

Introduction¹

Herman Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatic* is saturated in the certainty of *Deus dixit* (God has spoken). "As science never precedes life, but always follows it and flows from it," writes Bavinck, "so the science of the knowledge of God rests on the reality of his revelation."² The task of dogmatics then is to describe what God has done for humankind before discussing ethics: what renewed human beings do in the strength of redemption.³ The reality of God's truth is made known of its own power and is revealed to humankind, sin notwithstanding.

Some are not so sure. The starting point for dogmatics in the climate of positivism shifted variously from religious feeling to a history-of-religions approach. Most of these, Bavinck claims, viewed sin as moral deficiency humankind was evolving out of. A shift from objective revelation to subjective religious experience, Bavinck argues, risks losing the certainty of Christ's atoning work on the cross only to replace it with a cold legalism and vague mysticism. Placed side by side with Roman *supernaturalism* and the results of deism and pantheism are similar: a duality is struck between God and creation, nature and grace, faith and reason. For Bavinck these theories do not correspond with the certainty of God's word, which has permeated and enriched the world to the praise of his glory.

This paper will present and evaluate Bavinck's theology of sin and the *donum superadditum*. This paper will show that Bavinck's doctrine of sin and salvation takes the federalist position from confessional theology as a solution to the subjective approach of positivism and the Neoplatonic duality of supernaturalism. To achieve these goals this paper will first address a few key themes in Bavinck's *prolegomena* followed by analysis of the *superadded gift* within his doctrines of sin and salvation. We close with an assessment of Bavinck's theology and his claim to certainty in the Reformed expression of the *donum*.

I. Prolegomena

Dogmatics is the science that reproduces the truth of scripture in confessional statements in the certainty that God has spoken. The truth claims of dogma must correspond with scripture and not the subjective experience of religion to remain scientifically credible.⁴ This is not to split faith and reason into a duality. A subjective method starts with a principle other than revelation and eventually works towards (or away from) faith. Schleiermacher's definition of religion as 'an absolute feeling of dependence' is a case in point.⁵ Truth claims based on states of consciousness or feeling

¹ This paper was presented at ETS National Meeting: New Orleans, 2009.

² Herman Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation, the Stone Lectures for 1908 – 1909*, Princeton Theological Seminary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 24.

³ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Prolegomena*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 77. Hereafter cited as *R.D.* with respective volume numbers.

⁴ *R.D.*, 1:66, 67.

⁵ *R.D.*, 1:74, 75: "The notion that God is only and exclusively in the human heart and has everywhere else retreated from his creation is simply untenable. We have to make a choice here. We can consider the world

are not ultimate, writes Bavinck, and the expression of these in pantheism and deism exclude knowledge from faith, locking revelation out of creation.⁶ On the other hand, Schleiermacher's concept of *dependence* has substantial value. In religion, human beings find a relationship to God that extends to every aspect of life and beyond. Denial of this dependence does not produce freedom and cannot receive the things of God.⁷ Faith assumes that human beings are receptive to revelation and by acknowledging dependence on God's mercy are made "beneficiaries" of forgiveness, adoption as God's children, and obtain salvation by grace.

The method of theology is established on three foundations (*principia*). The ultimate source and foundation of revelation is God (*principium essendi*). God's self-consciousness is conveyed through his self-communication and presented in the world as the external foundation of knowledge (*principium cognoscendi externum*).⁸ With the possibility of conducting science established, the Logos makes reason and intellect possible as the creator of the reality outside ourselves and the laws of thought within us.⁹ Scripture, the instrumental cause of theology, bears witness to the fact that revelation proceeds from God before and after the fall. Scripture is revelation itself.¹⁰ Third, the *principium cognoscendi internum* presupposes the disclosure of divine self-revelation mediated deeply into the human self-consciousness through the illumination of the Holy Spirit.¹¹ Creation is the foundation for revelation from which proceeds all religious and ethical life. For Bavinck the question is never 'does God exist' but 'what is our relationship to him'.¹²

Sin has disrupted true religion but has not eradicated the *principium essendi*. Religion is integral to human nature as created in the image of God.¹³ The entire world is a revelation of God; every creature, "In its own way is the embodiment of a divine thought."¹⁴ General revelation permeates nature and human history unfolding through historical process. It appeals primarily to the intellect but cannot itself produce saving knowledge or personal faith.¹⁵ E. P. Heideman finds Bavinck's position dangerously close to the Greek concept of the *hule* yet consistently maintaining that reason is not

in its entirety and in all its parts as the work of God's hands and in that case also as a revelation of his attributes. The other possibility is that it originated and exists apart from God, but then there is no reason why we should believe in a revelation of God in the human heart either." For criticism on the history-of-religions approach in Harnack see H. Bavinck, (ed. John Bolt), *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), 40, 41.

