup>171</sup> What Bavinck and his audience were experiencing in much of the theology in Holland at the time was a kinder, gentler, and warmer Pantheism vis-à-vis Rationalism. Therefore Pantheism had won the day and as a result had eradicated the differentiation made between the supernatural and the natural.<sup>172</sup>

The overwhelming popularity of Schleiermacher's theology was meteoric in the intellectual community especially. As popular as Schleiermacher's brand of theology was, Bavinck was fully convinced that the principle for a sound biblical theology was

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>165</sup> In later writings, Bavinck will cease referring to Natural Theology and opt for the designation of General Revelation.

<sup>166</sup> Bavinck, *DWHG*, 12.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

falsified by Schleiermacher's methodology.<sup>173</sup> Schleiermacher's theological paradigm shift emphasized piety (*Frömmigkeit*) in a crass form of subjectivism. This subjective piety became the source of man's knowledge of God. This was the foundation upon which Schleiermacher built his famous *Glaubenslehre*. He situated truth in man's self-consciousness, thereby reversing the proper progression: over self-consciousness being formed and informed by the Word of God. This trajectory in Schleiermacher's theological method is most clearly evident in his doctrine of God where he states, "Die Theologie, die kein Wissen von Gott soll sein können, ist ihm nu rein Wissen von dem christlichen Bewußtsein oder der christlichen Frömmigkeit, also nur Selbstbesinnung."<sup>174</sup> Bavinck's contention about Schleiermacher's theology was that it was essentially regressive in nature, or as Charles Hodge described it, mystical in the negative sense of the term.<sup>175</sup>

What, if anything, was Bavinck's proposed solution to a theology that ended in subjectivism? In order to answer this question Bavinck returns to the concept of the *principium* that he had described earlier in the address and expanded upon it. The necessary correction looks like this: A proper theological method speaks of both a *principium externum* (the Holy Scriptures), but also and equally of a *principium internum* (the Holy Spirit, who dwells in the members of the congregation causing them to understand the things of the Kingdom).<sup>176</sup> In this way, the Spirit leads the Church into God's truth.<sup>177</sup> Without the Holy Spirit's work, we do not and cannot understand heavenly, spiritual matters. That being the case, the Holy Spirit is the Teacher of the Church.<sup>178</sup> This configuration is in glaring opposition to Schleiermacher for whom a feeling of absolute dependence on God is the origin of our knowledge of him.<sup>179</sup>

At this juncture, without alerting his listeners to the fact that he's preparing to slip in a brief discussion on apologetics, he reminded them that the Christian's faith doesn't rest upon external, historical evidences nor upon the witness of the Church, but rather only upon the witness of God that is placed in our hearts by the truth of the Spirit working in and through the Word.<sup>180</sup> A key thesis, therefore, in his inaugural address is that the Holy Scripture is not merely the *norma*, but also the *fixed* principle or standard of the source of knowledge for Theology. It is upon this foundation that true Theology either stands or falls.<sup>181</sup>

Bavinck's purpose with this thesis was to eliminate feelings, (bare) reason, Church, confession, Pope, and councils as the primary *principium* of Theology.<sup>182</sup> Theology's

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>182</sup> It is highly likely that Bavinck was alluding to what the Belgic Confession taught in Article 7 on this particular point. We read there, "We believe that those Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe unto salvation is sufficiently taught therein. For since the whole manner of worship with God requires of us is written in them at large, it is unlawful for anyone, though an apostle, to teach otherwise than we are now taught in the Holy Scriptures: nay, though it were an angel from heaven, as the apostle Paul says. For since it is forbidden to add unto or take away anything from the Word of God, it does thereby evidently appear that the doctrine thereof is most perfect and complete in all respects. Neither do we consider of equal value any writing of men, however holy these men may have been with those divine Scriptures; nor ought we to consider custom, or the great multitude, or

existence, assurance, and its scientific right are dependent upon the principle from which it is derived.<sup>183</sup> Indeed, Scripture is the only and sufficient principle of Theology.<sup>184</sup> Another key component to Bavinck's theological method regarding theology's principle is the concept that the theologian—and by extension, each Christian—is called upon to think God's thoughts after him.<sup>185</sup> Each discipline, Bavinck asserted, proceeded from axioms and presuppositions that do not require proof.<sup>186</sup> They constitute the “givens” of that discipline and without them, science is impossible.<sup>187</sup>

In the opening section it was Bavinck's intention to laid the groundwork that would allow him to proceed in the description of a spiritually correct theological method. His next step, therefore, was to describe what the content of scientific theology would consist of based on principles of theology he had described thus far.

### *The “Content” of Scientific Theology*

Just as the origins of the science of sacred divinity are not situated and located within the circle of visible things, so also the content that Theology has to unfold does not belong to the things of this world.<sup>188</sup> As far as a proper content for Theology was concerned, Bavinck insisted that Theology's name said it all: *Theo*-logy. The discipline is called Theology or Divinity not merely because it is derived from God, but also because it has him as its object.<sup>189</sup> Etymologically, in the Greek usage of the word, Theology was charged with the unfolding of the things of God to the Church. Theology as a science thus appears as an organism that grows and develops. It is constantly explaining and unfolding what its name encompasses.<sup>190</sup>

What Bavinck desired to make clear and evident to his hearers was that in “their time” a paradigm shift had been underway for quite some time in the type of theology being taught in the State universities in Groningen, Leiden, and Utrecht. The theology taught in those institutions was nothing short of a bastardization of true theology.<sup>191</sup> What had occurred—gradually and almost imperceptively—was that the Theology departments had undergone a metamorphosis into “History of Religion” departments.<sup>192</sup> The ultimate aim of this paradigm shift was to exchange sacred divinity for a science that investigated other religions from all times and came up with an amalgamation that incorporated the best of all worlds.<sup>193</sup> The upshot of the arrogance of the professors who embrace this shift were quasi-authoritarian pronouncement that had been “preached” in numerous

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antiquity, or succession of times and person, or councils, decrees, or statues, as of equal value with the truth of God, for the truth is above all; for all men are of themselves liars, and more vain than vanity itself. Therefore we reject with all our hearts whatsoever does not agree with the infallible rule which the apostles have taught us saying, “Test the spirits whether they are of God” (cf. 1 John 4:1). Likewise, “If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not in your house” (cf. 2 John 10).

<sup>183</sup> Bavinck, *DWHG*, 17.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*

(*Hervormde Kerk*) pulpits in a kind of *ex cathedra* manner. The net result of the shift was precisely the type of secularized theology that Rauwenhoff advocated.

Bavinck enumerated certain serious problems with this approach. First, religion was really a vague, ethereal concept in which none of the religions being compared possessed similar tenets and doctrines.<sup>194</sup>

Second, this particular form of comparative religion was loosed, as it were, from the moorings of the only and sufficient principle of sacred divinity, namely the Holy Scriptures.<sup>195</sup>

Third, this approach claimed an ostensible, but ultimately indefensible, neutrality. That animal, Bavinck insisted, did not exist.<sup>196</sup> It was, at best, an assumed or presupposed neutrality that was measured by an arbitrary (*willekeurig*) and constantly shifting norm or standard found in man.

Fourth, this theological method was little more, ultimately, than an analysis of man's religious consciousness.<sup>197</sup>

Fifth, the type of theology being taught in the State university Theology departments robbed Christianity of its absolute character and placed every religion on precisely the same plane.<sup>198</sup>

Sixth, this method was catapulted and augmented by a doctrine of evolution that ascribed a kind of theological "survival of the fittest" mentality to what was termed more "advanced" religious systems in opposition to the more "primitive" ones.<sup>199</sup> Without an absolute standard of measure, how was one to differentiate advanced from primitive? Was it not possible that was man considered to be primitive, could, in point of fact, actually be advanced and vice-versa? Man was the determinative factor in this system of thought which religions were truly religions of a "less god."

