



PHILOSOPHY
of REVELATION

A New Annotated Ed.

Herman Bavinck

Editors: Cory Brock and
Nathaniel Gray Sutanto

Foreword by
James P. Eglinton

“While Bavinck’s lectures, *Philosophy of Revelation*, are a hundred years old, they are as timely as ever. Bavinck speaks to questions that continue to challenge us and revisits the core of Christian conviction: that God has revealed himself—that we have a Word from beyond the immanent frame we’ve constructed. And in this new edition, Brock and Sutanto highlight Bavinck’s influence on contemporary philosophers and his enduring relevance. Bavinck deserves a wider, ecumenical audience, and this volume is an excellent introduction.”

—James K. A. Smith, professor of philosophy, Calvin College,
and author of *Desiring the Kingdom and How (Not) to Be Secular*

“The fundamental question human beings face has not changed over the millennia: Do we find our meaning in something transcendent, or do we construct our own meaning from that which is immanent? Over recent centuries, this question has become more complicated, as one philosophical critique after another has claimed that the traditional Christian ideas of God and revelation are implausible or even incoherent. That question and these critiques lie at the heart of Herman Bavinck’s *Philosophy of Revelation*, in which the great Dutch theologian mounts a positive articulation and careful defense of the Christian idea of revelation in the face of its most pointed intellectual critics. With helpful introductory essays by James Eglinton and two rising stars in the world of Bavinck studies, this new edition of the Stone Lectures is a gift to the church. While the lectures were given over a century ago, they have a contemporary ring because the issues with which they wrestle remain with us. They offer the Christian today a model of intelligent, informed, and courteous engagement with opponents and a lasting contribution to orthodox theology.”

—Carl R. Trueman, Professor of Biblical and Religious Studies
Grove City College, Pennsylvania

“The ongoing second coming of Herman Bavinck’s works, originally written a century ago, remains a cause for celebration. First there was *Reformed Dogmatics*, and now we have what is arguably Bavinck’s second-most important work on the centrality of revelation for a Christian worldview. Bavinck deserves to be ranked among the great theological *B*’s of the twentieth century—Barth, Brunner, and Bultmann—but this work is of more than historical significance. Christian theologians today continue to negotiate the narrow orthodox path through the broad avenues of modernity, and Bavinck’s firm grasp of the necessity of revelation for knowing not only God but also the world and ourselves makes him a reliable guide.”

—Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Research Professor of Systematic Theology
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

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of **REVELATION**

A New Annotated Edition

PHILOSOPHY *of* REVELATION

A New Annotated Edition

Herman Bavinck

*Adapted and Expanded from the 1908 Stone Lectures
Presented at Princeton Theological Seminary*

Edited and Introduced by Cory Brock & Nathaniel Gray Sutanto

Foreword by James P. Eglinton



Philosophy of Revelation: A New Annotated Edition

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FOREWORD

This new edition of Herman Bavinck's *Philosophy of Revelation*, carefully revised by Cory Brock and Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, is a timely publication. In the century since the book's first appearance, the heyday of late modern Western culture—when supremely confident human knowers went about their task of grasping a comprehensible, orderly world—has run its course and given birth to a new age. In the present day, cultural natives find the Western world as an altogether more chaotic, discordant place. It is a scene of profound and painful social divisions—class-based, political, cultural, racial, and generational, among others—where imaginings of the past and visions of the future jostle endlessly to nobody's great satisfaction.

Against that backdrop, the great questions at the heart of *Philosophy of Revelation* remain pertinent, albeit taking on a twenty-first-century flavor: How should we understand the world and our place within it? Is such an understanding even possible, given the dampened epistemological self-confidence that pervades twenty-first-century Western culture? What of the Dawkinsesque claim that the natural sciences are the best—or perhaps the only reliable—way to understand the cosmos and all that is found therein? Should we expect the natural sciences to provide a rich and satisfying account of life in its entirety? In an era where revived populist nationalisms set themselves against liberal progressivism, how ought we to understand the existence and development of human culture in this world? Is progress self-evidently good or inevitable? Are “progress” and “regress” in any sense useful terms? In that light, is it possible to think meaningfully about either history or the future? Why, despite the dire prognosis afforded to religion in the late nineteenth century, does religiosity remain the norm rather than the exception across human cultures in the present day? (And from this, the supremely Christian concern remains: What is the significance of Jesus Christ in the West's current cultural iteration?)

In this book, Herman Bavinck advances an argument of stark consequence for present-day readers: namely, that the deep issues undergirding these questions (an account of humanity and the world, God, history and progress, science, and the power of religion) must be answered to our satisfaction if our lives are to be well lived. Should we fail to do so, Bavinck's logic implies, we will remain locked in the existential and intellectual ennui that marks our

secularized age. This implication flows from Bavinck's belief that the search for all knowledge is, at heart, a ceaseless effort to understand the relationship between God, humans, and the world—an undertaking that necessitates and births the aforementioned questions.

God, the world, and humanity are the three realities with which all science and all philosophy occupy themselves. The conception which we form of them, and the relation in which we place them to one another, determine the character of our view of the world and of life, the content of our religion, science and morality. (70)

For Bavinck, to ignore any of these—or to treat them as unanswerable, as is assumed by some streams of twenty-first-century thought—is inherently existentially unsatisfying. To do so is to neglect the greatness of the human spirit, which longs for a satisfying knowledge of who God is, who we are, and how we should exist in this world.

How did Bavinck direct his early twentieth-century readers in answering these questions? Where were they to begin in search of a satisfying knowledge of the world and their place in it? This book is an extended argument for the necessity of *revelation* in making sense of life in the world, and God, to our own satisfaction. Echoing the classically Augustinian desire to know both God and self, Bavinck argues that our search for a fulfilling knowledge of ourselves and our world must begin with God's own knowledge of himself. As God knows himself perfectly and fully, and finds this self-knowledge to be delightful, God chooses to share it in an act of self-disclosure. God *reveals* what would otherwise have remained a mystery to us: the love, infinity, simplicity, glory, perfection, complexity, and unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

For Bavinck, this process of revelation should be viewed along two lines. *Generally*, God is revealed in the origin and ongoing existence of the universe itself. The cosmos is a *general* revelation of God. Macro- and microcosmically, the world itself “makes known to us the power of [God's] mind” (25). Alongside this, God also practices another form of self-disclosure, which Bavinck sees as *special* revelation. This form of revelation, which centers on God as made known in Jesus Christ, functions as “a disclosure of the greatness of God's heart” (25). We can know that our Creator loves us, because he tells us so quite explicitly.

