

“Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms in the Thought of Herman Bavinck”<sup>1</sup>

A Response  
(abridged and expanded)  
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*A Pearl and a Leaven: Herman Bavinck for the Twenty-First Century*  
Calvin Theological Seminary  
Grand Rapids, MI  
19 September 2008

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Thank you for this most welcome opportunity to reflect together in celebration of the life and labors of Herman Bavinck. I trust that my comments will enhance our joint reflection and enlarge the profit we may derive from this occasion.

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<sup>1</sup> This is the title of the paper presented by Dr. David VanDrunen, professor at Westminster Seminary California, at the Bavinck conference, held on 18-20 September 2008 in Grand Rapids, Michigan. In what follows, parenthetical references to his conference paper are identified by using initials and page number.

## 1. Introduction

1.1 By way of introduction, I wish first to thank Dr. VanDrunen for his contribution, for the forthrightness of his analysis and assessment of natural law and two kingdoms in Bavinck's thought. Some might conclude on the basis of my comments<sup>2</sup> that ours are merely differences of accent; indeed, there is much from Bavinck about which we agree. Nevertheless, I do not think that differences of accent are benign, since they can in fact be an impediment to clear communication and mutual understanding.

I share Dr. VanDrunen's concerns regarding the apparent triumphalism among some neo-Calvinist heirs of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck.<sup>3</sup> Naturally, it must be determined whether in this case the error of the disciples can properly be attributed to the masters. Unfortunately, in the 1960s and later, the neo-Calvinist project became misdirected to the extent that it embraced the transformational Calvinism of H. Richard Niebuhr,<sup>4</sup> whose project is undergoing significant analysis and correction nowadays (see the works of Craig Carter,<sup>5</sup> D. A. Carson,<sup>6</sup> and most recently, Andy Crouch<sup>7</sup>).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> An earlier form of this response to the conference paper of Dr. VanDrunen was also presented at the Bavinck conference, and has been both abridged and expanded here. It was abridged with a view to clarifying several statements, and expanded to interact in a more fulsome way with references to the conference paper.

<sup>3</sup> This triumphalism is not just rhetorical, but extends to theological emphases as well. I have in mind rhetoric about Christians "extending" the Lordship of Jesus Christ; about Christians "redeeming" or "renewing" culture; about Christians "transforming" culture for Christ; and the like. Such rhetoric forms the substance of vision statements and advertising slogans for a number of Reformed, Presbyterian, and evangelical colleges in North America.

<sup>4</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951).

<sup>5</sup> Craig A. Carter, *Rethinking Christ and Culture: A Post-Christendom Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006). See also Nelson D. Kloosterman, review of *Rethinking Christ and Culture: A Post-Christendom Perspective*, by Craig A. Carter, in *Mid-America Journal of Theology*, 18 (2007): 221-3.

<sup>6</sup> D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008). See also Nelson D. Kloosterman, review of *Christ and Culture Revisited*, by D. A. Carson, in *Mid-America Journal of Theology*, 19 (2008): 297-301.

1.2 As I hope to explain in my brief remarks, I wish modestly to demur with respect to the thesis that forms a thread, if not the backbone, of Dr.

VanDrunen's presentation. He is suggesting that the alleged existence of "two Bavincks" has left us with a theology that is inconsistent and incoherent.<sup>9</sup>

Rather, I wish to suggest that Bavinck's life-work in general, and his treatment of natural law and the kingdom of God in particular, supply us with a helpful model for integrating the dualities present in theological truth and the dualities operative within his—and our—religious experience. That there were tensions, even polarities, in Bavinck's life and thought is incontrovertible, but in my judgment these need not be elevated to the level of incoherent inconsistencies or irreconcilable themes.

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<sup>7</sup> Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Problems identified in Niebuhr's project include these: (1) his classifications are reductionistic, since a number of representatives whom he classifies as belonging to one category can in fact be classified with others; (2) his classifications are not clearly rooted in the entirety and unity of biblical revelation; and (3) his classification of transformational Calvinism is not faithful either to Augustine or to Calvin, in its neglect of predestination and of the antithesis.

<sup>9</sup> As one of his concluding assessments of Bavinck's teaching regarding natural law and two kingdoms, Dr. VanDrunen wrote, "Third, I am not convinced that Bavinck has left us with an entirely coherent portrait of Christians' basic relationship to this world and of the fundamental nature of their cultural endeavors" (dvd-23). In his accompanying footnote at this point, he appeals to "the two-Bavincks hypothesis." In this context he refers to an article by George Harinck, to an article by John Bolt, and to Bolt's editorial introduction to Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*. The mention of at least two of these sources to imply agreement with "the two Bavincks hypothesis" is astonishingly dubious, since Harinck clearly emphasizes the achievement in Bavinck's thought of integration and unity, and Bolt's introductory essay speaks only of "tensions" in Bavinck's life.

