

REFORMED DOGMATICS



Herman Bavinck (1854–1921)
Graphite Sketch by Erik G. Lubbers

REFORMED DOGMATICS

VOLUME 4: HOLY SPIRIT, CHURCH,
AND NEW CREATION

HERMAN BAVINCK

JOHN BOLT, GENERAL EDITOR
JOHN VRIEND, TRANSLATOR


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To the memory of
Robert G. den Dulk
1937–2007

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

This, the fourth and final full volume of Herman Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* in English translation prepared by the Dutch Reformed Translation Society, represents the culmination of a twelve-year project. Prior to the first full volume on prolegomena, published by Baker Academic in 2003,¹ the second on God and creation in 2004,² and the third on sin and salvation in Christ in 2006,³ two half-volume works—one on the eschatology section of volume 4⁴ and the other on the creation section of volume 2⁵—were published. The present volume includes the chapters published in the single volume on eschatology (appearing here as chs. 12–18) as well as material on the Holy Spirit and Spirit-led renewal, the church and sacraments, and the new creation—material never before available in the English language. This volume thus provides additional insight into the genius of Bavinck's theology. We will briefly consider these new dimensions and their contemporary relevance later in this introduction, but first, a few words about the author of *Reformed Dogmatics*. Who was Herman Bavinck, and why is this work of theology so important?

Herman Bavinck's *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*,⁶ first published one hundred years ago, represents the concluding high point of some four centuries of remarkably

1. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003).

2. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004).

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

4. Herman Bavinck, *The Last Things: Hope for This World and the Next*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996). This volume presents the second half of volume 4 of the *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*.

5. Herman Bavinck, *In the Beginning: Foundations of Creation Theology*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999). This volume presents the second half of volume 2 of the *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*.

6. Kampen: Bos, 1895–1901.

productive Dutch Reformed theological reflection. From Bavinck's numerous citations of key Dutch Reformed theologians such as Voetius, De Moor, Vitringa, van Mastricht, Witsius, and Walaeus (as well as the important Leiden *Synopsis purioris theologiae*),⁷ it is clear that he knew that tradition well and claimed it as his own. At the same time it also needs to be noted that Bavinck was not simply a chronicler of his own church's past teaching. He seriously engaged other theological traditions, notably the Roman Catholic and the modern liberal Protestant ones, effectively mined the church fathers and great medieval thinkers, and placed his own distinct neo-Calvinist stamp on the *Reformed Dogmatics*.

KAMPEN AND LEIDEN

To understand the distinct Bavinck flavor, a brief historical orientation is necessary. Herman Bavinck was born on December 13, 1854. His father was an influential minister in the Dutch Christian Reformed Church (Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk) that had seceded from the National Reformed Church in the Netherlands twenty years earlier.⁸ The secession of 1834 was in the first place a protest against the state control of the Dutch Reformed Church; it also tapped into a long and rich tradition of ecclesiastical dissent on matters of doctrine, liturgy, and spirituality as well as polity. In particular, mention needs to be made here of the Dutch equivalent to English Puritanism, the so-called Second Reformation (*Nadere Reformatie*),⁹ the influential seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century movement of experiential Reformed theology and spirituality,¹⁰ as well as an early-nineteenth-century international, aristocratic, evangelical revival movement known as the *Réveil*.¹¹ Bavinck's church, his family, and his own spirituality were thus definitively shaped by strong patterns of deep pietistic Reformed spirituality. It

7. The Leiden *Synopsis*, first published in 1625, is a large manual of Reformed doctrine as it was defined by the Synod of Dort. Well into the twentieth century it served as a standard reference textbook for the study of Reformed theology. (It is even cited by Karl Barth in his *Church Dogmatics*.) As an original-source reference work of classic Dutch Reformed theology, it is comparable to Heinrich Heppe's nineteenth-century, more broadly continental anthology *Reformed Dogmatics: Set Out and Illustrated from the Sources*, rev. and ed. Ernst Bizer, trans. G. T. Thomson (London: Allen & Unwin, 1950; reprinted, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1978). While serving as the minister of a Christian Reformed church in Franeker, Friesland, Bavinck edited the sixth and final edition of this handbook, which was published in 1881.

