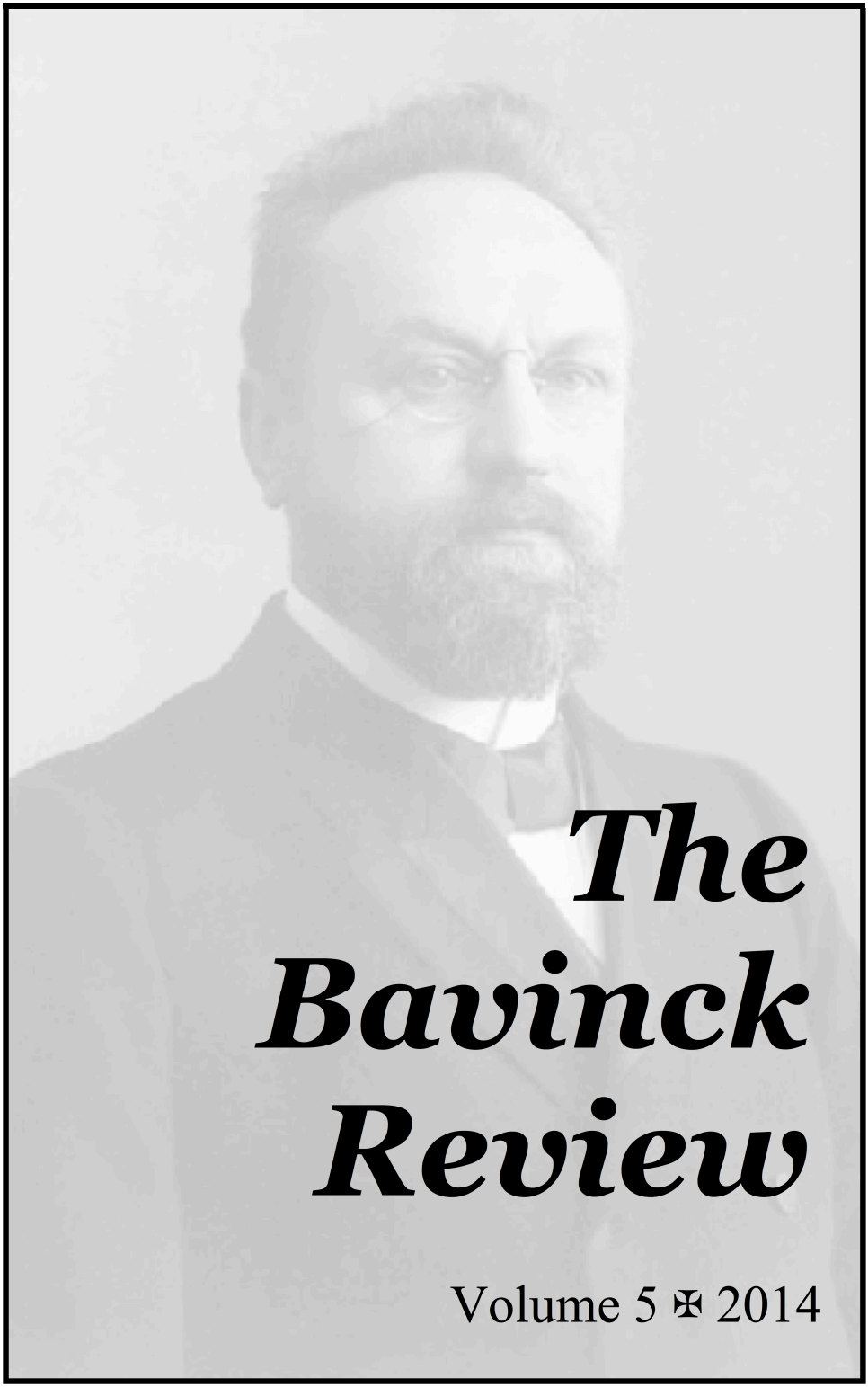


The Bavinck Review

Volume 5 ✠ 2014

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The Bavinck Review

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Contents

Editorial 6

Articles

What Kuyper Saw and Thought: Abraham Kuyper's Visit to the Holy Land
Bert de Vries 8

The Missional Character of the (Herman and J. H.) Bavinck Tradition
John Bolt 43

We Do Not Proceed into a Vacuum: J. H. Bavinck's Missional Reading of Romans 1
Gayle Doornbos 61

An Adventure in Ecumenicity: A Review Essay of *Berkouwer and Catholicism* by Eduardo Echeverria
John Bolt 76

In Translation

The Pros and Cons of a Dogmatic System
Herman Bavinck, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman 90

Pearls and Leaven

Bavinck as Pastor (1880–82)
John Bolt 104

Bavinck Bibliography 2013 106

The Bavinck Review 5 (2014): 6–7

Editorial

Our fifth volume opens with a colorful Holy Land adventure. With the mind of an archeologist, the eye of a photographer, and the heart of a Reformed Christian, Professor Emeritus de Vries leads us back to the early twentieth century where we trace Abraham Kuyper's footsteps in the sands of the Holy Land as he recorded them in his travelogue, *Om de oude werldzee*. In response to Kuyper's enthusiasm for sacred soil, orientalist biases, and colonialist notions that come to light along the way, de Vries asks us to consider how much of what we think about Palestine-Israel today has been inherited from Kuyper and his contemporaries a century ago.

"Missional" is a buzzword in theology these days. But what does it mean? How is it defined theologically? In what sense is God on a mission? Should we replace ice cold, abstract "systematic" theology with white hot, relational "missional" theology? These are the questions professor Bolt addresses in his essay on the "missional character" of the Bavinck tradition. He presents a series of rhetorical questions to explain how Herman Bavinck (in dogmatics) and Johan Herman Bavinck (in missiology) together contributed a robustly "missional" voice within twentieth-century Protestant theological discourse and to suggest how that tradition offers wisdom that is still relevant for enriching "missional theology" today.

How do Christians evaluate non-Christian religions? Gayle Doornbos looks at how J. H. Bavinck addressed this fundamental missiological question both psychologically and ultimately on the basis of his interpretation of Romans 1:18–32. She then offers several suggestions for how Bavinck's psychological and theological insights can enrich current missiological discussions that flow out of the recent shift to the Triune-God-as-missionary-God paradigm.

This year's translation piece, Herman Bavinck's lecture on the "Pros and Cons of a Dogmatic System," is interesting to consider both in its own right and in relation to the "missional" question in the previous two essays. Regarding the former, Biblical studies generally, and in Reformed theology redemptive-historical biblical studies in particular, has been in vogue for several decades now. Ac-

cordingly, dogmatic theology with its penchant for philosophical and historical analysis, its pursuit of the unity of faith and reason, its scholastic form, and its aim of grounding Christian ethics in that which may be known about humanity's duty to God in both general and special revelation has dwelt under varying degrees of derision and neglect. Perhaps the no small amount of unrest of souls and ideological ennui that characterizes contemporary thought about the true, the good, and the beautiful bids us to ponder whether a century-old taste of perennial wisdom on the "systematic" character of knowledge concerning God offers light and guidance for our pursuit of seeing all things in God and God in all things. Regarding the latter, if it is it really the case that systematic theology is inherently cold, abstract, philosophical and hence to be joyfully relegated to history's dustbin, then certainly it offers not aid but an outmoded hindrance to the "missional" mind. Yet, if systematic theology teaches divine wisdom concerning God, is taught by God, and leads its pupils to God, then there is reason for both masters and disciples to consider whether a greater or more useful tutor than divine wisdom can be found for pursuing and promoting "missional" ends.

Finally, Professor Bolt's ecumenical adventure introduces a longstanding friendship with a colorful criss-crossing of Roman Catholic and Neo-Calvinist traditions. What arises out of this friendship is the type of academic exchange that is at once amicable, critical, and real—a gift that invites the wounds of friend for sharpening and perfecting. Professor Echeverria's close reading and patient analysis of Neo-Calvinist criticisms of Roman Catholic formulations of the relation between nature and grace will certainly interest if not challenge Reformed Protestants as will Professor Bolt's frank assessment of where and how Echeverria's critiques ring true in the Neo-Calvinist tradition.

—Laurence O'Donnell

The Bavinck Review 5 (2014): 8–42

What Kuyper Saw and Thought: Abraham Kuyper's Visit to the Holy Land[1]

Bert de Vries (dvrb@calvin.edu), Professor Emeritus of History and Archeology, Calvin College

Abraham Kuyper's account of his 1905–06 Palestinian tour, "The Holy Land," was first published in *Om de oude wereldzee*, the two-volume travelogue of his extensive journey around the countries of the Mediterranean which he took as a consolation for losing his bid for reelection as Prime Minister of the Netherlands.[2] Ironically, he had at first intended to skip Palestine and travel by boat directly from Beirut to Cairo. The reason? In 1876 an intended trip from Marseille to Jaffa had to be aborted due to serious illness, and since then he had heard nothing good about the place from travelers who claimed their visits had disappointed in numerous ways. But in the end the choice to by-pass Palestine left him with feelings of guilt and disrespect: "To visit Syria and Egypt, but not *the Holy Land*, that I could not make myself do" (*HHL,* 10). And seeing this visit in the context of reading the entire *Om de oude wereldzee,* his reluctance makes some sense. His main motive for this world journey was to understand the region in global politics and its potential for economically successful colonization.[3]

1. A plenary lecture delivered on 12 October at the 2011 Bavinck Conference, "After 9/11/11 . . . What? Reformed Theology and the Church's Global Mission Today," held at Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

2. "Het Heilige Land," in *Om de oude wereldzee,* vol. 1 (Amsterdam: Van Holkema and Warendorf, 1907), ch. 9; hereafter: *OOW*; republished as *Palestina: het heilige land* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1925); hereafter: *HHL*. See figure 1.

3. James D. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 325–35, describes the entire journey recounted in *OOW* and covers in particular Kuyper's four excursions from his travel account on the significant others affecting the state of the world: "Het



Figure 1: Covers from *Om de oude wereldzee* and *Palestina: het heilige land*

For these interests he considered Palestine to be a backwater destination without contemporary value except for its salvific geography, its "Biblical-era splendor."[4] Thus the bypassing of Palestine meant a show of disrespect in paying greater homage to the contemporary worth of Egypt and Syria than to the value of Palestine as the locale of the incarnation of Jesus. What he actually saw and thought during his visit confirmed his preconceived hunch and justified his choice to include Palestine in his journey after all. "Though I hesitated momentarily," he wrote, "I nevertheless in the end made the right choice" (*HHL*, 10).

Aziatische Gevaar" (the Asian threat), "De Zigeuners" (Gypsies), "Het Joodsche Probleem" (the Jewish problem), and "Het Raadsel van den Islam" (the riddle of Islam).

4. Bert De Vries, "Archaeology," in *Encyclopedia of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, vol. 1, *A–H*, ed. Cheryl A. Rubenberg (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 2010), 105.



L. G. Leary, Syria: *The Land of Lebanon*. New York: McBride, Nast and Co 1913

Figure 2: Hauran map showing the railway lines used for the journey from Damascus to Samakh Station south of the Sea of Galilee.

Therefore, I've made the theme of this article "What Kuyper Saw and Thought." In part 1, "Experiencing the Biblical Past in Its Geographic Setting," we see how the tour affirms his conviction that the glamor of the land is indeed in its reflection of "het heilige." In Part 2, "Seeing and Thinking about the Palestine of 1905," we follow his investigation into the worth of Palestine in the larger religio-political economy of the colonial world in the decade before World War I. My method of presentation is to use Kuyper's own words (what he thought) in combination with pictures of what he describes (what he saw). The core of this article is thus key quotations with the Dutch originals embedded in the illustrations and my translations quoted in the text of the article. For those who do not read Dutch the article will make sense in English, but those who read Dutch will be able to enjoy the rich, colorful, and emotionally charged quality of Kuyper's original words. The one exception is a long quotation, the opening three pages, which, for economy of space, I give only as my translation in the text. In the illustrations

all color photographs are by the author unless otherwise noted, and all black and white photographs are from another early Dutch Palestine travel book by A. Noordtzij.[5]

Part 1: Experiencing the Biblical Past in Its Geographic Setting

An Informed Dissertation on the History and Population of the Hauran

Kuyper traveled from Damascus across the fertile plain of the Hauran to the west of the "Druse Mountain" using the recently developed French railway designed to transport goods, especially grain, from this region to Haifa on the coast (*OOW*, 426–27; fig. 2).

This region comprises both the modern Golan occupied by Israel and, to its east, the Hauran of southern Syria and northern Jordan where I have my archaeological project at Umm el-Jimal (www.ummeljimal.org). As he watched from the windows of the train you can picture his excited note taking as he witnessed the obvious agricultural richness of the land and the numerous villages with cores of black basalt ruins from the Roman, Byzantine, and early Islamic centuries. While writing an excellent description of the recently settled Druze and Arab communities, he exclaimed, "it experienced its greatest flowering under the strict Roman administration," and "During this resettlement of the Hauran the new inhabitants found they had convenient and useful ruined cities at their disposal" (*OOW*, 428; fig. 3). In fact, he says, some of the ancient houses were so well built and preserved, the new settlers could simply move in and avail themselves of the old stone tables and benches still in place. As always he was especially interested in the religiously and politically anomalous group, the Druze, so we get a short dissertation on their culture; though, he also remarks on the warm hospitality of the local Arab villagers (*OOW*, 428–29).

Because this region is my own research habitat I should report that his elaboration on what he saw is essentially correct. The combination of his actual travels and his later research enabled him to get a pretty accurate picture of both the modern socio-economic

5. *Palestina en het land van den Jordaan* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1926).

setting and its relationship to the ancient archaeological remains in the landscape. Interestingly, in January and February of 1905 the outstanding archaeologists H. C. Butler (Princeton University Expedition to South Syria, 1905, 1909) and Gertrude Bell preceded him in the Hauran. However, he gives no indication of meeting them or any other archaeologist on his entire journey from Damascus through Palestine. I get the sense they passed like ships in the night. At least he did not seek them out for interviews as he did Turkish authorities, foreign dignitaries, and colonists; but his later library work, which is not credited with references, may have led him to the results of their work.



Figure 3: A basalt façade at Umm el-Jimal, Jordan, representative of the ruins Kuyper saw from the window of his train from Damascus.

I also sense that here, still outside Palestine, he is able to see and focus on modern people more directly, whereas, as soon as he got off the train at the Sea of Galilee, he started seeing Biblical events in the modern geography (fig. 4). Consequently, he seemed

less able to admire the people of Palestine as openly as he did the Druze and the Arabs that he saw in the Syrian Hauran.

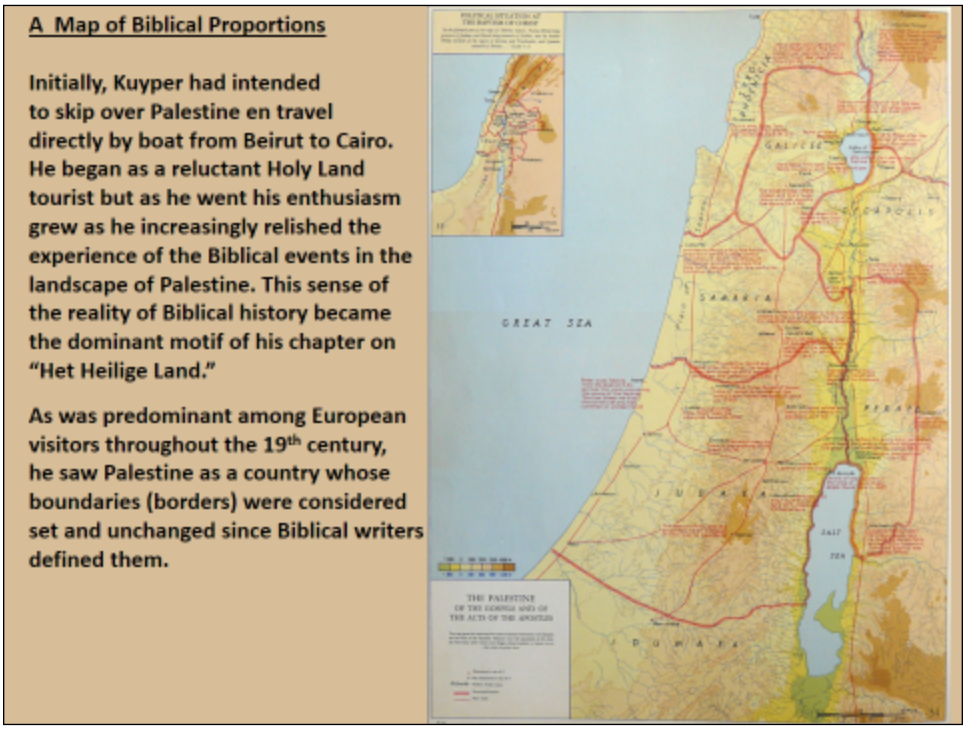


Figure 4: Map of Biblical Palestine.

The "Holy" in "Het Heilige Land"

The Setup: "Propelled through the Dark-Hued Water"

When Kuyper disembarked the train at Samack and stood on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, and it was as though his "seeing" was instantly changed, as though he had put on a different set of glasses. The flavor of this transformation by which Kuyper saw Palestine differently than the other regions of the Mediterranean covered in *OOW* is caught perfectly in the first three pages of *HHL:*

> From the small railroad station at Samack, where you arrive by train coming from Damascus, you descend a high, grey and steep rock slope to the shore where the waters of Lake Gennesareth lap at your feet. At this shore a contingent of six Turkish musketeers stood on guard, and a sturdy boat with six men at oar lay ready to row the small party across to Tiberias. As it was already late and Tiberias still ten kilometers distant,

we stepped into the boat without further ado, and before we were even settled, were gliding with rhythmic oar strokes across the gently rolling lake's surface.

For close to two hours we were propelled through the dark-hued water as we cut across the lake, with silence all around us and also silence in the boat. Of the sort of rowers' song with which Venetian gondoliers might have serenaded us, there was not a trace of sound, and none of us were able to converse with the crew. Thus, disturbed by nothing, we each gave ourselves over to reflection on the impression the thrilling experience was making on us; thrilling not because of what we were witnessing, but because of the mystery that engulfed us.

The lake itself offers nothing captivating, neither in extent, nor in form nor in appearance, and ranks, whether geologically or scenically, far behind either Lake Lucerne or Lake Geneva. Even the friendliness of a softly up-sloping shore is missing here; mountaintops are not immediately visible; there is no liveliness of sprawled villages at water's edge, no prevalent farm-groves wafting their pleasant odors toward you, no herdsman leading his flock to water. Nothing is happening on this lake, so that it seems a pretty big deal to see a fishing dinghy darting into or out of a streamlet. The south and east coast especially is rendered inaccessible by a ten-meter high vertical rock wall; only on the north is there more gradually sloping terrain, and on the west coast also a woods. But when you add it all up you get the impression of a lifeless watery corner over which no birds flap their wings and from which no darting fishes jump up.

The only beauty came from the sky arching high over the lake; on the left the red fireball descending, and to the right the glassy-gleaming light-disk, which at first appeared to be resting on the earth, but then pulled itself up into the sky.

Even though this magical sky drama of sun and moon harmonized with the mystery that one's soul was seeking, this was not that mystery itself. Whatever stirred one on this quiet journey came from above, from the hidden world of spirit, through which a holy past welled up in my imagination.

It was the name of Jesus which from all the shores around me, and across the waters over which I was sliding, was called out to me. Forget Him and Lake Gennesareth loses every attraction, but if you visualize Him in your imagination, then at once everything around you is aglow as no lake in Switzerland could be. You see everything come to life in your mind's eye. There along the shore Jesus used to stroll, a throng of many thousands following him; from that hillside in the distance echoed the Sermon on the Mount in its quiet majesty. These waters on which you float quietly were, when they were storm-tossed, stilled by his command. Here he recruited those simple fishermen, who soon, as his anointed

apostles, would conquer the world for the Cross with their powerful words [*machtwoord*].

True, it wasn't here, but in Jerusalem that He suffered, died, and rose up; but here in Galilee, here with this Lake Gennesareth as the midpoint of his holy business, it was the Son of Man who spoke as might-possessed, who through his miracles astounded the throng and who as "Christus Consolator" spread blessings around him.

To be allowed to meditate under such an overpowering spell—disturbed by nothing for two full hours—brought me an enjoyment of spiritual enrichment the likes of which I found in no other spot in Palestine. For me it was as if, after Jesus's presence had been so powerful here that one time, after his departure everything here died out, leaving nothing behind besides the never dying memory of his holy Name. (*HHL*, 7–9; *OOW*, 433–34; fig. 5)



Figure 5: Lake Tiberias (Genessareth) seen from Um Qeis, Jordan.