More problematic, however, is this insinuation in that same footnote: "Though a complete account is more complex, a good general argument can be made, I believe, that his [Bavinck's] defense of the natural law and two kingdoms categories belongs to the 'orthodox' Bavinck and his advocacy of themes such as grace restoring nature and the kingdom as leaven belongs to the 'modern' Bavinck" (dvd-24). Presumably, we are being invited to embrace the "orthodox" Bavinck and to shun the "modern" Bavinck with suspicion.

For more discussion of the "two Bavincks" hypothesis, see *Addendum # 1* below.

## 2. **Natural law in Herman Bavinck**

I agree with Dr. VanDrunen regarding the presence, in Bavinck's writings, of "a" doctrine of natural law. As we know, Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin, followed by all the Protestant orthodox, spoke of natural law. In doing so, however, these Reformational writers, in distinction from Roman Catholic and humanist doctrines of natural law, uniformly opposed significant elements of the classical doctrine of natural law. The Reformers' doctrine of natural law needs to be coordinated with their robust acknowledgement of the radical seriousness of the fall, of the pervasive depravity of human reason, and of the necessity of Holy Scripture as the spectacles for correctly interpreting all of general revelation. For example, although Calvin regularly spoke of the *ordo naturae*, the *lex naturalis*, and *natura docet*, both their right apprehension by fallen human reason and their right functioning in the consciences of fallen humanity were governed by the wisdom learned from Scripture. Moreover, the Reformers never used their doctrine of natural law as the basis for a twofold ethics, one derived from nature, the other from grace, the one governed by human reason, the other by the Christian faith.

Bavinck's careful acknowledgement of human morality was nurtured by an awareness like that confessed in the Canons of Dort III/IV.4.

There remain, however, in man since the fall, the glimmerings of natural light, whereby he retains some knowledge of God, of natural things, and of the difference between good and evil, and shows some regard for virtue and for good outward behavior. But so far is this understanding of nature from being sufficient to bring him to a saving knowledge of God and to true conversion that he is incapable of using it aright even in things natural and civil. Nay further, this understanding, such as it is,

man in various ways renders wholly polluted, and hinders in unrighteousness, by doing which he becomes inexcusable before God.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, as one who followed in the line of Reformed orthodoxy, Bavinck's understanding and use of natural law must be coordinated with the following equally important components of his theological system.

1. It is God, not nature, that explains all the external moral righteousness we see around us. By his providence God governs the world and maintains the structures—moral as well as physical—of the creation. God's general revelation, as Calvin has taught us, is dynamic, personal, and existential throughout history. Bavinck's emphasis on God's continual personal interaction with creation prevents natural law from becoming, as it so often has throughout the history of the concept, a handmaiden to secularization.
  
2. This active, personal divine providence accounts for the continuation, and recognition, of creational ordinances like marriage, authority, labor, and leisure. In God's daily government of the universe we may recognize constants that serve to restrain human beings who would otherwise live out their rebellion unto total destruction. For example, propagating anarchy presupposes some kind of authority; even denying the creational

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<sup>10</sup> Latin original: "Residuum quidem est post lapsum in homine lumen aliquod naturæ, cujus beneficio ille notitias quasdam de Deo, de rebus naturalibus, de discrimine honestorum et turpium retinet, et aliquod virtutis ac disciplinæ externæ studium ostendit: sed tantum abest, ut hoc naturæ lumine ad salutarem Dei cognitionem pervenire, et ad eum se convertere possit, ut ne quidem eo in naturalibus ac civilibus recte utatur, quinimo quaecumque id demum sit, id totum variis modis contaminet, atque in injustitia detineat, quod dum facit, coram Deo inexcusabilis redditur."

boundaries of marriage presupposes at some point the acknowledgement of “the way things work.” So there is a providential correspondence between the content of the Decalogue and the law embedded within the give and take of human living in God’s universe.

3. In this context, it may be helpful to recommend the superb analysis provided by Al Wolters regarding the relationship between structure and direction. No one would deny that the normative structures of creation continue after the Fall, providing the bedding and boundaries of human existence. What distinguishes believers from unbelievers is the directionality, the motivation and purposiveness in their respective uses of creation. In terms of this distinction, moreover, Wolters insists that creational norms can be properly discerned *only in the light of Scripture*.<sup>11</sup>
  
4. God has inscribed “the work of the law” in the hearts of Gentiles. If we study carefully the context of Romans 2.14-15, two exegetical notes are relevant to this discussion. First, the law being referred to here in the context of Paul’s argument is the Mosaic law, the Decalogue—not “the natural law.” Second, God (not nature, not reason) has written this in their hearts. That which we know from the law of God, written once upon two tablets of stone, set forth in the law and the prophets, we find among unbelievers because they show that they have received the law’s work,

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<sup>11</sup> Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1985), especially 49-52, 72-95; for the point of the ability to discern creational norms only in the light of Scripture, see 91.

the law's activity, written by God in their hearts. Thus, we need not deny or ignore such moral activity if we are directed from the activity to the law—not the natural law, but the law revealed in the Bible. There we find the hermeneutical key for interpreting the moral uprightness we see in the world. The universal is clarified by the particular, the human is explained by the Christian. Not the other way around, such that the *lex naturae* becomes the hermeneutical key for the *lex scripturae*.