8. For a brief description of the background and character of the Secession Church, see James D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), ch. 1: "Secession and Its Tangents."

9. See Joel R. Beeke, "The Dutch Second Reformation (*Nadere Reformatie*)," *Calvin Theological Journal* 28 (1993): 298–327.

10. The crowning theological achievement of the *Nadere Reformatie* is the devout and theologically rich work of Wilhelmus à Brakel, *Redelijke godsdienst*, first published in 1700 and frequently thereafter (including twenty Dutch editions in the eighteenth century alone!). This work is now available in English translation (ET): *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, trans. B. Elshout, 4 vols. (Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1992–95).

11. The standard work on the *Réveil* is M. Elisabeth Kluit, *Het Protestantse Réveil in Nederland en daarbuiten, 1815–1865* (Amsterdam and Paris, 1970). Bratt also gives a brief summary in *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America*, 10–13.

is also important to note that though the earlier phases of Dutch pietism affirmed orthodox Reformed theology and were also nonseparatist in their ecclesiology, by the mid-nineteenth century the Seceder group had become significantly separatist and sectarian in outlook.¹²

The second major influence on Bavinck's thought comes from the period of his theological training at the University of Leiden. The Christian Reformed Church had its own theological seminary, the Kampen Theological School, established in 1854. Bavinck, after studying at Kampen for one year (1873–74), indicated his desire to study with the University of Leiden's theological faculty, a faculty renowned for its aggressively modernist, "scientific" approach to theology.¹³ His church community, including his parents, was stunned by this decision, which Bavinck explained as a desire "to become acquainted with the modern theology firsthand" and to receive "a more scientific training than the Theological School is presently able to provide."¹⁴ The Leiden experience gave rise to what Bavinck perceived as the tension in his life between his commitment to orthodox theology and spirituality and his desire to understand and appreciate what he could about the modern world, including its worldview and culture. A telling and poignant entry in his personal journal at the beginning of his study period at Leiden (September 23, 1874) indicates his concern about being faithful to the faith he had publicly professed in the Christian Reformed Church of Zwolle in March of that same year: "Will I remain standing [in the faith]? God grant it."¹⁵ Upon completion of his doctoral work at Leiden in 1880, Bavinck candidly acknowledged the spiritual impoverishment that Leiden had cost him: "Leiden has benefited me in many ways: I hope always to acknowledge that gratefully. But it has also greatly impoverished me, robbed me, not only of much ballast (for which I am happy), but also of much that I recently, especially when I preach, recognize as vital for my own spiritual life."¹⁶

It is thus not unfair to characterize Bavinck as a man between two worlds. One of his contemporaries once described Bavinck as "a Secession preacher and a rep-

12. Bavinck himself called attention to this in his Kampen rectoral oration of 1888, when he complained that the Seceder emigration to America was a spiritual withdrawal and abandonment of "the Fatherland as lost to unbelief" ("The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church," trans. John Bolt, *Calvin Theological Journal* 27 [1992]: 246). Recent historical scholarship, however, suggests that this note of separatism and cultural alienation must not be exaggerated. Though clearly a marginalized community in the Netherlands, the Seceders were not indifferent to educational, social, and political responsibilities. See John Bolt, "Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Dutch Reformed Church and Theology: A Review Article," *Calvin Theological Journal* 28 (1993): 434–42.

13. For an overview of the major schools of Dutch Reformed theology in the nineteenth century, see James Hutton MacKay, *Religious Thought in Holland during the Nineteenth Century* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1911). For more detailed discussion of the "modernist" school, see K. H. Roessingh, *De moderne theologie in Nederland: Hare voorbereiding en eerste periode* (Groningen: Van der Kamp, 1915); Eldred C. Vanderlaan, *Protestant Modernism in Holland* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1924).

14. R. H. Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck en zijn tijdgenoten* (Kampen: Kok, 1966), 20; cf. V. Hepp, *Dr. Herman Bavinck* (Amsterdam: W. Ten Have, 1921), 30.

15. Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck en zijn tijdgenoten*, 19.