⁶ R.D., 1:74, 75.

⁷ R.D., 1:243.

⁸ R.D., 1:233.

⁹ R.D., 1:231, 208: "The world is an embodiment of the thoughts of God" cf. Belgic Confession, art. 2. "The universe is before our eyes like a beautiful book in which all creatures ... are as letters to make us ponder the invisible things of God."

¹⁰ R.D., 1:277. See Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics (PRRD The Trinity of God*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 151-154 for *Scripture as Word of God and Principium Cognoscendi Theologiae*.

¹¹ R.D., 1:213. *Causa efficiens instrumentalis*. See also R.D., 3:276.

¹² R.D., 1:251.

¹³ R.D., 1:277.

¹⁴ R.D., 2:530, 531.

¹⁵ R.D., 1:341, especially § 94 – 96.

independent of revelation without going so far to say, as Emil Brunner, that reason is *co-worker* with revelation.¹⁶ Bavinck warns everywhere that without a strong view of revelation rooted in *sola scriptura* the alternatives will lean toward autonomy and run a course into deism and pantheism. Assuming as much dissolves religious knowledge into unconscious impressions of the divine or else casts faith into the mold of the enlightenment as a logical assent to the historical fact of scripture.¹⁷ For Bavinck this is disaster: dogmatic truth not aiming at the knowability of God loses its character, its certainty, and the intimate link between *externum* and *internum* in the personal activity of the Holy Spirit.¹⁸

The primary antagonist to Bavinck's covenantal theology is positivism. The naturalist view of revelation is identical to pantheism in that it does not go beyond the phenomena of the world to identify the creator as force, will, power, or the *something* responsible for the immutable laws of nature.¹⁹ The pantheism of Ritschl, for instance, devalues revelation prior to Christ to the point that only in Christ is the knowledge of sin made known.²⁰ His view of humankind's original integrity and fall rejects the federalism of the Reformed in favor of the process of primitive man from the animal to the moral state. Sin is not objective guilt deserving punishment, Ritschl says, it is only an ignorance of God's love which has since been proclaimed by Christ.²¹

Bavinck's analysis of Darwin's pantheistic roots runs along similar lines. Bavinck attempts to find connecting points between Darwin's natural selection in traducianism and some limited appeal for Christian theology (prior to 18th c. deism) in Aristotle: if creation has priority evolution is possible.²² The central problem in evolution, says Bavinck, is it defines of sin as "the survival or misuse of habits and tendencies that were incidental to an earlier stage of development and whose sinfulness lies in their anachronism."²³ This definition accords with Pelagius' correct understanding that sin is an act of the will, yet the essential distinction of freewill in humankind is lost between the ego and animal tendencies prior to moral consciousness.²⁴ These innate animal tendencies are not sinful, but the "raw material" either for sin or for doing good (F.R. Tennent). For Bavinck this is the stuff of determinism and cannot convincingly reconcile Augustine and Pelagius.

¹⁶ Eugene Paul Heideman, *The Relation of Revelation and Reason in E. Brunner and H. Bavinck*, (Sheboygan Falls, Wisconsin: Van Gorcum & Comp. N.V. – Dr. H.J. Prakke & H.M.G. Prakke, 1959) 126, 127, 152. Bavinck's analysis (and avoidance) of the *hule* in *R.D.*, 2:408, 409.

¹⁷ *R.D.*, 1: 349.

¹⁸ *R.D.*, 1:348, 351, *et. al.* Heideman, *ibid*, 158-9, Brunner for example does not stress the indwelling of the Spirit, nor accounts for the Spirit in election and predestination, whereas Bavinck holds God created reality, man, etc., which is not a 'counterfeit' reality. Reason and revelation are the flipside of the Trinity and predestination.