What Makes the Holy Land Holy*?*

"What, then," Kuyper asks, "was the purpose for which Palestine was set apart as *holy*" (*HHL*, 15)? He began the answer with a huge negative: "But the holy significance of this land fell away after

it had fulfilled its higher task. . . . It sank into oblivion as though struck by a curse. All its earlier glory went under" (*HHL*, 14; fig. 6). Taken in the best light, he meant that that there is nothing inherently holy in the land. But he also meant this in a more emphatically negative way. After Jesus had departed, Kuyper could no longer see the sort of potential in the land that he saw in the other places he visited like the Hauran.



Figure 6: Close-up of Lake Tiberias with Jordanian university students. Kuyper first saw it from the shore straight below them.

Thus we leave the land of the present for the land of the biblical past, for Kuyper's historical geography of the incarnation. As he put it,

> the idea is, that as in Christ God's holy presence becomes concrete and touchable [*tastbaar*], that there be a community of people [*kring*] that can "grasp" spiritually the Father of the Spirits. To attain this goal, Israel as a people [*volk*] and Palestine as a land is set apart. For that reason it has been [*geweest*] the *Holy* Land. (*HHL*, 17; fig. 7)



Figure 7: Fishing on Lake Tiberias. As is true of much Christian Holy Land lore, quaint moderns like these fishermen were photographed and filmed as stand-ins for the disciples and other people around Jesus.

Strikingly, though this happened in the past, he puts the condition of Israel and the land in the present, by which he must mean the universal present of sacred history rather than the punctual present of ordinary history in which the land is actually under a curse.

After he crossed the lake he found proof of the curse on the land in the ruins of Roman-Byzantine Capernaum: "To Capernaum was extended the highest spiritual, truly divine, privilege. By refusing that it called on itself the total curse: it has been wiped off the face of the earth" (*HHL*, 40–41; fig. 8). Unless one takes such a statement as tongue-in-cheek, it represents an extreme replacement of archaeological and historical explanations of the decay of material remains of a civilization with the rather irrational alternative of God's collective punishment. I wonder whether such sacred-historical notions still color the mystique of Holy Land tourism among members of Dutch and North American Reformed communities today. It seems at least true that on this score Kuyper was not innova-

tive but simply fell in line with the prevailing notions of "Biblical archaeology" among his contemporaries.[6]



Figure 8: The ruins of Capernaum testify to the curse pronounced by Jesus.

Two Holy Mountains: Tabor and Carmel

Tabor: Chosen as the Mount of Transfiguration

In his journey from Lake Galilee to Jerusalem Kuyper visited cities and colonies that fit not only the inquest of his entire Mediterranean journey but also a selection of sites that followed the special preoccupation with the holiness of the land that he had reserved for Palestine. The next stop on this spiritual journey was Mount Tabor. "The Tabor," he writes,

> is totally unique in that it stands completely isolated; because its sides descended into a flat plain, it appears much higher than it really is (i.e., only 562 m above sea level). And because of its nearly perfect bowl-shape

6. De Vries, "Archaeology," 105.

> it appears like a mighty dome plunked down in the middle of the landscape. (*HHL*, 45)

Standing on top of the mountain, Kuyper relives the story of the Transfiguration: "What happened here is spellbinding. God's entire purpose in Israel was to approach the human heart with His spiritual presence, to make evident the hidden glory of the higher world in this world" (*HHL*, 51–52; fig. 9).



Figure 9: Mount Tabor seen by telephoto lens from the east, from Um Qeis, Jordan.

But standing there he also sees the modern settlement and agricultural uses of the terrain, and he feels compelled to argue that, contrary to "the destructive criticism of the Thabor tradition" (*HHL*, 56), there had been a particular spot on the crest of the mountain where the very private theophany of the Biblical story could have taken place. His anger is hidden in the typically Dutch hyperbolic sarcasm I remember from my Dutch childhood:

> But isn't there something really wicked in a critical approach that allows its destructive conclusion to rest on such uncertain ground. . . ? Yes, isn't

> it so that they find a certain satisfaction by sneaking up on every pilgrim about to abandon himself in sacred reflections to whisper in his ear: "You've got an entirely distorted impression; you're letting yourself get carried away by superficialities!" (*HHL*, 62; fig. 9)

My English, "sneaking up," doesn't really do justice to "aan te sluipen," which conjures up the image of a tempting serpent slithering along and mouthing enticements which sway modern "Eves" into accepting its lies as the truth. For Kuyper, not only is the Transfiguration historically real but also it had to have happened here, at Tabor!

Carmel: Chosen for the Victory of Monotheism

From Tabor Kuyper traveled via Nazareth to Haifa. Although he was interested in the port and its Bahai, Jewish, and German colonial settlements, he found Mount Carmel the most fascinating feature of the coastal landscape not just for the startling transition from beach to mountain but much more so because here Baal and his priests were defeated by God and Elijah. Kuyper couches this battle in virtually Zoroastrian dualist terms as "[t]he struggle between the kingdom of Light against the kingdom of Darkness. . . . It was here that the spirit of God burst in on the spirit of humanity" (*HHL*, 74). This victory for monotheism through Elijah coalesces with Jesus's prominent ministry in the Galilee: "not in Samaria, that fell away completely, nor in Judea, that chose legalistic ways, but here, high in the north, precisely where on the Carmel Baal's power was broken" (*HHL*, 76; fig. 10).

More ships in the night: the German archaeologist Gottlieb Shumacher excavated Megiddo on the other side of Carmel from 1903 to 1906, and stayed at the Templar "Colony" in Haifa where Kuyper also stayed and which he described in detail (*OOW*, 447), but Kuyper did not meet him. Archaeology was not an important factor in Kuyper's fascination with his conception of the Holy in "Het Heilige Land." At Carmel sacred history trumped ordinary human history entirely.



Figure 10: View from Mount Carmel
looking down on Haifa and its beaches.

Two Holy Cities: Jerusalem and Bethlehem

The Cosmic Meaning of Jerusalem

From Haifa Kuyper traveled to Jaffa via the highlands, passing through Jenin and Nablus, and from Jaffa he went up to Jerusalem and Bethlehem. With the basic substance of his "Heilige Land" thesis laid at Tiberias, Tabor, and Carmel, the visits to Jerusalem and Bethlehem become its punctuation marks. Jerusalem is its natural center, the locus for the very origin of "religion" defined as the three faiths which still revere its centrality: "the motif of religion . . . has its singular beginning in Jerusalem, in the Holy City, to which Jew *and* Mohammadan *and* Christian still journey in prayerful silence" (*HHL*, 115–16; fig. 11).

"Jesus and Jerusalem belong together inseparably" (*HHL*, 115; fig. 12), he asserted, and the key event of sacred history took place at Golgotha. Like at Tabor, he therefore has to take on the critics,

the archaeologists, who disparaged the possibility of locating either the location of the crucifixion or the burial sites from the available evidence.



Figure 11: The three religions of Jerusalem's Old City

Kuyper had no better evidence, but he had such a passionate need for the physical locale of redemption that he went through a process of elimination to deduce that it could not have happened anywhere but at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. "Thus I am convinced," he concluded, "that specifically here (at the Church) the Christ suffered and died, and that here He arose from the dead on the third day. Standing on these holy places, I'm not a bit troubled, and I have believed" (*HHL*, 135; fig. 12). Thus the tradition of sacred history trumped the evidence of archaeology.

He contrasts the rational arguments of a natural scientist, a deist who relies only on evidence, with the simple acceptance of a believer like himself who when standing in the church *feels* (*voelt*) that this *is* the point where Golgotha and tomb come together (OOW, 522–23; fig. 13). He feels and therefore knows that he is at

the sacred center of the universe: "the center-point [*aspunt*] of the history of the world may for a while at least have been in Rome; here, where the cross stood, and Christ swallowed up death into the intensity of eternal life, not just the history of the world, but the whole of cosmic being has been revolving around its axis [*as*]" (*HHL*, 139; *OOW*, 524; fig. 13).



Figure 12: Church of the Holy Sepulcher. A pendentive dome support in the central nave (*catholicon*) depicting Mark with his Gospel.

No archaeologist can penetrate such confessional conviction of the truth, which simply flicks aside all that mundane sifting through material evidence and embraces the traditions of sacred geography and asserts this spot as *the* location of the passion of the Christ and therefore the center of everything. Kuyper passed on this holy land mystique to future generations, including my parents (who were "Kuyperians"), for whom the war-caused cancellation of a visit to Jerusalem (1973) was one of the major disappointments of their lifetimes.



Figure 13: Church of the Holy Sepulcher. The dome over the central nave for which the Mark pendentive (fig. 12) is one of the supports.

Bethlehem: the Locale of the Incarnation

Kuyper celebrated Christmas 1905 with the Latin Patriarch. He was much taken with Bethlehem's small-town character and the overwhelming majority of Christians among its population. He felt blessed to be there at the time of the Latin Christmas, enjoyed the decorations and celebrations at Manger Square, and relished being invited to the Christmas mass in the Church of the Nativity by the Patriarch. "The *Te Deum* I attended was impressive," he writes, "and then we all descended to the sacred spots" (*OOW*, 535; fig. 14).

The emotional intensity of his spiritual journey comes to a climax here as his constant stress on the centrality of Jesus and the incarnation became increasingly entwined with a frank veneration of the traditional places and structures where these events were believed to have happened. Sacred history needed a sacred geography, "Het Heilige Land," and the methods of Biblical theology (exegesis

of Scripture and confessions) blurred the methods of archaeology (analysis of soils and structures).



Figure 14: Priests saying mass over the grotto below the altar of the Church of the Nativity, the place where Jesus is believed to have been born.

Here in Bethlehem he was so convinced of the accuracy of the locale of Jesus's birth that he did not need to take on the critics as he had at Tabor and Jerusalem. Instead he took several pages to recall the history of quarrels over access to the sacred sites among the various Christian denominations and groups. He attributed this perpetual quarreling to the emotional volatility of easterners compare to westerners (*OOW*, 536–39; see below, p. 32).

But he counters his screed on Christian disunity with a concluding paeon of praise for the splendid meaning of *the* Bethlehem event: "In Bethlehem all is Divine poetry. Our poetry is fiction, the depiction in song of a higher reality than the lackluster reality that presses on us. But Divine poetry is *creation*, the insertion into this reality of a higher reality than this world can offer us. And thus was the miracle of Bethlehem, the Incarnation of the Eternal Word,

amidst eradiation of more than earthly glimmers" (*HHL*, 162; fig. 15).



Figure 15: Looking from the Milk Grotto across the rooftops to the churches of Bethlehem at Manger Square.

Comments on The "Holy" in "Het Heilige Land"

As an archaeologist I am underwhelmed by Kuyper's need to prove the precise locations using a combination of logic and faith as a substitute for material evidence being made rapidly available by archaeologists who had been busy mapping, surveying, and excavating the cultural landscape.[7] I react this way especially because, in the other aspects of his travel scholarship, he based his conclusions on careful and thorough collection of information.

To get a better handle on his notion of "holy land" it may help to see what he did not mean by it. First, he limited his labeling to

7. E.g., C. R. Conder and H. H. Kitchener, *The Survey of Western Palestine*, 3 vols. (repr. 1970; Jerusalem: Kedem Publishing, 1881).

the terms Palestine and Holy Land, and nowhere did he use the term "Promised Land" that is so much in vogue among modern fundamentalists. And following on that, he did not become an avid Zionist, though he was not adverse to Jewish colonization as we will see below.

In general Kuyper is typical of Christians who visit Israel-Palestine with a sense of this being the place where the deeds of salvation took place. But, as Gary M. Burge points out so well, there is a fine line between such a general sense of the geographic reality and forgetting that in Christ any earlier Biblical "theology of land" had been absorbed into the theology of redemption.[8] Kuyper crosses that line in this work by mixing together the veneration of places with the celebration of the incarnation. That is why he has to be so defensive against the critics who were denying the possibility of scientific proof for the identification of the precise spots like Tabor and Golgotha where Biblical events took place. As a Christian one can be a tourist enjoying the reality of the earthly life of Jesus in the same way that one can enjoy visiting Chaco Canyon to appreciate the historical culture of the Anasazi. In each case physical nearness can make the event more real in the mind of the visitor. But one cannot cross the line from such tourism for education and enjoyment to actual pilgrimage, which means the actual veneration of those physical places which are felt to transmit mystical power.[9] Kuyper let his initially unplanned tour of Palestine lapse into a pilgrimage once he decided to go. Ironically, in this way he left the door open for a veneration of physical space (land) among subsequent generations of Reformed Christians whose basic identity includes a tradition of protests against such behavior in medieval Catholicism. This is perhaps an unintended consequence of his emotional-spiritual enthusiasm for the physical reality of the incarnation, but real and damaging nevertheless.

8. *Jesus and the Land: The New Testament Challenge to "Holy Land" Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 125–31.

9. For discussion of the distinction, see Tony W. Cartledge, "Walk about Jerusalem: Protestant Pilgrims and the Holy Land," in *Archaeology, Bible, Politics and the Media: Proceedings of the Duke University Conference, April 23–24, 2009*, eds. Eric M. Meyers and Carol Meyers (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 139–43.

Part 2: Seeing and Thinking about the Palestine of 1905

The Political Geography of the Early Twentieth Century

Kuyper's journey through Syria and Palestine took place before the post-World War I drawing of the national borders by the European powers, when the region was still ruled from Istanbul as part of the Ottoman Empire. He says about the Turkish provincial designation of the region: "The drawing of the border around the land by the Turkish administration is thus also wholly arbitrary and solely determined by the intent of forming one Greater Syria from the Taurus to Egypt and from the Mediterranean to the desert . . ." **(***OOW*, 442; fig. 16).

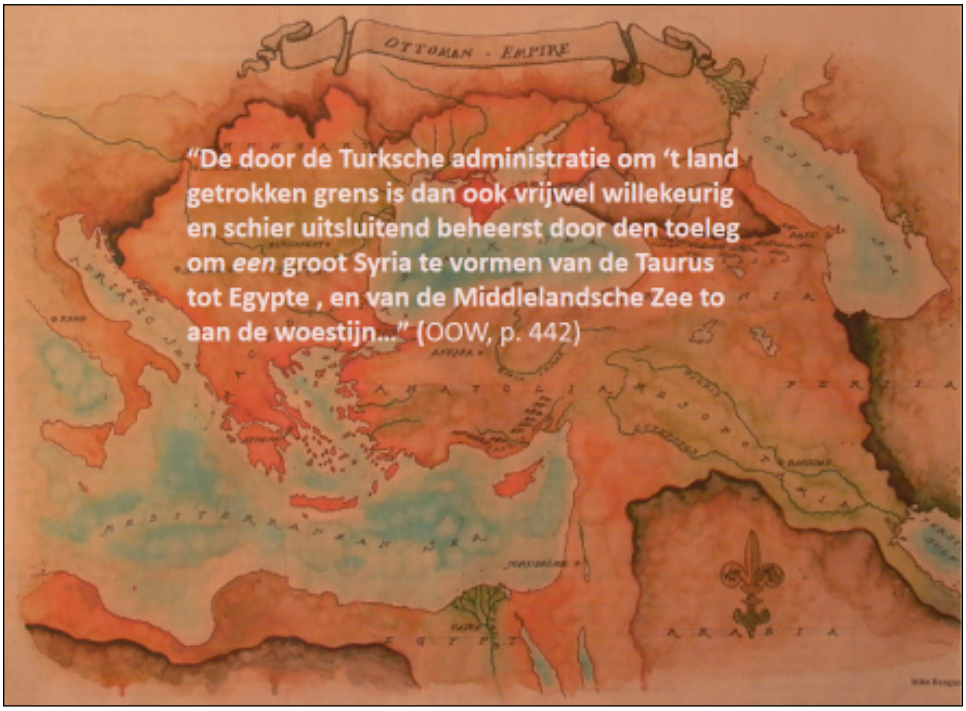


Figure 16: Map of the Ottoman Empire showing the region of "Greater Syria" (Levant) between the Taurus Mountains of Turkey and the Suez and between the Arabian-Syrian desert and the Mediterranean.

The Ottomans restored a system that had already been in effect in the Roman Empire in which Syria was considered a single

province with subdivision such as the governorate of Jerusalem. After the mid-nineteenth century reorganization in which Jerusalem was made a governorate covering most of Palestine within the province of Syria, the situation was eerily reminiscent of this Roman precedent. Local inhabitants also saw themselves as denizens of Greater Syria, *Bilad ash-Sham*, which is Arabic for "The Towns of Damascus."

I'm not sure, therefore, why Kuyper saw this Greater Syria border as artificial, unless it was a threat to the prevailing Judeo-Christian notion that Biblical Palestine-Israel is a distinctive region with its own border permanently set by the conquests of Joshua and David. The really artificial borders in the region are those drawn by the allies in the post-World War I carving up of Greater Syria (1922–32). Even in the 1970s numerous acquaintances there identified themselves as much as denizens of Bilad ash-Sham as citizens of their respective nation-states, and the regional history from the Crusades to World War II is studied as the "History of Greater Syria" in the local regional universities today.

All this indicates that Kuyper did not really see the region through local eyes but through those of a Judeo-Christian Westerner.

Palestine as Kuyper Saw: A Degenerate Land Inhabited by Useless People

The Ruination of a "Paradise of Fertility"

Kuyper's impression of the accursed land at the outset was confirmed by what he saw through the windows of his carriage as he crisscrossed the region on both coastal and highland roads. "It [the land] sank into insignificance," he remarked, "and seemed as though stricken by a curse. All its former glory went under" (*HHL*, 14). And now "along the coastal road [we saw] nothing but small hovels and long distances apart an impoverished Khan or hostel" (*HHL*, 89; fig. 17).

The historical sequence in his mind is clear: a Biblical paradise, "land of milk and honey," has been ruined, its "former glory" no longer visible. Earlier we saw this explained as a logical outcome for post-incarnation Palestine. Now, looking at the land and its people, he is seeing it and them through the rosy glasses of Israelites wan-

dering in the Sinai looking north and admiring huge bunches of grapes. This Bible-oriented stereotype, already prevalent in 1905, remains the norm among western Christians today.



Figure 17: Ruin of the main residence in Abwin, which was one of more than twenty "throne villages" that flourished in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Palestine.[10]

What his mind's eye perceives as a former "paradise of fertility" (*OOW*, 443) his real eyes see as an undeveloped wasteland the de-

10. Suad Amiry, *Throne Village Architecture: Palestinian Rural Mansions in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Arabic with summary in English). (Ramallah: RIWAQ, Centre for Architectural Conservation, 2004), 203. Kamal Abdulfattah and Bert de Vries, "The State of Agricultural Terraces in Palestine: A Photo Essay Based on a Visit to the Agricultural Village of Silwad," in *Food and Foodways in the Middle East*, The Lower Jordan River Basin Programme Publications and Global Moments of the Levant 18, ed. Nefissa Naguib (Bergen: BRIC, 2009).

generation of which was caused by a post-Biblical decline of agricultural civilization:

> This comes in part from the ruination of the terrace system, partly from the desiccation of the soils resulting from irresponsible tillage and lack of manure, . . . partly from the destruction of the irrigation systems, partly from deforestation, partly from the lack of safety caused by wandering Bedouin. (*HHL*, 22; fig. 18)



Figure 18: Abandoned and eroded terraces at Silwad, north of Ramallah. This was actually a flourishing vineyard until hit by a blight decades ago. The Israeli occupation has made its restoration very difficult.[11]

The towns and villages of Palestine had had a post-Biblical history of prosperity and a recent revival of sorts triggered by the Ottoman Tanzimat reforms of the 1840s, and had he actually interviewed the local residents of the "hovels," he would have heard very different explanations of the agricultural decline and denudation and might have imagined a redevelopment involving local inhabitants rather

11. Abdulfattah and de Vries, "The State of Agricultural Terraces," 143ff.

than the "rescue" by Europeans through more intense colonization by "Westerners."



Figure 19: A Bedou sheikh in front of his tent, proud of his son and traditional culture artifacts.