The upshot of this particular manner of theologizing was that it jettisoned its own rightful principle of investigation and its true object of study.<sup>200</sup> In the process and in the wake of this theological method, theology became mere anthropology. God was created in the image of man and, in essence, became an idol.<sup>201</sup> According to Bavinck, the State universities were precisely what was dreadfully wrong with Theology in his day. A truly scientific and theological method did not take its starting point in naked Empiricism, but rather in the revelation of God. The so-called "facts" must be pondered and ordered as they are specifically given by God.<sup>202</sup>

Other theologians in Bavinck's era were prepared to take a more "mediating" position striving somewhat valiantly to achieve a compromise between the approach of the State universities and the traditionally Reformed position. All of their efforts ended, however, in a "theology from below."<sup>203</sup> These theologians, known in Holland as the Ethical

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 24-25.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

theologians,<sup>204</sup> began with the believing community and from there attempted to spin out a theology of Scripture. In other words, they desired a theology that began with man and from that vantage point moved to God. It was a movement from life to doctrine; from ethics to dogmatics.<sup>205</sup> Apart from being entirely untenable and rife with subjectivism, this approach was tantamount to erecting a stone edifice on shifting sands.<sup>206</sup> In the demonstration of the Ethical theologians the Christ that is presented to us is not the Christ of Scripture, but rather an ideal formed according to man's fantasy and/or creativity.<sup>207</sup>

Bavinck commented that the voice of Schleiermacher could be heard in the methodology of the Ethical theologians asserting that truth ultimately rests in the self-consciousness of man. Rather than healing the rift caused by the history of religions approach to a sound theological method, the mediating position of the Ethical theologians only served to widen the gap between Theology and the Church.<sup>208</sup> In the final analysis, the method employed by the Ethical theologians was little more than *Religionsphilosophie*.<sup>209</sup>

The deplorable condition that existed in the State universities was exacerbated by an ever-widening gap between the theologian and the man and woman in the pew. In essence, the independent "research" that the Theology professors were performing pitted them against the faith of the church folk. What developed in this environment is what continues to develop to this day: the proud, self-sufficient, and independent spirit of the egos behind unbiblical theologies estranged it from the Church or was the catalyst for the disintegration of true faith.<sup>210</sup> There was, truly, wide separation between the Academy and the Church. In such a setting faith and science became irreconcilably juxtaposed to each other. The essential problem with both approaches (History of Religion and that of the Ethical theologians) was that both failed to realize that Church and Christianity are not the *object* of Theology, but rather its *subject*.<sup>211</sup>

In a proper theological method, however, the theologian proceeds from the revelation of God. It is as if the Church and Theology are connected and that they both think and know God from God's Word.<sup>212</sup> It should be remembered that the Theological Seminary in Kampen was truly a school of the Separatist churches and that its professors were accountable to the churches for what they taught in the classroom. This arrangement provided the added advantage that the professors and the pastors knew each other well and that the pastors themselves were trained in an institution supported by the Separatist churches. In other words, the churches had a vested, personal interest in the school. The clear "trickle down" effect of agreement manifested itself in a biblically well-trained laity. The exact opposite was the case in the State Church. In the Separatist congregations, however, "In principle the congregation is comprised of theologians who are taught by God himself."<sup>213</sup> This type of congregation will always desire to know more

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<sup>204</sup> See my article "Church and Community or Community and Church?" in *Reforming or Conforming?* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008).

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

of him whom they have come to know by faith.<sup>214</sup> In essence, there is no difference between Church and Theology, only a degree of clarity. The theologian stands neither outside of nor over against the congregation, but is to be taken wholly and totally into it.<sup>215</sup> “Theology is the Church itself in its highest, most glorious, and richest revelation.”<sup>216</sup>

Because theology is nothing less than Christianity, the Church, and faith as a science, it has no other content than Christianity, the Church, and faith itself.<sup>217</sup> What is that content? Bavinck informed those in attendance that it is the eternal, invisible things and God himself as he is reflected in the face of Christ. “That is the content, the object of Theology.”<sup>218</sup> With that in mind, Bavinck reminded his listeners that God’s revelation is found in both nature as well as in grace. A sound theological method therefore subsumes everything under the rubric of God causing Theology to remain thereby theocentric throughout the entire theological enterprise.<sup>219</sup>

To the extent that theologians are willing and prepared to submit themselves to the *principia* and the revelation of God is the extent to which their discipline will truly be theology. If they refuse submission to the authority of the Word of God, their efforts will continue to be, to a greater or lesser degree mere anthropology.<sup>220</sup> The alternatives in Theology as a discipline are limited. In other religions it is patently true that as the man is, so his God is.<sup>221</sup> In sacred divinity, however, as God is so ought man to be.<sup>222</sup> For Theology to remain Theology it must be satisfied with being placed in God’s light so that it can see light.<sup>223</sup> That which is truly spiritual in nature can only be traced in a spiritual manner. Only the pure in heart will see God.<sup>224</sup> Moreover, every true Christian feels, because and insofar as he believes, a desire in himself to seek after and to know the things that are above where Christ is seated a God’s right hand.<sup>225</sup> This desire finds its origin in God himself. He is the One who causes our hearts to thirst for the living God. He desires to be marveled at, comprehended, known, and loved by us.<sup>226</sup> He renews us according to his image and also according to the image of knowledge that he possesses in himself.<sup>227</sup>

From this elaboration of his viewpoint on a sound theological methodology, Bavinck proceeded to aver that Theology is *the science*, the *Regina scientiarum*, elevated above all sciences.<sup>228</sup> Why does Bavinck employ this description of Theology? After all, it seems rather arrogant to our ears. It smacks of arrogance to speak of one’s discipline as the “Queen.” His rationale for employing such a term, however, was to point out that all other disciplines have a special territory of endeavor within the created order that is the object of their research. They busy themselves with the cosmos or man. In short, they

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 34.



constantly busy themselves with the created order.<sup>229</sup> Theology, on the other hand, is born of God and has him as its proper object.<sup>230</sup> Nevertheless, theology stands in close relationship with the other disciplines. Given its object, however, Theology remains the *Universalwissenschaft*. There is a similarity perhaps between theology and philosophy, but there are also decided differences as well. For example, philosophy is anthropocentric; it views all things from man's standpoint and in man's light. It discusses everything from man's viewpoint and has him as the center point and measure of all things.<sup>231</sup> The biblical truth of the matter is this: whoever views all of life from God's perspective is the true man.<sup>232</sup>

### *The "Goal" or "Aim" of Scientific Theology*

In the final section of his speech Bavinck tied the first two elements together as well as developing more fully a number of other themes he desired to address. It was here that he directed his attention to the relationship of Theology and the Church and outlined a true Church Dogmatics. In addition he more fully described the difference between a purely academic Theology and a more congregationally oriented one. Finally, we observe him discussing the place of Practical Theology within the purview of Theology proper as well as a defense of Post-Reformational Theology and the manner in which it brought dogmatics and ethics into close proximity.