### 3. **Two kingdoms in Herman Bavinck**

#### 3.1 **The kingdom of God: *ipsissima verba Bavincki* (the very words of Bavinck)**

As we investigate Bavinck's understanding of the "two kingdoms," we are fortunate to possess two significant essays from his pen that deal explicitly with the kingdom of God. Each is available at this point only in the Dutch language,<sup>12</sup> but both provide an important biblical-theological orientation to Bavinck's kingdom theology.

The second essay (1893) exhibits Bavinck's expansive view of the kingdom of God, including its political significance.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The first is "Het Koninkrijk Gods," in *Handboekje ten dienste der Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland voor het jaar 1894*, ed. J. H. Feringa and A. Littooi (Le Cointre, 1893), 243-252. The second is "Het rijk Gods, het hoogste goed," in *Kennis en leven. Opstellen en artikelen uit vroegere jaren* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1922), 28-56.

<sup>13</sup> Bavinck, "Het Koninkrijk Gods," 249: "When we explain the kingdom of God in this full, rich sense, there is no basis for the claim that the OT idea of the kingdom of God was entirely spiritualized in the NT and stripped of all its sensory [*zinnelijke*] and political elements. For also in the NT the kingdom of God comes to earth (Mt.5.5); it is frequently portrayed by the images of a wedding and festive celebration (Mt.8.11); and it also possesses a political significance (Mt.20.20-23; Lk.19.11-27; Ac.1.6-7; Rev.21.23-24)." Dutch original: "Wanneer we het Koninkrijk Gods opvatten in dezen vollen, rijken zin, is er geen grond voor de bewering, dat de Oudtestamentische idee van het Koninkrijk Gods in het N. Test. geheel vergeestelijkt en van alle zinnelijke en politieke elementen is ontdaan. Want ook in het N. Testament komt het Koninkrijk Gods op aarde Matth. 5:5; het wordt meermalen geschilderd onder de beelden van

Twelve years earlier, on 3 February 1881, Bavinck had presented a lecture to the Kampen theological students on “The kingdom of God, the highest good.” Midway through this lecture, Bavinck treated the subject of “The kingdom of God and the community (family, state, church, culture).” The kingdom of God is broader than the organized institutional church, Bavinck argued, because Christianity is more than worship, since it constitutes an entirely new life-power that can penetrate and enliven all spheres and forms of life.

Thus it is that we speak of a Christian society, a Christian school; there is nothing human that cannot be called Christian. Everything within and beyond the church that is enlivened and governed by Christ, who exercises sovereignty over all things, contributes to and belongs to the kingdom of God.<sup>14</sup>

The goal of the church’s ministry is that its members live out their personal consecration to God in their natural, moral, civic, and political life.<sup>15</sup> With a clarity that astonishes twenty-first century ears, Bavinck insisted that even the state finds its goal and destiny in the kingdom of heaven.

Just as the individual must seek the kingdom of God not beyond but within his earthly calling, so too the kingdom of God requires of the state not that it surrender its earthly calling or its unique national particularity, but simply that it allow the kingdom of God to penetrate and saturate its people and nation. In this way alone can the kingdom of God come into existence. For this kingdom is not an effort of one nation or another, not even of one people and of one government, but of all

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een bruiloft en feestmaal Matth. 8:11; en heeft ook eene politieke beteekenis Matth. 20:20-23. Luk. 19:11-27. Hand. 1:6, 7, Openb. 21:23 v.”

<sup>14</sup> Bavinck, “Het rijk Gods, het hoogste goed,” 46-47: “Wij spreken daarom ook van eene Christelijke maatschappij, van eene Christelijke school; niets menselijks is er, wat niet Christelijk heeten kan. Al wat in en buiten de Kerk door Christus, die de souvereiniteit draagt over alle dingen, wordt bezielend en beheerscht, vormt mee en behoort tot het Rijk van God.”