The Miserable Inhabitants of "the Accursed" Land

Kuyper's impressions of the local people are rooted in a stark set of contrasts between western and eastern people that is best captured by his characterization of eastern Christians' tendency for infighting: "Now we are cool-headed Westerners [*koele Westerlingen*], but the Easterner is so much more hot-tempered [*heetgebakerd*]" (*OOW*, 537). The following snippets are representative of his general assessment of these "hot-tempered" Easterners (fig. 19):

> . . . impoverished Bosniaks and homeless Bedouin whose concepts of hospitality are not very lofty. . . . (*HHL*, 87)
>
> . . . lack of security caused by the wandering Bedouin. . . . (*HHL*, 22)

> This native Mohammmadan populace does not know how to raise itself to a higher economic status (i.e., pull itself up by its bootstraps). (*HHL*, 98)
>
> . . . the eastern filthiness and immiseration. . . . (*HHL*, 71)
>
> . . . the Asiatic native proclivity toward sexual orgies. . . . (*OOW*, 27; but note also this remark on the same page: ". . . the sexual evil that also rages in Europe and America. . . .")

Kuyper evaluated people he observed in terms of their potential for enterprise and economic development. He therefore judged farm communities by their neatness and productivity, towns and cities by the robustness of their trade and industry, and the vitality of communities by demographics. Thus local people did not measure up to his Dutch standards of cleanliness and enterprise. Conversely, he was not much interested in cultural achievements by themselves, and as a result, he missed the rich visual culture of Palestine evident both in traditional town architecture and artistically pleasing weaving and embroidery which were marks of Palestinian historic identity.[12] Others, as Noordtzij demonstrates with the photo album used in this article, were much more captivated by the beauty and dignity of the material culture of Palestine's countryside and townscapes.

The "Empty" Land Ripe for Colonization

As the quotations indicate, he considered these flaws inherent and irreversible, and thus the redemption of the land required an influx of colonists and settlers who met his western requirements of neatness and enterprise:

> The native inhabitants do not give evidence of any robust initiative whatsoever. . . . If, therefore, the expectations of those who look forward to a better economic future for Palestine are to be fulfilled, such an improved future must be realized by shoving the Bedouin back to the East, and through the entry of an international mixture of colonists, who would form the foundation for an entirely fresh repopulation of Palestine. (*OOW*, 445; fig. 20)

12. See www.arabheritage.org for late 19th century textiles, weaving, and embroidery that are emblematic of Palestinians' distinctive cultural identity today.

This contrast between the "locals" (*inheemschen*) and colonists is stated repeatedly and emphatically.



Figure 20: Women at the well or carrying water were favorite subjects of early painters and photographers.

His investigation of the following colonial settlements was the substantial "business" component of his visit to Palestine: the four German Templar colonies, the major Jewish colonies, and the American Colony (founded by Anna Spafford). The settlers were all foreigners from the west, and he found each an economic success. What he says of the German colony at Haifa is typical:

> What one notices most particularly about Haifa is the contrast between the German Colony and the native portion of the populace. . . . These five-hundred colonists live communally in a separate area, and all that you see there is sturdily constructed, looks well maintained, and gives a pleasant impression of order and neatness; a small western oasis in the midst of Eastern filth and neglect. (*HHL*, 71; fig. 21)

Kuyper was also very interested in the ports: Haifa, at the head of the Hauran railroad; and Jaffa, which served as the port of

Jerusalem. For they enabled the export of goods and produce from the colonies. He also tended to favor the strong administration of imperial organization, which in this case helped the trade infrastructure flourish. (Recall his explanation for the flowering of the ancient Hauran as due to "the strict Roman administration.") He therefore tended to treat Ottoman Turkish provincial administrators with respect and sought them out for interviews—but also because he liked the company of elites.

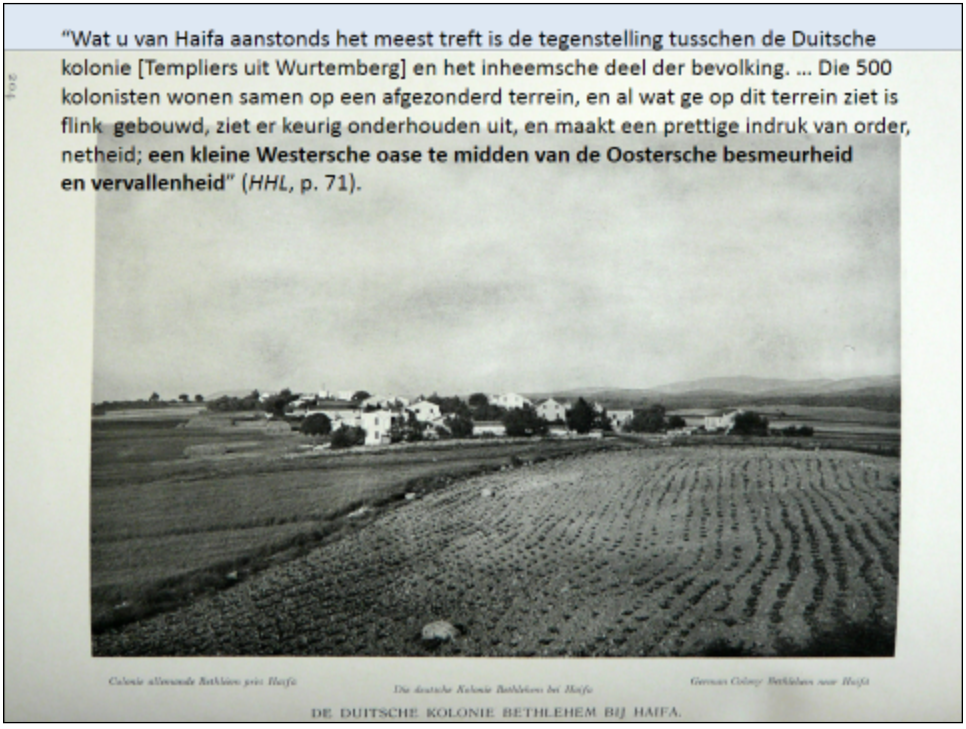


Figure 21: The German Colony at Haifa set in its agricultural fields.

Jewish Colonies and the Zionist Enterprise

Kuyper was emphatically uninterested in religious Zionism because he had such a strong sense of the spiritual, non-national outcome of God's promises in the incarnation of Jesus that there simply was no room for it; therefore, his sacrilizing of the places of the incarnation could not link up with a Zionist theology of the Messiah's return as it did for Christian dispensationalists. At Capernaum, reflecting on the aftermath of the Sermon on the Mount, he re-

marked, “Didn’t it come to this then, that he would expose the full confession—clear and transparent—to his disciples, and that surely a purely spiritual confession, totally free of Israel’s dreams of nationhood” (*HHL,* 49; fig. 22)? And even more emphatically: “Whether this could ever happen again, as long as Israel does not put aside its rejection of the Messiah, may be doubted. There is a promise that eventually all Israel will be saved, *but through the Christ”* (*HHL*, 99; fig. 22).



Figure 22: Walking the streets of Jerusalem
in typical east European Jewish dress.

He could well have agreed with the more secular Zionist agenda of his day in the spirit of which Israel Zangwill wrote in 1902, “Palestine has but a small population of Arabs and fellahin and wandering, lawless, blackmailing bedouin tribes.” And the phrase

he made famous: "restore the country without a people to a people without a country."[13]

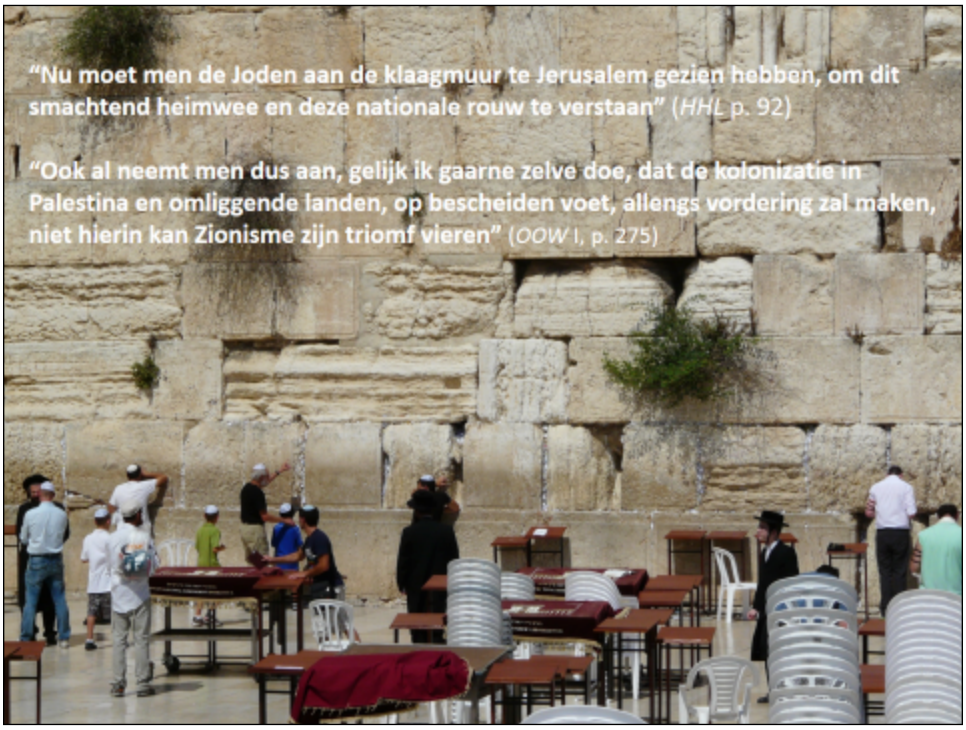


Figure 23: Prayers at the Western Wall.

Note that Zangwill shared Kuyper's biases against the local population and its psychology. In the minds of both thinkers the land was empty and available because these indigenes were outside the focal range of their vision. Therefore, the land was not really deserted but "empty" in the sense that it was ripe for colonization by those who were industrious and orderly rather than blackmailing and wandering. The difference was, however, that Zangwill was designating Jews as exclusively "the people without land" whereas Kuyper considered the European Jews as part of a larger cohort of western colonists who qualified by being industrious and energetic; in that cohort there was room for Jews too. This means that he was not particularly Zionist, but not unsympathetic nor opposed to sec-

13. *English Illustrated Magazine* 221 (Feb. 1902): 421–30.

ular Zionism. And, like Theodor Herzl, and later also Zangwill, he did not consider the land of Palestine to be the only or best location for the fulfillment of the Jewish national dream.

Kuyper discussed the larger role of the Jews in his long chapter elsewhere in his travel book ("Het Joodsche Probleem," in *OOW*, 239–324), but here he merely includes them in his economic evaluation of the colonization of Palestine. Though Bratt notes that in this larger chapter he taps into some typical anti-Semitic stereotypes,[14] here he shows no traces of anti-Semitism. Rather, he displays considerable sympathy for Jewish prayers and mourning at the Western Wall: "You have to have seen the Jews at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem in order to understand this languid homesickness and this national mourning" (*HHL*, 92; fig. 23). Nevertheless, he denied that the Zionist objective of nationhood could succeed on the coattails of successful colonization: "Even though you presuppose, as I do eagerly, that a modestly paced colonization of Palestine and environs can make gradual progress, Zionism cannot expect to celebrate its triumph thereby" (*OOW*, 275).

Missions in "Het Heilige Land": Western Missions and Eastern Christianity

The Christian colonies, three German and one American, which he judged successful at economic development, he declared to be failures as missions (*HHL*, 101–11). This negative evaluation fit his general thinking that the evangelization of Muslims was to be seen as a dead-end: "It is not feasible to think of missionaries' impact in terms of conversion [from Islam] to Christendom" (*HHL*, 26; fig. 24).

Needless to say this left classic nineteenth-century missionaries, who were seriously drawn to Palestine, with a problem that they have not yet solved. Kuyper's solution was frank and practical: "The missionary venture in Palestine has therefore no other meaning than to bring the Christian sector already found there up to a higher level" (*HHL*, 26; fig. 25).

14. *Abraham Kuyper*, 330.



Figure 24: Graffiti on a shop door in the Old City of Jerusalem.
It reads: *al-Masiah, Nour el-Alim*; "The Messiah, Light of the World."

My hindsight observation is that this was a correct assessment. While many western denominations have churches in Palestine and Jordan, most of their members were already Christians whose families "converted" from an eastern to a western denomination.

What Kuyper Could Not Have Seen nor Thought

Although Kuyper is known as an innovator and founder of a tradition of revived Dutch Calvinism, what he saw and thought in Palestine belonged to the religio-political culture of his day. We should therefore not be too surprised at his attitudes and interpretations. Most western visitors, including archaeologists, imagined Palestine more in terms of the Biblical passages and Sunday school lessons from which they had learned its geography. Not all shared his enthusiasm for the holy places, however.



Figure 25: Tile in Armenian Orthodox Church,
Armenian Quarter, Old City, Jerusalem

A Dutch Jewish business man who toured Syria-Palestine in 1907 for the express purpose of inquiring into the business aspect of the secular Zionist colonization project did not share Kuyper's enthusiasm for the sacred places, not because he could not share his faith in the incarnation, but because of the corrupt commercialization he witnessed. He remarked:

> Meanwhile, I have to observe frankly that Jerusalem's holiness is also Jerusalem's downfall. The holy sites are being exploited as wellsprings of profit, the love of the Holy land [*het Heilige land*] has become an object of business speculation, and there is trade in relics and in goods for use in the churches. Spirituality often becomes a mixture of worship, trade, and politics.[15]

Nevertheless, had the two met, they would have agreed on a lot involving planning for economic development and colonization

15. J. H. Kann, *Erets Israel, het joodsche land* (Leiden: Brill, 1908), 22–23 (my translation).

from their shared location in the European colony-founding empires. The dark thoughts Joseph Conrad expressed in *Heart of Darkness*, also published in 1905, were neither Kuyper's nor Kann's thoughts.



Figure 26: Jerusalem, looking west from the Mount of Olives.

Looking back at what Kuyper saw and thought is naturally biased by what we now know but Kuyper could not have known. That awareness should blunt our criticism when we are shocked by his enthusiasms for sacred soil, for his orientalist biases, and for his colonialist notions. Were Kuyper to come to Israel-Palestine today, what would he see and think while standing on the Mount of Olives looking west across Jerusalem at the skyline of the western, Israeli city (fig. 26)? I'll leave the answer to your flights of imagination. But as our minds soar we should ask how much of what *we* see in or think about Palestine-Israel was inherited from Abraham Kuyper and his contemporaries a century ago. My answer is: a great deal, even though things may not have turned out the way Kuyper would have hoped during his 1905 pilgrimage-tour. And what Kuyper and

his contemporaries thought in 1905 certainly influenced the transformation of Palestine as he saw it to the Israel-Palestine we can see today.

The Bavinck Review 5 (2014): 43–60

The Missional Character of the (Herman and J. H.) Bavinck Tradition[1]

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Because the word "missional" has come to mean so many different things to different people, it needs to be clearly defined. The importance of this was impressed upon me when I stumbled across this curious claim by an evangelical seminary (Biblical Seminary in Philadelphia): "Why we teach 'missional theology' rather than 'systematic theology.'"[2] The explanation stated that "missional theology is not 'theology of (foreign) missions'; it's exploration of the character of God, who is a God on a mission." The contrasting approach, it was suggested, is to "present God as 'a philosophical concept' to be analyzed." The conclusion: "So, at Biblical, we ask, 'so why should we teach theology as though it is a branch of philosophy?'"

Now I am committed to the proposition that good theology equips God's people for mission and that the primary mission of the church and of Christian believers is to bring the gospel, the good news that Jesus saves and reigns, to the nations. At the same time, I am convinced that the formulation I just summarized is not helpful and even potentially confusing.[3]

Let us leave aside the sloppy caricature of "God as a philosophical concept to be analyzed." Even Hegelians, who come as close to

1. Adapted from a lecture delivered on 18 October 2012 at the "Doctrine for Proclamation and Mission" Bavinck Conference held at Calvin Theological Seminary. I have retained some of the characteristics of the oral presentation.

2. From the website of Biblical Seminary in Philadelphia, http://goo.gl/kpsmCf (accessed 5 September 5, 2012). The rationale was written by Dr. Todd Mangum and dated 6 December 2011. The quotations that follow are taken directly from this short statement.

3. For much of what follows I am deeply indebted to an unpublished paper by my former CTS student Gayle Doornbos, "*Missio Dei*: 'A New Theology for a New Day?' Explorations in Contemporary Missiology."

this as anyone, don't really think of God as a pure concept only to be analyzed. The Hegelian self-determining God who is *becoming* is more like an article of faith tied to religious experience of a mystical sort (*Geist der Ganze?*) than the final product of logical analysis. (Hence the reliance on images and metaphors among Hegelians.) And while it is true that theology must be about God, is it also true that the most or best we can say about the character of God is that "God is on a mission"? And while it is true that theology should not be taught "as though it is a branch of philosophy," what happens when theology is torn loose from its metaphysical foundations?

That brings me to my definition of "missional" which I will set up with a few preliminary claims:

1. As an adjective, "missional" should not be the primary or exclusive defining notion for a good theology; i.e., it cannot be a *substitute* for "systematic" theology.

2. The first and most important criterion for a sound theology must remain *fidelity* to the *truth* about God. The task of theology as a science is to make truthful statements about God: statements that correspond to who God truly is.

3. The term "mission" should not be predicated of God and of God's people in a univocal way (e.g., "we must join God's mission for the world"). With respect to God, "mission" refers to the intra-trinitarian notion of sending, the sending of the Son by the Father, and the sending of the Holy Spirit by the Father and the Son. With respect to the church, "mission" refers to the dominical command to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:18–20).

Therefore, I want to consider the adjective "missional" not to define the *content* of theology so much as to indicate the *result* or *consequence* of a particular theology; namely, its *impact* or *effect*. In other words, starting with the premise that the content of theology is not in the first place to be decided by whether it is *missional* but by whether it is *true*, then we can ask whether a particular formulation of that theological truth content contributes to the effective mission of the church's task in bringing the gospel to the world. (Incidentally, it is my firm conviction that we continue to do systematic theology because we need to be contemporary, to communi-

cate effectively in *our* age, and to equip the church for its mission *today*.) I therefore define "missional theology" thus:

A missional theology understands the task of systematic theology to consist of providing comprehensive and contemporary summaries of the Christian truth about God with a view toward assisting the church in effectively fulfilling the Great Commission in our day.

The one additional preliminary note I need to make here is that a theologian or a theology may qualify as being "missional" explicitly or implicitly. My claim—and there is no surprise here—is that Herman Bavinck's theology is *implicitly missional* while J. H. Bavinck's is more *explicitly* missional. It is what they strongly have in common that leads me to speak of the missional character of the Bavinck tradition. I will develop my case by answering a series of rhetorical questions.

1. The opening illustration you used seems to locate mission in the doctrine of God rather than in ecclesiology. Is that right? Was this a conscious change, and, if so, when and why did it come about?

Yes, this is exactly what happened. In a nutshell, the change came about sometime after 1920 thanks to a perfect-storm confluence of anti-colonialism, missiological upheaval, and the breakout of neo-Orthodox theology (i.e., Karl Barth). From the 1500s through the late twentieth century, the major European powers—Spain, Portugal, Britain, the Netherlands, France, and Germany—acquired, exploited, maintained, and eventually released territories in Asia, Africa, and the Americas. With India's independence from Britan in 1947, Indonesia's independence from the Netherlands in 1949, the Congolese declaration of independence from Belgium in 1960, and Algeria's independence from France in 1962, the European colonial period effectively came to an end. But the seeds of anti-colonial and anti-imperial attitudes go back into the late nine-

teenth century thanks to the work of anti-imperialists like Joseph Schumpeter,[4] Thorsten Veblen,[5] and J.A. Hobson.[6]

The World Mission Conferences, beginning with Edinburgh in 1910, gradually moved from using language like "missionary work" and even speaking without embarrassment about "colonialism" and extending "God's Kingdom" along with "(Western) civiliation," to the quite different notion of "keeping abreast of God's mission."[7] This shift moved the topic of missiology from ecclesiology to the doctrine of God. The addition of anti-imperial notes to the missional chorus is apparent as early as the Jerusalem Conference of 1928 which repudiated "any symptoms of a religious imperialism" and "fixed ecclesiastical forms which derive their meaning from the experience of the Western Church."[8] Much of this came to a fairly definitive conclusion at the Missionary Conference of Willingen (Ger-

4. Joseph Schumpeter (1883–1950) was an Austrian-Hungarian-American economist and political scientist whose essay on imperialism ("The Sociology of Imperialism," in Schumpeter, *Imperialism and Social Classes* [New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1951]), according to John H. Kautsky, "is generally and rightly considered one of the most spophisticated theoretical contributions to the subject to come from the pen of a non-Marxist." (Kautsky, "J. A. Schumpeter and Karl Kautsky: Parallel Theories of Imperialism," *Midwest Journal of Political Science* V/2 [May 1961]: 102.) General information obtained from "Joseph Alois Schumpeter," *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (2008); Encyclopedia.com (28 September 2012), http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3045302351.html.