He opened the final section of his inaugural address with these words: "It is thus God himself...who gives theology to his Church through his Holy Spirit. Allow me then in the third place to point you to the goal that God envisions."<sup>233</sup> To Bavinck's mind, theology as a science exists not merely who teach varying disciplines within it, but also by the "simple" as well as more educated members of the Christian congregation. There is reciprocity of checks and balances between the theologians and their church. The congregation should detect in theology a means of defending the true Christian faith.<sup>234</sup> In its turn, theology must be consciously aware of its position to edify God's people and not to confuse them or to lead them down an unbiblical path.<sup>235</sup>

It is not saying too much to assert that without theology, the congregation cannot lead a spiritually healthy and strengthened life.<sup>236</sup> This begs the question: How can doing theology aid the spiritual growth and nourishment of God's people? In the primary part, Bavinck posits, theology's mission is focused in Scripture. This is patently clear from what he has already said. The various revealed truths in the Bible are scattered throughout in a colorful variety of genres, literary styles, narratives, poetry, wisdom literature, and didactic propositional truth. God has never, in any place, given his people "sliced bread" to eat, but allows the seed to grow until we make it into bread.<sup>237</sup> Our "food" is deposited in Scripture, but it must be "prepared" by the sweat of our brow.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

In other words, the Bible is not the codification of laws, wherein we only have to look up article after article. Moreover, it also doesn't offer us a ready made system of truths that we merely need to mimic. God has placed his creatures before a higher duty and calling. He has presented man, in Scripture, with an organic unity of revelation.<sup>239</sup> It is, therefore, the theologian's job to exegete Scripture meticulously and to cull out the truths that are deposited in the Word. Rightly, Reformed theologians asserted that theology was not an "apprehensive" science, but rather a "discursive" one. That is to say, its commission is not merely to repeat—literally and verbatim—what is contained in the Bible, but to labor through the material and to present their labors to the Church.

There is, therefore, a proper use of man's reason in a sound theological method and in the science of theology. Reason, properly used, is both welcome and valued to elucidate the truths contained in Scripture, to compare biblical truth with biblical truth, and to deduce other truths from what God has revealed.<sup>240</sup> It is also the rightful place of Christian theology to bring the truth of Scripture to the Christian conscience.<sup>241</sup> It is merely *πιστις* that is the gift of the Holy Spirit, but it is also *γνωσις* as well.<sup>242</sup>

A major thesis that emerges in this section of Bavinck's inaugural address is that Christianity is the reconciliation of the *whole* man; not only his heart and conscience (*geweten*), but also his understanding and reason.<sup>243</sup> That being the case, it is the glorious goal of theology to make a reasonable presentation of God's truth to the faith of the Church.<sup>244</sup> To further drive home his point, Bavinck cited Charles Hodge who stated, "It is one thing to know that oceans, continents, islands, mountains and rivers exist on the face of the earth; and a much higher thing to know the causes which have determined the distribution of land and water on the surface of our globe; the configuration of the earth; the effects of that configuration on climate, on the races of plants and animals, on commerce, civilization and the destiny of nations."<sup>245</sup>

How precisely was this spiritual reconciliation of the whole man to be achieved, accomplished? Bavinck is confident that this occurs best in and through Systematic Theology.<sup>246</sup> It is precisely there that the calling of theology reaches its apogee. We must be careful here that we don't misunderstand what Bavinck is asserting with this statement.<sup>247</sup> As we shall see, he is not declaring that Systematic Theology has hit its stride as the Queen of the sciences and has nothing left to learn or nothing more to do with Scripture. In fact, Bavinck asserts the exact opposite of that view. When speaking of the "material" that is deposited in the Bible Bavinck maintains that all systems and principles must be derived from the "source," namely the Word of God.<sup>248</sup>

What, if anything, is the further undertaking of theology? The primary responsibility that Bavinck formulated in this address was this: "Theology causes us to know God; to

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<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., 37-38.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> It should be remembered that even though Bavinck was a good friend of Geerhardus Vos and they corresponded often, he was not embroiled in the same discussions that modern theologians are vis-à-vis Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology.

<sup>248</sup> Bavinck, *DWHG*, 39.

stand in awe of him.<sup>249</sup> Apart from the fact that this type of statement is rarely heard in our contemporary context Bavinck's affirmation begs the question: Why does proper knowledge of God cause us to stand in awe of him? Bavinck answers that the salvific discovery that is made when we deal with God's revelation and come to the conclusion that we are not dealing with a chaos where our spirit cannot find any order, but rather that we have to do with an artistic tapestry from the Triune God that fills our hearts with worship and silent adoration.<sup>250</sup>

In addition to this Bavinck also pointed his listeners to the fact that there had been a longstanding dispute among theologians centering around the question of whether sacred divinity was a theoretical or practical science. The Thomists historically opted for theology as a theoretical science while the Scotists insisted that it was, at bottom, practical. The Reformed, however, stated that this was not an either/or problem, but both/and; it was neither of the two options alone, but both together.<sup>251</sup> Sacred theology is not a vain (*ijdel*) attempt to know simply for the sake of knowing. That kind of an approach constitutes the "fanaticism" of science and knowledge merely for the sake of knowledge is little more than an egotistical enterprise.<sup>252</sup> Where this phenomenon has presented itself in the past, especially vis-à-vis theology, the Christian congregation has been horribly duped and diminished by the self-styled theologians.

There is a veiled reference in Bavinck's words to the State Church (*Hervormde Kerk*) and its theologians, who had trailed unbelieving pastors to embrace the latest liberal theologies at the expense of true faith, thereby leading innumerable pastors and congregations astray. The net result was that the "egotistical" professors, veering from God's revealed will, passed along faulty, unorthodox views to the theological students, who, in turn, passed those same views—sometimes with slight modification—on to the congregation. The result of this kind of theological science was patently clear to those listening to Bavinck's speech. They had seen its pernicious effects in the State Church and in the low level of scriptural knowledge as well as the weak faith of its members. Some had seen the devastating effects personally since they had relatives and friends in the State Church. They had observed how State Church congregations had become less and less interested in the things of God, leading them to a more secular lifestyle. To the extent that theology continued to be secularized, à la Rauwenhoff's suggestion, the secularization process in the congregation was accelerated exponentially.<sup>253</sup> Bavinck touched on something here, that while not having eternal value, is a truth that has unfortunately repeated itself in a large number of theological seminaries throughout the world. We would do well to heed his words.

According to Bavinck, true theology is rooted in life and is meant to be lived. That is its goal.<sup>254</sup> When God gave us the gift of theology, he meant for us to know him in the face of Christ and to possess the gift of eternal life.<sup>255</sup> Therefore, theology is both a theoretical and practical science.<sup>256</sup> What Bavinck intended to get across to his audience

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<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>253</sup> Cf. John Leith, *Crisis in the Church*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997). Especially see chapters 3 & 4.