<sup>15</sup> On this point, VanDrunen puzzlingly employs a footnote to identify what appears to be his most basic criticism of both neo-Calvinism in general and Herman Bavinck in particular. For further discussion of this, together with a response, see *Addendum #2* below.



peoples and all governments, it is the „Gesamtaufgabe” of the human race.<sup>16</sup>

Of course, the state is an agent not of grace, but of the law. The state neither establishes the kingdom of God nor brings about redemption. By fulfilling its divine calling to pursue justice and to uphold the moral order, however, the state can become a *paidagogus* or tutor (Bavinck uses the Dutch word *tuchtmeester*; he is alluding to Gal. 3:24) unto Christ. In that sense the state has the ability and the calling to work in service to the kingdom of God.<sup>17</sup>

Regarding the broader relationship between the kingdom of God and culture, Bavinck views these as members of the same family. Using an analogy as imaginative as it is profound, Bavinck observed that

cultus and culture ought to be sisters, independent to be sure, but still sisters bound together in love. And even though it happens that of these two sisters, Martha, that is, culture, is preoccupied with many things, and Mary, that is, cultus, has chosen the best portion, nevertheless it remains true that Jesus loved them both.”<sup>18</sup>

The point we are seeking to emphasize is that although Bavinck recognized the twofold kingship of Christ, this never functioned in his theology as the warrant

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<sup>16</sup> Bavinck, “Het rijk Gods, het hoogste goed,” 49: “Evenals de enkele het Rijk Gods niet moet zoeken buiten, maar in zijn aardsche beroep, zoo ook eischt het Godsrijk niet van den Staat, dat hij zijn aardsche roeping, zijn eigene nationaliteit prijs geve, maar juist dat hij het Rijk Gods in zijn volk en nationaliteit late inwerken en doordringen. Zoo alleen kan het Rijk Gods tot stand komen. Want dit Rijk is niet een werk van dezen of genen, zelfs niet van één volk en van één Staat, maar van alle volken en alle Staten, het is de ‚Gesamtaufgabe’ van het menschelijk geslacht.”

<sup>17</sup> Bavinck, “Het rijk Gods, het hoogste goed,” 49: “Zeker, het Godsrijk stichten kan hij niet; verlossing kent hij niet; een vrij, zedelijk, geestelijk leven kweken vermag hij niet. De Staat staat op het standpunt der wet. Maar door die wet hoog te houden, eerbied en ontzag voor haar te kweken, haar majesteit te handhaven, de zedelijke wereldorde als de onvoorwaardelijk geldende te doen eerbiedigen, kan hij een tuchtmeester worden tot Christus, In dien zin kan hij en heeft hij ook de roeping, aan het Rijk van God te arbeiden.”

<sup>18</sup> Bavinck, “Het rijk Gods, het hoogste goed,” 50: “Cultus en cultuur behooren dus zusters te wezen, wel zelfstandig maar toch zusters, door liefde aan elkander verbonden. En al is het dan, dat van beide Martha, dat is de cultuur zich om vele dingen bekommert, en Maria, dat is de cultus, het beste deel heeft gekozen, toch blijft het waar, Jezus had ze beide lief.”

either for a dual ethic or for a duality-of-independence between religion and cultural life in the world, including politics.

### 3.2 **The Christological unity and integration of God's works**

With respect to the matter of “two kingdoms” in Bavinck, I believe that Bavinck places more detailed emphasis on the Christological unity and integration of the so-called “two kingdoms” than Dr. VanDrunen lets on.

For example, from his other writings<sup>19</sup> we learn that for Bavinck, the state was not to be characterized by a colorless neutrality toward spiritual realities, but rather has a sacred task and could not adopt a position of neutrality between truth and falsehood. The separation of church and state never entailed the claim that the state was free from religion or from God's claims in Jesus Christ. Somewhat more than Kuyper, Bavinck maintained the principle that the state was called to advance God's honor and the church, though this may not happen through force and may not conflict with the nature of the gospel and the rights of people and of various arenas of life.<sup>20</sup> According to Bavinck, the first of seven summarizing principles to be kept in mind in connection with regulating the relationship between the church and the world was the principle that the church cannot resist stating the demand

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<sup>19</sup> See Herman Bavinck, “Christian Principles and Social Relationships,” in *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, ed. John Bolt, trans. Harry Boonstra and Gerrit Sheeres (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 119-143. See also Herman Bavinck, *Christelijke en neutrale staatkunde. Rede ter inleiding van de deputatenvergadering, gehouden te Utrecht, op 13 April 1905* (Hilversum: Witzel & Klemkerk, 1905).