16. Hepp, *Dr. Herman Bavinck*, 84.

representative of modern culture,” concluding: “That was a striking characteristic. In that duality is found Bavinck’s significance. That duality is also a reflection of the tension—at times crisis—in Bavinck’s life. In many respects it is a simple matter to be a preacher in the Secession Church, and, in a certain sense, it is also not that difficult to be a modern person. But in no way is it a simple matter to be the one as well as the other.”¹⁷ However, it is not necessary to rely only on the testimony of others. Bavinck summarizes this tension in his own thought clearly in an essay on the great nineteenth-century liberal Protestant theologian Albrecht Ritschl:

Therefore, whereas salvation in Christ was formerly considered primarily a means to separate man from sin and the world, to prepare him for heavenly blessedness and to cause him to enjoy undisturbed fellowship with God there, Ritschl posits the very opposite relationship: the purpose of salvation is precisely to enable a person, once he is freed from the oppressive feeling of sin and lives in the awareness of being a child of God, to exercise his earthly vocation and fulfill his moral purpose in this world. The antithesis, therefore, is fairly sharp: on the one side, a Christian life that considers the highest goal, now and hereafter, to be the contemplation of God and fellowship with him, and for that reason (always being more or less hostile to the riches of an earthly life) is in danger of falling into monasticism and asceticism, pietism and mysticism; but on the side of Ritschl, a Christian life that considers its highest goal to be the kingdom of God, that is, the moral obligation of mankind, and for that reason (always being more or less adverse to the withdrawal into solitude and quiet communion with God), is in danger of degenerating into a cold Pelagianism and an unfeeling moralism. *Personally, I do not yet see any way of combining the two points of view, but I do know that there is much that is excellent in both, and that both contain undeniable truth.*¹⁸

A certain tension in Bavinck’s thought—between the claims of modernity, particularly its this-worldly, scientific orientation, and Reformed pietist orthodoxy’s tendency to stand aloof from modern culture—continues to play a role even in his mature theology expressed in the *Reformed Dogmatics*. In his eschatology Bavinck in a highly nuanced way still continues to speak favorably of certain emphases in a Ritschlian this-worldly perspective.¹⁹

17. Cited by Jan Veenhof, *Revelatie en Inspiratie* (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 1968), 108. The contemporary cited is the Reformed jurist A. Anema, who was a colleague of Bavinck at the Free University of Amsterdam. A similar assessment of Bavinck as a man between two poles is given by F. H. von Meyenfeldt, “Prof. Dr. Herman Bavinck: 1854–1954,” *Christus en de Cultuur*, “*Polemias* 9 (October 15, 1954); and G. W. Brillenburg-Würth, “Bavincks Levenstrijd,” *Gereformeerde Weekblad* 10.25 (December 17, 1954).

18. Herman Bavinck, “De Theologie van Albrecht Ritschl,” *Theologische Studiën* 6 (1888): 397; cited by Veenhof, *Revelatie en Inspiratie*, 346–47, emphasis added by Veenhof. Kenneth Kirk contends that this tension, which he characterizes as one between “rigorism” and “humanism,” is a fundamental conflict in the history of Christian ethics from the outset. See K. Kirk, *The Vision of God* (London: Longmans, Green, 1931), 7–8.

19. See below, 721 (#578; = *Last Things*, 161). According to Bavinck, Ritschl’s this-worldliness “stands for an important truth” over against what he calls the “abstract supernaturalism of the Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic Church.”

In the section on the doctrine of creation in volume 2 (chs. 8–14), we see the tension repeatedly in Bavinck's relentless efforts to understand and, where he finds appropriate, either to affirm, correct, or repudiate modern scientific claims in light of scriptural and Christian teaching.²⁰ Bavinck takes modern philosophy (Kant, Schelling, Hegel), Darwin, and the claims of geological and biological science seriously but never uncritically. His willingness as a theologian to engage modern thought and science seriously is a hallmark of his exemplary work. It goes without saying that though Bavinck's theological framework remains a valuable guide for contemporary readers, many of the specific scientific issues he addresses in this volume are dated by his own late nineteenth-century context. As Bavinck's own work illustrates so well, today's Reformed theologians and scientists learn from his example not by reprinting but by fresh address to new and contemporary challenges.