5. Thorsten Veblen (1857–1929) was an American economist and sociologist who taught at the University of Chicago, Standford, and the University of Missouri. He proposed a Darwinian social-evolutionary view of economic history. His critique of imperialism was that it was wasteful and thus doomed. Information obtained from "Thorstein Veblen," *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (1968); Encyclopedia.com (28 September 2012), http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3045001301.html.

6. John Atkinson Hobson (1858–1940) was an American economist whose work *Imperialism: A Study* (1902) helped sow "the seeds of two of the most powerful ideologies of the 20th cent.: Keynesian economics, and the Leninist interpretation of imperialism." John Cannon, "John Atkinson Hobson," *The Oxford Companion to British History* (2002); Encyclopedia.com (28 Sept. 2012), http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1O110-HobsonJohnAtkinson.html

7. Wolfgang Günther, "The History and Significance of World Mission Conferences in the 20th Century," *International Review of Missions* XCII, no. 367: 525.

8. Günther, "History and Significance," 525; citing the *Report of the*

many) in 1952 where the final statement explicitly ties the church's mission to the very nature of the triune God:

> The missionary movement of which we are a part has its source in the Triune God himself. Out of the depths of his love for us, the Father has sent forth His own beloved Son to reconcile all things to himself . . . On the foundation of this accoplished work God has sent forth His Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus. . . . We who have been chosen in Christ, reconciled to God through Him, made members of His Body, sharers in His Spirit, and heirs through hope of His Kingdom, are by these very facts committed to full participation in His redeeming mission to the world. . . . "As the Father has sent Me, even so send I you."[9]

Missio ecclesiae now derives directly and solely from the *missio Dei.*

That now brings us to Karl Barth (and Emil Brunner).[10] After World War I, the growth of secularism in Europe led Emil Brunner to accent the need for a new apologetic missionary methodology that would build a bridge from the church to a world that had moved beyond Christendom.[11] According to Brunner, pursuing the "relationship between the 'natural human' and the word of God, the church had to locate the 'point of contact' between the two."[12] For Brunner, the church, as the bearer of the gospel message, needs to look for "points of contact" to make it understandable to the world. There are five assumptions underlying Brunner's plea: (1) God created the world; (2) the world is fallen and needs redemption; (3) God still addresses the fallen world (Belgic Confession, art. 2); (4) God calls a new people to himself (Abraham); (cf. *Heidelberg Catechism*, Q & A 54); (5) God sends his "called out" people into the world as *missionaries.* For our purposes it is very important to note

Jerusalem Conference of the IMC, vol. 1, 480–86.

9. Cited by Günther, "History and Significance," 525–26.

10. The compressed narrative that follows borrows heavily from John G. Flett, *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, and the Nature of Christian Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

11. Emil Brunner, "Die Bedeutung der missionarischen Erfahrung für die Theologie," in *Die deutsche evangelische Heidenmission Jahrbuch* 1933 der vereinigten deutschen Missionskonferenzen (Hamburg: Selbstverlang der Missionskonferenzen, 1933).

12. Emil Brunner, "Die Frage nach dem 'Anknüpfungspunkt' als Problem der Theologie," *Zwischen den Zeiten* 10 (1932): 506.

that Brunner's call was at odds with the growing anti-imperial, anti-colonial mood that also affected the World Mission Conferences. It perpetuated the notion that the Western/Christian world had a message for the non-Western/Christian world that the latter needed to accept for salvation. This smacked of superiority and cultural as well as religious imperialism.

But that was not the reason for Karl Barth's decisive and derisive "NEIN!"[13] Though the Barth-Brunner debate was in the final analysis a missiological debate, Barth's objections were concentrated on the doctrine of God. To posit the possibility of a knowledge of God that is independent of his relationship to us in Christ, independent of his particular act of reconciliation, says Barth, locates "the constitution of that relationship external to God himself" and has "the pernicious consequence of cleaving God from his act." Over against this, Barth insists that God is who he is in his act. "The essence of God which is seen in His revealed name is His being and therefore His act as Father, Son and Holy Spirit."[14] David J. Bosch captures the significance of Karl Barth for a new understanding of mission:

> Throughout, the Barthian influence was crucial. Indeed Barth may be called the first clear exponent of a new theological paradigm which broke radically with an Enlightenment approach to theology. . . . It was here [IMC Willingen, 1952] that the idea (not the exact term) *missio Dei* first surfaced clearly.[15]

It is this confluence of anti-colonialism, missiological second-thoughts, and Barth's revisionist understanding of the doctrine of God that brought us the result of Willingen.

2. How important was this shift in shaping missiology in the second half of the twentieth century?

Very. Contemporary missiological literature is filled with the language of *missio dei* as the ground of all mission. Influential mis-

13. Emil Brunner and Karl Barth, *Natural Theology: Comprising "Nature and Grace" by Emil Brunner and the reply "No!" by Karl Barth*, trans. Peter Fraenkel (London, G. Bles, The Centenary Press, 1946).

14. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957) II/1:241.

15. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 390.

siologist David Bosch's language has frequently been quoted by others: "In the new image mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God. God is a missionary God."[16] Bosch then quotes with approval Jürgen Moltmann's restatement of the church in mission: "It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfill in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church."[17] Bosch concludes: "To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God's love toward people, since God is a fountain of sending love."[18]

Bringing it closer to home to my own denomination, the Christian Reformed Church, the following statements from the CRCNA website (crcna.org) reflect a similar, though not necessarily identical, understanding.

Christian Reformed Home Missions: "Christian Reformed Home Missions follows God's lead in the movement of the gospel in North America."

Christian Reformed World Missions:

> We value faith in God and passion for God's mission in the world.
>
> We mirror the Father's desire to reach the lost.
>
> We obey Jesus' command to be His witnesses, proclaiming the gospel to all peoples.
>
> We depend on the Holy Spirit's power to transform individual and community life through interaction with the triune God.

World Renew (formerly CRWRC):

> World Renew, compelled by God's passion for justice & mercy, joins communities around the world to renew hope, reconcile lives, and restore creation.

I call attention to these statements not to start an ecclesiastical rumble but to highlight the pervasiveness of the link between "God's mission" and the church's mission in current missiological literature and mission practice at the denominational level.

16. *Transforming Mission*, 390.

17. Citing Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (London: SCM, 1977), 64.

18. *Transforming Mission*, 390.

As I now move to a theological critique of this popular emphasis, I want to make it very clear that I enthusiastically support the mission impulse behind the language and in no way want to deny that mission is a work of God the Holy Spirit who equips Christ's disciples to go out and "make disciples."

3. Is there a problem with this notion that God is a missionary God and we are to join in God's mission?

Yes there is. Let me spell out three important issues.

1. *The language is confusing*. The word "missionary" can refer to *someone on a mission* or to *someone who is sent*. God the missionary God as the ground and model of our missionary character cannot mean that God is being sent; so we who are missionaries following God's lead must be people on a mission. To keep the analogy intact we must understand our missionary identity as those who are on a mission rather than those who are sent. Two important consequences, two major losses, follow from this move. First, without the sense of divine command that sends us, we lose the clear motivation given in Scripture itself. Second, the well-defined mission of Matthew 28:18–20 is lost and replaced with an expansive definition of mission as "all kingdom work." We only *participate* in "God's kingdom mission," and it is left up to us to discern what it is that God is doing in the world.

2. *Epistemic humility*. It is very difficult for us to know exactly what God is doing in the world. That knowledge is mostly hidden to us. We can see the providential and redemptive tapestry of God's work only in part, in broad general terms, and often only in retrospect. Since the ambiguity of events in our own life is an integral dimension of both spiritual discipline and pastoral care, there is a danger of short-circuiting spiritual growth when we pronounce too quickly on what exactly God is doing. Besides, let us not forget that God judges as well as blesses; do we really want to pronounce with certainty that God is doing such and so, here and there? Let me illustrate this with an example of two influential twentieth-century theologians, Hendrikus Berkhof and Jürgen Moltmann.

In *Christian Faith* Berkhof posits a direct analogy between the renewing work of the Holy Spirit in human persons (sanctification)

and in the structures of society.[19] "Structures, too, can be sanctified by God, that is, be made serviceable. They can promote or obstruct freedom and love." Concretely, this has happened when we arrive at [structures] that "as much as possible allow the transmission or at least room for the purposes of God's holy love" (511). These would include equality before the law, separation of executive and judicial powers, compulsory education, universal franchise, freedom of religion and press, and care for the handicapped (515–16). So, according to Berkhof, the Christianizing of society, the socially democratizing and individualizing, and the desacralizing, scientific-technological emancipation from nature is what God has done and is doing in history. As he writes in his *Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, "The liberating and transforming power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ is at work everywhere where men are freed from the tyranny of nature, state, color, caste, sex, poverty, disease and ignorance."[20]

Moltmann has a quite different understanding. He condemns the very thing that Berkhof celebrates. He sees the secularization, emancipation, and scientific-technical mastery of Western civilization as the problem since it has resulted in a life and death struggle for the creation itself. "[Today] the de-divinization of the world has progressed so far that the prevailing view of nature is totally godless, and the relationship of human beings to nature is a disastrous one."[21] Rather than seeing humanity as the crown of creation and the Spirit's work in sanctification as one of liberating humanity from its bondage to nature and its ills, Moltmann reverses the order. "[T]he human being is not the meaning and purpose of evolution. The cosmogenesis is not bound to the destiny of human beings. The very reverse is true: the destiny of human beings is bound to the cosmogenesis" (196). To be fair, Moltmann then adds: "Theologically speaking, the meaning and purpose of human beings is to be found in God himself, like the meaning and purpose of all things." However, the God in whom all meaning and purpose is to

19. *Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Study of Faith*, trans. Sierd Woudstra, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 505; hereafter cited in text.

20. (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1964), 102.

21. *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, The Gifford Lectures, 1984–85 (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 98; hereafter cited in text.

be found is a panentheistic God who not only "dwells in the world," but "conversely, the world which he has created [also] exists in him" (98). Since "the kingdom of glory is the indwelling of the triune God in his whole creation" (183), salvation is to be found in re-divinization of nature as a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit. A "mechanistic domination of the world" ethic has to be replaced with the idea of "an ecological world community" [egalitarian, co-operative, reciprocal] in which "the earlier [i.e., pagan] matrifocal symbols of the world are pregnant with promise for the future, because they once again 'give us something to think about'" (320).

In response to both Berkhof and Moltmann, and others who search to see what God is doing in the world, perhaps the first affirmation of the *Barmen Declaration* (1934) is appropriate:

> Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death. We reject the false doctrine, as though the church could and would have to acknowledge as a source of its proclamation, apart from and besides this one Word of God, still other events and powers, figures and truths, as God's revelation.

To keep our focus here, remember that we are answering the third question I posed to myself: what is the problem with this notion that God is a missionary God and we are to join in God's mission? Having claimed that the language is confusing and lacks epistemic humility, I come to my third reason for objecting.

3. *The Boundaries between the Church and the World become blurred.* The formulation "God is a missionary" all too easily loses the necessary redemptive focus on the work of Christ and thus blurs the distinction between the church and the world. This is the easiest point to document because the traditional understanding of a redeemed people called out from the world and then sent into the world by their Lord to make disciples of the nations required a clear line between church and world, and it is this very line that the emphasis on the *missio dei* sought to overcome. Now a crucial distinction is made between "mission" and "missions," and "the primary purpose of the *missiones ecclesiae* can therefore not simply be the planting of churches or the saving of souls; rather, it has to be service to the *missio Dei,* representing God in and over against the

world, pointing to God. . . ."[22] In this scenario, the world does not consist of lost people who need to be called out of it and constituted as a new people of God, the first fruits of all creation. Instead, God is seen as pouring out his love on the world in general and the church's task is to discern God's missionary work and join in. Instead of obeying her Lord's command to go out into the world and make disciples, the church now snoops around the world to find out what God is doing. Think of it: in this scenario, the church no longer recognizes that she herself is the place where God's Word and Spirit are at work gathering and equipping a people who have been given a mission to call the world to come home to God; instead it is the church that must come home to the world.

4. But doesn't Herman Bavinck also derive an action plan for Christian discipleship from the very trinitarian being of God? What's the difference?

Yes he does indeed. Bavinck defines the essence of Christianity in trinitarian terms: "The essence of the Christian religion consists in the reality that the creation of the Father, ruined by sin, is restored in the death of the Son of God, and re-created by the grace of the Holy Spirit into a kingdom of God."[23] According to Bavinck, the being of creation reflects the triune Being of God: "Just as God is one in essence and distinct in persons, so also the work of creation is one and undivided, while in its unity it is still rich in diversity."[24] Furthermore, since all creatures bear the unmistakable stamp of the Trinity, "we can be convinced that our investigation of reality fails to penetrate to its core and comes to its proper conclusion unless we come to the confession of the triune God."[25] The emphasis is on God's works: ". . . [A]ll the works of God *ad extra* are only adequately known when their trinitarian existence is recognized" (*RD*,

22. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 391.

23. *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols., trans. John Vriend, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003–08), 1:112 (#35); 2:288 (#220); hereafter *RD*. Cf. Bavinck, *The Sacrifice of Praise*, trans. John Dolfin (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1922), 71; Bavinck, *Het Christendom* (Baarn: Hollandia, 1912), 23, 62; Bavinck, "Het Christelijk Geloof," in *Kennis en Leven* (Kampen: Kok, 1922), 95–97.

24. *RD*, 2:422 (#255).

25. *Kennis en Leven*, 105 (translation mine).

2:333). Stated differently, "the thinking mind situates the doctrine of the Trinity squarely amid the full-orbed life of nature and humanity. The Christian mind remains unsatisfied until all of existence is referred back to the triune God, and until the confession of God's Trinity functions at the center of our thought and life" (*RD*, 2:330). The Trinity, according to Bavinck, is a complete and perfect system, the "origin, type, model, and image of all other systems." He thus lauds the fact that Abraham Kuyper in his explication of the Anti-Revolutionary Party program sought to root all human life, theologically, morally, juridically, socially and politically, in the very trinitarian being of God.[26]

5. What then is the real difference between the Bavinck tradition and the twentieth-century emphasis on *missio Dei*? Aren't both rooted in the Trinity?

Yes they are. However, there is a real difference between grounding the church's mission in the *missio Dei* as an *attribute* of God and Bavinck's appeal to the Trinity as the "origin, type, model and image of all systems." The difference can be summed up with two words: *revelation* and *analogy*. When Bavinck applies trinitarian language to worldly realities he is speaking analogically. He is most definitely not bringing creational/worldly realities into the very being of God himself. The Trinity as the system which is the model for all systems is *analogically* possible because all reality is rooted in *revelation*. "The world itself," he writes,

> rests on revelation; revelation is the presupposition, the foundation, the secret of all that exists in all its forms. . . . The foundations of creation and redemption are the same. The Logos who became flesh is the same by whom all things were made.[27]

26. *Kennis en Leven*, 59. The essay from which this is quoted is "Het voor en tegen van een dogmatisch systeem," translated into English by Nelson Kloosterman, "The Pros and Cons of a Dogmatic System," in this issue of *The Bavinck Review* 5 (2014): 92. Kuyper's elaboration of the program of the Dutch Calvinistic Political Party, the Anti-Revolutionary Party, is found in *Ons Program*, 4th rev. ed. (Amsterdam: Höveker & Wormser, n.d. [1901?]), which was first published in 1879.

27. *The Philosophy of Revelation: The Stone Lectures for 1908–1909, Princeton Theological Seminary* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1908), 27; hereafter cited in text.

It is this analogical, trinitarian perspective rooted in revelation that is the foundation of the Bavinck tradition's missional character. I will take a closer look at this tradition by first considering Herman Bavinck, and then his nephew, the missiologist, J. H. Bavinck.

6. So then, if not the doctrine of God and the Trinity, what is an appropriate ground for our missional thinking? Ecclesiology?

In part, yes. But I want to start with prolegomena (in particular, the doctrine of revelation) and anthropology. In his 1908 Stone Lectures, *The Philosophy of Revelation* (and the title is significant: it is a *philosophy of* revelation), Bavinck attempts to "trace the idea of revelation, both in its form and in its content, and correlate it with the rest of our knowledge and life" (24). The missiological significance of this should be obvious: missionaries come with the gospel message about God's saving work in Christ. If this message is to have any chance of being understood, the content must have some connection to the knowledge of God that people already possess as God's image bearers living in his world. In other words, we see here Emil Brunner's "point of contact." Building on the Reformed tradition's convictions about God's general revelation to all people, Bavinck first of all insists that our theology of revelation must not restrict itself to Scripture.

> The old theology construed revelation after a quite external and mechanical fashion, and too readily identified it with Scripture. Our eyes are nowadays being more and more opened to the fact that revelation in many ways is historically and psychologically "mediated." (22)

Bavinck is acknowledging here that theology must take into account the way in which God's revelation to Israel was not something *de novo*; Israel's religious practices had parallels with those of her contemporaries. This meant taking the new disciplines (in his day) of the history and psychology of religions seriously, in spite of the way in which many scholars misused them: "[In spite of significant problems; e.g., explaining Israel solely in terms of its neighbors] . . . these historical and psychological investigations are in themselves an excellent thing" (23).

Bavinck's contention that Israel's religious practices—including covenant, circumcision, sacrifices, and the priesthood—have much in common with those of her neighbors is rooted in anthropology.

The religious practices of Israel's neighbors (and of all people) arise from the fact that they are God's image bearers living in God's creation. God is present to them; they cannot avoid or evade responding to God. Biblical revelation does not drop out of the sky; God comes to Abraham, to Moses, to post-exilic Jews in the days of Caesar Augustus and Quirinius, to the Greeks and to barbarians, to Frisians and to native peoples everywhere, and calls them to himself in language they can understand. To demonstrate the truth of this—his *philosophy* of revelation—Bavinck argues from the wondrous mystery of human self-consciousness. As we become self-conscious, three things are revealed to us: our self, the world, and God; and all three are gifts:

> In consciousness our own being, and the being of the world, are disclosed to us *antecedently* to our thought or volition; that is, they are *revealed* to us in the strictest sense of the word. (75)
>
> In self-consciousness God *makes known* to us man, the world, and himself. (79)
>
> [Self-consciousness is a *gift*] it is received on our part *spontaneously*, in unshaken confidence, with *immediate assurance*. (62)

7. This is great philosophy, but how does it affect the content of theology in a missiological way?

In each locus of theology Bavinck begins by calling attention to the *universal* reality of human religious longing and practice as an entry point for his discussion of a biblical approach. In this way he provides a natural bridge ("point of contact") for Christians to communicate their faith to unbelievers and seekers. As an example, consider the opening sentences of his chapter on Christ's Exaltation:

> The death of Christ, the end of his humiliation, was simultaneously the road to his exaltation. In all religions and philosophical systems, one encounters the idea, expressed more or less consciously, that death is the road to life. People saw this phenomenon in nature, where day follows nigh and an awakening in the spring occurs after a winter of hibernation or dormancy. (*RD*, 3:421)

It is this *methodology*, placing the content of Christian biblical, doctrinal, theological truth in the context of universal human religious desiring and longing that gives Bavinck's theology its missiological cast.

8. But you spoke of the "Bavinck tradition." How does J. H. Bavinck fit into this pattern?[28]

Let me begin with a brief biography. Johan Herman Bavinck (1895–1964) was the nephew of Herman Bavinck. He served as missionary to Indonesia 1919–1926 and again from 1929–1939. He then returned to The Netherlands to become the Professor of Missiology for the *Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland* at the Theological University in Kampen and at the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam. His two works best known in the Anglophone missiological world are *Introduction to the Science of Missions* (1954) and the posthumously published *The Church between Temple and Mosque* (1966). In our context, also deserving of mention is his *The Impact of Christianity on the Non-Christian World* (1947).

There is renewed interest today in J. H. Bavinck as a missiologist, both in Europe (The Netherlands) and in North America. Some of his works in Dutch have been republished in new editions, and Eerdmans has recently published the *J. H. Bavinck Reader*.[29] Of the four major divisions in the *Reader*, I want to highlight the third section (chs. 3–6) which is a translation of Bavinck's *Religieus besef en christelijk geloof* (1949; *Religious Consciousness and Christian Faith*).