<sup>20</sup> This observation is made by Klaas van der Zwaag, in *Onverkort of gekortwiekt? Artikel 36 van de Nederlandse Geloofsbelydenis en de spanning tussen overheid en religie. Een systematisch-historische interpretatie van een ‘omstreden’ geloofsartikel* (Heerenveen: Groen, 1999), 405-407.

that all creatures, arts, sciences, family, society, state, and so forth must submit to the Word of the Lord.<sup>21</sup>

This unity and integration are rooted particularly in the person and work of Christ Jesus. In contrast to positing a continuing duality between the Logos and the Incarnate One, Bavinck saw Jesus Christ as revealing himself progressively in human history through his unitary and unitive mediatorial activity. Although before his incarnation, the Second Person of the Trinity was indeed the *Logos Asarkos*, after his incarnation he remains the *Logos Ensarkos*. The profound significance of the incarnation is precisely that Christ's work in the creation is taken up within and made serviceable to his work of redemption. This has implications for the relationship between the church and the world. In a very significant passage in volume 4 of his *Reformed Dogmatics*, Bavinck applies this Christological unity to the relationship between the church and the world:

Accordingly, the relationship that has to exist between the church and the world is in the first place organic, moral, and spiritual in character. Christ—even now—is prophet, priest, and king; and by his Word and Spirit he persuasively impacts the entire world. Because of him there radiates from everyone who believes in him a renewing and sanctifying influence upon the family, society, state, occupation, business, art, science, and so forth. The spiritual life is meant to refashion the natural and moral life in its full depth and scope according to the laws of God. [Dutch original: Het geestelijk leven is bestemd, om het natuurlijk en zedelijk leven in volle diepte en omvang weer aan de wet Gods te doen beantwoorden]. Along this organic path Christian truth and the Christian life are introduced into all the circles of the natural life, so that life in the household and the extended family is restored to honor, the wife (woman) is again viewed as the equal of the husband (man), the sciences and arts are Christianized, the level of the moral life is elevated, society and state

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<sup>21</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 4, *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation* [hereafter: *RD 4*], ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 439-440.

are reformed, laws and institutions, morals and customs are made Christian [Dutch original: Christelijk gestempeld worden].<sup>22</sup>

The importance of this paragraph as a digest of Bavinck's understanding of the relationship between Christ and culture is difficult to exaggerate. For Bavinck, church and world, grace and nature, faith and reason, though *distinguishable*, are best understood as *integrated* in Christ Jesus.

As we know, Bavinck contended against various dualities by appealing to the overarching unity—especially the unity found in God himself—that integrates the truth concerns found on either side. “The entire Scripture proclaims the unity of God,” Bavinck declared in 1911, “which means, the unity of the God of nature and of the God of grace, and for that reason Scripture cannot dualistically separate creation and redemption, but always binds them together organically and harmoniously.”<sup>23</sup> His concern for the *unity that integrates duality* included his anthropology:

To divide [human] persons in two—like Rome and in part like the Lutherans—and to say that in the realm of the supernatural and spiritual they are incapable of any good but in the natural realm they can do things that are totally [*volkomen*] good is contrary to the unity of human nature, to the unity of the moral law, and to the teaching of Scriptures that humans must always be images of God, do everything they do to the glory of God, and always and everywhere love God with all their heart, mind, and strength.<sup>24</sup>

Bavinck's concern for this kind of unity included Reformed spirituality as well.

Observing that Bavinck refused to choose between faith and science, George

Harinck claims that

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<sup>22</sup> Bavinck, *RD* 4.437.

<sup>23</sup> H. Bavinck, *Modernisme en orthodoxie* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1911), 37: “Heel de Schrift predikt de eenheid Gods, dat is de eenheid van den God der natuur en van den God der genade, en kan daarom schepping en herschepping niet dualistisch scheiden, maar bindt ze altijd organisch en harmonisch saam.”

<sup>24</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 3, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 123.

All his theological work can be regarded as a refutation of the duality of faith and culture, which was, given his secessionist background, so familiar to him and for which a meeting with modern theology offered such an opportunity. This rejection of duality, which he knew from the Secession and from Leiden, was a decisive step in Bavinck's spiritual development and became characteristic of his Reformed spirituality.<sup>25</sup>

Harinck describes Bavinck's emphasis on the unity between faith and scholarship as "the *Leitmotiv* of Bavinck's life."<sup>26</sup> Such unity between Christianity and culture was rooted in the Christian confession of the one God, one Creator of all things and the one Redeemer. "This Redeemer not only shed his blood for people's sins, but also for all creation."<sup>27</sup>

### 3.3 The cosmic scope of God's work in Jesus Christ

Part of our disagreement with the portrait sketched by VanDrunen arises from the inadequate attention given to Bavinck's emphasis on the catholicity and integration of the Christian faith and life. Catholicity here is more than historical and geographical, but includes the cultural. As John Bolt has observed, "This emphasis upon catholicity becomes Bavinck's sword against all forms of dualism, that of Rome, of Luther, and that of Anabaptism and pietism. 'The gospel is a joyful proclamation,' wrote Bavinck, 'not only for the individual person but also for humanity in general, for family, and society, and state, for art and science, for the entire cosmos, for the whole groaning creation.'"<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> George Harinck, "Something That Must Remain, If the Truth Is to Be Sweet and Precious to Us": The Reformed Spirituality of Herman Bavinck," in *Calvin Theological Journal* 38 (2003): 252.