GRACE AND NATURE

It is therefore too simple merely to characterize Bavinck as a man trapped between two apparently incommensurate tugs at his soul, that of otherworldly pietism and this-worldly modernism. His heart and mind sought a trinitarian synthesis of Christianity and culture, a Christian worldview that incorporated what was best and true in both pietism and modernism, while above all honoring the theological and confessional richness of the Reformed tradition dating from Calvin. After commenting on the breakdown of the great medieval synthesis and the need for contemporary Christians to acquiesce in that breakdown, Bavinck expressed his hope for a new and better synthesis: "In this situation, the hope is not unfounded that a synthesis is possible between Christianity and culture, however antagonistic they may presently stand over against each other. If God has truly come to us in Christ, and is, in this age too, the Preserver and Ruler of all things, such a synthesis is not only possible but also necessary and shall surely be effected in its own time."²¹ Bavinck found the vehicle for such an attempted synthesis in the trinitarian worldview of Dutch neo-Calvinism and became, along with neo-Calvinism's visionary pioneer Abraham Kuyper,²² one of its chief and most respected spokesmen as well as its premier theologian.

Unlike Bavinck, Abraham Kuyper grew up in the National Reformed Church of the Netherlands in a congenially moderate-modernist context. Kuyper's student years, also at Leiden, confirmed him in his modernist orientation until a series of experiences, especially during his years as a parish minister, brought about a dramatic conversion to Reformed, Calvinist orthodoxy.²³ From that time

20. Bavinck, *In the Beginning*, passim (= *Reformed Dogmatics*, II, 407–619 [##250–306]).

21. Herman Bavinck, *Het Christendom*, Groote Godsdiensten 2.7 (Baarn: Hollandia, 1912), 60.

22. For a brief overview, see J. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America*, ch. 2: "Abraham Kuyper and Neo-Calvinism."

23. Kuyper chronicles these experiences in a revealing autobiographical work titled *Confidentie* (Amsterdam: Höveker, 1873). A rich portrait of the young Abraham Kuyper is given by G. Puchinger, *Abraham Kuyper: De*

Kuyper became a vigorous opponent of the modern spirit in church and society²⁴—which he characterized by the siren call of the French Revolution, “Ni Dieu! Ni maitre!”²⁵—seeking every avenue to oppose it with an alternative worldview, or as he called it, the “life-system” of Calvinism:

From the first, therefore, I have always said to myself, “If the battle is to be fought with honor and with a hope of victory, then principle must be arrayed against principle; then it must be felt that in Modernism the vast energy of an all-embracing life-system assails us, then also it must be understood that we have to take our stand in a life-system of equally comprehensive and far-reaching power. . . . When thus taken, I found and confessed and I still hold, that this manifestation of the Christian principle is given us in Calvinism. In Calvinism my heart has found rest. From Calvinism have I drawn the inspiration firmly and resolutely to take my stand in the thick of this great conflict of principles.”²⁶

Kuyper’s aggressive this-worldly form of Calvinism was rooted in a trinitarian theological vision. The “dominating principle” of Calvinism, he contended, “was not soteriologically, justification by faith, but in the widest sense cosmologically, the Sovereignty of the Triune God over the whole Cosmos, in all its spheres and kingdoms, visible and invisible.”²⁷

For Kuyper, this fundamental principle of divine sovereignty led to four important derivatory and related doctrines or principles: common grace, antithesis, sphere sovereignty, and the distinction between the church as institution and the church as organism. The doctrine of common grace²⁸ is based on the conviction that prior to and, to a certain extent, independent of the particular sovereignty of divine grace in

Jonge Kuyper (1837–1867) (Franeker: T. Wever, 1987). See also the somewhat hagiographic biography by Frank Vandenberg, *Abraham Kuyper* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960); and the more theologically and historically substantive one by Louis Praamsma, *Let Christ Be King: Reflection on the Times and Life of Abraham Kuyper* (Jordan Station, ON: Paideia, 1985). Brief accounts can also be found in Benjamin B. Warfield’s introduction to Abraham Kuyper, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology: Its Principles*, trans. J. H. De Vries (New York: Charles Scribner’s, 1898); and in the translator’s biographical note in Abraham Kuyper, *To Be Near to God*, trans. J. H. De Vries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1925).