In both forms of revelation, Bavinck believed that God reserves the exclusive right to define himself and his actions, to grant purpose to the universe, and to tell us who we are. For Bavinck, this knowledge is indispensable to the human quest for existential and intellectual satisfaction. A twenty-first-century reader might ask: What about those who profess no belief in God? How does Bavinck's assertion relate to those whose worldview is founded on naturalism,

and who want to answer the great questions of life without recourse to the supernatural? Might it not be possible to develop satisfying answers to these questions by starting (and concluding) with ourselves and our world, rather than beginning with a seemingly abstract and distant notion like God's knowledge of himself?

To this, Bavinck responds that all people live out a functional, if not intentional, dependence on God's self-revelation. This leads Bavinck to portray life lived in denial (or ignorance) of the reality of divine self-disclosure as necessarily fractured, in contrast to the blessed life that acknowledges revelation. No one, Bavinck argues, lives consistently with the idea that there is nothing beyond the natural world and that revelation from the outside is an utter impossibility. Rather, those who profess the creeds of strict atheism and naturalism nonetheless live out a *de facto* reliance on the reality of revelation. "Humanity, no less than formerly, continues to live and think after a supernaturalistic fashion" (17). However, while most people approach the great questions of God, the self, and the world in ways that assume (rather than deny) the reality of revelation, fewer consider the importance of revelation deeply enough to render their experience of life as beautiful in its coherence. In that light, this book should be read as a search for the good life. It is a pursuit of that which will satisfy heart and mind, conscience, and will.

This bold argumentation, of course, was first aired in early twentieth-century America by a cultural native of mid-nineteenth-century Europe. In the course of the twentieth century, Bavinck's claims generally failed to receive the attention merited by their audacity and nuance. Thanks to the editorial work of Doctors Brock and Sutanto, two of the most exciting figures in a new generation of Bavinck interpreters, those claims are now being brought to bear on the particular intellectual and social conditions of the twenty-first century—an era that, for its own reasons, also struggles to lay claim on the good life. For this investment of their theological, historical, and linguistic skills and dedication, Brock and Sutanto have each written outstanding doctoral dissertations on Bavinck, read his work in Dutch, and possess exceptional knowledge of his intellectual milieu. We are much in their debt.

Dr. James P. Eglinton
Meldrum Lecturer in Reformed Theology
University of Edinburgh
April 2018

PREFACE TO THE ANNOTATED EDITION

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in Herman Bavinck studies. Herman Bavinck (1854–1921), the chief dogmatician of the neo-Calvinist movement in the Netherlands, inaugurated a new era of theological reflection—an era of rapprochement between confessional orthodoxy and modernity that was an alternative to liberal Protestantism as well as to conservative biblicism. With the translation of his magnum opus, the four-volume *Reformed Dogmatics*,¹ and numerous other essays from Baker’s compilation of his studies on religion, society, and science,² to the Hendrickson edited volume of Bavinck’s works on preaching, translated by James Eglinton,³ there is indeed ever-growing exposure to Bavinck’s primary sources today in the Anglophone world.

These newer studies have propelled reevaluations of the prior English scholarship on Bavinck. While older studies have tended toward identifying Bavinck with one brand of his sources—whether classical or modern, pitting one against the other—it is only recently that a more holistic picture of Bavinck has emerged. This new edition of *Philosophy of Revelation* hopes to contribute toward that end: an understanding of Bavinck on his own terms through the republication of a significant work that is somewhat neglected in his corpus. Written several years after his *Reformed Dogmatics*, an understanding of *Philosophy of Revelation* (hereafter cited in the text as *PoR*) will prove invaluable to reshaping and deepening one’s reading of the *Dogmatics* in particular and of his thinking in general. Indeed, *PoR* constitutes the mature Bavinck on issues pertaining to revelation, philosophy, epistemology, and ontology. Bavinck offers to the contemporary reader the most substantial alternative amid modern theologies of the twentieth century and particularly the neo-Orthodox movement, especially represented by the theology of Karl Barth. *PoR*, Bavinck’s most

1. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003–08) (hereafter cited in the text as *RD*).

2. Herman Bavinck, *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, ed. John Bolt, trans. Harry Boonstra and Gerrit Sheeres (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

3. James P. Eglinton, ed., *Herman Bavinck on Preaching and Preachers* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2017).

important work after the *Dogmatics*, is critical for understanding the completion of Bavinck's thought.

An annotated edition is necessary, because Bavinck's epistemology and metaphysics particularly have commanded a considerable degree of attention.⁴ Moreover, Bavinck's epistemology and conception of revelation have proved influential to several strands of scholarship inspired by neo-Calvinism. Three are worth mentioning.

The first, and by far the most influential, is the Reformed epistemology of Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff. Characterizing Bavinck as a "proto-Reformed epistemologist,"⁵ Plantinga and Wolterstorff draw from Bavinck's emphasis on Christianity as a starting point for epistemological reflection. To them, Christian belief is warranted in much the same way as perceptual, memorial, and testimonial beliefs are. Beliefs about God are properly basic beliefs and as such are warranted prior to argumentation. This is so not simply because one must take beliefs for granted in our ordinary living, but because the alternative, classical foundationalism, erects criteria that are much too restrictive for beliefs to be held rationally. Christian philosophers and theologians, then, should be free to utilize Christian starting points in their intellectual projects, positively utilizing resources from revelation in order to formulate answers in