Religious Consciousness was published in the aftermath of World War II. The war put final nails in the coffin of Christian cultural confidence, and Bavinck wrote eloquently and presciently about the rise of alternate spiritualities as people sought to find some meaning in the midst of chaos. The book was written as a call to mission activity—a call issued in hope. To get at Bavinck's message, first of all a reminder from his uncle about consciousness "[Self-consciousness is a gift] it is received on our part spontaneously, in unshaken confidence, with immediate assurance" (*Philosophy*, 62).

28. For more on this point, see Gayle Doornbos's essay in this same issue: "We Do Not Proceed into a Vacuum: J. H. Bavinck's Missional Reading of Romans 1," *The Bavinck Review* 5 (2014): 61–75.

29. Trans. James A. De Jong, eds. John Bolt, James D. Bratt, and Paul J. Visser (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013).

In the opening chapter of *Religious Consciousness* (ch. 3 in the *Reader*), Bavinck addresses the problem of religious consciousness in an age that no longer lives by the consciousness of the Christian religion:

> . . . [T]he question of religion has been taken up by our generation once again and with irresistible force. . . . When they realize that they have been caught up in the great and fatal events of history, they experience this as their struggle with the inevitable, with the fate that mercilessly tosses them on paths that they had no voice in choosing. They experience their humanity as something tragic, mysterious, confining, compelling, liberating, and conflicting. They recognize the problem of solitude versus community as a religious problem, as a tension, as insoluble conflict. In short, they feel that their entire lives in all their relationships and circumstances exist in a thoroughly perplexing reality. . . . Contemporary people certainly understand that they are pressed forward by a totally factual world, but they no longer experience this as a process in which they are willingly involved because it no longer accords with the sentiments of their hearts; much more, they submit to it as a kind of fate, such as they clearly witnessed in the terrible circumstances of those who have died. (*Reader*, 146–47)

In Bavinck's judgment, this means that, although the forms of Christendom have passed, religious consciousness has not disappeared at all.

> We now face the necessity of giving a further account of what we understand by "religious consciousness." We have already seen that this religious consciousness is a rather persistent force that can continue operating even after the connection with a given religion has ceased. In our western world there are countless people who no longer call themselves Christian but who are still definitely sustained by that undefined something that we have designated as religious consciousness. (*Reader*, 148)

Bavinck then sets forth what he calls five "magnetic points" of religious consciousness. These universal and permanent markers of human religious experience are the following:

1. The experience of totality (we are part of a cosmos).

2. A sense of a religious norm (we are responsible).

3. A Connection with Higher Power (we know God exists).

4. The craving for deliverance/salvation (we are in trouble).

5. The course of life as a tension between action and fate (we are free and bound).

I do not have the time to explore each one in detail. A brief comment on each will have to suffice.

The first magnetic point is the experience of totality (we are part of a cosmos). Modern secularism challenges this claim. Bavinck quotes Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*, "Once one said God when one looked upon distant seas; but now I have taught you to say: overman" (*Reader*, 146). However, two world wars and a sense of fatalism about science and technology have led many—"religious" as well as "non-religious" people—to desire and search for "more." Bavinck gives a number of descriptive examples (William James) to show that the sense of totality is still very present in the modern world. He quotes an ancient Japanese philosopher who in response to the question, "What is life?" replied: "It is like a boat. The emerging dawn discloses it as it makes its way on the sea, quickly rowing away. Then, on the heaving waves no trace of can be found that it ever passed that way" (*Reader*, 155).

The second magnetic point is a notion of norm, the awareness that we are responsible. Bavinck judges this to be universal and provides Western (Plato, Immanuel Kant) as well as non-Western examples to prove his point (Indian *Rita* and *dharma*; Chinese notions of *Dao* and *Li*; and Islam's submission to the will of Allah).

The third magnetic point is connection to a higer power, the awareness that God, however understood, exists. He provides examples from myths and living religious traditions to show that these forces (Force) are to be venerated and placated. Bavinck concludes:

> Thus, we find a universal development in human history of the awareness that this world and all that happens in it is intimately connected to the mysterious, supernatural world of the gods. Something of that mystery, of that divine force, is found in everything that exists. People know in every moment of their existence that they are connected to higher powers that they can never fully understand, before which they tremble with fear, and that nevertheless draw them to themselves with magnetic power. (*Reader*, 183)

The fourth magnetic point concerns the craving for deliverance: we know we are in trouble. Human beings differ about the problem from which they need deliverance but not that they need it. Bavinck refers to two distinct Indonesian mythical traditions about death. The first portrays death as coming from the hostile Night power who gave humans "short-term breath" instead of "enduring breath"

or eternal life. Within the same tribe, however, there is a story of a "long liana or tropical vine that provides access to heaven. . . . It made possible fellowship between gods and human beings." In prehistoric times uninterrupted traffic took place between heaven and earth, but "alas, due to some fatal accident that connection was broken and the liana was severed. Earth was left to its own destiny," leaving only a few priests to have contact with heaven (*Reader*, 183–84). To these mythical views we can add the classic cycle of "birth-death-rebirth" found in countless religious traditions, past and present. Bavinck also discusses the variety of visions of salvation provided by religious traditions.

The fifth and final magnetic point is the sense that life courses between action and fate: we sense that we humans are both free and bound. Examples abound, and Bavinck cites ancient and modern authors to make the point from the Greek notion of fate to the modern claims of German Romantic poet of freedom, Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805).

Concluding Question: What is the payoff of showing the missional character of the Bavinck tradition in its doctrine of revelation and its understanding of humanity's ineradicable religious consciousness?

In addition to paying attention to the history of redemption as revealed in the narrative of Scripture from creation to consummation as a missional resource (e.g., as seen in the work of Michael Goheen), this provides us with a perspective on human religious experience that yields a rich treasure of resources for evangelistic apologetics. The Bavinck tradition gives us a great set of tools; it provides a framework within which to do theology in general and missiology more particularly.

The Bavinck Review 5 (2014): 61–75

We Do Not Proceed into a Vacuum: J. H. Bavinck's Missional Reading of Romans 1[1]

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In many ways the scope of Johan Herman Bavinck's missiology was to develop and understand a *theologia religionum* (a theology of religions) that could form the foundation for a theology of missions and missionary work. Bavinck himself saw developing a theology of religions as one of the essential missionary tasks. In his book *Introduction to the Science of Missions* he claims that "a theory of missions is incomplete unless it can properly evaluate non-Christian religions." For Bavinck, this question took the particular form of asking about the connection between religious consciousness and the Christian faith. And it is within this question and his development of a theology of religion that Bavinck made one of his most significant contributions to the question of other religions: his exegesis of Romans 1. Commonly used within discussion concerning religion, Bavinck uses Romans 1 not only as *a* resource for articulating a biblical account of other religions but as *the* primary lens for a biblical-theological understanding of religion. Thus an exploration of the question of missions in the Bavinck tradition would remain incomplete without taking a thorough look at J. H. Bavinck's reading of Romans 1. In this article we will take an in-depth look at Bavinck's reading of Romans 1 and how it forms the basis for his theology of religion. We will do this by briefly examining Bavinck's own missiological context in order to place his theology historically, to unpack his hermeneutical approach to scripture, and to outline

1. This essay is an adaptation of a paper delivered at the "A Missional Reading of Scripture" conference held at Calvin Theological Seminary on 19–21 November 2013.

his reading of Romans 1 and how it forms the foundation to his theology of religion. Finally, I will look at ways in which Bavinck might speak today—particularly within the context of the contemporary "missional" movement.

Bavinck In Context

Paul Visser notes that Bavinck's theology of religion developed throughout his missiological career.[2] Early in Bavinck's career he tended more towards defining religion as a universal *a priori* feeling in humans that is activated by experiences of God. This was a commonly held conception within his day, deeply influenced by the writings of Schleiermacher, Tyler, and Otto that tended to articulate the continuity between all religious experience psychologically as rooted in a human capacity. In Bavinck's own lifetime, the theology of religion was addressed within academic circles and at the missionary conferences held in Jerusalem (1928) and Tambaram (1938). At the Jerusalem conference, a serious attempt to find the good in other religions was undertaken, but a serious theological engagement of the issue remained lacking. As Bavinck delved more deeply into the topic, he came under the influence of Hendrik Kraemer, the Dutch missiologist whose work proposed a large chasm between Christianity and other religions. Thus Bavinck began to express that seeing religion as rooted in a human capacity "seemed too impoverished to explain the confusing complexity of religious phenomena."[3] Instead, he began to investigate the question of religion through a self-consciously theological approach. It is this later approach to the question of religion—which is already present in his book *Christ and the Mysticism of the East* (1934)—that becomes so essential for his reading of Romans 1.

2. Paul Visser, "Introduction," in *The J. H. Bavinck Reader*, ed. John Bolt, James D. Bratt, and Paul Visser, trans. George De Jong (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 42; hereafter: *JHBR*.

3. *JHBR*, 150. Regarding Kraemer's influence on Bavinck's thought, see Visser, "Introduction", in *JHBR*, 35–36.

Bavinck's Theological-Biblical Approach

> And it is a book that brings us to our knees and makes us tremble before the greatness of Him who holds our life and breath in His hands.[4]

Bavinck's theological orientation to the question of other religions is present in both of his in-depth studies on other religions: *Religious Consciousness and Christian Faith* and *The Church Between Temple and Mosque*. In each, Bavinck begins with the observation of the universality of religious experience in humanity, an experience that he identifies as a universal religious consciousness. He notes that there is "universal religious consciousness that remains indestructible . . . that seems to be the driving force behind all we encounter in the different religions and is what makes the religious issue so intensely interesting and difficult as well" (*JHBR*, 151). Beneath particular religions rests an indestructible—yet often vague—religious consciousness whose essential elements are open to investigation and explanation (*JHBR*, 151). Methodologically, then, Bavinck begins investigating these elements that appear in all of our experience phenomenologically as they appear outside of biblical revelation, explicitly stating, "we will limit ourselves . . . to the residue of what has grown out of religious sensitivity *outside the realm of biblical revelation*" (*JHBR*, 151; emphasis added). However, after he masterfully surveys the structure and content of religious consciousness by utilizing in-depth knowledge of the various religions, he reaches a wall in trying to identify the reason religious experience exists:

> We have . . . definitely reached a boundary here. . . . [N]ow we can go no further; now we have hit a wall. We have seen religious consciousness as it unmistakably exists and as it has always existed. . . . But now we have reached a boundary. Where does religious consciousness originate? . . . To repeat: we have hit a wall here. The human eye cannot see over it; human thought cannot penetrate it. Here we can only speak from the vantage point of faith; here we can only talk theologically. (*JHBR*, 231–32)

Upon reaching the limits of phenomenological investigation, he turns to theology for an answer to his central question (i.e., what religious consciousness has to do with God and his revelation) by ask-

4. J. H. Bavinck, *The Church Between Temple and Mosque* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 193.

ing: how does God's biblical revelation explain religious consciousness?

And it is Scripture, then, to which he primarily turns as the lens through which to articulate religious consciousness.

Here Bavinck follows Calvin's famous metaphor of Scripture as the lens through which we see the world, and he endorses Kraemer's understanding that a biblical-theological approach is just as valid—if not more so for a Christian—as the approach of Otto and others who sought to articulate religion through the lens of history and the phenomenology of religion. Even though historical investigation of the Christian tradition offers insight for Bavinck, it is scripture alone that grounds and forms a theological understanding of the other religions. This becomes particularly clear in *Religious Consciousness and the Christian Faith* when Bavinck frames his exploration of the tradition with an investigation of scripture in order to analyze and critique the tradition via scripture. For Bavinck a *biblical*-theological approach becomes the only proper method for developing an account of religious consciousness, and it is within this approach that Romans 1 becomes essential.

Beyond the Wall: Bavinck's Reading of Romans 1:18–32

As Bavinck investigates the primary question of his missiological project—the relationship between "religious consciousness" and the Christian faith—he notes: "far and away the most important passage for [his] purposes is" Romans 1:18–32 (*JHBR*, 241). Romans 1, for Bavinck, is of determinative significance for understanding religion when he hits the wall of phenomenological investigation into the content of what he observes in experience as universal religious consciousness. It both moves us beyond the wall and transforms how we perceive all that we articulated before we ran up against the wall. Thus, we will now turn to seeing how Bavinck uses and reads Romans 1.

I want to highlight four important aspects that we can extrapolate from Bavinck's reading.

1. General Revelation and Religious Consciousness

First, for Bavinck Romans 1:18–32 undeniably teaches general revelation, and this revelation in some way reaches and is involved with "every nation" and "every person." Contra Barth, whose early dialectical theology and exegesis of Romans 1 left it nearly impossible to talk about the content and impact of general revelation, Bavinck affirms its reality. And in affirming this reality, he also proposes two essential and dynamic relationships in general revelation that are present in Romans 1: (a) the relationship between God and humans and (b) the dynamic between reception and response within human beings. Within the context of these two relationships, argues Bavinck, religious consciousness is formed within humanity.

Bavinck establishes the divine-human relationship in general revelation by unpacking Romans 1 as a primarily describing two dynamic relationships in the dialogue between God and humanity. He moves from the broad affirmation of general revelation to defining this dialogue as initiated by as "God's voiceless speech" present in in creation, human consciousness, and in the history of peoples and individuals. He develops this definition by analyzing verse 19. Bavinck notes that the common Pauline term ἀποκολύπτω—to reveal, make known, remove a curtain/veil—is absent in verse 19 as it describes God's actions; instead Paul uses φανερόω: "to make manifest." This "making manifest" Bavinck takes to mean the powerful "voiceless speech" of God. In this voiceless speech Bavinck sees God as making known eternal power and divinity (Rom. 1:20). As this speech goes out humans are unable to shake it off, as evidenced particularly in verses 20, 21, and 32. "In this revelation God is speaking to every individual, every people in the world."[5]

So then as God initiates this voiceless speech, human beings stand within the relationship as receivers who must respond. As humans respond to the divine voiceless speech, they become, as Bavinck sees Paul describing human beings—particularly in verses 20–21—"knowing receivers."

But what does this mean? This question moves us to the second important dynamic relationship Bavinck unpacks in Romans 1: the

5. J. H. Bavinck, "Human Religion in God's Eyes: A Study of Romans 1:18–32," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 12 (March, 1994): 45.

relationship within humans between receiving and responding to God's voiceless speech.

As human beings receive general revelation, they respond to it through the dual act of "supressing/repressing and exchanging." As the knowledge of God's divinity and eternal power (Rom. 1:20) are made manifest, humans "push it down, repress it, suppress it" (*JHBR*, 285). According to Bavinck, this "occurs with the mysterious always unstated, often also entirely unconscious motive of moral opposition to God" (*JHBR*, 285). Morally opposed then humans suppress the truth of God, and exchange enters and fills the "cavity or empty space that occurs as a result of suppressing that needs to be filled" (*JHBR*, 288).

Here Bavinck takes a distinctly psychological approach to interpreting Paul by drawing on the contemporary psychological categories of his day, particularly those of Carl Jung. Bavinck describes the "suppressing/repressing and exchanging" process as something that occurs in humanity unconsciously. This is essential for Bavinck because he was incredibly wary of the power of rationalism and natural religion throughout his writings. He did not want the reception of knowledge and the dual process of suppression and exchange to be primarily seated in the intellect as an untapped human capacity or knowledge innate within us, as if someone could think really hard about God and come to know what was already innate within; namely, that God is both Lord and saviour. Instead, the truth always comes from the outside, and it exists within the human only through constant and continual dialogue with God. Where exactly this whole process of reception is seated is somewhere within the cognitive powers that run throughout the entire structure of a human being and, particularly, it seems in the heart. But the exact nature of this is unclear in Bavinck's writings. He only begins to articulate an anthropology within the context of his exposition of Romans 1.

However, what is important to highlight here is that this notion of dialogue and the truth coming from the outside is the way that Bavinck connects general and special revelation. They are both God-initiated dialogues wherein the truth comes from the outside. Humans are beings to whom God speaks; they exist in dialogue with him. The proclamation of the gospel brings light and rips open

(in the sense of ἀποκολύπτω) the process of repression and suppression. Through special revelation

> people gain an entirely new vision of the world in which they live and to which they are tied with every fibre of their being. This is not to say that the gospel of Jesus Christ is entirely different from what general revelation has been saying . . . for a long time . . . but it can happen that God causes their hearts to submit. Then all engines of resistance are switched off and people listen. (*JHBR*, 291)

Special revelation transforms the listener so that the process of suppression and exchange is ripped open and the human is again able to hear God.

However, within the realm of general revelation, the results are different: suppression and exchange makes humans who are "receivers in dialogue" as those who "know" but do not know. They have received the truth, suppressed it, and exchanged it. From God's perspective as the initiator of the dialogue, their legal standing is that of someone who knows and who understands; that is to say, of "someone who knows in the depths of his or her being that he or she is accountable to the 'just demands of God'" but do not themselves know God and the promise of his Gospel. Thus, as Paul writes in Romans 1 God's qualities have been made clear so that people are without excuse. Bavinck takes this to mean that human receptors and responders to general revelation are positioned in a negative juridical stance before God, one that is rooted in their own moral opposition to God. Without the gospel humans are culpable of the act of suppression, repression, and exchange.

For Bavinck the experience from the human side of things is best described with the metaphor of living in a dream. Within a dream there are influences from the outside that are intuited but are not consciously bought to cognition. Furthermore, these influences are often distorted and made into something entirely different then what they are. With this metaphor he argues that general revelation

> impinges on them and compels them to listen, but it is at the same time pushed down and repressed. And the only aspects of it that remain connected to human consciousness, even while torn from their original context, become the seeds of entirely different sequence ideas around which they crystallize. (*JHBR*, 290)

The ideas that begin to crystalize at the intersection of this divine-human dialogue wherein humanity represses and exchanges the

truth of God's revelation are the expression of religious consciousness. For Bavinck, then, religion, which is rooted in a universal religious consciousness, rests on revelation. Religious consciousness rests deeper than religion as it is the formation of ideas during the process of suppression and exchange, ideas that everyone must wrestle with.

2. Religious Consciousness: Universal and Particular

What is interesting about Bavinck's reading of Romans 1:18–32 is how he grounds the universality of religious consciousness even as it comes to expression in particular contexts. As we have seen, in Bavinck's later work he refuses to root religious consciousness in an *a priori* human capacity. Instead, as he reads Romans 1, he roots religious consciousness in the universality of God's initiating a dialogue with all of humanity and humanity's subsequent response. "God speaks, and all human stammering about God is to be understood as nothing other than an answer and a response" (*JHBR*, 235).

In the dialogical relationship between God and every human being (I-Thou), human response takes place within life-relationships and is shaped historically by cultures, locations, and traditions. This repression and exchange that gives rise to various ideas "really happens" according to Bavinck's reading of Romans 1, and it happens particularly, even as God's universal revelation means it is universally inescapable. This is important for Bavinck's whole missiology. He affirms the universality of religious consciousness and the ability to abstract particular expressions of religious consciousness in various religions into overarching statements, but for Bavinck one never meets -2027406090 the universal understanding of this or that particular religion: I never meet Islam, Hinduism, or even Atheism. I meet a muslim, a hindu, an atheist who are each shaped by their own particular struggles and dialogue with God in the I-Thou relationship. While these individual dialogues are influenced of course by formative traditions within communities that have struggled with God together, they are still deeply particular even as they are rooted in the universality of religious consciousness.

So central is dialogue for Bavinck that it is the very definition of being human: that is to exist in a dialogical relationship with God,

here drawing on many of the I-Thou understandings growing in popularity in his own day. Only in and through the universal revelation of God at all times and all places can "people . . . only really exist. As soon as they let go of it, they die" (*JHBR*, 281).

The significance as Bavinck sees it of the universality of revelation is that as God makes himself manifest to all, and all repress and exchange, that religious consciousness becomes a *universal*, albeit complex, phenomenon. It stretches over all of human life. "[R]eligious consciousness," remarks Bavinck, "can at any time take shape in various movements" (*JHBR*, 148). No one can escape the pull of God's revelation, for his revelation by very nature requires a response.

Yet because this process is so relational—as it exists dialogically—the religious consciousness it produces is also incredibly particular. "General revelation must be seen . . . as a force that people encounter in their life-relationships" (*JHBR*, 278). Religious consciousness is not some nebulous concept that exists outside of living in the world. Instead, it is deeply rooted in being human. The act of repression and exchange described in Romans 1, as Bavinck writes, "really happens" (*JHBR*, 244). It is embodied, contextual, and often messy.