¹⁹ *R.D.*, 1:296.

²⁰ *R.D.*, 3:44.

²¹ *R.D.*, 3:553.

²² *R.D.*, 2:512.

²³ *R.D.*, 3:48. The quote is apparently Rischl's.

²⁴ *R.D.*, 3:49.

Assuming Revelation is integral to the universe, knowledge, science, and culture are made possible: reason, the friend of revelation.²⁵ What remains to be seen is the application of Bavinck's *prolegomena* in the doctrine of sin: reason: the menace to revelation.

Sin, the Menace to Certainty

We now proceed to Bavinck's doctrine of sin, the *donum superadditum*, and the thing recovered by Christ's life, death, and resurrection. Bavinck's treatment of the early Genesis narratives assumes they describe events that occurred pre-history.²⁶ The historical connection between Genesis 3 and Romans 5 is vital, says Bavinck, if the fall, sin and death are understood as 'the data of experience' and not merely as articles of faith.²⁷ The biblical connection of the second Adam with the first underwrites the whole of faith in Christian dogmatics: (1) the fall and imputation of sin to all humanity "in a certain sense" from Adam and (2) the imputation of righteousness to believers in Christ.²⁸ If primitive man was not created in a state of integrity, placed at the beginning of the road to eternal life and lost it, the New Testament message of the cross falls to the ground. Here Bavinck's theology faces two staggering difficulties: (1) the imputation of sin and righteousness and (2) Darwinism. Will Christ's fulfillment of all righteousness also validate the scientific credibility of divine revelation? The answer is complicated.

Sin is a mystery. It has no right to exist; it has no substance, it is ethical in character and its fruits are evident on a universal scale. The narrative of Genesis 3 describes sin as originating in the creature in a willful act of separation from God's authority and covenant. This is not an advance of empirical knowledge for civilization as some had claimed: God does not empirically know sin, so becoming like God in that respect is impossible.²⁹ For Bavinck, the knowledge of good and evil has less to do with the content as the manner in which is cultivated,

By violating the command of God and eating of the tree, they would make themselves like God in the sense that they would position themselves outside and above the law and, like God, determine and judge for themselves what good and evil was. (R.D., 3:33)

Sin is lawlessness, deriving its ethical character through the violation of a positive command from the basis of lying (John 8:44).³⁰ Genesis makes clear that sin does not have an *origin* as an 'independent ethical power' co-existing apart from God. Its

²⁵ Heideman, *ibid.*

²⁶ R.D., 2:407 (ch. 8); 3:34, 83, 102 *et. al.*

²⁷ R.D., 3:37.

²⁸ R.D., 3:38, 102. Heideman, *ibid.*, 165 notes a controversy that Bavinck later may have verbally changed from a historical to a metaphysical view of Genesis 1-3, but not in writing. Heideman cites Bavinck's phraseology: "in a *certain sense*" as the catalyst for this debate. Berkouwer, *Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 437 sees here the "vortex of criticism" for the realist position.

²⁹ R.D., 3:34.

³⁰ R.D., 3:74, "... According to Scripture, the fall is essentially distinct from the creation itself. Sin is a phenomenon whose possibility was indeed given in the creation of finite, mutable beings, but whose reality could only be called into being by the will of the creature."

beginning is a folly and absurdity.³¹ Sin disrupted humanity's relationship with God leaving an unfulfilled moral debt for Adam's posterity.

The Superadded Gift

Human beings did not become sub-creatures after the fall but something changed.³² The loss or perhaps the *deformity* of the image of God was not a physical change but an inability to produce and maintain righteousness occurred in the will and imagination.³³ The power of love, freedom, and intellect with which humankind served God is now directed toward the creation. From Augustine to the Reformation the *image of God* was the supernatural gift, an endowment of grace 'bridling' or 'curbing' the passions and desires between flesh and spirit. Rome's dogma of the superadded gift describes first the ability to know truth and perceive God through reason. Concupiscence is a prominent feature of the doctrine, taking the desire to procreate as that which is inclined to sin. Original sin, the *weakness* of human nature, is restored or 'bridled' once grace is infused into the believer at baptism (Bellarmine). Rome's doctrine eventually arrives at the beatific vision of God elevating the soul to participation in the divine nature (*theosis*) by the means of grace and good works.³⁴