4. Henk Van Den Belt, *The Authority of Scripture in Reformed Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 229–300; K. Scott Oliphint, "Bavinck's Realism, the Logos Principle, and *Sola Scriptura*," *Westminster Theological Journal* 72 (2010): 359–90; Michael S. Chen, "To See Darkness, To Hear Silence': Herman Bavinck and Augustine on Epistemology," *The Bavinck Review* 2 (2011): 96–106; David S. Sytsma, "Herman Bavinck's Thomistic Epistemology: The Argument and Sources of His Principia of Science," in *Five Studies in the Thought of Herman Bavinck: A Creator of Modern Dutch Theology*, ed. John Bolt (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2011), 1–56; Steven J. Duby, "Working with the Grain of Nature: Epistemic Underpinnings for Christian Witness in the Theology of Herman Bavinck," *The Bavinck Review* 3 (2012): 60–84; Bruce Pass, "Herman Bavinck and the *Cogito*," *Reformed Theological Review* 74, no.1 (2015): 15–33; Bruce Pass, "Herman Bavinck and the Problem of New Wine in Old Wineskins," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 17, no. 4 (2015): 432–49; Arvin Vos, "Knowledge According to Bavinck and Aquinas," *The Bavinck Review* 6 (2015): 9–36; Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, "Herman Bavinck and Thomas Reid on Perception and Knowing God," *Harvard Theological Review* 111 (2018): 115–34; Cory Brock and Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, "Herman Bavinck's Reformed Eclecticism: On Catholicity, Consciousness, and Theological Epistemology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* no. 3 (2017): 310–32.

5. The main places where Wolterstorff and Plantinga explicitly invoke Bavinck are in Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Herman Bavinck—Proto-Reformed Epistemologist," *Calvin Theological Journal* 45 (2010): 133–46; and "Reason and Belief in God," in Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, eds., *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 64–65. John Bolt acknowledges this in an editor's note in *RD* 1.590n73.

response to intellectual problems. While the Bavinckian contours of Reformed epistemology had been drawn almost exclusively from Bavinck's *Dogmatics*, investigating it with the light of *PoR* in hand will be generative.

The second trajectory follows the reformational philosophy of Herman Dooyeweerd (1894–1977), who was professor of law at the Free University of Amsterdam. While Dooyeweerd is critical of Bavinck and Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) in several respects, he remains conscious of his dependence on them in developing a distinctly Christian vision of social thought and philosophy.⁶ Inheriting the sensitivity against all forms of dualism in thought and worldview, Dooyeweerd keeps both modal aspects and ground-motifs together in his reformational philosophy, while emphasizing the phenomenological character of faith and revelation. Rereading Dooyeweerd's critical reflections and appropriation of Bavinck in the light of *PoR* will also prove illuminating, especially as publications in this line of scholarship have remained vigorous in recent years.⁷

Third, *PoR* will help generate greater understanding of various theologians in the American Reformed context. The dissemination of Bavinck's work in America was mediated earlier through the likes of Louis Berkhof (whose *Systematic Theology* was heavily dependent on Bavinck's own),⁸ Geerhardus Vos, Cornelius Van Til, and most recently by theologians such as Richard B. Gaffin Jr., Michael S. Horton, John Bolt, and philosophical theologians such as James K. A. Smith.⁹ Exposure to and a fresh reading of *PoR* might reinstate a deeper

6. See esp. Herman Dooyeweerd, "Kuypers wetenschapsleer," *Philosophia Reformata* 4 (1939): 193–232. For the English translation, see Herman Dooyeweerd, "Kuyper's Philosophy of Science," in *On Kuyper: A Collection of Readings on the Life, Work, and Legacy of Abraham Kuyper*, ed. Steve Bishop and John H. Kok, trans. D. F. M. Strauss (Sioux Center, IA: Dordt University Press, 2013), 153–78.

7. See, for example, Jonathan Chaplin, *Herman Dooyeweerd: Christian Philosopher of State and Civil Society* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011); Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen, *Christian Philosophy: A Systematic and Narrative Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013).

8. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

9. Citations to or assuming the ongoing validity and relevance of Bavinck's works are ubiquitous in the works of these thinkers. See, for example, James K. A. Smith, *Awaiting the Kingdom: Reforming Public Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), a chapter of which was delivered at Kampen Theological University's annual Bavinck lecture; Michael S. Horton, *Rediscovering the Holy Spirit: God's Perfecting Presence in Creation, Redemption, and Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017); John Bolt, *Bavinck on the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016); "Doubting Reformational Anti-Thomism," in *Aquinas Among the Protestants*, ed. Manfred Svensson and David VanDrunen (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 129–47. Geerhardus Vos, *Redemptive-History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard Gaffin (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001), 59–90. Cornelius Van Til writes: "I had tried to work out Kuyper's *Calvinism*, Bavinck's *Philosophy of Revelation* and

understanding of Bavinck's reception in North American Reformed theology, in which Bavinck's thinking is often positively deployed but at times in mutually contradictory ways.

Finally, we hope that this edition will facilitate a greater comprehension of Bavinck's concepts of revelation and reality with respect to its relation to other theologically modern trajectories regarding the same. Relevant here is Friedrich Schleiermacher, who identified the immediate consciousness of self as correlative with God-consciousness in the feeling of absolute dependence.¹⁰ One thinks also of the work of Karl Rahner, who articulated revelation as a "transcendental experience," producing an "unthematic" knowledge of God,¹¹ or, more recently, of Jean-Luc Marion's idea of revelation as a primordial "given."¹²

Stoker's *Philosophy of the Christian Idea* with increasing depth and breadth." in "Herman Dooyeweerd and Reformed Apologetics," *The Westminster Theological Journal* (Philadelphia: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1972): 3.43. Cf. Cornelius Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 2nd ed., ed. K. Scott Oliphint (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2015), 67–68; James D. Baird, "Analogical Knowledge: A Systematic Interpretation of Cornelius Van Til's Theological Epistemology," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 26 (2015): 93–94. On the key differences between Van Til and Dooyeweerd, see K. Scott Oliphint, "Jerusalem and Athens Revisited," *Westminster Theological Journal* 49 (1987): 65–90. The influence of Kuyper and Bavinck on Van Til is widely recognized but is specifically highlighted by James Eglinton: "The likes of Geerhardus Vos, Louis Berkhof and Cornelius Van Til stand out in this regard [as those who mediated Bavinck to the English-speaking world]." In *Trinity and Organism: Towards a New Reading of Herman Bavinck's Organic Motif*, T&T Clark Studies in Systematic Theology (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2014), 2. James Bratt also highlights this in his "Reformed Theology in America," in *Cambridge Companion to Reformed Theology*, ed. David Fergusson and Paul Nimmo (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 282. See also Brian G. Mattson, "Van Til on Bavinck: An Assessment," *Westminster Theological Journal* 70 (2008): 127; and William Edgar, foreword to K. Scott Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics: Principles and Practice* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 17.

10. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith: A New Translation and Critical Edition*, ed. Catherine L. Kelsey and Terrence N. Tice, trans. Terrence N. Tice, Catherine L. Kelsey, and Edwina Lawler (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2016), §4.2; §32–33. In Herman Bavinck, *Beginnselen der Psychologie* (Kampen: Bos, 1897), 53–4. Bavinck summarizes Schleiermacher as follows: "Schleiermacher . . . defined feeling as the immediate self-consciousness, wherein the subject, before all thinking and willing himself, becomes conscious of his own being and thereupon simultaneously his absolute dependence on God." Dutch original: "Schleiermacher . . . omschreef het gevoel als het onmiddellijke zelfbewustzijn, waarin de mensch vóór alle denken en willen zichzelf, zijn eigen zijn, en daarin tegelijk zijne volstreekte afhankelijkheid van God bewust wordt."

11. Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1978), 21.

12. Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002); *Givenness & Revelation*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

Herman Bavinck adhered to the classical Reformed understanding of general revelation, and thus that God reveals himself objectively through nature and the moral order available to the human consciousness. On the objective side, rational agents “get to know things because they exist and after they come into existence . . . from the world to God.”¹³ On the other hand, he argued that the objective side of revelation required a corresponding subjective side. This included affirming the classical understanding that humans are born equipped with the apparatus required to reason properly to true claims about God: “We possess both the capacity (aptitude, faculty) and the inclination (*habitus*, disposition) to arrive at some firm, certain, and unfailing knowledge of God.”¹⁴ But more so in the subjective side of revelation, Bavinck also affirmed that God reveals himself primordially and internally, arguing that there is an “interior impact of revelation upon [human] consciousness”¹⁵ that “precedes” both the implanted and acquired knowledge of God.¹⁶

It is this “revelatory pressure”¹⁷ on which Bavinck expands and further clarifies in his *PoR*, which conceptually links Bavinck to other precognitive accounts of revelation on offer in the more recent presentations of revelation noted above. In the third chapter of *PoR*, for example, Bavinck argues that God’s revelation takes place “before all thinking and willing,” in the “feeling of dependence” and in the locus of “self-consciousness” (57, 59). It is in these senses (in the precognitive, immediate, and prepredicative) that general revelation is characterized in *PoR* regarding its subjective element. Grasping this might open new avenues and insights into Bavinck’s doctrine of revelation through comparison with other conceptions on offer in the twentieth century and beyond.

Our hope is that students and scholars would be motivated to read Bavinck afresh, and that this new edition would be a stimulus toward that end.

13. Bavinck, *RD* 2.69.

14. *RD* 2.71.

15. *RD* 2.72.

16. *RD* 2.73.

17. *RD* 2.73.

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This project would not have come to fruition without the help of many. We thank Greg Parker Jr. for exhorting us to work on this project and for taking it to Hendrickson Publishers; his commitment and enthusiasm for Bavinck's work fueled the impetus and completion of this task. We would also like to thank Patricia Anders at Hendrickson for overseeing the project, and James Eglinton, who graciously provided the foreword.

We had worked on our doctoral theses together at Edinburgh under James's supervision, and it was during those many conversations at New College that the idea sparked of publishing an annotated edition of Bavinck's *Philosophy of Revelation*. Taking up this task, however, was not merely a labor of love. Bavinck's lectures here are characterized by all the features that mark his works in a way we think will continue to nourish the church and academy: broadness of mind, rigorous research, a winsome kind of Reformed theological reasoning, and a charitable and penetrative interaction with all of his interlocutors. That this work has been neglected in the Anglophone world seems to us a great loss—not merely for grasping the whole of Bavinck's thought, but also for the vitality of the church's heart and mind in the contemporary world.

We are also thankful for the support and enthusiasm of many of our friends at New College: Cam Clausing, Bruce Pass, Andrew Ong, Zachary Purvis, Joshua Ralston, and Andrew Johnson, for their ongoing support of the project. We are also grateful to Indita Probosutedjo and Greystone Theological Institute's Kristen Rice for some aid in forming the index. We are grateful, too, for some translation help from Marinus de Jong, Koos Taminga, and Guy Waters. George Harinck's and Robert Covolo's enthusiasm and insights were also helpful as we undertook this project.

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This project could not have been completed without their labor and attention during this time.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE ANNOTATED EDITION

Understanding *Philosophy of Revelation*¹

Every human being, Bavinck suggests just four years before *Philosophy of Revelation*, is confronted in life with a specific set of questions.

The problems that confront the human mind always return to these: what is the relation between thinking and being, between being and becoming, and between becoming and acting? What am I? What is the world and what is my place and task within this world?²

These are the questions of both philosophy and theology. At the head of these questions is the relation between human consciousness (feeling and thinking) and the embodied external (being and doing). Here begin the questions of an orientation Bavinck regularly refers to as a world- and lifeview, including the whole of the human person in all his or her faculties (3).³ Both philosophy and theology offer answers to this series using different and, for Bavinck, interdependent systems of classification.⁴

1. This section includes an alternate and edited version of material in Cory Brock, *Orthodox yet Modern: Herman Bavinck's Appropriation of Friedrich Schleiermacher* (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 2018).

2. Herman Bavinck, *Christelijke wereldbeschouwing* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1929), 14. “De problemen, waarvoor de menselijke geest altijd weer te staan komt, zijn deze: wat is de verhouding van denken en zijn, van zijn en worden, van worden en handelen? Wat ben ik, wat is de wereld en wat is in die wereldmijne plaats en mijn taak?”

3. Bavinck situates the entirety of reflection in *PoR* to the determination of world-view as defined by the answers to these questions, and he particularly narrows to the broad distinction between the naturalist/supernaturalist dichotomies.

4. This language is original to Nick Adams, “Hegel,” *Theology and Philosophy*, ed. Oliver Crisp, Gavin D’Costa, Mervyn Davies, and Peter Hampson (London: Bloomsbury / T&T Clark), 129–42.