3. Religious Consciousness: A Structured Response

As religious consciousness comes to expression in humanity, Bavinck discerns its distinctive structure. This is less obvious from his reading of Romans 1, but there is an indication of how particularly embodied responses to God's revelation can come to inhabit a particular structure.

In general revelation, as articulated through his reading of Romans 1, God communicates his eternal power and divinity. While Bavinck himself does not draw this connection immediately, one could argue that this reading of Romans 1 explains and explicates that at the center of the divine-humans dialogue lays the awareness within humans of a dialogue initiated by some power outside of themselves.

And for Bavinck this awareness stands in the center of religious consciousness. He describes religious consciousness as centering around five "magnetic points" because "they are points which demand our attention and which we cannot evade. We cannot help be-

ing confronted with them. Since they are rooted in our existence, they are stronger than ourselves, and somehow we must come to grips with them."[6] He defines these points as follows: (a) the experience of totality, (b) the notion of a norm, (c) the connection to a reality behind reality, (d) the need for deliverance, and (e) that the course of life is the tension between action and fate.[7] These magnetic points not only form five centers around which humans must grapple but also organize themselves along two lines: destiny within a totality and the freedom to act and be delivered. The hub connecting the points is an awareness of a higher power (*JHBR*, 203). As communities and traditions begin to formulate responses to these magnetic points, religions and traditions of understanding develop which in turn shape the responses individuals make to God's revelation.

While Bavinck himself leaves the question of the exact nature of the origin of this structure as slightly mysterious, by placing the awareness of a higher power or a reality beyond reality as he describes the center of religious consciousness, he roots religious consciousness back again in general revelation in his reading of Romans.

4. Religious Consciousness: Unearthing the Idols

Religious consciousness, then, rests on revelation and is therefore universal, has a definite structure, is embodied in particular contexts, and is shaped by communities and traditions. This is crucial for Bavinck's whole missiology. For although he sees this whole process wherein religious commitments come to expression as moderate blessings, he is not incredibly positive about religious consciousness, especially in light of the moral impetus for repressing and exchanging and the moral results of exchange in Romans 1. "Backsliding from the living God and turning towards created idols leaves humans in a state where they desperately need the gospel" (*JHBR*, 108). And it is only by the power of the Spirit that "the gospel of Jesus Christ . . . [can] . . . break through human religious consciousness" (*JHBR*, 297). Thus while Bavinck will affirm that

6. *The Church Between Temple and Mosque*, 32.

7. See *JHBR*, ch. 3, and *The Church Between Temple and Mosque*, part 1.

God's general revelation does produce some elements of truth in a vague and general sense, he eventually draws a sharp contrast between Christianity and non-Christian religions. "The more one explores other religions, the more one becomes aware that there exists a great void between non-Christian religions and Christianity" (*JHBR*, 108).

But even though a great void exists, God's work is in and through the whole world. And this is the central and incredible point of Bavinck's missiology: the objective work of God and God's self-manifestation is the contact point for reaching all those outside of the faith. "In his missionary preaching," writes Bavinck,

> Paul very definitely does not take his point of departure from human religion, but from the objective work of God and from God's self-manifestation. My own inner conviction is that this is the only truly relevant point of contact. All others are empty and useless. This point of departure is not simply a beginning for the preaching of the gospel, it is the beginning of a new chapter. "In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). We are the bearers of the "now" in this text. We stand in that momentous divine "now," the "now" of a new chapter in God's involvement with his world. All missionary proclamation only stands on solid ground when it is done in this conviction: "God has been busy with you already for a long time, but you have not understood this. Through my preaching, God is coming to you once again in order to call you to conversion." (*JHBR*, 278)

Paul in Romans 1 is describing the always, everywhere work of God. This means that, when one goes out to preach the gospel, it is not to find the place where human longing has reached a place where it has come to see God, but it is to go and see that God has already begun a dialogue with humanity and that through our living and preaching we call humanity again to conversion. The primary question then for Bavinck is: How have you been struggling with God? What have you done with him?

Yet this call to conversion is not only for those outside of the Christian faith but also for those within. "Christian faith," he writes,

> is the subjective response of the reborn person to the gospel. In a certain sense, it stands with religious consciousness. This is the case to the extent that it is an answer or reaction to divine speaking and acting. At the same time, this determines that Christian faith is always limited and incomplete, always subject to the gospel itself. (*JHBR*, 298)

Thus Christians must also seek transformation by the gospel as they proclaim it in the knowledge that God is always, everywhere at work. For we are all in desperate need at all times for the in breaking of the gospel and the truth of scripture to disrupt and uncover our subjective responses to God's revelation.

J. H. Bavinck's reading of Romans 1: Within Contemporary Missional Conversations

Driven by the collapse of colonialism, the rise of the ecumenical movement, various shifts in theological methodology, and the revival of trinitarian theology, missiology in the twentieth century has undergone several significant developments methodologically, theologically, and practically. In the course of these developments the foundation, motive, and nature of missions has been reassessed and redefined. One of the most prominent shifts was to root mission in the nature of triune God himself: all mission is God's mission because the *triune* God is a missionary God.[8] This trinitarian foundation of mission, described by the term *missio Dei* after the Willingen Conference of the International Missionary Council, has became one of *the* dominant terms to describe one's missiological paradigm in the later half of the twentieth century. This shift has ignited an exciting conversation around missions, what missions

8. John G. Flett, *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth, and the Nature of Christian Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 35; David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 389–93; Fancis Anekwe Oborji, *Concepts of Mission: The Evaluation of Contemporary Missiology* (New York: Orbis Books, 2006), 134–49; Stephen B. Bevans, Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 286–304; Seven B. Bevans, "Wisdom from the Margins: Systematic Theology and the Missiological Imagination," in *Australian eJournal of Theology* 5 (August 2005): 1–17; Ross Hastings, *Missional God, Missional Church: Hope for Re-Evangelizing the West* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012), 86–87; Timothy C. Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2010), 54–55; Charles Fensham, introduction to *Emerging from the Dark Age Ahead: The Future of the North American Church* (Toronto: Clements Academic, 2011); and Georg Vicedom, *Mission of God: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission,* trans. Gilbert A. Thiele and Dennis Hilgendorf (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1965), 5.

mean, and how to live out the Christian faith within contemporary contexts.

Yet as the discussion has entered into popular literature—particularly in evangelical protestant spheres through pop theology books and blogs—the question of religion and how to regard those outside of the Christian faith has begun to disappear. As missional conversations commonly take place within secular contexts, the question of why people respond to and live in the world as they do is no longer primary. The world is what Christians go to, live in, and the ground for missional encounters. Although not ignored as a category, the world is often left described as an unexplored vacuum, leaving the readers of missional readings of scripture left thinking that the world is a vacuum of God's activity. The relationship between gospel and culture is explored, the use of culture for mission is explored, and yet the rational behind these expressions and connections is ignored.

How can Bavinck enter into this conversation today? Bavinck's focus was primarily on other religions—a *theologica religionum*—not on the analysis of culture and or secular worldviews. Nor was he primarily focused on questions concerning hermeneutics or readings of scripture. But this voice from, what in modern missiology is from the ancient past, can serve to enter into the conversation along four helpful lines.

1. Bavinck provides a *universal framework* rooted in God's universal revelation to understand and articulate what lies at the root of cultural commitments and worldviews. The analysis, for him, runs deeper; it runs to the very heart of how God's work in the world is received by human beings caught in the grip of sin. Thus even as Bavinck describes the modern world using T.S. Elliot's quip, "men have left God not for other gods, they say, but for no God: and this has never happened before" (*JHBR*, 108), if we may update this sentiment a bit for the postmodern world, Bavinck's framework for understanding the contemporary world remains relevant. All humans stand in the grip of God whether or not their answer to his revelation, particularly in recognizing a higher power, is an incredibly resound "no!" Furthermore, this framework can also bring us to see something that Bavinck was always so keen to recognize: modernity has in many ways left the west in spiritually ungroundedness. Thus when Christians engage the world, formed and shaped

by scripture, they do not proceed into a vacuum of divine activity. Rather, God is already there, already at work; we do not bring him, we proclaim him again to those who are trapped within a cycle of repression and suppression. God's initiating dialogue is the point of contact. Thus there is everywhere today a resurgence of spirituality and a search for deeper connections that were forsaken in modenity.

2. *There is no vacuum!* God is already in the world, already at work. Bavinck gives Christians engaged in mission a framework to understand the existential quest and soul of those whom Christians desire to reach with the gospel; it is a structured response within which God is already at work. With an incredibly masterful eye Bavinck shows what Christians must do when they look out at their communities and neighbourhoods: they first must ask, "What have you done with God?" And whatever answer is given, while containing certain vague elements of God's truth, is never the sole ground for engagement. Human achievement is always within the context of God's great dialogue; it is grounded in God's initiative. The church goes out in humility in the boldness of Christ and his gospel which alone has the power to uproot, unearth, and renew.

3. A Shared Humanity. Bavinck's biblical-theologcial approach to religion, rooted in Romans 1, articulates a particular anthropology. He places all humanity within the same original group: humans who subjectively respond to the God. This means that even as Christians receive the gospel, idolatry creeps in. It is the power of the gospel alone for Bavinck that breaks through all of this idolatry.

4. *God beyond Mission.* Bavinck reminds his readers not only that God is at work both in the church and in the world but also that God exists in and for his own glory. God is not just the God of mission. God is not just on a mission for us. He is out for his own glory, his own renown. Manifesting God's glory is a primary function of the church. If we only see God as missional, we can miss this. God is worthy of glory, praise, honour, for and in his own sake. He is more than mission, and as we work to plant and renew, doxology is the song that we sing. If mission becomes our only song, we have missed something key, something essential, something primary.

In sum, Bavinck's exegesis of Romans 1 stands at the center of his own biblical-theological approach to religion. As he develops his *theologia religionum* he not only contributes to the discussion in

his own day but also grants a helpful framework for those wishing to discuss mission and missional theology today. It is a framework for understanding that places God and his work in creation at the center. Even if questions remain concerning his slight tendency towards psychologizing repression, whether he removes too much of some innate desire placed within human beings for God himself, and how to fully bring his understanding of religious consciousness to bear within postmodernity, Bavinck nevertheless serves as an excellent missiologist within the Bavinck tradition.

The Bavinck Review 5 (2014): 76–89

An Adventure in Ecumenicity: A Review Essay of *Berkouwer and Catholicism* by Eduardo Echeverria[1]

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Two friends, Two Roads: A Brief Synopsis of a True Story

Two friends, both seminary professors now teaching in the same state (Michigan), one Roman Catholic and the other Reformed, discover through their education at schools in the other's tradition the rich resources for appropriating and renewing or deepening commitment to their own. The Roman Catholic does advanced degree study at the school which represents the crowning achievement of the Dutch neo-Calvinist tradition in which his friend is born and raised, and the encounter deepens his understanding of, commitment to, and practice of his Catholic faith. His friend, raised and trained in the schools of the Dutch neo-Calvinist tradition, completes doctoral study at a leading Roman Catholic university and gains renewed appreciation for the catholicity of his Reformed faith. This is an entirely true story and the two friends are of course the Roman Catholic author of the volume under review and the Dutch Reformed reviewer.[2]

1. This review of Eduardo Echeverria's *Berkouwer and Catholicism: Disputed Questions* (Leiden: Brill, 2013; hereafter *BC*) is a slight reworking of the paper I presented at two symposia: the first at Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit, Michigan on 1 March 2014, where the author of the title under review is Professor of Philosophy; and the second at Calvin Theological Seminary on 4 March 2014. In both instances I was joined in response to Professor Echeverria's presentation by one other respondent: by Dr. Francis Beckwith in Detroit and by Fr. John Kelly at Calvin Seminary.

2. This paragraph, with slight modification to fit the occasion, was directly taken from my foreword to Eduardo Echeverria, *Dialogue of Love: Confessions*

G. C. Berkouwer and Me: From Embrace to Dissatisfaction

I ask the reader's indulgence for beginning this review by quoting myself; it is, I admit, a little gauche. I did it for a couple of reasons. First, in the interest of full disclosure, I want to be upfront about a friendship that is important to me; and second, the portrait of the two life journeys I presented is the key to understanding why my engagement with G. C. Berkouwer is different from Prof. Echeverria's. Berkouwer's *Dogmatic Studies* were an important part of my theological coming of age. A number of them were assigned in my systematic theology classes at Calvin Seminary in the 1970s. However, it didn't take long before the numerous ambiguities Echeverria so painstakingly documents, and patiently and generously engages in this book, began to annoy and dissatisfy me. In this, I know I was not alone. It was a sentiment shared by many of my classmates at CTS, and it took me a few decades and the help of Herman Bavinck and Richard Muller before I could name my dissatisfaction more precisely. But, to tell the truth, I have really paid Berkouwer only cursory, and then mostly critical, attention in the last twenty years or so. Berkouwer's failure as I see it, and Echeverria's book confirms it in spades, is an absence of Christian metaphysics and an unclear and inadequate commitment to epistemological and linguistic realism. As I moved away from Berkouwer I found guidance in precisely those aspects of Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* that Berkouwer and others dismissed as "scholastic": in the seventeenth-century Protestant Orthodox, in Thomas Aquinas, and in St. Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*. All of this is interesting because, with this study, my Roman Catholic friend has challenged me to take another look at Berkouwer. I trust that the reader will sense the charming irony of this.

Reformed Misunderstanding of Roman Catholic (Thomistic) Thought

To put the achievement of this book into perspective, let me compare it with Arvin Vos's 1985 book, *Aquinas, Calvin & Contem-*

of an Evangelical Catholic Ecumenist (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), ix–xi.

porary Protestant Thought[3] which challenged a long-standing and widely-accepted Protestant, particularly Reformed, portrait of Roman Catholic thought. Rome, so this view holds, does not believe in the first letter of the famous TULIP acronym: total depravity. In fact, so it is then alleged, even after the Fall into sin and quite apart from special revelation and grace, there remains a pure human nature, including a self-sufficient reason, that is quite capable of truly knowing God. Admittedly this natural reason cannot know supernatural truths about God such as the doctrine of the Trinity, but it does a pretty good job on its own of perceiving the important higher goods of moral and religious truths. There exists, in other words, a *duplex ordo* of natural knowledge and supernatural knowledge; Rome operates in a two-story epistemological universe. Grace elevates but does not transform nature.

Echeverria's Accomplishment: Bringing the Argument Up To Date

This familiar portrait, effectively propagated by Herman Dooyeweerd, Cornelius Van Til, Francis Schaeffer, and their numerous disciples, is now discredited among those who have taken the time to read Arvin Vos's careful rebuttal. Where Vos concentrated on Aquinas, Echeverria has extended the argument by bringing into it the vast riches of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Roman Catholic magisterial, conciliar, and theological teaching and discussion, including the important *nouvelle theologie* that also engaged and intrigued Berkouwer. By carefully analyzing and assessing Berkouwer's engagement Echeverria has brought the discussion to a deeper level and higher plane and opened up new possibilities for an enriched and more fruitful ecumenical conversation between Rome and the Reformed/Protestant world, especially in an area—human nature, reason and revelation—that was for a long time a continental divide.

The Question: Why Does Dutch Reformed Theology and Philosophy Persist in Rejecting Natural Theology and Insist that the Reformed

3. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985.

View Is Incompatible with the Roman Catholic View?

Let's now go to the heart of the matter: Why this persistence in Dutch Reformed theology and philosophy? Why reject what seems, on the face of it, the clear implication of Romans 1:20 and conclude, counter intuitively, that the "real Pauline doctrine is that the [unregenerate] do not know God at all"? (*BC,* 167; citing Berkouwer's *General Revelation* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955], 139). I shall first provide a partial answer and then a more complete one.

A Partial Answer

1. Herman Bavinck's Surprising Misreading of Rome

The rejection of natural theology comes from two quarters, theology and philosophy. What the two have in common, unfortunately, is an affinity with Herman Bavinck who doesn't get Roman Catholic theology, in particular, Thomas Aquinas, quite right either. In Bavinck's case this is rather remarkable since his own epistemology is quite Thomistic[4] and it is precisely this "scholastic" dimension that Berkouwer, Dooyeweerd, and their followers, repudiate in Bavinck. Furthermore, a close look at Bavinck's anthropology, particularly his understanding of the eschatological destiny for which humans were created, shows that it is formally identical to Thomas's. The best one can say here is that on this point Bavinck too was a child of his time, falling into the trap of reading Thomas and the entire Roman Catholic tradition through the lens of its sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and especially nineteenth-century neo-scholastic advocates who *did* express themselves in terms that legitimately led to the Reformed critique. Undoubtedly, Bavinck and those who followed him also over-read Vatican I's declaration *Dei Filius*, taking the positive affirmation of reason as a comprehensive theology of nature and grace, reason and revelation. What Echeverria makes clear, however, is that Thomistic neo-scholasticism was

4. See David S. Sytsma, "Herman Bavinck's Thomistic Epistemology: The Argument and Sources of his *Principia* of Science," in John Bolt, ed., *Five Studies in the Thought of Herman Bavinck, A Creator of Modern Dutch Theology* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 2011), 1–56.

also severely criticized from within the Roman Catholic world by the *nouvelle theologie* theologians who insisted that human reason always operates within a teleology of belief and unbelief. What is more remarkable is that Berkouwer is aware of this and yet persists in his characterization. I hope to shed some light on this in what follows.

2. Concern about the "Hellenizing" of the Gospel

Echeverria helpfully distinguishes a variety of objections to natural theology. The one that comes from the philosophic side, in this case from Dooyeweerd, fits Echeverria's "hellenization" objection like a glove: "The concept of God acquired through the medium of created reality is empty, abstract, and formal, leaving us with an idea of God that is an intellectual idol of the philosophers rather than the God of the Bible" (*BC*, 116). Listen to how Dooyeweerd frames the question about Romans 1:20: "Does Paul really want to say here that God can be known from his creatures purely by drawing theoretical conclusions" (*BC*, 170)? No, he does not, but Echeverria convincingly demonstrates that not only did Thomas not say that but also neither did Vatican I, nor Cardinal Newman, nor Etienne Gilson, nor Jacques Maritain, nor Henri De Lubac, and so forth. Furthermore, Dooyeweerd fails to do justice to the way in which Thomas himself attends to the noetic effects of sin in *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.4–5 as well as in his commentary on Romans 1:20. According to Eugene F. Rogers Jr.,

> in his Commentary on Romans, Aquinas portrayed natural law as an injured and therefore ineffective party in a story of decline and fall. . . . So bound, natural knowledge could not exercise the office of true cognition of God, which is "to lead human beings to the good." It became a failed knowledge of God, an instance of ignorance rather than knowledge, an ignorance brought about by injustice and therefore culpable. Aquinas made the story a subplot in the larger narrative of the gospel grace of Christ, which first reveals the bondage of natural law in freeing for renewed effectiveness in a life of grace-sustained justice and gratitude. . . .[5]

John Calvin could not have said it better.

Of course Dutch Reformed philosophers and theologians were hardly the first or even the only early twentieth-century folk occu-

5. Eugene F. Rogers Jr., "The Narrative of Natural Law in Aquinas's Commentary on Romans 1," *Theological Studies* 59 (1998): 254–76.

pied with the issue of "hellenization." A line of luminaries committed to de-hellenizing Christian doctrine can be traced from Unitarians such as Michael Servetus to the influential historian Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930) who claimed that "dogma in its conception and development is a work of the Greek spirit on the soil of the Gospel."[6] Part of Berkouwer's opposition to natural theology includes elements of the "hellenization" objection to scholasticism, but Echeverria concentrates on what he calls the "anthropological" objection: "Reason's truth-attaining capacity has been corrupted by sin and hence, being crippled, is incapable of attaining true knowledge, though imperfect, of God" (*BC*, 116). I must confess that Echeverria's patient, generous, and scrupulously fair detailed analysis of Berkouwer's writings surprised me in pointing out how much more nuanced Berkouwer's lifelong engagement with Rome was than I had previously thought. Echeverria deserves a lot of credit for taking Berkouwer seriously as a conversation-partner with Rome, even though Berkouwer finally, and exasperatingly, refuses to budge in his opposition on this crucial point. Considering Berkouwer's awareness of the self-critique within Roman Catholic twentieth-century theology, a less patient person might be less generous and inclined to attribute this to stubbornness and confusion.

In this review I cannot add anything substantive to Echeverria's meticulous engagement with Berkouwer and his careful, judicious refutations of the charges against Roman Catholic notions of natural theology. Taken together with Arvin Vos's book, we have I believe a convincing case for saying that Reformed people can be comfortable with the Roman Catholic understanding of natural theology. Think of the Vos-Echeverria combination as a solid one-two punch, even a knockout.