<sup>26</sup> Harinck, "Something That Must Remain," 254.

<sup>27</sup> Harinck, "Something That Must Remain," 255.

<sup>28</sup> H. Bavinck, "The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church," trans. John Bolt, in *Calvin Theological Journal* 27, no. 2 (1992): 220-51. Dutch original: "Het Evangelie is eene blijde boodschap voor den enkelen mensch niet slechts, maar ook voor de menscheid, voor

At the same time, it is precisely this catholicity and integration of the Christian faith and life that marks an important difference between Calvin and Luther, and the deficiency of the latter. Bavinck wrote:

Just like Zwingli and Calvin, so too Luther set life in the world free from the realm of the church, but for the rest he abandoned that life to stand alongside the spiritual, speaking occasionally as if external human existence is wholly indifferent and incapable of moral renewal. Luther's mistake was that he restricted the gospel and reduced the grace of God. For him, the gospel changes only the internal, the attitude, the heart, but all the rest remains unaffected until the last day. So here dualism is not entirely vanquished; at this point the true and full catholicity of Christianity is not reached. Redemption remains positioned alongside creation.<sup>29</sup>

Permit one more citation from Bavinck that clarifies the important differences among the Reformers, and explains the genuine catholicity of Calvinism:

Calvin investigated the dynamic of sin more broadly than Luther and more deeply than Zwingli. For that reason the grace of God is more limited with Luther and more impoverished with Zwingli than with Calvin. Here in the mighty spirit of the French Reformer, redemption is not a supplement to creation, as with Rome, nor a religious reformation that leaves the creation intact, as with Luther, far less a brand new creation, as with the Anabaptists, but a joyous message of renewal unto all creatures. Here the gospel comes into its fullness, unto its genuine catholicity. Nothing exists that cannot and should not be evangelized. Not just the church, but also the home and the school, society and the state are placed under the dominion of the Christian principle; and with iron will and irrepressible stubbornness Calvin introduced that dominion to Geneva. So the German Reformation was a reformation of worship and preaching, the Swiss Reformation additionally a renewal of state and society; the one bore an exclusively cultic character, the other an equally social and political character. Everything flows forth from the fact that

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het gezin en de maatschappij en den staat, voor kunst en voor wetenschap, voor den ganschen kosmos, voor heel het zuchtend creatuur" (*De Katholiciteit van Christendom en Kerk*, 11).

<sup>29</sup> Dutch original: "Luther maakt dus het wereldlijke wel, evenals Zwingli en Calvijn, vrij van het kerkelijke, maar hij laat het verder los naast het geestelijke staan en spreekt soms alsof het uitwendige geheel onverschillig is en voor zedelijke vernieuwing niet vatbaar. De fout ligt daarin, dat Luther het Evangelie beperkt en de genade Gods verkleint. Het Evangelie verandert alleen het inwendige, het gemoed, het hart, maar al het andere blijft zoo tot den jongsten dag. Het dualisme wordt hier dus niet geheel overwonnen; tot de ware volle katholiciteit van het Christendom komt het hier niet. De herschepping blijft naast de schepping staan" (*De Katholiciteit van Christendom en Kerk*, 31).

for Luther the Bible is only the source of redemptive truth, whereas for Calvin the Bible is the norm for all of life.<sup>30</sup>

#### 4. **The integration of the Christian's spiritual pilgrimage and cultural participation**

We conclude with some thoughts about the relationship between pilgrimage and participation.

The biblical-theological grounding of our living as Christians in the world should be the cultural mandate as fulfilled in the finished work of Christ as the Last Adam. In this connection, Dr. VanDrunen is correct to warn us of the toxin of triumphalism arising from an over-realized eschatology that sees our efforts as establishing and ushering in the kingdom of God. There is another danger, however, this one equally toxic, namely, ingratitude arising from an *under-realized eschatology that refuses to extend the Third Use of the Law beyond personal ethics into social-cultural relationships*, an ingratitude that quarantines the active rule of King Jesus, and communal principled response to it, to the church parking lot.