Therefore, in 1908, he delivers simultaneously a philosophy of *revelation* and a *philosophy* of revelation.⁵ One can understand the genitive in either subjective or objective form. In the former, a philosophy of *revelation* is a “revelational philosophy,” in which the affirmation of revelation controls the method and contents of philosophical investigation. Bavinck never abandons the idea that the fact of revelation, God coming out of his hiddenness, is helpful for thinking about and acting in the world. The latter, a *philosophy* of revelation, is a philosophical study of the “where” and “how” of revelation. *PoR* is something of both. It is from the perspective of the fact of revelation (a fact derivative of the conclusions of dogmatics), from which Bavinck embarks on a philosophical investigation of the “how” of revelation in its relation to the human subject and the objective world. For Bavinck, any philosophy of revelation must be, to some degree, a “revelational philosophy” due to the necessity of assuming revelation when embarking on this investigation.⁶ Intending for this book to be read alongside his treatise on the Christian worldview, Bavinck elaborates on the implications of this in penetrating ways in *PoR* (ch. 1n61).⁷

PoR is also an apologetic, but its task is not to set forth a detailed defense of the “secret” of existence (revelation). For Bavinck, apologetics rather takes form in assuming faith and accepting the fact of revelation in the activity of disciplined thinking. Such an attempt is a defense as pronouncement:

With their faith [Christians] do not stand as isolated aliens in the midst of the world but find support for it in nature and history, in science and art, in society

5. The activity of the philosophy of revelation in general is a modern enterprise. Bavinck associates the development of the field to a post-Kantian need for philosophical treatments of revelation in antithesis to rationalism: “Yet it soon became evident that the theorists [of Enlightenment] had too swiftly dismissed revelation. Upon deeper historical and philosophical investigation, religion and revelation evinced a much closer kinship than they had thought under the sway of rationalism. Thus, in more modern theology and philosophy, the concept of revelation again regained some respectability, and various attempts at reconstruction were made. The critical philosophy of Kant led Fichte to undertake an inquiry into all revelation, which, though it modified the concept, nevertheless maintained its possibility” (*RD* 1.288).

6. The fact that Bavinck engaged in the project of *PoR* is a testimony to his relation to modern theology, as glimpsed in the previous footnote. Philosophies of revelation were an enterprise in the nineteenth and early twentieth century and, in distinction to premodern theology, such a focus on revelation as a locus was novel. Any concept of revelation, its defense, and expressions of its relation to other fields of cognition is both absent and assumed in theologies like that of Calvin.

7. “The present lectures elaborate in detail the fundamental ideas expressed by the author in an address on Christelijke Wereldbeschouwing, 1904.”

and state, in the heart and conscience of every human being. The Christian worldview alone, is one that fits the reality of the world and of life.⁸

The basic point is this: An investigation of the varied scientific domains unveils the reality of revelation, and thinking disciplined by attention to revelation makes intelligible many solutions in the domain of philosophical enquiry. *PoR* is participation in an assumed God-ward reality insofar as it examines revelation in and through its relation to the various arenas of human life. Those areas include philosophy in general, epistemology, metaphysics, nature, history, religion, experience, culture, society, and time.

Revelation here, in review of his dogmatic claims, refers first to the act of God *ad extra* to create and, in unfolding time, redeem. Such action is God's word set forth, *Deus dixit* ("God has spoken"). It is the concept that God has "come forward out of his hiddenness."⁹ For Bavinck, revelation includes both the Scriptures (*principium cognoscendi externum* of dogmatics) and God's self-manifestation in the created order. But *PoR* is written for the sake of a twofold task that includes first the conceptual expansion of the field of revelation. This project stems, he suggests, from the fact that "the old theology construed revelation after a quite external and mechanical fashion" (21). Old and unspecified theologians of the Reformed tradition, according to Bavinck, too readily associated revelation solely with the written text or with an object in general. An expansion, rather, includes the recognition of the unity of "revelation as a disclosure of the *mysterion tou theou* ["mystery of God"]. What neither nature nor history, neither mind nor heart, neither science nor art can teach us, [revelation] makes known to us (the fixed, unalterable will of God) . . . a will at variance with well-nigh the whole appearance of things" (23). It is, in other words, that "the secret of the universe" lies beyond the self-evident (as appearances) in "the secret of revelation," the will of God made manifest to the human consciousness.¹⁰

Revelation, then, for Bavinck, is organic. It is organic not simply because its shape and content form a unity-in-diversity, but because it too is the ground for all human culture and phenomena and is thus related to all of

8. *RD* 1.515.

9. *RD* 1.286.

10. For Bavinck, the self-evident is not only self-evident: "There are few things we comprehend . . . I comprehend, or think I comprehend, the things that are self-evident and perfectly natural. Often comprehension ceases to the degree that a person digs deeper into a subject. That which seemed self-evident proves to be absolutely extraordinary and amazing. The farther a science penetrates its object, the more it approaches mystery. Even if on its journey it encountered no other object it would still always be faced with the mystery of being" (*RD* 1.619).

creation.¹¹ Though Bavinck redefines the organic language he inherited from his nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophical counterparts by drawing from his Reformed orthodox roots, using it for his own purposes, it remains significant that Bavinck describes the organic developments made by the Romantics in his introductory section on the doctrine of revelation in a manner that closely resembles his own descriptions:

By contrast [to rationalism], Hamann, Claudius, Lavataer, Herder, Jacobi, and others placed more stress on the kinship between religion and art and thus associated revelation with the inspiration of genius. They expanded the concept of revelation to such an extent that almost everything seemed to originate from revelation: religion, poetry, philosophy, history, and language are all seen as expressions of the one and same original life. . . . And the person of Christ came to stand in the center of all those revelations: everything pointed to him, and everything revolved around him.¹²

The developments by the mediating theologies that followed them, then, resulted in a more “organic” account of revelation:

When we compare this newer concept of revelation with what was generally accepted before that time, we find that it is distinguished by the following features: (1) Special revelation, which is the basis of Christianity, is more organically conceived and more intimately connected in heart and conscience with general revelation in nature and history; (2) scholars adhering to the new concept attempt to understand special revelation itself as a historical process, not only in word but also in deed, both in prophecy and miracle, which then culminate in the person of Christ; (3) they view its content as existing exclusively or predominantly in religious-ethical truth, which aims primarily, not at teaching, but at moral amelioration, redemption from sin; and (4) they make a sharp distinction between the revelation that gradually took place in history and its documentation or description in Holy Scripture; the latter is not itself the revelation but only more or less accurate record of it.¹³

Significant differences remain between Bavinck’s organicism and the modern accounts he outlines in these two texts. Bavinck makes no disjunction between revelation and Scripture. Though revelation is not reducible to Scripture, Scripture is nonetheless the revealed word of God and the only means through which Christ, the Triune God’s will, and the history of redemption are known. To create a dichotomy between religious or christological truths that affect moral renovation and its supposedly nonessential, disposable (and potentially

11. See esp. Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*.

12. *RD* 1.289–90.