<sup>254</sup> Bavinck, *DWHG*, 41.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

was the simple yet clear biblical fact that theology was meant to involve the *total* engagement of the *total* man.<sup>257</sup> To insist that theology was only practical would be tantamount to allowing man to live any way he pleased as long as he led a “good life” and served God with his mind—which was precisely part and parcel of the teaching of the State Church in a majority of cases.<sup>258</sup>

In terms of theological trajectories, the phenomenon Bavinck described is precisely what had become the driving, dominant force since the time of Schleiermacher, who reacted to the rationalists and supernaturalists in the theology of his day.<sup>259</sup> But was Schleiermacher correct? Without doubt, the theological pendulum had swung from mere objectivity and objectivism to a rampant subjectivism due to the popularity of Schleiermacher’s theological methodology. Was Schleiermacher’s theology a necessary correction or was it an over-reaction to the theology of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries? It is Bavinck’s contention that it was the latter. On balance, he asserted, most believe that earlier theology was engaged in unfruitful hairsplitting, but this was most certainly not the actual case.<sup>260</sup>

In point of fact, the mark of Reformed theology was truly practical in nature and ultimately and par excellence ethical. The older Reformed theologians directed their works towards the life of the Christian. The “praxis” that they insisted upon was required, however, to be under girded by a strong and healthy theory. This sound theory must lead to good “praxis.”<sup>261</sup> Without explicitly saying so, Bavinck had introduced in his address the concept of the relationship of dogmatics to ethics. This introduction formed a rather natural transition to a discussion of Practical Theology. In distinction from those who would view P.T. as a mere appendage of theology or a kind of “bridge” built over the chasm between theology and the Church, Bavinck described it as a very essential and indispensable component of sacred divinity.<sup>262</sup> Apart from the theoretical side of Bavinck’s presentation, he had, no doubt, seen how essential and fruitful the relationship between Systematic theology and Practical Theology were in his own father’s ministry. He reminded his audience that theology that is not practical does not deserve to call itself theology.<sup>263</sup> Faith without love is impossible. Knowing God and not serving him is unconscionable.<sup>264</sup> The *credenda* are simultaneously the *agenda*.<sup>265</sup>

The theologian, who exercises his discipline without biblical faith in his heart, does so as mere theory, not touching and outside of life, operating with God’s truths as he would with a mathematical formula. Bavinck supplied this provocative analogy of the theologian and his sacred discipline: In a very real sense, a theologian is a priest, who serves God day and night in his temple. He is a prophet, who declares God to God’s people and always speaks for the honor of God’s Name. He is a man of God, who is equipped for every good work.<sup>266</sup> For Bavinck, the concept of the theologian as priest,

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<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., 43-44.

prophet, and man of God entails the notion that theology is a form of worship (*Godsdienst*), a service to and of God, and a laboring in his Kingdom.<sup>267</sup>

The same practical goal is true of theology's service to the Church. Theology is not an enemy standing over against the Church, but it is meant both to lead and edify the Church in the holy faith.<sup>268</sup> If a proper relationship exists between the Church and Theology, then it is this: The Church calls Theology into existence and keeps it in existence. Since Theology labors in the service of and for the spiritual benefit of Christ's Church, it is necessary for it to see its goal and function in close relationship to the Church. Viewed from this perspective, the calling of Theology in its relationship to the Church is not monolithic, but various. Bavinck took a few moments to flesh that concept out for his hearers.

He avowed that the calling that Theology must fulfill to the Church is a many-sided one. First, Theology must serve by enabling the Church to understand the meaning of the scriptures.<sup>269</sup>

In addition, by dealing with the truth of God's Word, Theology must protect the Church from veering to the left or right regarding God's truth. Once again, Theology has not always fulfilled this function as Bavinck knew and we still know. There have been times when theologians have become so enamored of their own abilities and creativity that they have strayed—badly—from the truth of God's Word and have caused churches and church members to follow them.

Third, it is Theology's responsibility to insure that the Church is aware of its own history. Therefore, Theology must take pains to teach what occurred in theological development, what the debates were and why they were held, and what the heresies were that challenged the Church of Christ throughout the ages.<sup>270</sup>

Fourth, Theology was to make the Church aware of the spiritual treasures that were hers in the history of the Church.<sup>271</sup> In this regard, one cannot help but think that Bavinck was pointing to the existence and relatively recent history of the Separatist Church. As we have seen, it was born out of a titanic struggle for the purity of the faith. The Separatists rediscovered, as it were, the Three Forms of Unity that have proven to be such a spiritual repository for the Reformed churches. Bavinck desired that the Church would view these confessional statements with honor and not disdain. He was also not, it should be noted, a proponent of revamping the confessional statements as a routine course of operation.

In summary, Theology has the glorious task of causing the congregation to know and to worship God so that in both Church and State people might be aware and apprised of the multifarious wisdom of the Lord.<sup>272</sup> This is not a task that Theology should undertake with a bad attitude as if it has bigger and better fish to fry outside of its service to the congregation, but rather Theology should not rest until its calling to the Church of Christ is finally fulfilled.<sup>273</sup> Moreover, the ultimate reason why Theology performs and fulfills its calling with such joy is concentrated on one main theme: Theology is called to labor in

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<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-45.

the Church to the glory of God.<sup>274</sup> Every other goal and calling of Theology is subsumed under this calling. This is its highest and holiest aim.<sup>275</sup> Theology may not rest until it finds its rest in God.<sup>276</sup>

There are those today who believe that the history of the Church is little more than a manifestation of mass confusion and error. But rather than viewing it that way, Bavinck contends that it is a architectonic unfolding of the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>277</sup> Therefore we observe movement, thought, method, and plan/design in the history of Theology. The treasures of the Word are gradually brought into a regulated order and also brought to the conscience of God's congregation.<sup>278</sup> This being the case, Bavinck informed his hearers that Theology was both *conservative* as well as *progressive*. It is conservative precisely in the fact that it conserves the past. Reformed theologians receive the heritage of previous generations in order to better them, make them—if possible—more Reformed, *i.e.*, more scriptural and then to pass that on to the coming generations.<sup>279</sup> Negatively stated, Bavinck was not a proponent of taking the heritage of Theology and confession and throwing them in the “crucible of critique.”<sup>280</sup> In terms of “faddish” theologies or theologians utilizing their creativity to come with something new, unique, and different Bavinck had this word: “It is an illusion in Theology always to be trying to find something ‘new.’”<sup>281</sup> He followed with this warning: “Such curiosity is always punished with disappointment.”<sup>282</sup>

Simultaneously, a true theological method is also progressive. It honors the past and builds and works from the foundation that has already been laid, until it has achieved its goal. In other words, it honors both Chalcedon and Dordrecht, but doesn't remain there. It labors under the mission and passion of having the Church stand, as it were, on Mt. Nebo to catch a glimpse of the beauty of the land.<sup>283</sup>

In terms of the all-encompassing work of Christ and the goal of a Christian life- and worldview, Bavinck emphasized the need for Christianity to realize a biblical worldview that encompassed all of life in an organic, unified whole.<sup>284</sup>

In his concluding remarks, Bavinck expressed the hope that he had, in some small way, given a brief outline and broad sketch of the image of sacred divinity.<sup>285</sup> To some, his remarks might sound overly pious and out of place in an academic environment, but this was a man out to create a truly Church Dogmatics. He affirmed that Theology was to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified. It exercised itself to speak about God because it exercised itself to speak out of God's revelation.<sup>286</sup> Theology endeavors to labor in life for life, for the sanctification of the saints, for the edification and equipping

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid.

of the body of Christ, for the true worship of God, and for the love and praise of his holy Name.<sup>287</sup>

Bavinck closed his inaugural address as the newly appointed systematic theologian in Kampen with these words from Jesus' High Priestly Prayer (John 17:3): "And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."<sup>288</sup> These words would typify and characterize Bavinck's life as well as his theological method.