24. See especially his famous address *Het modernisme, een Fata Morgana op Christelijke gebied* (Amsterdam: De Hoogh, 1871). On page 52 of this work he acknowledges that he, too, once dreamed the dreams of modernism. This important essay is now available in J. Bratt, ed., *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 87–124.

25. Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931), 10.

26. *Ibid.*, 11–12.

27. *Ibid.*, 79.

28. Kuyper’s own position is developed in his *De gemeene gratie*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam and Pretoria: Höveker & Wormser, 1902). A thorough examination of Kuyper’s views can be found in S. U. Zuidema, “Common Grace and Christian Action in Abraham Kuyper,” in *Communication and Confrontation* (Toronto: Wedge, 1971), 52–105. Cf. J. Ridderbos, *De theologische cultuurbeschouwing van Abraham Kuyper* (Kampen: Kok, 1947). The doctrine of common grace has been much debated among conservative Dutch Reformed folk in the Netherlands and the United States, tragically leading to church divisions. For an overview of the doctrine in the Reformed tradition, see H. Kuiper, *Calvin on Common Grace* (Goes: Oostebaun & Le Cointre, 1928).

redemption, there is a universal divine sovereignty in creation and providence, restraining the effects of sin and bestowing general gifts on all people, thus making human society and culture possible even among the unredeemed. Cultural life is rooted in creation and common grace and thus has a life of its own apart from the church.

This same insight is expressed more directly via the notion of sphere sovereignty. Kuyper was opposed to all Anabaptist and ascetic Christian versions of world flight but was also equally opposed to the medieval Roman Catholic synthesis of culture and church. The various spheres of human activity—family, education, business, science, art—do not derive their *raison d'être* and the shape of their life from redemption or from the church, but from the law of God the Creator. They are thus relatively autonomous—also from the interference of the state—and are directly responsible to God.²⁹ In this regard Kuyper clearly distinguished two different understandings of the church: the church as institution gathered around the Word and sacraments, and the church as organism diversely spread out in the manifold vocations of life. It is not explicitly as members of the institutional church but as members of the body of Christ, organized in Christian communal activity (schools, political parties, labor unions, institutions of mercy) that believers live out their earthly vocations. Though aggressively this-worldly, Kuyper was an avowed and articulate opponent of the *volkskerk* tradition, which tended to merge national sociocultural identity with that of a theocratic church ideal.³⁰

To state this differently: Kuyper's emphasis on common grace, used polemically to motivate pious, orthodox Dutch Reformed Christians to Christian social, political, and cultural activity, must never be seen in isolation from his equally strong emphasis on the spiritual antithesis. The regenerating work of the Holy Spirit breaks humanity in two and creates, according to Kuyper, "two kinds of consciousness, that of the regenerate and the unregenerate; and these two cannot be identical." Furthermore, these "two kinds of people" will develop "two kinds of science." The conflict in the scientific enterprise is not between science and faith but between "two scientific systems, . . . each having its own faith."³¹

It is here in this trinitarian, world-affirming, but nonetheless resolutely anti-theological Calvinism that Bavinck found the resources to bring some unity to his thought.³² "The thoughtful person," he notes, "places the doctrine of the Trinity

29. "In this independent character a special *higher authority* is of necessity involved and this highest authority we intentionally call *sovereignty in the individual social sphere*, in order that it may be sharply and decidedly expressed that these different developments of social life have *nothing above themselves but God*, and that the state cannot intrude here, and has nothing to command in their domain" (*Lectures on Calvinism*, 91).

30. On Kuyper's ecclesiology, see H. Zwaansra, "Abraham Kuyper's Conception of the Church," *Calvin Theological Journal* 9 (1974): 149–81; on his attitude toward the *volkskerk* tradition, see H. J. Langman, *Kuyper en de volkskerk* (Kampen: Kok, 1950).

31. Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 133; cf. *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology*, 150–82. A helpful discussion of Kuyper's view of science is given by Del Ratzsch, "Abraham Kuyper's Philosophy of Science," *Calvin Theological Journal* 27 (1992): 277–303.