I share Dr. VanDrunen's appreciation for the biblical image of Christians as pilgrims. The status of pilgrim should not be viewed, however, as an

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<sup>30</sup> Bavinck, *De Katholiciteit van Christendom en Kerk*, 32: "Calvijn heeft de werking der zonde breeder dan Luther, dieper dan Zwingli nagespeurd. Maar daarom is de genade Gods bij Luther ook beperkter, bij Zwingli armer dan bij Calvijn. Hier in den machtigen geest van den franschen Hervormer, is de herschepping niet een stelsel, dat de schepping aanvult als bij Rome, niet eene godsdienstige hervorming die de schepping intact laat als bij Luther, veel minder eene nieuwe schepping als bij de Wederdoopers, maar eene blijde boodschap van vernieuwing aan alle creaturen. Hier komt het Evangelie tot zijn volle recht, tot waarachtige katholiciteit. Niets is er dat niet geëvangeliiseerd kan en behoort te worden. Niet de kerk alleen, ook het huis en de school, de maatschappij en de staat worden onder de heerschappij van het christelijk beginsel gesteld; en met ijzeren wil en onverbidde gestrengheid heeft Calvijn die heerschappij te Geneve ingevoerd. De Duitse Reformatie was daarom eene hervorming van godsdienst en predikambt, de Zwitsersche eene vernieuwing ook van staat en maatschappij; gene droeg een uitsluitend godsdienstig, deze evenzeer een sociaal en politiek karakter. Alles gevolg daarvan, dat de Bijbel voor Luther alleen bron is van de heilswaarheid, voor Calvijn de norma van geheel het leven."

*alternative* to Christian cultural participation, but rather as the *mode* of Christian cultural engagement. It is precisely as pilgrims that we seek and pray for the coming of God’s kingdom already here and now. Our seeking the kingdom of God, Jesus taught, is already here and now accompanied by the gifts of eating, drinking, and clothing. If we may—indeed, must—seek God’s kingdom as we enjoy food, why not as we plant the seed and farm the ground that supplies our food? Why would we not seek God’s kingdom as we market and package and ship our food? Everything we do—all our eating, drinking, buying, selling, marrying, childrearing, educating, entertaining, burying—must be directed to the glory of God. Our orientation toward the future need not paralyze our responsible cultivating of creation in the present. The church fills the time between Christ’s ascension and Christ’s return with preaching and teaching the gospel *together with all of its consequences for living in this world*. Such gospel preaching and teaching necessarily, and thankfully, bears fruit also for Christian cultural activity.

Finally, we must take note, with respect to eschatological world renewal, that Bavinck takes a Scriptural position between the two extremes of the permanent continuation of the world in its present form, and of the annihilation of this world’s substance and its replacement with a brand new world (Origen, the Lutherans, Socinians, Remonstrants, and some Reformed). Redemption, writes Bavinck, “is never a second, brand-new creation but a re-creation of the existing world.”<sup>31</sup> “All that is true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, and commendable in the whole of creation, in heaven and on earth, is

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<sup>31</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4.717.



gathered up in the future city of God—renewed, re-created, boosted to its highest glory.”<sup>32</sup>

**Summary:** As we encounter Bavinck’s constant emphasis on the present and future integration and restoration of all of created reality in Christ Jesus, and as we review his own application of theology to life in the areas of women’s suffrage, statecraft, pedagogy, and psychology, we may not fail to honor both his struggle and his achievement. But more than that, as together we reflect on whatever weaknesses and strengths that Bavinck’s thought and life exhibited, we may not refuse to give thanks to Bavinck’s Savior and Lord, even Jesus Christ.

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**Addendum #1: Were there really “two Bavincks”?**

In his discussion of the North American reception of Herman Bavinck’s work,<sup>33</sup> John Bolt begins with the “annoying acknowledgment” (his words) “that there is not just one but rather *two* Bavincks.”<sup>34</sup> Presumably, Bavinck #1 was a son of the Secession, loyal to the piety and orthodoxy of the church of his youth, yet critical of its cultural asceticism; whereas Bavinck #2 was a restless student of modernity, enamored of the problematics that had surfaced in contemporary philosophy and theology, yet critical of their answers. Bolt’s

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<sup>32</sup> Bavinck, *RD* 4.720.

<sup>33</sup> John Bolt, “Grand Rapids Between Kampen and Amsterdam: Herman Bavinck’s Reception and Influence in North America,” in *Calvin Theological Journal* 38 (2003): 263-80.

<sup>34</sup> Bolt, “Grand Rapids,” 264-65.

conclusion at this point rests on the analysis of Dutch writers like A. Anema, G. C. Berkouwer, and J. Veenhof—all of whom identify the “tensions” and the “polarities” in Bavinck’s theology and experience, but none of whom (including Bolt) elevates these, as VanDrunen does, to the level of two inconsistent and incoherent Bavincks.