In the remainder of this review essay I will try as best as I can to answer the "why?" question; to provide additional insight into the reason why, after the deaths of Abraham Kuyper in 1920 and Herman Bavinck in 1921, Dutch Reformed theology (and philosophy) became and stayed so aggressively passionate in its objections to natural law and natural theology in its public denunciations of "scholasticism." The final two points in my partial answer reflect my

6. *History of Dogma,* trans. Neil Buchanan, 1:17.

own changed perspective on Berkouwer thanks to Echeverria's work.

3. Karl Barth? Berkouwer's Passion for the Other "Other"

What I mean by the other "other" is that Berkouwer's occupation with Karl Barth rivals that of his attention to Roman Catholicism. In addition to his 1936 book *Karl Barth*, he also published *Karl Barth en de kinderdoop* (1947; Karl Barth and infant baptism) and *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth* (1954).[7] His essay and article file on topics such as "Karl Barth and Ethics" is lengthy and goes back to 1926. And take note of the title of his inaugural address as Extraordinary Professor of Theology at the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, on 11 October 1947: "Barthianism and Catholicism."[8]

4. Berkouwer's Correlation Method

For a long time I was convinced that going back as far as his dissertation, *Geloof en openbaring in de nieuwere Duitsche theologie* (1932; Faith and revelation in recent German theology[9]), and continuing in the first volumes of his *Dogmatic Studies* in which the method of correlation dominates ("faith and justification"; "faith and sanctification"; and "faith and perseverance"), Berkouwer had himself been captured by the attempt to transcend the subject/object relation (the knowing human subject and the objective revealing God). After all, he hints at this in the closing pages of the dissertation where he seems to speak appreciatively of the efforts to move to a "living, personal, truthful relation" between human beings and God. From this it was easy to move to the development in the Dutch Reformed Church where truth was understood as "relation" or "encounter" rather than propositional. However, Echever-

7. *De triomf der genade in de theologie van Karl Barth* (Kampen: Kok, 1954); ET: *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. Harry Boer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956). Both *Karl Barth* and *Karl Barth en de kinderdoop* were also published by J. H. Kok in Kampen.

8. *Barthianisme en Katholicisme: rede gehorden bij de aanvaarding van het ambt van buitengewoon hoogeleeraar in de Faculteit der Godgeleerheid aan de Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam am op Vrijdag 11 October 1940* (Kampen: Kok, 1940).

9. Utrecht: Kemink en Zoon.

ria alertly picked up Berkouwer's insistence that dialectical theologians such as Barth, Brunner, and Heim failed to overcome the problem of subjectivizing faith altogether because, in Berkouwer's view, "God in his revelation does not abandon the work of his hands in creation."[10] A realist epistemology, in other words, still obtains for Berkouwer. While there are dimensions of Berkouwer's use of a correlation method that invite further study, for now I accept this judgment and will look elsewhere for an answer to the "Why?" question.

A Fuller Answer: Biblicism

Valentijn Hepp, Bavinck's successor in the chair of dogmatics at the Vrije Universiteit, published a series of four polemical brochures in the 1930s under the general title *Dreigende deformatie* (Threatening deformation).[11] In them he describes a new movement in the post-World War I Dutch Reformed Church (*Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland*; hereafter *GKN*) that he characterizes broadly as "progressive biblicism." Unlike Bavinck, who repeatedly expressed criticism of what he dismissively described as "so-called biblical theology," this new movement embraces, celebrates, and takes pride in its *biblical, reformational* identity. Its chief targets? Scholasticism and dualism, particularly the doctrines of common grace and natural theology.[12]

10. *Geloof en openbaring*, 241 (translation mine).

11. *Dreigende deformatie*, 4 vols. (Kampen: Kok, 1936–37); the four volumes are subtitled: 1. Diagnose (Diagnosis); 2. Symptonen A: Het voortbestaan, de onsterfelijkheid en de substantialiteit van de ziel (Symptoms A: The Pre-existence, Immortality, and Substantiality of the Soul); 3. Symptonen B: *De vereeninging van de beide naturen van Christus* (Symptoms B: The Unification of the Two Natures of Christ); 4. Symptonen C: De algemeene genade (Symptoms C: Common Grace).

12. There is an interesting connection between Hepp's brochures and the Christian Reformed Church. In 1953 the Rev. William Masselink, a Christian Reformed minister, published his *General Revelation and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans) with the telling subtitle "A Defense of the Historic Reformed Faith Over Against the Theology and Philosophy of the So-Called 'Reconstructionist' Movement." He openly indicates his debt to Hepp and continues the exposé as it applied to the North American context.

Remarkably, in four volumes and nearly 300 pages Hepp never names the targets of his critique and provides no citations for the numerous passages to which he calls attention. He did this, he says, to remove all *ad hominem* elements from his efforts and keep the matter in the realm of ideas.[13] He also wanted to avoid ecclesiastical conflict, a wish tragically not granted when the Dutch Reformed Church (*Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland; [GKN]*) initiated disciplinary measures against Klaas Schilder in 1944.[14]

Without going into elaborate detail about this development, we need to mention the key figures in this new movement. First in prominence were three academics, the philosophers Dirk Th. Vollenhoven (1892–1978) and Herman Dooyeweerd (1894–1977), and the theologian Klaas Schilder (1890–1952). We also need to mention here two prominent Amsterdam preachers in the *GKN*, J. C. Sikkel (1855–1920) and S. G. De Graaf (1889–1955), both renowned and lauded for their fresh biblical preaching. De Graaf's influential biblical-theological guide for those who provided Bible instruction in church and school to children, his two-volume *Verbondsgeschiedenis* (covenant history), it is worth noting, was translated into English by Calvin College philosophy professor H. Evan Runner and his wife Elizabeth and published in four volumes.[15] In his introduction to the project, Prof. Runner talks about "an evangelical awakening" that was concerned "for what the Word of God has to say about man's life in society, about man as a complete being." "The sermons of Sikkel and De Graaf," he adds, "which steer clear of theological speculation and unfounded doctrine,

13. It is not difficult, however, for knowledgeable readers to discern Hepp's targets and even locate key references. At the same time that Hepp's four volumes appeared, another GKN minister, Hendrik Steen also directly challenged the new Reformational philosophy of Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven in his *Philosophia deformata* (Kampen: Kok, 1937). Unlike Hepp, Steen did not hesitate to name names and cite chapter and verse from published material.

14. One way to understand the ecclesiastical schism of 1944 is to think of it as the end result of warring biblicisms all in search of a pure biblical theology untainted by alien philosophical elements.

15. *Promise and Deliverance*, 4 vols., trans. H. Evan Runner and Elisabeth Wichers Runner (St. Catharines, Ontario: Paideia, 1977–81).

brought believers in the Netherlands close to the Word of the living God. The light of that Word lit up the entire life of man in society."[16]

I refer to Sikkel and De Graaf here as symbolic representatives of a larger phenomenon in the Dutch Reformed Church, a revitalization of biblical studies that was not just academic but filtered down to the pulpits and pews. Not only did it produce a brand new New Testatament commentary series for serious exegetes, *Kommentaar op het Nieuwe Testament*,[17] it also led to a popular series on the entire Scripture, the *Korte verklaring* (concise explanation).[18] There was a significant revitalization of Scripture study in the Dutch Reformed Church in the twentieth century.

Obviously, on the face of it, how could this be problematic? Who could be opposed to the desire to have the "light of the Word of God light up the entire life of man in society"? Very briefly, let me summarize what Hepp means by "progressive biblicism" and why he is so critical. Hepp observes that biblicism comes in different shapes and degrees. There is first of all the simple "back-to-the-Bible" posture that regards all creeds, confessions, and church dogma as mere human products to be rejected. A second form of biblicism acknowledges the legitimacy of creeds, confessions, and dogmas but emphasizes their relativity so strongly that it continually calls for their revision. This posture does not reject church formulations but places them under a cloud of suspicion and doubt. Finally, the most gentle and kind of the three types gives full respect to the confessions in general but bypasses them on a few key doctrines where it judges to have found a more biblical approach. It appeals to the Bible but does not take very seriously the full tradition of the church on these points, preferring to go its own way. Included among these doctrines are the body/soul duality and the continued existence of the soul after death. In Hepp's judgment, it is this third

16. Translator's introduction to *Promise and Deliverance*, 1:11.

17. A total of nineteen volumes were published by the Amsterdam publisher H.A. van Bottenburg between 1922 and 1950.

18. By my best count more than seventy volumes of the *Korte verklaring* were published by Kok (Kampen) in the twentieth century in two distinct series. Seven volumes of the series (Genesis; Exodus; Numbers; Deuteronomy; Joshua, Judges, and Ruth; Isaiah; Matthew) were also translated into English and published by Zondervan from 1981–87.

form that is dominant in the *GKN* of his day. Though it is the gentlest of the three, he says, "it does not escape biblicism's fundamental flaw" which is an "individualistic approach to Scripture." This form of biblicism, he adds, "fosters dormant gravamina."[19]

The biblicism that Hepp identifies was closely aligned with Karl Barth's Christomonistic theology. In the first issue of *Philosophia Reformata*, the new organ of the Association for Calvinistic Philosophy (now the Association for Reformational Philosophy) founded by D. H. Th. Vollenhoven and Herman Dooyeweerd, S. G. De Graaf published an article that presented a Christological reading of the creation account.[20] We have already taken note of Berkouwer's lifelong occupation with Barth, and we see here in De Graaf's essay a clear affinity with Barth's own Christological reading of creation.

What about Hepp's charge of "Biblicism"? I have already taken note of the revival of biblical studies in the Dutch Reformed Church during the twentieth century. As someone who has benefitted directly from this scholarship, I want to note it here with gratitude. If Hepp's accusation of biblicism is correct, it is an accidental byproduct of this renewal of biblical scholarship, not intrinsic to it. As we consider Berkouwer's place in this portrait, it seems to me that much of Hepp's critique fits the tradition of reformational philosophy better than it does Berkouwer, though he was not entirely immune to its charms.[21]

The biblicism Hepp referred to as his third type and believed was prominent in the *GKN* of his day gave full respect to the confessions in general as a formal matter but chose to bypass them on key doctrines such as the duality of body and soul where it judged to have discovered a more biblical approach. As it operated in the circles of the new reformational philosophy, one could describe it as the biblicism of infinite regress. In practice it unfolds like this:

1. An earlier Reformed thinker like Abraham Kuyper or Herman Bavinck is praised by a subsequent generation, let's say by

19. *Dreigende deformatie*, 1:19.

20. S. G. de Graaf, "De Genade Gods en de Structuur der Gansche Schepping," *Philosophia Reformata* 1 (1936): 17–29. ("The Grace of God and the Structure of the Whole Creation"—Ed.)

21. See the conclusion of this essay below.

Herman Dooyeweerd, for some of his solid, biblical, reformational insights that break away from Roman Catholic "synthesis thinking" (i.e., the wrongheaded attempt to mix pagan Greek thought with Christian biblical thought, the climax of which appears in medieval scholasticism's chief synthesizer: Thomas Aquinas).

2. Dooyeweerd determines lamentably that the earlier generation's break from synthesis thinking was not complete and that the vestiges that remain need to be purged. A revision of philosophical thinking and language is proposed that ostensibly takes the reformational project one step closer to a pure biblical philosophy or theology.

3. However, the reform proposal itself then becomes the target for further critique. Another thinker, let's say Cornelius Van Til, steps forth, praises Dooyeweerd for his efforts in purging Bavinck and Kuyper, but laments that he has not yet finished the job because remnants of alien thought also persist in his reform. Hence additional reformation is proposed.

4. But then Dooyeweerd returns the favor, and the disciples of the two men continue the process ad infinitum, ad nauseum, all in the name of finding *the* true, biblical or reformational philosophy.

What I have just described is in fact the outline, played in a hundred variations, of the reformational philosophy movement in the twentieth century.

Here I do need to insert a caution, lest I be misunderstood. All intellectual work, whether it be theology or philosophy, is and always will be imperfect and incomplete. Even the greatest Christian thinkers in the church's history can and must be subjected to the careful scrutiny of biblically-informed subsequent thinkers. The work of reformation, including the renewal of our minds, is an ongoing requirement of Christian discipleship. Jesus is Lord also of our heads. In principle, therefore, I have no objection to someone at any given time raising good questions about someone else's thought. There are, however, two reasons I resonate so well with Hepp's concern about biblicism. First, the regressive criticism I described above strikes me as lacking the most basic level of Christian humility. To think that in the past everyone had it wrong to some degree or other and that I and my group are going to set it straight for good is arrogant and uncharitable. Second, while the Bible must of course inform our theology and our philosophy and all our sci-

entific work, it is a serious epistemological blunder to try and produce a pure biblical philosophy or a pure biblical chemistry or mathematics or whatever. The Bible may not be used in such a way; that is not its purpose or its authority. It seems to me far better to say that a particular philosophy or view of the human person reflected in a particular psychology is appropriately *consistent with* or *at odds with* biblical teaching about the image of God. Claims by philosophers or psychologists who are Christians need to be modest and intentionally open to correction and revision.

Let me return now to Berkouwer. He needs to be considered on his own apart from the group I have just considered, for he is a theologian not a philosopher, and he concentrates on classic dogmatic-theological questions and problems rather than metatheoretical ones. At the same time I believe one might with justification speak of him as a "biblicist." At this point I offer this as a *suggestion*. I need to do more research myself on Berkouwer's relation to the biblical theology movement in the Dutch Reformed Church during the twentieth century, and I am not yet finished with the truth question that comes out of his method of correlation. I will suggest that thinking of Berkouwer as a biblicist does help explain his method in the *Dogmatic Studies*. One of the features of Berkouwer's method-that exasperated many of us in the 1970s was his habit of trying to overcome classic dilemmas and distinctions in orthodox Reformed theology with exegesis. Time and again Berkouwer seems to pull back from distinctions and explanations found in the Reformed Orthodoxy of the sixteenth- and seventeenth- centuries, and the reader is presented with a series of biblical reflections on puzzling texts, on texts that seem to suggest tension or contradiction; and when it is all done, we are frustrated because there seems to be no resolution. Instead of careful theological analysis we were given homilies that often left us begging for an *answer* which was not forthcoming. Two examples come immediately to mind: Berkouwer's treatment of reprobation in his book *Divine Election* and his treatment of the immortality of the soul in his *Man the Image of God*. At first glance, this extensive biblical, exegetical work appears as a virtue; when systematic clarity is lost, however, it is less appealing.

Echeverria's examination of Berkouwer's ecumenical engagement with Roman Catholic theology inspired me to take another look at Berkouwer. I am grateful for that gift of friendship that has deepened my own understanding of important theological and

philosophical roots of my own intellectual formation. Because of that gift and what it entails I have come to the following conclusion, one which might seem startling for a Protestant, and a Reformed one to boot:

A key to good ecumenical conversation between Reformed thought and the Roman Catholic tradition is the necessity for Reformed people to get beyond their biblicism. This means: (a) aligning oneself philosophically with the Augustinian/Thomistic tradition of Christian metaphysics, and (b) carrying on the conversation in the light of the great ecumenical consensus of Christian dogma and liturgical practice.[22]

22. Without necessarily endorsing everything in it, I consider the 1982 Faith and Order Paper No. 111 of the World Council of Churches, "Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry," to be exemplary in this regard; see http://goo.gl/uwNLy3.

The Bavinck Review 5 (2014): 90–103

The Pros and Cons of a Dogmatic System[1]

Herman Bavinck, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (ndkloosterman@gmail.com), Worldview Resources International

[57] The esteemed secretary of the Committee for the Central Pastoral Conference has requested and instructed me to introduce to you the subject of the pros and cons of a dogmatic system. The subject itself proceeds from the assumption, which is certainly universally acknowledged, that any dogmatic system has such pros and cons, and that, just as we see with everything here on earth, so too with a system of the church's faith-truths, we can see two sides, the one shedding light, the other shadowy.

A proper treatment requires, first, that we consider what we are to understand by a system. For many people the term itself has a bad odor. Among some, especially in the discipline of dogmatics, the portrait immediately comes to mind of narrow-minded rigidity; of a methodological suspicion and denunciation of others; and especially of a cold and formalistic faith that lacks any life and animus. I think that the word itself is not culpable, and should not provide any warrant for these prejudices.

After all, everything that exists is systematic. The entire cosmos was created and arranged according to a fixed plan. It is not an aggregate of materials and forces that were accidentally merged. If it were, it would not constitute a cosmos, a unity. But all things are oriented toward each other, exist together in an unbreakable connection, together constitute a system, an organism. The Mosaic creation story provides us a glorious insight into the systematic, ordered, and teleological nature of the creation; and Paul teaches us

1. Address to the Central Pastoral Conference held at Utrecht 16–17 August 1881. Published in *De Vrije Kerk. Vereeniging van Christelijke Gereformeerde Stemmen* 10 (1881): 449–64. Included in H. Bavinck, *Kennis en Leven* (Kampen: Kok, 1922), 57–67. Pagination from *Kennis en Leven* is provided in brackets.

that [58] same truth when he writes to the church in Corinth: everything is yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's (1 Cor. 3:22–23).

When, in order to be able better to oversee and comprehend creation, we now classify the whole of the creation into groups of similar phenomena, then too we can observe a system within those distinct classes. Still, they do have significant differences. In connection with the inorganic creation we actually cannot speak of any system. It is dominated and designed entirely in terms of the physical laws of attraction, cohesion, weight, temperature, electricity, magnetism, by the chemical laws of bonding and composition, and by fixed relationships of material substances with each other. In itself, the inorganic creation has no purpose and thus no explanation; as pure aggregate, it lacks a unique principle and thus also a unique system. It is purely a product of those physical and chemical forces, is wholly passive with respect to them, and has nothing within itself that can either withstand or propel it.

But the matter is different within organic nature. There as well, to a certain degree we find the same physical and chemical laws. However, they no longer govern everything, but serve everything; they are still the *conditio* but not the *causa* of things. Organic life cannot be explained by the laws of mechanisms. Every attempt devoted to doing so has been fruitless to this point. As soon as we come into contact with an organism, we see at work a force, a principle, a *vis vitalis* or whatever people may term it, which, rather than being explicable by physical and chemical laws, instead governs them, stands above them, not destroying and suspending them in any way, but putting them in service and directing them. That mysterious, hidden power is exactly what comprises the organic, and is the constitutive and supportive principle of the organic. Within inorganic nature, everything is aggregate, with things appended to each other from the outside; so there is no real whole, no genuine unity, and thus no diversity. But within organisms, each small part is governed, formed, and predisposed by the whole. Thus, the whole precedes the parts, and supplies each part with its own function within the whole. Within the organic for the first time we encounter a whole in terms of its parts, unity in diversity, principle within the system. Nevertheless, we can still discern great difference here. In the lowest organisms, unity and diversity are very limited. Many plants and animals possess a unity so minuscule that

parts of them continue living and grow again. But the more developed the organism, the more its system increases; continually richer diversity is accompanied by a unity that increasingly binds and governs all the parts. The animal is more [59] developed, and thus better systematized than the plant. And humans are far superior to animals, and show us the most glorious and complete system here on earth. For the human being is a personality, and this is the most developed and rich and glorious system there is. Within this system, the Ego is the principle, the root, the life force; through the Ego, the human spirit and soul and body, with all their capacities and powers, are governed, shaped, directed.

Our God himself provides us with an even infinitely higher and richer and more glorious system, to behold and admire, he who is one in essence, in three persons, in whom the one identically complete essence dwells hypostatically in a threefold manner. He, the Triune One, shows us in himself the entirely perfect system: origin, type, model, and image of all other systems. For this reason, it is an altogether remarkable and glorious idea with which Dr. Kuyper concludes his explanation of the Antirevolutionary Program, namely, that life in theological, moral, juridical, social, and political arenas will never be plumbed as long as the investigation does not come to rest in God himself, that is, in the confession of his Sacred Trinity.

I have attempted to show you—without losing ourselves in philosophical distractions and without patterning reality according to our notions—from the life and essence of things what it is that we must understand by a system. What has been said will preserve us, I hope, from ever talking about the systematic in a derogatory way. To cultivate a mortal aversion to this notion and attach to it the association of narrowness and bigotry is simply the proof of ignorance.