The Reformed countered by asserting the *weakness* in human nature was sinful, "the loss of original righteousness that ought to be in humans."³⁵ *Total depravity* ascribes complete moral and spiritual corruption to humanity on the basis that the whole person is included in the biblical idea of likeness or image of God.³⁶ The *image* in Reformed theology varies in emphasis such as dominion over the earth, reason, immortality of the soul, intellect and will, and a unique physical place above animal life to say nothing of Barth's *analogia relationis*.³⁷ Still the whole essence remains elusive. If one attribute is raised above another to theologically represent the image of God problems between scripture and dogmatic certainty abound.

Take the long discussion between Augustine and Pelagius on the will. There is only one of two courses to take, argues Bavinck, either the human will stands outside of an innate tendency towards sin, born with the image of God and free personality intact (Pelagius) or it is affected and weakened by original sin, immediately deviating from the law of God (Augustine). If sin is merely in the choosing, says Bavinck, then the Pauline Gospel that God will punish lawlessness is incoherent (Rom. 3:9; 5:18; 11:32). The Pelagian view of the will, which can make a mistake one minute and correct it another, is completely inconsequential to the doctrine of sin:

³¹ *R.D.*, 3:69.

³² *R.D.*, 3:174. "The Reformed maintain that, while the image of God had been lost in the restricted sense, yet in the broader sense, though completely mutilated and corrupted, it as not been destroyed. The image of God is not an external and mechanical appendage to us but integral to our very being: it is our health."

³³ *R.D.*, 3:140.

³⁴ *R.D.*, 2:539.

³⁵ *R.D.*, 3:98.

³⁶ Cf. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, *reprint*, 1997), §14.

³⁷ G. C. Berkhouer, *Studies in Dogmatics: Man: the Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 72, 73.

“This [Pelagian] view of the will never has a fixed nature, a determinate character, and never attains one; it is and remains neutral, indifferent, without any inner bias, always situated between opposites and focusing … in another direction.” (*R.D.*, 3:107)

Freewill is an integral part of human nature. But there is a distinction, an order, and progress in the relationship between God and the creature. God gives freewill and a command as well: they are independent but not mutually exclusive. If dogma takes the image to mean that grace is an additive to nature it creates a duality between flesh and spirit and, as we shall see, deadens the centrality of the cross in salvation.

Christ the Center: Revelation and Re-creation

So far Bavinck’s view of general revelation has nature and grace, reality and values inseparably connected.³⁸ An added gift of grace denies general revelation³⁹ in the same way that ‘the free gift is not like the trespass.’ From Christ proceeds the certainty of *Deus dixit*, in whom Bavinck finds his next favorite mantra: *grace restores nature*.⁴⁰ Christ himself is the one that moves general revelation from the intellect into the living world. There is however, *in a certain sense*, a very real problem.

Earlier Bavinck said that the issue of original sin proceeds on *how* all humanity is comprehended in Adam as the physical and ‘federal’ representative of the human race. Bavinck affirms that sin is hereditarily transmitted (*traducianism*) and the woe of humankind can be traced back to the first man *in a certain sense*.⁴¹ On the one hand, “We may have been comprehended in [Adam],” but on the other hand, “it was he who broke the probationary command and not we.”⁴² When identifying the transmission of guilt as either *representatively* or *physically* true, “Realism helps little”⁴³ because it does not make the vital distinction between imputed sin and imputed righteousness. In the realism of W.G.T. Shedd, Greydanus, and Jonathan Edwards, each individual commits the sin with Adam and likewise makes satisfaction for it by his or her death.⁴⁴ If the whole human race is made culpable for the first sin specifically then it follows Christ’s physical descent from Adam and Eve would contain the element of original or inherent sin.⁴⁵ As a biblically based concept, realism attempts to maintain the unity of the human race and God’s law.⁴⁶ Bavinck’s concern here is that realism takes on a pantheistic understanding of imputation: if the imputation of sin or righteousness is mediated physically it follows

³⁸ *R.D.*, 1:322.

³⁹ *R.D.*, *ibid.*

⁴⁰ *R.D.*, 1:320, 321. Cf. summary 322, “Nature precedes grace; grace perfects nature. Reason is perfected by faith, faith presupposes nature” (Grotius).