To buttress his claim that there were “two Bavincks,” Dr. Bolt cites the observation of Dutch theologian G. C. Berkouwer, and footnotes the Dutch original, as to how people with radically opposing agendas had annexed (appealed to) Bavinck’s theology in defense of their own views. In his essay, Bolt observes how

Berkouwer judges that it is difficult to overcome this danger [of annexing Bavinck to their cause] “because Bavinck’s theology contains so many *irreconcilable* themes in tension.”<sup>35</sup>

A careful look at what Berkouwer wrote will disclose, however, that he was not talking about the danger of *others with opposing views* appealing to Bavinck, but rather about the danger that *Berkouwer himself* faced. Here is the full original citation from Berkouwer in Dutch:

Het gevaar van een beschrijving en beoordeling van Bavincks levenswerk is, dat men hem annexeert voor eigen inzichten. Het is echter [this word omitted from Bolt’s citation] niet onmogelijk boven dat annexatie-gevaar uit te komen, doordat in het werk van Bavinck allerlei onweersprekelijke motieven zichtbaar worden.

Rather than Bolt’s rendering of Berkouwer’s claim to the effect that

“. . . Bavinck’s theology contains so many irreconcilable themes in tension,” a

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<sup>35</sup> Bolt, “Grand Rapids,” 265, note 6 (italics added): “Het gevaar van een beschrijving en beoordeling van Bavincks levenswerk is, dat men hem annexeert voor eigen inzichten. Het is echter [omitted from Bolt’s citation] niet onmogelijk boven dat annexatie-gevaar uit te komen, doordat [sic] in het werk van Bavinck allerlei *onweersprekelijke* motieven zichtbaar worden.’ G. C. Berkouwer, *Zoeken en Vinden: Herinneringen en Ervaringen* (Kampen: Kok, 1989), 55.

more accurate rendering of the Dutch original would be this: “The danger present in describing and evaluating Bavinck’s life-work is that one might annex him for one’s own insights. *It is, however, not impossible to escape that annexation-danger, since various undeniable themes become manifest in Bavinck’s work*” (italics and underline added).

We must make two exegetical comments here. First, the Dutch word *onweersprekelijke* means “un-contradict-able” or “not able to be spoken against”—hence *undeniable*. Second, within its own context, Berkouwer’s point is that the danger of *wresting* Bavinck’s thought in defense of opposing viewpoints can be avoided if we both acknowledge and respect the presence in Bavinck of *various* undeniable themes. In other words, respecting the *coherence* of Bavinck’s own thought will prevent us from succumbing to the danger embedded in the popular approach of isolating and identifying one’s own point of view with one or another “strand” in Bavinck—a danger that was not altogether avoided, regrettably, in VanDrunen’s conference paper.

In summary, although one can identify various “tensions” within the thought of Herman Bavinck (as one can for every theologian, including John Calvin!), this is inadequate warrant for the claim that there existed “two Bavincks,” i.e., two irreconcilable strands of thought within Bavinck’s theology.

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## **Addendum #2: What about “Christian” schools and “Christian” art?**

In the context of an academic presentation of one’s insights, it can easily happen that substantive claims get buried in footnotes. Lest this happen with a number of important claims made by VanDrunen but relegated to footnotes, let us examine one of them a bit more fully.

In seeking to explain Bavinck’s distinction between the authority God has given to the church and the authority God has given to the state, VanDrunen properly points to Bavinck’s warning that civil government should not usurp jurisdiction that God has not entrusted to it. This comment is accompanied by a footnote containing the following (dvd-10):

E.g., Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4.370. In my judgment, Bavinck’s use of language here about a “Christian government” and similar terms is confusing. If [civil government proceeds from] the Son as Logos, through the work of common, preserving grace, rather than from the Son as Christ, through the work of special, redemptive grace, then *ascribing the language of “Christian” to the state, even when civil authority is exercised by Christians in a just manner, is a confusion of categories*. A similar dynamic and confusion, again in my judgment, occurs in the work of Abraham Kuyper; . . . [italics added, ndk].

If Bavinck’s language about “Christian government” involves a confusion of categories for the reasons given by VanDrunen (a claim with which we disagree), one may validly infer from VanDrunen’s argument that the same confusion attends the language of Bavinck and Kuyper with respect to “Christian education” and “Christian art” and “Christian science.”

As far as I understand the contemporary advocacy of this recent version of “the two kingdoms doctrine,” it is precisely this “pay off” involving the rejection of the century-long neo-Calvinist heritage among Reformed and Presbyterian believers that should form an important concern among these folk

about the implications of this particular version of “the two kingdoms doctrine.”

Perhaps Bavinck’s heirs today could be shown how, if the language of “Christian government” is a confusion of categories, Reformed and Presbyterian believers can continue speaking of “Christian schooling” and “Christian art” and “Christian science.” Given VanDrunen’s analysis, are not these phrases also a confusion of categories?

Further, if the language about “Christian” government, education, art, and science constitutes a confusion of categories, perhaps those advocating this recent version of “the two kingdoms doctrine” might serve the Reformed Christian community by clarifying their disagreement with *the worldview undergirding the establishment and support of “Christian schools” around the world, a Reformed Christian world-and-life-view that for more than a century has been nourished precisely by this allegedly “confusing language” of Kuyper and Bavinck.*