32. The relation between Bavinck and Kuyper, including differences as well as commonalities, is discussed in greater detail in John Bolt, "The Imitation of Christ Theme in the Cultural-Ethical Ideal of Herman Bavinck"

in the very center of the full-orbed life of nature and mankind. . . . The mind of the Christian is not satisfied until every form of existence has been referred to the triune God and until the confession of the Trinity has received the place of prominence in all our life and thought."³³ Repeatedly in his writings Bavinck defines the essence of the Christian religion in a trinitarian, creation-affirming way. A typical formulation: "The essence of the Christian religion consists in this, that the creation of the Father, devastated by sin, is restored in the death of the Son of God, and re-created by the Holy Spirit into a kingdom of God."³⁴ Put more simply, the fundamental theme that shapes Bavinck's entire theology is the trinitarian idea that grace restores nature.³⁵

The evidence for "grace restores nature" being the fundamental defining and shaping theme of Bavinck's theology is not hard to find. In an important address on common grace given in 1888 at the Kampen Theological School, Bavinck sought to impress on his Christian Reformed audience the importance of Christian sociocultural activity. He appealed to the doctrine of creation, insisting that its diversity is not removed by redemption but cleansed. "Grace does not remain outside or above or beside nature but rather permeates and wholly renews it. And thus nature, reborn by grace, will be brought to its highest revelation. That situation will again return in which we serve God freely and happily, without compulsion or fear, simply out of love, and in harmony with our true nature. That is the genuine *religio naturalis*." In other words: "Christianity does not introduce a single substantial foreign element into the creation. It creates no new cosmos but rather makes the cosmos new. It restores what was corrupted by sin. It atones the guilty and cures what is sick; the wounded it heals."³⁶

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND RENEWAL

The title of this volume is *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, and its divisions point to the Spirit's work in the renewal of the Christian person, the community of the church, and finally the renewal of all things. The title reflects the importance of noting the pneumatological cast of Bavinck's strong emphasis on creation, a not-always-recognized significant feature of Reformed thought more generally. In the creation section of volume 2 (chs. 8–14) we see how Bavinck's

(PhD diss., University of St. Michael's College, Toronto, 1982), especially ch. 3: "Herman Bavinck as a Neo-Calvinist Thinker."

33. Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*, trans. W. Hendriksen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 329 (= *Reformed Dogmatics*, II, 329–34 [#231]).

34. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, I, 112 (#35).

35. This is the conclusion of Veenhof, *Revelatie en Inspiratie*, 346; and Eugene Heideman, *The Relation of Revelation and Reason in E. Brunner and H. Bavinck* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1959), 191, 195. See below, 697n5 (#572; = *Last Things*, 200n4).

36. Herman Bavinck, "Common Grace," trans. Raymond Van Leeuwen, *Calvin Theological Journal* 24 (1989): 59–60, 61.

doctrine of creation served as a key starting place for his theology.³⁷ It does this because Bavinck is convinced that the doctrine of creation is the starting point and distinguishing characteristic of true religion. Creation is the formulation of human dependence on a God who is distinct from the creature but who nonetheless in a loving, fatherly way preserves it. Creation is a distinct emphasis of the Reformed tradition according to Bavinck, a way of affirming that God's will is its origin and God's glory its goal. Creation thus is the presupposition of all religion and morality, especially Christian teaching about the image of God in all human beings.

Yet, of course, the truth of the Christian religion cannot be known through creation. A special revelation of God's grace is essential for knowing what our dilemma is and what our misery consists of as human beings (our sin), and how we are to be delivered from it (salvation). As we see in volume 3, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, so too in this volume Bavinck's theology is a profoundly biblical theology. Bavinck once again reveals himself to be a careful student of Holy Scripture, one whose very thought patterns are shaped by those of the Bible. However, as he often does, Bavinck surprises us with the wide range of his knowledge by linking the Holy Spirit's application of Christ's work to the larger context of the Triune God's purposes in creation.