13. *RD* 1.291–92.

erroneous) historical claims is ironically to recapitulate the very mechanistic tendency that the mediating theologians wanted to reject in the first place.¹⁴ Scripture's historic, theological, and metaphysical claims have to be taken seriously as a single organic whole that possesses no contradictions with the truths revealed in the general studies of nature and history.

Nonetheless, the affinities are also clear. The holism with which Bavinck describes the Romantics marks his own thoughts: Christ is the center of revelation toward which all things point and from which all things flow. His first intention, though, is to universalize the search for revelation—to take it up to the enormity of the *universe* (a concept derivative of organic unity) in all its diversity and bring it all the way down into the inner self. Modern natural sciences and psychology have offered the opportunity of expanding the dimensions of existence, and with it so must the concept of God's immanent presence be coordinate. In this regard, Bavinck also unveils the fact of the *self*-evidence of revelation. At the center of *PoR* is his argument that the self is given in a revelatory act, or as a gift, in immediate self-consciousness. The basic premise of the unity of revelation is this:

The world itself rests on revelation; revelation is the presupposition, the foundation, [and] secret of all that exists in all its forms. The deeper science pushes its investigations, the more clearly will it discover that revelation underlies all created being. In every moment of time beats the pulse of eternity; every point in space is filled with the omnipresence of God. (24)

Revelation is the answer to the “how” of all unified relations, because that answer is the power of the word of God.

Revelation comes “to us” from everywhere into our consciousness, shining by its own light and “tells us” both its content and form. It is the “how” of revelation's movement that occupies the second purpose of *PoR*. Bavinck “trace[s] the idea of revelation both in its form and content and correlate[s] it with the rest of our knowledge and life” (22). The task is to associate the wisdom gained in the various fields of philosophy and science with the fact of revelation. It is an investigation of how it comes “to us” (awakening the consciousness), how it relates to all of human existence (in cognition and embodied action), and how it makes intelligible the unity of the arts and sciences. But above all, we ask how revelation speaks to the relation between consciousness and world, thinking and being, or the ideal and real. The answer to this question is found at the crossroads of the activity of revelation and the fact of the self, which is given in experience.

14. See the discussion in *RD* 1.415–48.

This path to an account of the real begins through consideration of the many problems of modern philosophy. He polemicizes against all philosophies that fail to satisfy the needs represented by the human heart in both its affective and intellectual demands.¹⁵ These include all philosophies that set themselves against religion (as love for God) and, by coextension, revelation.

The history of philosophy has been a history of systems that broke each other down and ended among the Greeks, in skepticism, in the Middle Ages in nominalism, and today among many in agnosticism. The truths most necessary to religion (the existence and essence of God; the origin and destiny of humanity and the world; sin and forgiveness; reward and punishment) have alternately been taught and combated. On all these issues, no adequate certainty can be obtained in philosophy. Cicero, therefore, correctly asks the question: “Does not every eminently competent and serious philosopher confess himself to be ignorant of many things and that—even more—there are still many things to be learned by him?”¹⁶

While there had been a day when philosophy and science blunted the sword of revelation with the rock of reason, and scientism seemed to have prophesied the future fall of religion, at the turn of the twentieth century Bavinck saw a renewed interest in things unseen.¹⁷ Both the academic and social imaginary were recovering from the materialisms of the late nineteenth century and they were, he supposed, rediscovering revelation and Hegel. Revelation holds a central place in the world. This the ancients knew, and this was the content of the awakening from the disenchanting death of the post-Darwinian nineteenth century as Bavinck read his times.

After the in-breaking of autonomy as a social order in the tenets of the Enlightenment, revolution, and the Darwinian turn, the expanding search for *how* revelation comes to us is a mark of the spirit of a renewed religious curiosity. The Romantic recovery of the inexhaustible “fullness of life” (in Goethe and Herder) was followed by a Romantic evolution in Hegel that proved too organic and teleological for the nineteenth century (10–11). After Marx and Darwin, “revelation could no longer be considered a possibility” (13). “Nevertheless, the

15. Per its scriptural use and as shown in chapter 3, Bavinck regularly uses the heart and subsequently both personality and consciousness as synonyms to describe the entire faculty range of the human “mind” (*geest*).

16. *RD* 1.313.

17. In 1904, he wrote, “A new generation has appeared, which has exchanged the insight that we have become so glorious with the insight that the unknowable and unrecognizable surrounds us on all sides. Besides, on the one hand, the pursued idolization of science and culture, there is on the other hand a reaching out to return to mystical idealism, to a vague belief in things unseen, which is influential in every field.” Herman Bavinck, *Christelijke Wereldbeschouwing* (Kampen: J. H. Bos, 1904), 7.

transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century witnessed an important change in this respect. The foremost investigators in the field of science have abandoned the attempt to explain all phenomena and events by mechanico-chemical causes” (13). Modern science has helped expand “our” conception of the universe, and it now helps theology advance the concept of the immensity of God in light of the enormity of the cosmos. Modern theology has helped us also see that one can no longer draw from Scripture in a mechanical fashion without recognizing the historical and psychological mediation, the organic development, of its authors and readers in their own milieu—that revelation in its near entirety is not dictation. Bavinck remarks that the spirit of the early twentieth century was open to the fact that God’s relation to the world is living and active: “God is not far from any one of us” (20). There was, therefore, an ever-blossoming emphasis on the immanence of God.