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<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

## Appendix B

### The “Afscheiding”

By the time the dissent in Holland became official against the Regulation of 1816, there was already a cry—if not a scream—welling up among pastors, their fellow-Elders, and members of their congregations against the deplorable spiritual condition in the State Church (HK). The Rationalism that was dominant at the State schools and seminaries was squeezing the life out of those congregations that wanted to remain true to Scripture, the Three Forms of Unity (Belgic Confession, Canons of Dort, and the Heidelberg Catechism), and the Church Order of the Synod of Dort (1618/1619). King Willem I’s creation was proving to be a spiritual monster.<sup>289</sup> There were a number of causes and motivations that eventually led to the Separation of certain congregations from the HK. Like a number of the other countries in Europe, Holland had fallen prey to the “Revolution” and Enlightenment thinking. It had become “infected in whole and in very part by the philosophy and practice of ‘the Revolution’; it could regain its health only by returning to Christ and History.”<sup>290</sup>

The HK was run, primarily, by the wealthy in the Netherlands.<sup>291</sup> In general, the aristocracy viewed the middle and lower classes within the HK with disdain. Regarding the Separatist movement Bratt writes, “The ‘big farmers,’ the local aristocracy, the ‘progressive’ and ‘enlightened’ elements of society ridiculed the movement; the hired hands, the poorer farmers, and the small tradesmen (but not the destitute) composed almost its entire membership.... Official provincial reports for 1836 described Seceder membership (Bratt uses “Seceder” for what I’m calling “Separatist.”) as ‘for the most part...from the lowest ranks,’ ‘uncultured,’ ‘the least significant,’ having ‘no man of name’ among them. Individual leaders were variously described as ‘a maniac’ and ‘a miserable’ creature, and de Cock was labeled ‘the most dangerous man in society.’”<sup>292</sup>

Quite possibly the first and most important cause of the Separation was the spiritual deadness that was the result of a State Church organized by the government and staffed

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<sup>289</sup> James Bratt describes King Willem’s (or William’s) actions as a kind of betrayal by the House of Orange to those who wanted to return to the “old faith” of men like Gijsbertus Voetius (1589-1676) and Willem á Brakel (1635-1711). He writes concerning the attitudes of the Separatists, “Long among the staunchest supporters of the House of Orange, they saw in the overthrow of the Statholder the triumph of their traditional enemy, the urban merchant oligarch; similarly, in Revolutionary ideology they detected the old liberalism in more virulent form. But the Restoration brought no relief, only further decline, tinged with betrayal. For now Orange itself seemed to be furthering Revolutionary tendencies, as William I (he was not king, no longer statholder of the republic) cast himself as an enlightened autocrat and pushed forward the process of political centralization. *Of special affront to the pious was his transformation in 1816 of the National Church into the State Department of Religion, just another civil institution ruled by a bureaucratic hierarchy. This completed the process that had begun to alienate them a century before, removing control of religious affairs from the local level and making the church more a promoter of social unity than a body of fervent believers.*” (Emphasis added.) (*Dutch Calvinism in Modern America, A History of a Conservative Subculture*, [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984], p. 5). Emphases mine.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>291</sup> Bratt describes the situation this way: “The more affluent leaned toward enlightened agnosticism or, more frequently, the comfortable theology of ‘the Groningen school.’ The latter, in its pulpits and its aptly named periodical, *Truth in Love: A Theological Journal for Cultured Christians*, preached a ‘reasonable’ brand of Romantic religion. Christ was less a bleeding Savior than a model of fully realized humanity; the end of religion was less salvation from sin than the achievement of virtue; the human heart was less a sin-blackened seat of evil in need of radical conversion than a trustworthy organ of discernment fit to replace doctrinal standards as the ultimate measure of religious truth.” (*DCMA*, 5.)

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.



with ruling bodies that—as often as not—had little or no real interesting the things of Christ. An intolerant bureaucracy was created that was, like other bureaucracies, self-perpetuating and its “prophecies” were self-fulfilling. Those put in their positions of authority by King Willem believed, by and large, that what had been handed down by the “fathers” of Dort was little more than a narrow-minded, bigoted, and cold-hearted Christianity. The bureaucrats aimed at introducing a kinder, gentler, more tolerant version of the Christian faith. “One still believed in God, on virtue, and immortality, but also in particular on one’s one excellence.”<sup>293</sup>

Mark Beach characterizes the Afscheiding in the following manner:

The *Afscheiding* (or Secession) can be characterized as an ecclesiastical movement that attempted to effect reform within the State Reformed Church (*De Hervormde Kerk*) but came to exist as a separate denomination apart from it. The occasion for this effort to reform the church is a story in itself. For our purposes it is sufficient to assert that, fundamentally, this effort at reform sought to re-establish the church upon the foundations of the fathers, i.e., to affirm the Three Forms of Unity (the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort) as a living and authoritative confession of the church, and that these standards govern the church along with the old Dort Church Order. More broadly and generally, the *Afscheiding* sought to thwart the decaying effects of doctrinal liberals and to reassert biblical authority in the in the face of its denial by liberal critics. The acids of the Enlightenment had eaten away at the vitality and purity of the churches. The *Afscheiding* sought to bring healing and reform to what was left. In so doing, it was concerned that a genuinely reinvigorated piety mark the church in its life and fellowship.<sup>294</sup>

Like many grassroots movements—and that is what the Afscheiding was—it did not occur overnight or fall from the sky one day. There was a development that can be traced back to the very implementation of the Regulation of 1816. In 1819 Nicolaas Schotsman (1754-1822) pled for and return to what the Synod of Dort had decided as a truly international synod of professors and pastors. Schotsman was demonized. Isaac Da Costa<sup>295</sup> had a work published in 1823 with the translated title *Objections to the Spirit of the Age* (*Bezwaren tegen den geest der Eeuw*). Da Costa was aided in his efforts by the highly capable G. Groen van Prinsterer,<sup>296</sup> who was then the Secretary of the Cabinet and

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<sup>293</sup> CE1:59.

<sup>294</sup> Mark Beach, “Introductory Essay,” in Herman Bavinck, *Saved by Grace*, (Nelson Kloosterman [trans.]), (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), p. xii.

<sup>295</sup> The evangelical revival of Restoration Europe had both an elite as well as a popular base. The Dutch counterpart and manifestation of this revival came to be known as “The Réveil.” It contained elements from Switzerland and England and typically appealed, first and foremost, to the aristocracy, but not totally and exclusively so. The father of the Dutch revival was Willem Bilderdijk (1756-1831). Bavinck would later write a rather extensive brochure on him. It is quite true that Bilderdijk was the premier Dutch poet of the age. “A classic exemplar of reactionary Romanticism, Bilderdijk, despised rationalists, utilitarian’s, and revolutionaries of every sort and championed Orange, orthodoxy, and tradition. He paid for his sentiments—and was reinforced in them—by going into exile when the French took the Netherlands in 1795; yet he so valued stable order that he returned to serve Louis Bonaparte. Deprived by political intrigue of the university post he deserved, he began teaching small groups privately in Leiden, carrying on the cause there and in his endless writings.” (Bratt, *DCMA*, 10.) Upon Bilderdijk’s death, the leadership of The Réveil fell to Isaac de Costa, a converted Jew and man of letters.

<sup>296</sup> Van Prinsterer wrote a provocative book with the translated title, *Unbelief and Revolution*. To his mind, unbelief and the Revolution went hand in hand. In fact, his famous motto was that unbelief *produced* revolution. Bratt describes the Revolution and its impact in this manner: “The Revolution had reduced society from a harmony of diverse parts to a

archivist of the royal records. Together, they carried on the tenets of The Réveil, “meeting privately in one another’s homes for Bible study, devotional exercises, and lectures on Dutch history, literature, and current social problems.”<sup>297</sup> The bureaucracy of the Regulation as well as the professors and pastors within the HK increasingly were contemptuous towards those who wanted to return to the Reformed ecclesiology.