Now, the same attention to the doctrine of creation characterizes this final volume in Bavinck's theological system. The final goal of God's redemptive work in Jesus Christ is the new creation, the new heaven and the new earth. Yet he also avoids the latent universalism of contemporary emphases on salvation as renewal of creation by maintaining a clear antithesis between life in the service of sin that leads to eternal punishment and life lived before the gracious face of God. There is a wonderful scriptural reserve evident in Bavinck; he is open to a wide embrace of God's mercy (see #579) but always insists that we must bow to Scripture's testimony and be silent on matters not directly addressed, such as the thorny pastoral issues of salvation of pagans and children who die in infancy. Committed to neo-Calvinism's program of cultural engagement, he was nonetheless cautious about triumphalism and keenly attuned to the prospect of apostasy and cultural decline in the West. While strong in his affirmation of the earthly, life-affirming, bodily character of Christian hope, he is also true to his pietist roots when he insists that a this-worldly hope alone is inadequate. The goal of all Christian longing is eternal fellowship with God.

Not only does the renewing work of the Holy Spirit undergird the cosmic vision of the new heaven and the new earth; Bavinck's theological structure also affirms the same about the new birth in Christ. Consider the opening sentence of this volume: "God produces both creation and new creation by his Word and Spirit." The Protestant emphasis on the proclaimed Word is not enough; genuine rebirth by means of the Holy Spirit must take place. Furthermore, spiritual

37. See "Editor's Introduction," in Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, II, 19–21.

rebirth is like natural life in that it must be nourished in order to grow (#449). And, in true Calvinian fashion, Bavinck insists that forensic justification imputed to us as a benefit of Christ's obedience, while foundational and essential, is not enough. Salvation is to make us holy; the Holy Spirit who unites us with Christ in his death also raises us to newness of life. That Holy Spirit is the guarantee and pledge of our full deliverance, our glorious destiny when we his children will see God face to face.

Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* is biblically and confessionally faithful, pastorally sensitive, challenging, and still relevant. Bavinck's life and thought reflect a serious effort to be pious, orthodox, and thoroughly contemporary. To pietists fearful of the modern world on the one hand and to critics of orthodoxy skeptical about its continuing relevance on the other, Bavinck's example suggests a model answer: an engaging trinitarian vision of Christian discipleship in God's world.

In conclusion, I add a few words about the editing decisions that govern this translated volume, which is based on the second, expanded edition of the *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*.³⁸ The eighteen chapters of this volume correspond to thirteen in the original. The three major divisions of the eschatology section (part 3) were originally three chapters in the Dutch; from that material we have created seven distinct chapters. In addition, all subdivisions and headings are new. The latter along with the chapter synopses, which are also not in the original, have been supplied by the editor. Bavinck's original footnotes have all been retained and brought up to contemporary bibliographic standards. Additional notes added by the editor are clearly marked. Works from the nineteenth century to the present are noted, usually with full bibliographic information given on first occurrence in each chapter and with subsequent references abbreviated. Classic works produced prior to the nineteenth century (the church fathers, Aquinas's *Summa*, Calvin's *Institutes*, post-Reformation Protestant and Catholic works), for which there are often numerous editions, are cited only by author, title, and standard notation of sections. More complete information for the originals, or accessible editions, is given in the bibliography appearing at the end of this volume. Where English translations (ET) of foreign titles were available and could be consulted, they have been used rather than the originals. Unless indicated in the note by direct reference to a specific translation, renderings of Latin, Greek, German, and French material are those of the translator working from Bavinck's original text. References in the notes and bibliography that are incomplete or unconfirmed are marked with an asterisk (*). To facilitate comparison with the Dutch original, this English edition retains the subparagraph numbers (##433–580 in square brackets in the text) used in the Dutch edition. Cross-references cite the page numbers of the translated volumes of *Reformed Dogmatics*, but include the

38. The four volumes of the first edition of *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* were published in the years 1895 through 1901. The second revised and expanded edition appeared between 1906 and 1911; the third edition, unaltered from the second, in 1918; the fourth, unaltered except for different pagination, in 1928.

subparagraph numbers (marked with #) of *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* to facilitate cross-reference to any of the Dutch editions. When no volume number is given, the cross-reference can be assumed to be to the present volume. The notes appearing in *The Last Things* have been updated and corrected in chapters 12–18 of this volume, as has the bibliography.