⁴¹ *R.D.*, 3:102.

⁴² *R.D.*, *ibid.*

⁴³ *R.D.*, 3:103.

⁴⁴ *R.D.*, *ibid.* The federal view presupposes the physical unity.

⁴⁵ *R.D.*, 3:103. Note: Bavinck’s analysis is a little heavy handed in not treating the realist understanding of the virgin birth in this context. For an excellent treatment of Shedd’s realism see George P. Hutchinson, *The Problem of Original Sin in American Presbyterian Theology* (Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 1972), 36 – 45.

⁴⁶ Cf. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* Vol. 4, part 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1961), 369.

that the work of the Spirit (*faith, indwelling, sanctification, etc.*) is material and not spiritual and ethical. Positivism, Realism and the modern schools all face the same problem looking back at humankind's primitive origins: the tendency to rationalism on the basis of incomplete evidence resorts to a pantheistic expression contrary to scripture. Federalism says Bavinck can remain objectively certain given its presuppositions rest in scripture's central claims: God created the world with grace and restoration built in (*grace restores nature*). So from this point forward Bavinck takes the federalist position with a few modifications.

With the covenant of works broken, Bavinck continues, the demand to keep it (*satisfaction, obedience*) doubles: God's law demands punishment for the violation and the restoration of the original intent (i.e. the reward of eternal life).⁴⁷ The only essential difference between the covenant of works and that of grace is the exchange of Adam's representation for Christ's. Christ bears the punishment demanded of the first covenant and mediates the New, bestowing benefits on believers through the knowledge of the Spirit.⁴⁸ The second Adam secures what the first neglected and abandoned. In other words, grace is the fulfillment of the covenant of works. Grace restores the original intent of creation as the revelation of God and her eschatological purpose: eternal life spent in doxological praise to God.⁴⁹ The last question for our consideration here is how grace is guaranteed to fallen humanity if it is not super-imposed onto nature. The answer, says Bavinck, is simple.

The Image of God and the Human Nature of Christ

The Incarnation has its foundation in the Trinity. Its most intimate expression is made in the *pactum salutis* or the 'council of peace'.⁵⁰ The *pactum* has been criticized among other things as speculative and often marginalizes the person of the Holy Spirit in redemption.⁵¹ The pact of salvation is not just a decree says Bavinck, it is, "the free conscious consultation of the three persons" and, "it is a personal, not a natural work."⁵² The Logos of John's gospel presupposes that all prior revelation (general and special) links up in the person of Christ.⁵³ The *pactum* is the device used to explain how the covenant of grace, entrusted to the Son within the foundation of Trinity, supersedes the covenant of works and all other covenants prior to the Incarnation.

At this point the indwelling activity of the Holy Spirit comes to the forefront as the image of God in humankind and the human nature of Christ as well. The Holy Spirit is the author of life especially the religious-ethical life: "The true human who bears God's

⁴⁷ R.D., 3:226.

⁴⁸ R.D., 3:227, 228.

⁴⁹ R.D., 3:225 – 226.

⁵⁰ R.D., 3:274, 275. Cf. R.D., 1:342 § 95

⁵¹ Cf. Barth, *ibid.* 370 – 372. Heinrich Heppe *Reformed Dogmatics Set out and Illustrated from the Sources* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd. 1950), 375 – 379. Heppe's analysis does not mention (or include in his readings) the H.S. in the *ps.* Heideman, *ibid.*, notes Brunner does not mention the H.S. in predestination.

⁵² R.D., 3:276.

⁵³ R.D., 3:280. John 1:1-5, 9, 14-19; 3:16-21. cf. Heb. 1:1-2.

image is inconceivable even for a moment without the indwelling of the Spirit.”⁵⁴ The Spirit’s agency is not limited to Christ’s conception but conducted his sanctification to glorification. For our purpose here, this is essentially the crux of the problem between the lost image of God in man and the culmination of revelation in the humanity of Christ. For one, Bavinck believes any Christology which does not maintain the supernatural birth of Christ destroys the personality of the human or the divine leads to a view of the Spirit’s indwelling as a temporary, superficial, occasional ecstasy. In pantheism and deism, this renders the true Image of God in human beings impossible as confusion between the divine and human results in deification and a loss of personality.⁵⁵ The result is that the message of the Gospel shifts from the center of revelation (Incarnation) to teaching (morals) and example. The church becomes a school. Faith and worship become an academic exercise based on human effort, graded by human standards.