It is in this biblical concept of God’s closeness to his creation in the reality of revelation that Bavinck proceeds in his task to “trace the idea of revelation . . . to several spheres of the created universe.” He begins, accordingly, with the relations of God, humanity, and revelation by reflecting on the human awareness of self as self and its relation to the objective, real world. Other commentators have suggested that his turn to the self is a movement that started as early as 1892 on his first *reis naar Amerika* (“journey to America”). The second half of Bavinck’s life consisted of, George Harinck suggests, a movement “van buiten naar binnen” (“from without to within”).¹⁸ For Bavinck, *PoR* “registers the maturation of that approach,” argues James Bratt, “and documents its time in that ‘from without to within’ was the trademark of a revolution in elite culture that was underway across the North Atlantic world in the first decade of the twentieth century.”¹⁹ In Bavinck’s second *reis naar Amerika* at Princeton Theological Seminary, his turn to self participates in what Bratt calls the “new modernism.” This modernism stood in relative antithesis to other modern movements, such as positivism on the one hand and a mere drive for industrial development on the other. The new moderns, as Bratt describes, “perceived their mission” as the redemption and preservation of “the genuinely human against this modernization.”²⁰ The old modernists of the nineteenth century, Bavinck suggests using Weber, were “professionals without spirit” (ch. 10n64).

18. George Harinck, *Bavinck’s Mijne reis naar Amerika* (Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 1998). See also George Harinck, “‘Land dat ons verwondert en ons betoove:’ Bavinck en Amerika,” in *Ontmoetingen met Herman Bavinck*, ed. George Harinck and Gerrit Neven (Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 2006).

19. James Bratt, “The Context of Herman Bavinck’s Stone Lectures: Culture and Politics in 1908,” *The Bavinck Review* 1 (2010): 4–24.

20. Bratt, “The Context of Herman Bavinck’s Stone Lectures,” 14.

New modernism, however, fragmented itself from the accepted trajectories and developed various fields in creative fashion. Beginning in 1900, examples include Picasso, the invisible world of Planck, the death of metaphysics at the hands of Bertrand Russell in 1901, Husserl's idealism in 1903, and Einstein's discovery of the relativity of time in 1905.²¹ The spirit of this age was a participant in the creative sense of the early Romantic movements of the previous century. Bavinck enjoined aspects of this creative movement in repudiation of materialistic evolutionism, forms of monism, and scientific positivism that engendered an alternate Romanticism of the early twentieth century. He, nevertheless, wrote *PoR* to point the intellect and imagination toward a different *telos* than the fragmented ends the new moderns could offer. As Bratt summarizes:

Bavinck's typical cultural-modernist turn away from the masses toward peer professionals, fellow *cognoscenti*, gave him some margin for open exploration. But he would not stay open all the way. At the end, no matter how fragmented reality seemed to be, and how illuminating it could be to explore it as such in this vale of human relativity, *Bavinck was sure that it all cohered in God's absolute unity—and that human life could proceed only under that assurance.*²²

The changing social milieu, therefore, allowed Bavinck to mount a polemic on all mechanistic and positivistic conceptions of science and philosophy in order to offer an alternate solution to the problems philosophy had suffered throughout the nineteenth century—not simply a new *telos* but an eschatology. He began with the hermeneutical reassertion and nuance in the face of all positivistic methods that all cognition is restricted and does contain some contextual, subjective determinations:

The directions in which it is possible for our thinking to move are not nearly so numerous as we suppose or imagine. We are all determined in our thought and action by the peculiarity of our human nature, and then again by each one's own past and present, his character and environment. And it is not rare that those who seem to lead others are rather themselves led by them. (29)

It is not, for Bavinck, that humans cannot know the real—that the mind is cut off from the thing in itself in any strict sense—but that one cannot know truth absolutely. The world- and lifeview to which he so regularly refers is an orientation of the whole self, both in thought and action, reason and desire, toward an ultimate good, because of an origin narrative, making claims on daily life. He argued that all humans, accordingly, view the horizon of reality from one of three basic dispositions: materialism, humanism, or theism. And

21. For a wider list of the principal developments in this modernism from 1900 to 1915, see Bratt, "The Context of Herman Bavinck's Stone Lectures," 14–16.

22. Bratt, "The Context of Herman Bavinck's Stone Lectures," 21 (emphasis added).

in the modern philosophies these are reflected intellectually in movements such as evolutionary monism (materialism), transcendental idealism/pragmatism (humanism), and the philosophy of revelation (theism). Or, as he describes the latter in *RD* 1: “The worldview of Scripture and of all of Christian theology is a very different one. Its name is theism, not monism; its orientation is supernatural, not naturalistic.”²³ Any “worldview” outside of theism fails to account for “the unity of thinking and being” (the relation between consciousness and other) and therefore loses access to the real in any ontological account. The myopic inwardness of Kant and especially Fichte, for example, “is like the she-bear which draws all her nourishment from her own breasts and thus eats herself up, *ipsa alimenta sibi*” (52). These critiques, however, do not preclude Bavinck from incorporating the philosophical grammar of his intellectual contemporaries. Indeed, consistent with the irenic spirit displayed in his other writings, *PoR* showcases Bavinck’s critical appropriation of those outside of the orthodox Reformed tradition in a manner perhaps clearer than elsewhere. The reader will find him gleaning insights from Schleiermacher, Kant, and Eduard von Hartmann in these lectures, which go beyond mere synthesizing or demonizing.

All of these emphases—an investigation of the impact and nature of revelation, a response and apologetic to the challenge of modernity, and a working out of a philosophy that traces the implications of revelation while standing on its grounds—is the presentation of Bavinck’s conviction that Christian theism contains powerful resources with which to address every age. At the bottom, after all, he argued that there were two live options, two worldviews: “the theistic and the atheistic.”²⁴ Acknowledging the influence of James Orr, Bavinck’s *PoR* propels the importance of the best of worldview thinking, without isolating the intellect in neglect of the imagination.²⁵

A Note on the Text

Herman Bavinck delivered these lectures in the late autumn of 1908. In the *Princeton Theological Review*, about one month before the Stone Lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary, the editors published an introduction to

23. *RD* 1.368.

24. “Eigenlijk zijn er dus maar twee wereldbeschouwingen, de theistsche en de atheistsche,” Herman Bavinck, *Christelijke wereldbeschouwing*, 51.

25. See especially ch. 1n60, and his “Eene belangrijke apologie van de Christelijke wereldbeschouwing,” *Theologische Studiën* (1894), 142–52. See also Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 128–30.