A second cause for the Separatist movement was a preceding revival (known in Holland as The Réveil [see above]) where the Holy Spirit moved in a way that brought spiritual awakening among a number in the land and the accompanying conversion of many souls. The Separatists had rather direct ties with many of the teachings of The Réveil, especially with a view to man’s corruption, Christ’s exclusive atonement, and experiential conversion.<sup>298</sup> It should be noted, however, that the relationship between the Separatists and The Réveil was rather loose. The Réveil circle only supported the Separatists partially and vice-versa. One of the major bones of contention was that the Separatists “decried the Réveil’s loyalty to a ‘false church’ (the HK—RG) but welcomed its legal assistance.”<sup>299</sup>

Third, even in the midst of the new edict from Willem I, a great deal of Reformed history had preceded his rise to the throne where the Dutch had become thoroughly acquainted not only with what came out of Dortrecht, but also with the writings of the “older” Reformed authors.

A fourth cause of the Separation movement was Pastor D. Molenaar’s publication in 1827 entitled *Address to all my fellow Hervormde believers*. Molenaar was the pastor of a HK congregation in The Hague (‘s-Gravenhage) and with this publication laid open the sad spiritual state of the HK, which had occurred in a relatively short expanse of time. Molenaar complained that the king had hamstrung the Church of Christ in Holland with his hierarchical domination through the various appointed “commissions.” Moreover, the Synod of The Hague had severely weakened the subscription formula for pastors by no longer requiring them to subscribe to what was taught in Scripture and summarized in the Three Forms of Unity, but rather they were permitted to subscribe to the general tenets of the confessional statements. In a kind of sleight of hand the Synod of The Hague no longer *de facto* required adherence to the Three Forms of Unity, even though lip service was still paid to them. This “lip service” decreased precipitously within a short expanse of time.

The fifth cause of the Separation movement could very well have been a series of “acts of God” or God’s providential dealings with the Dutch situation. Around 1830 three events in particular played roles not only in testing the country, but also testing the spirits of Christ’s Church in Holland. First, a lack of potable water presented itself in the Low Country, which, in itself, is an oddity and rarity of nature. Given the rain that is ubiquitous in that area of Europe a shortage of water presented a true irony. It must have been caused by global warming. Next, a war broke out between Holland and neighboring Belgium and generally speaking people are driven more to their knees during war than during peacetime. Finally, there was a severe outbreak of cholera in 1830 that played an integral role in causing people to seek God and his protection.

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chaos of disconnected fragments, had replaced the natural, unifying allegiance to kind and country with the impersonal regulations of a centralized bureaucracy.” (Bratt, *DCMA*, 12.)

<sup>297</sup> Bratt, *DCMA*, 11.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

It is generally agreed upon and accepted that the motivation for the Separation movement was concentrated in a man used very much by God during this time. Even though Hendrik de Cock was not the only man used by the Lord, he was a kind of Dutch Martin Luther. De Cock (1801-1842) was born in Veendam. He attended seminary at the State University in Groningen where he came under the influence of dominant theology of the time: “rationalistic supernaturalism.” In 1829 de Cock was ordained and installed as a pastor in the HK in the village of Ulrum in the province of Groningen by his predecessor and professor, Dr. Hofstede de Groot. In his arguments with the HK it was not his intention to separate and begin a new church, it was rather to purify the HK and to encourage it to return to its orthodox roots. He envisioned a purified version of the HK that returned to doctrinal orthodoxy.

Initially, de Cock was a product of his seminary education and his sermons were not unlike those of his HK colleagues. But what Pietje Baltus meant to Kuypers when he was in his first pastorate in Beesd, is what Klaas Pieters Kuipenga meant to Hendrik de Cock. Kuipenga understood the doctrine of salvation by sovereign grace far better than de Cock had been taught it while at Groningen. During a conversation about salvation with Pastor de Cock, this simple man Kuipenga remarked, “If I had to bring even one ‘sigh’ to my salvation, then I would be lost forever.” God used those words to penetrate deeply into de Cock’s being and he was a changed man. One of de Cock’s colleagues from Warfhuizen put a copy of Calvin’s *Institutes* into his hands and his preaching took a decided turn towards the Reformed camp.

One might say that de Cock over-reacted a little once he became Reformed. Two of de Cock’s more liberal colleagues, L. Meyer Brouwer and G. Benthem Reddingius, were accused by de Cock of being wolves, hirelings, and murders—and that was on a good day. In addition, de Cock’s concerns for the HK took on an un-Reformed aspect as well. For example, no doubt out of concern for the lack of orthodoxy in other State Churches, de Cock took to baptizing the children of members of other congregations. On December 19, 1833 de Cock was relieved of all pastoral duties but was allowed to retain his salary. Not satisfied, de Cock turned his attention to evangelical hymns that he typified as “siren-like love songs” (*Sirenische minneliederen*). The HK Provincial Church Committee defrocked de Cock on May 29, 1834. The Synod of The Hague upheld the PCC’s decision but gave him a half a year to reconsider his views and to repent. De Cock declined.

Monday, October 13, 1834 was a momentous day in the history of the Reformed Church in Holland. On that day, de Cock and the Consistory in Ulrum signed the *Act of Separation or Return*. Of primary importance is the assertion contained in the *Act* that the Dutch Reformed Church bore the marks of the false church described in articles 28 and 29 of the Belgic Confession. Contained in those articles of faith were the further accusations that the HK mutilated (*verminken*) sound doctrine, did not administer the sacraments in accordance with Scripture, neglected biblical discipline, and in general persecuted those who held to biblical orthodoxy. The *Act* continued and pointed out that the synodical regulations described in the edict of 1816 had no grounds in the Word of God and therefore could not be considered binding upon the consciences of the Church. Finally, the *Act* called for a return (*wederkeren*) to a view of Scripture as infallible and inerrant as well as the implementation of the Three Forms of Unity, and the Church Order of Dort.

Within a little more than two weeks the movement had spread to Doeveren, Genderen, and Gansoijen. The Classical Committee of Heusden relieved the local pastor in the town of Doeveren, Scholte, of his duties without loss of salary because of his participation in a worship service in Ulrum. Scholte declared the release illegal and threw it back into the face of the ecclesiastical bureaucrats in Heusden. With Scholte's refusal to comply with the HK decision he lost his salary, his position, and the HK kept the church facilities. In rather quick succession, the defrocking of Pastors Antony Brummelkamp (Gelderland; October 7, 1835), Simon van Velzen (Friesland; December 9, 1835), and Gezelle Meerburg (November 24, 1835).

These actions played an important role in the unrest in the Church of Christ in Holland during those tumultuous years. The situation was exacerbated by the application of Articles 291-293 of the Code Pénal that dated from the Napoleonic time. In summary, these articles made it unlawful for the dissenting pastors to lead in worship services. If they did, a reward for their capture and arrest was placed on their heads and they would be incarcerated. In addition, the Dutch soldiers were given the right of being garrisoned in the homes of the Dutch. The military personnel were, in general, not only unwelcomed, but the soldiers were also rude and demanding of their "hosts."

The government declared that the Separation was a tantamount to civil disobedience. De Cock alone was incarcerated over thirty-five times. Each time he was released he began preaching the gospel immediately. His dedication to the gospel and preaching did more, humanly speaking, to spread the cause of the Separation than anything else.