If sin does not deserve punishment, Bavinck argues, there is no need for grace or forgiveness.⁵⁶ To be sure, Bavinck holds that the law is the norm for the entire “moral world order” sin notwithstanding.⁵⁷ Born under the law, Christ fulfils the righteous requirements of the standing covenant of works through passive and active obedience. The whole of Christ’s life and atoning work is *obedience*, “self-denial was the secret of his life.”⁵⁸ Christ’s suffering was the penalty of sin, not a natural consequence of having entered the sinful world.⁵⁹ Just as the image of God in man encompasses the whole being, so Christ’s submission to the Father’s will, the consecration of his body and soul looks beyond “moral vocation” to the completion of atonement for sin in the cross.⁶⁰

The cross, the guarantee of the eternal and permanent covenant of redemption, is the foundation for certainty in God’s revelation and reconciliation in Christ. The cross makes it possible for Bavinck to maintain the federal characters of Adam and Christ in an ‘organic’ connection for all of humankind and the restoration of all things.⁶¹ The covenant of grace is not ‘universal law’ to which all are bound but it is concrete and certain, again, resting in the election of the Father who sent the Son to bear the legal punishment due sinners and deliver them from the deepest reaches of sin’s grasp.⁶² In principle, says Bavinck, all things are restored in the cross both materially and immaterially. The proof for this proposition looks back at the New Testament data.⁶³ The covenant of grace is not arbitrary, irrational or artificial despite the objection that it tends to idealism (Heideman). Supposing the Gospel is certain of its claim that grace is rooted in the eternal counsel of the Triune God, faith has an objective reality informing her knowledge and ethical growth: faith does not hang in the air.

⁵⁴ *R.D.*, 3:292.

⁵⁵ *R.D.*, 3:296. Bavinck has in view the problem of the historical Jesus in Hegel, Kant, and Strauss.

⁵⁶ *R.D.*, 3:324.

⁵⁷ *R.D.*, 3:375.

⁵⁸ *R.D.*, 3:432.

⁵⁹ *R.D.*, 3:404.

⁶⁰ *R.D.*, 3:395.

⁶¹ *R.D.*, 3:470.

⁶² *R.D.*, cf. 1:340, 341 w/ 3:406, 409, 466 – 467.

⁶³ *R.D.*, 3:405. Many scripture references from Bavinck include Rom. 3 – 6; Heb. 7:22; 8:6; 12:24; Matt. 26:28; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13, *et al.*

Conclusion: Grace is Absolutely Certain, Isn't It?

Bavinck's approach to revelation takes the realist position against naturalism on account of its refusal to conduct metaphysical investigation beyond the physical laws of nature. There is too much room for human reason to be wholly emancipated and autonomous from God's revelation, if not creation. The image of God in humanity is viewed here as *becoming* deity through the progress of history. Supernaturalism has a similar pantheistic tone underlying its views of nature and grace which imagines participation in the divine nature. The image of God is an additive to nature and treats Christ's vicarious atonement in soteriology as peripheral. Bavinck's solution gives special revelation (*Deus dixit*) priority allowing him to say that grace has so permeated the world that the power of sin has not eradicated God's knowability. Revelation is communicated to the world through the mediation of the Word and Spirit in creation and recreation ethically and spiritually. The image of God encompasses the whole person presupposing the loss and recovery of human righteousness and holiness is central to the Gospel message of covenant salvation.

Bavinck's theology has its share of problems but has several extremely valuable points. Bavinck's federalist treatment of the *pactum salutis* as the New Testament solution to the problem of sin upholds the marvel, the wonder, and the certainty of salvation in Christ. The problem of original sin and its transmission cannot be very well explained by analysis of physical data in, say, naturalism anymore than it can be biblically harmonized in supernaturalism and realism. For Bavinck, this enormous tension between theory and data is the horizon of faith and acceptance of God's word. What saves Bavinck from teetering over the edge into the brink of heresy on one side and rationalism on the other is the Reformed emphasis on the indwelling of the Holy Spirit; "I believe" is transformed into "I understand."

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