The initial opportunity for doing so can be provided by means of a scientific system. A person is not simply alive, but is also aware that he is alive. Within him all of nature, as it were, including himself, attains consciousness. Within him, it seeks its explanation, attempts to discern and behold itself in him. The person sees and thinks and knows. In that endless series of phenomena, he attempts to discern order and connection. Therefore, he begins to arrange, to

group, and to classify nature. If everything were chaos, a motley mass, that activity would be impossible; science would then not be able to exist. But the person who pursues knowledge proceeds on the basis of the assumption that systems exist everywhere, that what exists can be known, that an idea, a word, lies at the foundation of everything. Without that presupposition, science would destroy itself; and the suicide of science may not be demanded, either. Without Reason existing outside of us, Reason within us is a purposeless enigma. To practice science [60] is to seek for the Word that has made all things, without which nothing was made.

All science is one, just as the creation is one, and science searches for the principle and the system that connects and supports all things. Because of the limits of our view and of our understanding, however, the scientific enterprise is divided up into many kinds of science, each of which chooses its own group of phenomena as the object of investigation. Even those specialty sciences search for the principle and the system that must lie at the foundation of those special kinds of phenomena as well. They attempt, as it were, to uncover the basic idea, the life force of those phenomena, in order from that point of view to describe and illuminate everything belonging to a particular field, in order to know each thing not only in itself but also—and this too is required for genuine science—in the light of, and in connection with, and from the standpoint of, the whole.

Thus, a scientific system may be nothing other than a reproduction in words, a translation into language, a description, a reflection in our consciousness, of the system present in things themselves. Science does not have to create and to fantasize, but only to describe what exists. We contemplate what God has thought eternally beforehand and has given embodied form in the creation.

So then, no one can speak evil of seeking a system. To describe all things systematically, to search for the system of things, is rather a calling and a duty and a yearning placed in the human heart by God himself.

To forbid that is to slap science itself in the face, and to despise God's gift.

What, then, is a dogmatic system?

To answer this question, it is necessary to know what Dogmatics is. In any case, this is, as the term says, a scientific explanation of dogmas. With the term *dogma*, however, we come to stand immediately in the arena of the church. After all, a dogma is not a private opinion or an individual sentiment, but the faith-truth declared and confessed by the Christian Church as a whole or by one of its branches. Thus, Dogmatics is always ecclesiastical. A Biblical Dogmatics does not exist, and a Christian Dogmatics does not *yet* exist. Dogmatics is nothing other than the scientific description of the confession of the church.

The need for a dogmatic system in the true sense of the word began to be sensed slowly at first. The "unitary insight" (einheitliche Einsicht) into the truth of Christianity was obtained gradually at first. Church fathers and Scholastics sufficed with grouping the material of dogmatics as well as possible according to a practical standard, or to summarize it in a *Summa*.

[61] Nor did the Reformation in its day bring to life the need for a dogmatic system. Only Calvin provided us, in his *Institutes*, with a methodically organized, architectonic, and systematic whole. But by the remaining theologians, the content of dogmatics was arranged as well as possible into an order that hardly changed, and was discussed in terms of a sequence of *loci*. In the Lutheran church we find the first theologians who worked in dogmatics in a more systematic way—Calixtus, Calovius, and especially Quenstedt. In the Reformed churches after Calvin, it was especially Cocceius who followed the lead of others in making the idea of covenant to be the principium of his entire dogmatic system. In our present century it was especially Schleiermacher who pressed for a system, and in his own *Glaubenslehre* chose as the principium "salvation by Jesus of Nazareth." After him there has been a universal impulse to work strictly systematically in dogmatics. People are no longer satisfied with discussing doctrinal content simply in terms of certain rubrics of theology, anthropology, Christology, etc. Nowadays people want to set forth the church's faith-truths in the context of the church's organic unity and diversity.

That this insight was obtained gradually, and that the need for a dogmatic system has been awakened, are surely to be seen as good steps forward in the science of dogmatics.

Christianity has to satisfy our religious and moral needs first of all, to be sure, and therefore must prove itself to our heart and our conscience as being truth. But this is not enough. It should prove itself as truth to our understanding as well. Although a dualism of heart and mind may be maintained for a short time, it will not last long. "A Christian at heart and a pagan in mind" is a saying that either rests upon self-deception or leads to the rejection of the one or the other. What satisfies our heart, with its hidden and deeply internal needs, must satisfy our mind as well. Unless people want to believe that God has fixed an eternal chasm between mind and heart.

Now, it is the difficult but nonetheless glorious task of dogmatics to prove to the mind that the confession of the church is reasonable in the highest sense of the word. But then the primary requirement for our thinking mind is that the church's dogmas do not stand disconnected alongside one another, but they must be contained within one another; that together they constitute an unbreakable whole, an organic unity, a true and complete system. If the confession of the church is not merely a fruit of the imagination and a mythological "gimmick" (Spielerei), but a description of real acts of God, of a unique life, and if dogmatics still deserves to be called a science, then that strict requirement cannot [62] be avoided. A dogmatic system is the requirement that science places upon theology, and it is the proof of the reasonableness, of the genuinely scientific nature, of Christianity.

In order, then, to obtain a dogmatic system, before everything else the principium must be uncovered (not introduced to or forced upon dogmatics), from which the entire system as it were is constructed and can without violence and force be deduced. In this respect, as proof that we still know only in part, as yet very little agreement prevails among dogmaticians. One adopts as principium the person of Christ, another takes salvation, a third uses love, a fourth the Kingdom of heaven, and so on.

Perhaps there are others as well who say that it does not matter what principle people use for organizing the content of dogmatics. Whether one draws it from theology proper [the doctrine of God] or from soteriology or from another *locus*, one is nonetheless constantly dealing with the same truths. To a certain extent, this is true, and this already proves that all truths stand in unbreakable relationship with each other, and that no single truth can be examined

without requiring the examination of the others. But this does not therefore mean that the principle from which one proceeds in describing faith-truths is unimportant. The truly pure principium of the dogmatic system is but one and can be only one. With every principium one particular truth comes to stand in the light more than another. The only true principle of the dogmatic system is the one that appoints to every single truth its unique place within the organic whole, the one that places clearly in the light the relation of every truth with the principium and with all other particular truths, and in that manner unfolds organically on all sides in the multiplicity of truths in order again to be brought together organically into the truth itself. Seeking that principle, and from it to draw forth the entire edifice of the truths of dogmatics, is the postulate of the science of theology.[2]

At this point it has become clear what, in my view, should be understood by a dogmatic system. If I am not mistaken, this has helped to weaken much antipathy toward everything that hints of a system. After all, many appear to have so much resistance against a system of truths because they are entirely unfamiliar with, or have formed a false notion about, what science is and what a scientific system is. People think that a system is fatal [63] for living life, whereas we saw that a system is precisely the description and explanation of life, and that with the abundance and fullness of life the organic and the systematic constantly increased.

A system as system, including a dogmatic system, has no cons, but only pros. It obtains a shadowy side, occasionally even a very dark side, only when and to the extent that it corresponds decreasingly to its unique idea, and thereby is less of a system.

A system with its own unique principium may never be adopted apart from, or forced upon, the material that one wants to set forth systematically. For then it would be nothing more than a Procrustean bed, where one adapts and fits the truths, as good and as bad as they were. That would indeed be fatal for living. But such a system with its own principium must always be derived from the

2. In connection with this entire subject, compare L. Shoeberlein, *Das Princip und System der Dogmatik: Einleitung in die Christliche Glaubenslehre* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1881).

material itself. The dogmatician does not have to invent or devise the system and the principium; but by means of serious research, by means of living into what he wants to study and describe, let him attempt to arrive at the discovery of what, out of all those truths, comprises the constitutive, governing basic idea, the innermost driving force, the hidden stirrings, the deepest root.

In this way, he is bound most strictly to his material, to the object of his investigation. If we know from where the dogmatician draws his material and what kind of material it is, we can very easily identify the shadowy sides that, due to the neglect of one thing or another, will be observable in his dogmatic system.

The source from which all dogmatic truth has sprung forth and continues to spring forth is only Holy Scripture alone. The dogmatician does not, however, draw his material directly from Scripture. How could he do that, and from where would he derive the standard that stipulated which truth he would have to include in his dogmatics, and which truth he should omit? That has occurred long before he came on the scene, throughout the course of the centuries, under the leading of the Spirit, through the church. He finds his material given to him in the confession of the church of which he is a member, which material itself, however, establishes the requirement of scripturality. Both of these—Scripture and confession—are objective and exist independently of the dogmatician. In order that they receive subjective force for him as well, and can be reproduced, he must also sense within himself the testimony of the Holy Spirit—that testimony, however, as discerned not only in his heart but as discerned in the whole church that is now living, of which he is but one individual member.

The requirements fixed for the principium and system of dogmatics are therefore three: (1) that it be Scriptural, of divine origin; (2) that it be Ecclesiastical, bearing a churchly character, not despising the lessons of history, [64] possessing a conservative and simultaneously antievolutionary element, in its essence the fruit of its own time; and (3) that it be relevant, taking into consideration and corresponding to the needs of this generation, being progressive and striving for perfection.

Neglecting one or more of these three requirements can cause nothing but damage and increase resistance toward the dogmatic system.

If the dogmatic system seeks to be exclusively Biblical, it runs the risk of being neither truly dogmatics nor a genuine system. But precisely for that reason, that is what many want. In order to avoid all that is dogmatic and systematic, people make a colossal leap back over eighteen centuries of the Christian Church and land, so they think, on the unadulterated and secure ground of Scripture. There, neither with Jesus nor with all the prophets and apostles, we find no system at all. If by that is meant that Scripture never employs abstract concepts, is always graphic, picturesque, lively, and concrete, and describes everything in terms of the fresh awareness of life, then such a claim is undoubtedly true. But Scripture is not for that reason unsystematic. Is not Scripture itself one entity, an organism, where one single basic idea animates all its parts? And do not the thoughts of Jesus and of the prophets and apostles, of each individually and of all together, constitute an inner unity and a comprehensive entity that agrees internally and in all its parts, even though none of them has attempted to communicate their thoughts systematically, and even though the one was given a deeper glimpse and much broader view than another? Every more penetrating investigation of Scripture must proceed and does proceed from that presupposition.

But properly speaking, a dogmatic system can never be obtained from Scripture. One would get at most a kind of Biblical Theology, or whatever else one might call this discipline. Such a system has this defect: first, it is non-ecclesiastical in nature, often born of anti-ecclesiastical impulses, existing outside the church, not advancing the church, and would almost compel the church to reduce all ecclesiastical differences to the same level, committing an offense against its own existence and history. Secondly, it is foreign to the spiritual life and the spiritual experience of the church, lacks all life and animus, being fervently zealous in opposing everything it considers narrow, including even aversion to any intolerance, seeking refuge behind universal-Christian, often vague and undefined, concepts. The well-known "Biblical Theologians" of the first half of this century can provide us with ample proof of this. Thirdly, under the slogan [65] of *sola Scriptura*, by reducing Scripture virtually to a codebook, denigrating it to something like a *codex Justinianeus* from which one plucks the *articula fidei*, this approach usually risks becoming very unscriptural and losing its function of serving the church. Given that approach, we can expect to receive

criticism, as published recently by Professor Doedes against our confessions.

Still more could perhaps be said against a dogmatic system that, as it misunderstands Scripture and the continuing testimony of the Holy Spirit, seeks to be drawn only from what the Church has declared. Such a system runs the serious risk, as we see in the Roman Catholic Church, of abandoning the divine source, giving honor to human authority, culminating in deifying people, that is to say, in idolatry. We see that all too clearly in the Roman Catholic Church. But among Protestants as well, the very same dangers accompany such a system, though in another manner. For people end up, not in theory but certainly in practice, declaring the Church to be infallible, considering the constant testing of its pronouncements by means of Scripture to be unnecessary, even going as far as swearing by every word and every formulation of the confession. Such a system is, first of all, very unscriptural. Secondly, by misunderstanding the continuing testimony of the Holy Spirit and thus the progressive character that Dogmatics must have, the system becomes barren, lifeless, deadly, and destructive, a petrifaction, making those who advocate it either in theory or in practice to be petty, narrow-minded, and parochial. In Protestant circles we then find legalistic formalism, that rigid, ice-cold conservatism, that miserable hunting for heretics, features that, because the Protestant spirit seeks the freedom that gave it birth, leads it on a quest that ends up in the perpetually open arms of unbelief. Thirdly, under the slogan of being genuinely ecclesiastical, such a system threatens to destroy the essence of the Church. For it causes the Church either—as we see in Rome—to transition gradually into becoming a false Church, gradually removing from it the marks of a true Church, or—as is the case within Protestantism—to denounce as heretics all other Christian church denominations, elevating one's own church denomination to the one true Church, and when that one does not pass the test, to seek one's salvation and consolation in conventicles, societies, and evangelism groups, in order there to discuss the great apostasy of our day.

The third requirement that must be met in connection with forming a dogmatic system was the testimony of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the dogmatician himself and of the church from which he draws life. Great emphasis has been placed on this Christian consciousness, more now than formerly, ever since Schleiermacher,

who declared this to be the only [66] source. To a certain extent, this was correct. Thereby the progressive character of the church, of its confession, and thus of dogmatics as well, was being maintained, and the error was prevented of people thinking that at a particular moment in the past, with this or that Synod, the Holy Spirit had caused the full light to shine in the church upon all the truths of salvation. But if that Christian consciousness is seen to be the only source of the dogmatic system, then very serious dangers arise. First, by setting aside Scripture, the divine origin and Scriptural character of the material for dogmatics are lost. Secondly, by rejecting the confession of the Church, history is misunderstood, the leading of the Spirit in the past is denied, the truth now lies embedded in conservatism, and is entirely surrendered. But then, thirdly, the modern era can never be understood properly. No longer normed by Scripture, severed from the past, the Christian consciousness will gradually lose its Christian character; what the Holy Spirit testifies to within the church can at that point simply be invented, but can be evaluated only according to a subjective standard. At that point, the system thereby becomes subjective, individualistic, fashionable in the modern sense of that word.

Those, in short, are the disadvantages that can be bound up with a dogmatic system. Taken by itself, it has no cons, only pros. The extent to which it corresponds to its own idea depends entirely on what kind of system it is. It becomes more damaging, and causes more injury, to the degree that it misunderstands or fails to fulfill the requirements that, in my view, must be assigned to it. To spurn one of those requirements is fundamentally to misunderstand all three. A dogmatic system must be Scriptural, historical-ecclesiastical, and at the same time progressive. A dogmatic system can be each of these three only when it is all three simultaneously. For this reason it will have more advantages, and will spread blessing more abundantly, to the degree that it fulfills these three requirements.

So then, the advantages are many, three of which are especially noteworthy.

1. It maintains Christianity as being true for our mind, and shows us the reasonableness of our faith. A dogmatic system is not an apologetics, but nonetheless has an apologetic nature. That too is needed, namely, that Christianity prove itself to our mind, as something that is neither fable nor fiction, but real truth and life. That

comes fully to light only in the dogmatic system where for the first time theology comes to its own completely independent existence and is sustained with its own faculty.

[67] 2. It brings the life of the church to clear awareness. Not merely being alive, but knowing that one is alive, knowing oneself, one's own life in its origin and abundance, is the highest benefit.

The spiritual life of the church must be a clearheaded, conscious life. That is expressed already in the confessions of the Church, where the church gives consideration to itself. But this is only partial. The church strives for constantly more light and does not court the darkness. The Church requires theology, presses for theology, cries out for theology, without which the church would languish—even as theology would die without the church. Theology, and especially dogmatics whose essence must be systematic, has a glorious task; namely, to lead the church in understanding and knowing itself, in order to bring the church to awareness of its own life and treasures. That will contribute significantly to keeping the church on the right road, to protecting the church from missteps and errors, and thereby making the church's life healthy once again or continuing the church's health, and promoting the church's flourishing and growth and development.

3. Thirdly, the dogmatic system will supply us with a correct insight into the organism of Holy Scripture. Thereby the true unity within those many and various revealed truths will become visible to us for the first time. Order will be provided in that apparent confusion, unity and system among that colorful variety. A light will arise in our soul to shine upon all those wonderful ways of God. His redemptive acts, all of them and each of them in its own way, will radiate with luster and glory. And the blessed discovery that with the dogmatic system we are dealing not with a chaos wherein our spirit can find no order, but with an artifact of the Triune God, all of whose works comprise artistry and beauty, will fill our souls with joy and inexpressible gratitude. The dogmatic system leads us to know God and to revere God.

If that is for it, what then will be against it?

A Note on the Ensuing Discussion[3]

In response to the address, a lively discussion ensued. There were three questions in particular that came up for discussion. First, regarding the notion of Dogmatics. It appeared that many could not agree entirely with the presentation of the speaker. People did not want to be bound by the strict definition of the term *dogma* as an ecclesiastical faith-truth, but wanted to interpret the word in a broader sense so that one could speak of a Biblical Dogmatics as well. But then people get confused with regard to the existing distinction between Biblical Theology and Ecclesiastical Dogmatics.

Regarding the meaning of the term *dogma*, see Rother, *Zur Dogmatik*; Schoeberlein, *Princip und System der Dogmatik*; as well as Hagenbach, *Encyclopaidie*, 10th edition; etc.

A second question involved the mutual connection of the three requirements for a dogmatic system as set forth by the speaker: that it must be scriptural, ecclesiastical, and progressive. It was evident which one everybody thought was most important, and should weigh the heaviest. The scriptural character of Dogmatics is primary; Scripture binds and is authoritative; where conflict exists between Scripture and the confession, the latter must yield; in fact, this is a requirement that the confession itself imposes. By letting Scripture speak in such cases, Dogmatics does not become un-ecclesiastical but fulfills the requirement that the church assigned to itself and to its confession. But caution must be the preeminent recommendation at this point; no dogmatician has the right to prescribe for the church its own confession.

The third question was difficult; namely, how is the progressive character of Dogmatics to be maintained? May the dogmatician express himself beyond what the church says, and can he do that without coming into conflict with the church and its confession? Surely the dogmatician may not elevate to the status of dogma what is not confessed by the Church. Not the individual, not even the scholar, but only the Church establishes dogmas. Nevertheless, the dogmatician's ecclesiastical position does not prevent him from

3. This appendix is Dr. Kloosterman's translation of H. Beuker's brief report on the discussion that followed Bavinck's address. It was published in the same edition of *De Vrije Kerk* 10 (1881): 488–90.—Ed.

harboring sentiments and opinions that, though not in conflict with the confession, nonetheless are not being taught by the Church and its members.

The Bavinck Review 5 (2014): 104–05

Pearls and Leaven

Bavinck as Pastor (1880–82)*

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Upon completing his doctoral studies in 1880 and before he accepted the call from the Secession Christian Reformed Church to teach at its Theological School in Kampen in 1882, Bavinck served for two years as the pastor of a Christian Reformed congregation in Franeker, Friesland. Though brief, Bavinck's pastoral work at Franeker was memorable. The church's immediate history under its two previous ministers was troubled and characterized by division; under Bavinck's care, the congregation experienced healing and flourished. After reviewing the minutes of the church's consistory as well as those of the supervising classis, Bavinck biographer R. H. Bremmer notes that they bear consistent witness that "under Bavinck's ministry the congregation of Franeker noticeably experienced God's blessing."

As one example of Bavinck's pastoral heart, Bremmer passes on the story of someone who experienced it firsthand when he was a young man. After Bavinck's death in 1921, the man recalled his compassion for those who had physical and developmental disabilities. Bavinck visited the home of an "elderly woman whose two daughters were practically crippled, spoke with difficulty, and lived in circumstances of poverty; the mother was also not very neat. The two sisters expressed a desire to become members of the congregation and after a conversation with the consistory were gladly welcomed to the Table of the Covenant." Even when hindered from coming to church for Sunday services because of indisposition,

* This vignette is taken from the first chapter of my forthcoming *Bavinck on the Christian Life: Following Jesus in Faithful Service* (Crossway, 2015). The source of the quotations is R.H. Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck en zijn tijdgenoten* [Herman Bavinck and his contemporaries] (Kampen: Kok, 1966), 42, 38.

"they were brought to the church by ambulance and sat near the pulpit where they listened attentively and gladly."

Recalling this time in his youth forty years earlier, the man reported that this "small tableau" made a significant impression on the young people of the church. He adds that "it was precisely here, with and by means of these simple people whom the world despised as 'of no account,'" that Bavinck called on his congregation "to refashion themselves in the salvation that is found in Jesus."

Viewed from the vantage point of our thankfully more compassionate treatment of persons with disabilities today, one cannot help thinking that this must have been rare in Bavinck's day. By the standards of any age it provides a wonderful window into Bavinck's Christian and pastoral heart.

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