## Appendix C

### The “Doleantie”

#### *The Doleantie as a Theological Movement*

In this brief intermezzo, we pause and briefly consider some of the most salient aspects of the Doleantie movement.<sup>300</sup> Algra succinctly makes the following valid point: “Church conflicts lead to wounds that remain painful for a long time.”<sup>301</sup> That is most assuredly the case between the State Church and the Doleantie faction within it. For our purposes in writing about Herman Bavinck, it is not essential that we delve deeply into the intricacies of why the Doleantie occurred.<sup>302</sup> Suffice it to say that it was, indeed, a theological grass roots movement that swept across a segment of the HK. While the divide could not be strictly drawn along economic lines, it is true that a representative faction of those who remained in the HK constituted the patrician class of Dutch citizens. In the history of the formation of State Church in Holland, many of the wealthy landowners and entrepreneurs found the close association between the crown and the Church to be to their liking. These influential members of the HK served on the various committees and commissions by appointment. Their leadership was perpetual so that any changes that occurred had to receive their “imprimatur.” The HK, in this arrangement, was both hierarchical and, at times, heavy handed.

When voices were raised by the “man and woman in the pew” about the deviations from orthodoxy that many in the HK and in the state run and controlled universities were advocating, the commissions and committees quelled and stifled the voices of dissent. Their tact was, as often as not, to silence all dissent. In a very real sense, those of the

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<sup>300</sup> A very helpful little booklet is J.C. Rullmann, *De Doleantie*, (Zutphen: Uitgave J.B. van den Brink, n.d.). Mark Beach adds this interesting note: “The *Doleantie* itself emerged from the practical question whether those who denied the Reformed faith could be admitted to membership in the State Church. When the Amsterdam Consistory (the consistory having jurisdiction over all the churches in Amsterdam and its vicinity) refused to comply with the provincial board’s decision that ordered acceptance of such members, some 80 members of the consistory were deposed from office, Kuyper among them. This episode took place in 1886, and brought about the formation of a new ecclesiastical body of *Doleerende Kerken* [Grieving Churches]. This movement soon spread far beyond Amsterdam. (Introductory Essay, Herman Bavinck, *Saved by Grace*, xiii.)

<sup>301</sup> H. Algra, *Het Wonder van de Negentiende Eeuw*. Van Vrije Kerken en Kleine Luyden, (Franeker: T. Wever, 1966<sup>3</sup>), p. 317.

<sup>302</sup> When the Separation occurred in 1834, there were a number of orthodox believers who remained in the HK because they had criticisms of the Separation movement. These church members had been in opposition to the church organization document that dated from 1816. This “complaint” (the verb “doleeren” is typically translated with the word “complaint,” which does not capture the nuance of the Dutch word. Therefore, for the sake of clarity, the word will simply be left as “Doleantie.”) can be traced to around 1841 under the leadership of Groen van Prinsterer. On April 11, 1883 a conference was held by various churches still in the HK, all of which wanted to return to the Three Forms of Unity and release from the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the HK Synods. In that same year, a number of HK churches declared their intention to live according to the holy principles required by the ordination and installation into the offices of pastor, Elder, and Deacon. Matters came to a head when the Session/Consistory of Kootwijk called a graduate of the Free University as their pastor, thereby rejecting the edicts of the synodical organization of the HK. This first incident was under the leadership of Dr. Willem van den Bergh, who, himself, would play a key role in the Doleantie. On December 16, 1886 the Session in Amsterdam made a clean and final—albeit ecclesiastically illegal—break with the HK organizational structure. They called themselves the Nederduits Reformed Church, with the appended name of “doleerende.” By January 11<sup>th</sup> of the following year more Sessions broke with the HK hierarchical organization. By 1888, a synod of the NRC decided to scrap the name “doleerde,” but it stuck anyway. The rationale for dropping that part of the name was that it gave the impression that they were starting a new church, when in reality they believed that they were the true continuation of the true church. (cf. *CE*, 1:611.)

patrician class ruled the HK with the proverbial “iron fist in a velvet glove.” One of the primary reasons why that which was truly Reformed found little acceptance among those in positions of wealth and power in the HK was due, in part, to the disdain that many of the wealthy held for true biblical faith. Since many of them were well educated, there was an intellectual snobbery that looked down its nose at the tenets of the faith. The net result of this was that many among the more prominent and wealthy constituency in the HK was more than pleased that the Three Forms of Unity were abandoned and/or disparaged openly from the pulpits.

Fortunately, the Lord spared a “remnant” within the HK—men such as Kuyper, van den Bergh, and Rutgers—who were not only intellectuals, but who also possessed a child-like Christian faith and held the Reformed tradition in high esteem. Moreover, the leaders in the Doleantie recognized and acknowledged the value of and insights into a rich, vibrant, and robust faith life from the plainer, simpler folk in the HK. The subtitle of Algra’s book, “Of Free Churches and Little People” (*Van Vrije Kerken en Kleine Luyden*), captures the core of truth that the Doleantie was a grass roots movement.

Nevertheless, it should also be remembered that like their Separatist counterparts, those following the Doleantie did not start out to be—nor did they believe that they were—starting a *new* church. To their minds, the Doleantie was merely a purifying process in the line of the one, true Church of Jesus Christ. When they observed the spiritual bankruptcy of the HK, the non-Christian teachings of the liberal professors at the state universities, and the lack of genuine faith in the lives of a number of the pastors in the HK, they realized there was true cause for concern. In this sense, the appellation “Doleantie” (complainers, grievors, or protesters) was highly inappropriate and, as I mentioned in the footnote more definitively defining this movement, in 1888 the word Doleantie was officially dropped from the name of the movement.

Their complaints and protests were legitimate, however, and in the providence of God and under the leadership of men raised up by God the Doleantie became a fact of life and caused a great deal of consternation within the HK. It is next to impossible to argue against men and women in a Christian church who merely want the church to be Christian, which is another name for scriptural. In the past, the upper class in Holland had had no difficulty controlling the disparate voices of protest. Now, however, they were organized and under able, capable leadership. The line in the sand had been drawn and the struggle was on in earnest.

What appears to be the most painful, yet highly understandable aspect of the struggle, is that when the split finally became a “done deal,” it divided some people from one another that—in historical, objective perspective—it should not have divided. That statement demands some elucidation. As with any such struggle with so much at stake, some decisions to stay in the HK were made for less than adequate reasons. For example, some people chose to remain merely because their friends and family were staying. When this type of decision is made, it is usually just a matter of time before the ones staying no longer observe the problems that were so clear to them at one time. In addition, personalities played an important role in the split as well. There were some of the members who saw leaving the HK as tantamount to not supporting the king. After all, Church and State were intricately bound together in Holland at that time. Still others became consumed by the men leading each group rather than informing themselves fully of the ecclesiastical issues that were causing such a huge strain in the HK. In other words,

for some the split was “personality” driven. Therefore, when the split occurred it often tore families asunder. Such, however, is sometimes the nature of a reforming work. Algra remarks that the ecclesiastical wounds were deepest and most acutely experienced in the places in Holland where an *orthodox* congregation belonging to the State Church—and there were still some around—was split in two.<sup>303</sup>

### *The Doleantie's Threat to the Theological Seminary in Kampen*

As we have seen, the faculty in Kampen was divided over the issue of the Doleantie. As a movement, the Doleantie's initial influence was centered in Amsterdam, but it eventually spread to the entire country of Holland. The theological situation in the State Church had not improved over the years since the Separation. In point of fact, it had worsened. It will be remembered that Kuyper was an ordained minister in the State Church, as was Rutgers. 1886 proved to be a turning point in the sense that serious discussions were initiated about either rectifying the rampant liberalism in the State Church—which did not seem likely—or breaking away from it altogether.

Bremmer correctly states that from the very beginning Bavinck had possessed a keen interest in Kuyper's struggles in the State Church, the Doleantie as an ecclesiastical movement, and the various conflicts within the State Church itself.<sup>304</sup> Prior to 1886, when it appeared that a rupture was merely a matter of time, Bavinck had addressed the issue of a Church free from the interference of the State in *The Trumpet*. He pointed out how this freedom was precisely what the CRC longed for and accomplished by separating from the State Church. Borrowing from Groen van Prinsterer's rejection of the Revolution in favor of Reformation, Bavinck wrote, “The Revolution must be banished along with all of its unchristian elements. New states of affairs must be created by means of the acceptance and broader application of the principles of the Reformation.”<sup>305</sup>

In order to grasp something of the theological nuances that were at play in the debate surrounding the doctrine of the Church during those years, we need to understand something of the matter of “the true church” as it was contained in the Belgic Confession, which comprised one of the confessions in the triad known as “The Three Forms of Unity.”<sup>306</sup> The articles 27-29 of the BC address the matter of the Church of Jesus Christ. Article 29 in particular directs attention to the marks or notes of both the true and false Church.<sup>307</sup> In the course of that 29<sup>th</sup> article, we are told that the true church is recognized by the marks of the pure preaching of the Word of God, the pure administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of church discipline. From there, the author, Guido de Brès, describes the marks of the true Christian. He concludes with a description of the false church and its detractions from the Word of God and reminds Christians that “These two Churches are *easily* recognized and distinguished from each other” (Emphasis added).

Historically, de Brès was directing his criticisms against the Roman Catholic Church. Given the dire situation within the State Church, the Separatists had, rightly, taken the

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<sup>303</sup> Ibid. Emphasis mine.

<sup>304</sup> Bremmer, *HBZT*, 53.

<sup>305</sup> *De Bazuin*, 1884, no. 44.

<sup>306</sup> The Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession, and Canons of Dort.

<sup>307</sup> This is a matter, in my estimation, that North American churches should devote substantially more attention to in terms of denominational standards as well as individuals who are searching for a biblical church to attend and eventually to join. Of course, so much of modern evangelicalism is almost entirely bereft of any of the truths contained in Article 29, their search being overshadowed by their desire to be entertained or otherwise made to feel good about themselves or to have their self-esteem stroked.

words to apply to the widespread apostate ministry as well. Therefore, it is not surprising that Bavinck would address Kuyper on this issue—which he did prior to 1884—in a rather extensive article that appeared in the periodical the *Free Church*.<sup>308</sup> Bavinck and Kuyper were both strong personalities and both knew what they wanted and how they wanted to go about accomplishing their goals, even though it cannot be denied that Kuyper was certainly the stronger of the two personalities. Both were also leaders in their respective camps as well as being highly respected theologians. For his part in this discussion, however, Bavinck was not about to relinquish his strongly-held principles for Kuyper or Kuyper’s name. Conversely, while Kuyper had a great deal of admiration and respect for Bavinck, he sometimes suspected that his younger colleague was not one-hundred-percent “on board” with Kuyper’s plans—which was true. Numerous times the two men criticized each other publicly over matters of church, politics, and theology, but at the end of the day, they were allies.

We should not get the impression that only Bavinck was involved in the developments that came to be called the Doleantie. Bremmer cites instances when the entire faculty in Kampen was invited to Amsterdam to confer with the deputies of the Doleantie. Given Bavinck’s appointments to the Free University previously, he was considered a highly valuable contact for Kuyper, Rutgers, and others. At the same time, the affinities of the high profile leaders of the Doleantie for and with Bavinck ended up making him suspect by colleagues like Lindeboom. As far as the latter was concerned, Kuyper had Bavinck in his pocket.

Simultaneously, Bavinck occupied the unenviable position of being the message or “middle man” or mediator between the two parties. He would attempt to listen to the objections of his Kampen colleagues and then either mollify or correct them. In an article that appeared in *The Trumpet* in 1888, Bavinck accentuated the differences between the Separation and the Doleantie, because at bottom, the discussion concentrated itself on the subject of the State Church. The Separatists, Bavinck believed, had made a clean break with the State Church, which meant that they had broken with it as a “body.” The Doleantie was more complicated: they contended that they had broken with the “relation” to the State Church, but not with the “body.” Bavinck concluded, therefore, that “The Separation was a battle for the truth; the Doleantie was a battle for the right of the Reformed Churches. The former was ethical in nature; the latter was juridical.”<sup>309</sup>

On August 14, 1888, the CRC Synod met in the city of Assen and the matter of union with the Doleantie brothers and sisters was on their agenda. For three days they intensely discussed the possibility of union and what the grounds for such a union should be. As might be expected, Bavinck was the spokesman for the group that was more favorable towards unifying with the Doleantie, while Lindeboom took the opposite stance. He demanded that the Doleantie break *immediately (onverwijlde)* with the State Church. Barring that, Lindeboom argued, there could be no bona fide discussion about union. This decision was further complicated by the fact that during 1887 and 1888 the tensions sometimes ran high in the small group of faculty members at the theological seminary in

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<sup>308</sup> *De Vrije Kerk*, 1883, no. 9, pp. 542-575.

<sup>309</sup> *De Bazuin*, 1888, no. 31. “De afscheiding was een strijd voor de waarheid, de doleantie een strijd voor het recht der Geref. Kerken. Geene was ethisch, deze juridisch van aard.”



Kampen. There is little wonder that when it was time to meet in Assen, Bavinck and Lindeboom were more opposed than ever to each other.<sup>310</sup>

Four months later (December 18, 1888) Bavinck would deliver his *cri de coeur* in his first speech as rector of the school entitled *The Catholicity of Christendom and Church*.<sup>311</sup> That speech that was eventually made into a booklet was, no doubt, descriptive of the atmosphere of part of the August Synod meeting in Assen, although Bavinck also directed his attention to a number of other theological controversies in it as well.<sup>312</sup> What were some of those controversies that Bavinck addressed in his position of rector of the theological seminary? Throughout the speech, we discover Bavinck speaking about the Dutch Ecclesiastical Ruling that established the State Church, the dangers of withdrawing into a sort of “convent-like” mentality (*de conventikelgeest*), a pessimistic view of the world, narrow-mindedness (which he found in his own denomination), and the ever-present danger of a variety of church splits caused by non-essential, non-fundamental matters.

### **Summary**

Bavinck’s efforts were not wasted. In 1892, the churches of Doleantie and the Afscheiding formed a union that became known as the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. From the outset, there were obstacles regarding the “school question,” which centered on precisely which school, the Free University or the Theological Seminary in Kampen, would be the official school of the unified churches.

There was also a question about preaching style, the Doleantie churches leaning more toward subjectively oriented sermons, while the Afscheiding tended more to an exposition of God’s redemptive-historical dealings with his covenant people. This led to a distinction between the “A” (Afscheiding) and “B” (Doleantie) brothers and sisters.

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<sup>310</sup> Bremmer, *HBZT*, 58.

<sup>311</sup> Herman Bavinck, *De Katholiciteit van Christendom en Kerk* (G. Puchinger [ed.]), (Kampen: Kok, 1968). All quotations from this speech will be taken from Puchinger’s 1968 edition.

<sup>312</sup> For example, approximately twenty years previously the First Vatican Council had declared the infallibility of the Pope and on August 4, 1879 Pope Leo XIII had published his encyclical entitled *Aeterni Patris* that reinstated Thomistic philosophy. Both events widened the gap between Rome and the Protestants. Bavinck delved into this matter in his speech.