Bavinck in order that the American audience would be familiar with him when he arrived. They introduced Bavinck accordingly:

During the present month, Dr. Bavinck is to deliver the [Stone Lectures]. The circumstance seems worthy of notice; and the occasion seems to call for some introduction of Professor Bavinck to his American audience. . . . By the scientific labor in which Professor Bavinck has been engaged for more than twenty-five years, he has taken an honourable place in the church and the theology of his country. His work has been recognized in different ways and on different occasions. Not only is he a member of various scientific societies, e.g., of the Royal Academy of Sciences at Amsterdam, but he has also been decorated by Her Majesty the Queen with the order of the Dutch Lion.²⁶

While in Amsterdam, Bavinck wrote the original lectures in Dutch in a series of notebooks, in which he arranged all ten lectures in the order he presented them. He offered an abridged and somewhat simplified version of only six of these at Princeton, as noted above, before publishing them in full afterwards. This visit to Princeton was his second trip to North America, his first being sixteen years prior in 1892.

Apparently, there is no precise indication of the number of those who attended the lectures at Princeton, but it is likely the audience was not very large. According to Valentijn Hepp, Americans packed the churches when Bavinck preached but the “scientific” lectures were not well attended. Although Hepp does indicate that the audience size for these lectures outside of Princeton increased throughout Bavinck’s North American tour as Bavinck made adjustments for his audience.²⁷

In his preface to the German publication of his lectures, translated by Hermann Cuntz, Bavinck states his hopes for them. As his *Christian Worldview* had been translated to German (though never English) and had been favorably received, he writes, “May these lectures also receive a favorable reception.” He states confidently that while many consider the concept of revelation to be antiquarian, it is indispensable for any unified “worldview” that seeks to include both nature and history. For that reason, he felt that this topic is both timely and one of “great interest.”²⁸

This primary text, as seen in the original preface, is an English translation of Bavinck’s Dutch writing from 1909. Geerhardus Vos and B. B. Warfield prepared the English manuscript, and Nicholas M. Steffens, Henry E. Dosker, and Vos (probably the primary) were the translators. That translation, which we

26. “Herman Bavinck,” *Princeton Theological Review* VI.4 (October 1908): 534–43.

27. Valentijn Hepp, *Dr. Herman Bavinck* (Amsterdam: W. Ten Have, 1921), 303–4.

28. Herman Bavinck, foreword to *Philosophie der Offenbarung*, trans. Hermann Cuntz (Heidelberg: Carl Winter’s Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1909), iii–ix.

have edited in this version of *PoR*, is of high quality and has served readers well. This annotated edition does, nevertheless, nuance, change, update, and add to that 1909 translation, as well as provide editorial and explanatory notes, indicated by “—Ed.” at the end of each editorial note, in distinction from Bavinck’s original footnotes, to facilitate greater comprehension of Bavinck’s text.

The first major difference to note is that there is a large quantity of changes to the translation that better render Bavinck’s text to English and on many occasions we added clauses that were entirely passed over. Second, the explanatory notes include explanations of key terms, references to other works (translated and untranslated in Bavinck) where he deals with the same subject matter to illumine his treatment. These notes also include translation issues and nuances and, where relevant or illuminating, references to archival material that reside in the Bavinck Archives at the Free University of Amsterdam.²⁹

To comment on some of the changes, as an example, many English translations of Bavinck’s texts (including this one originally) gloss over the fact that Bavinck regularly uses non-Dutch terminology within his Dutch syntax. German is by far the most common second language throughout his works, but he often writes in French and English as well. These are usually for the purpose of signaling influence or to mark a precise meaning of a concept taken from its original authorial source. Much of these non-Dutch terms were originally translated directly into English with no indication of the presence of, for example, a German term instead of Dutch, which is often highly specialized vocabulary. We have highlighted all these instances. Parentheses are used to indicate the original text’s use of these foreign terms as well as in-text translations.

Further, we have edited and updated every original footnote, corrected some that were misplaced, added clauses that were originally left out and taken away several that were added, highlighted some alternate translation choices, attempted to be more consistent with the translation of particular terms, updated some outdated vocabulary, and fixed the numerous misplaced paragraph breaks. Some of these changes are made obvious with brackets, parenthetical additions, and editorial notes, and some are not (that is, paragraph breaks and translation updates).

Finally, the reader will simultaneously notice the relevance of the text for the twenty-first century as well as its aged character. Bavinck’s work, as a philosophy of revelation, offers the reader in its broadest goals something of a perennial project. Nevertheless, Bavinck is deeply dependent throughout on scholarship and language that is outdated and has been surpassed. The reader must remember that, while this text is over a hundred years old now (and its

29. H. Bavinck Archive, no. 346, folder 141 (Amsterdam: Historische Documentatiecentrum).

aged character is expected), its relevance to us today remains astounding. As an exemplary method, his keen sensitivity to current events, his lucid predictions of the likely effects of eugenics and nationalism (for example) in the coming early to middle twentieth century, his ability to work with and present the latest research in all manner of sciences, and his corresponding catholic approach to locating truth wherever it can be found in a treatise devoted to the exposition of the fact of revelation, remain a primary example for the contemporary theologian and Christian thinker who strives to be both Reformed and catholic. It is for this style that many twenty-first-century readers continue to turn to Bavinck more and more as the greatest theologian of the modern era. But most importantly, Bavinck's argument has perennial value in all contexts despite its datedness. It stands because he provides here in great detail the reason why revelation must be the ground of all possibility—why God coming out of his hiddenness is a necessary postulate. While some of the particulars no longer apply, its unabashed claim for the theological foundations of reality, for ethics and art, for the natural and human sciences, and for everything else, makes it forever relevant as both a philosophical argument and model.

A Note on the Book Cover

A few words should be said about the Mondrian design that adorns this book. Piet Mondrian (1872–1944) grew up in the midst of the neo-Calvinist movement. Even though he left his Calvinist faith as an adult, his artwork continued to be shaped by this experience. Indeed, there are some interesting theological and historical resonances between Herman Bavinck and the painter. As Joseph Maschek argues, Mondrian retained a certain “religious footing” even while his art depicted what might be called a secular “utopian society,” observing that, in art, “once common religious values spilled over as it were into the secular realm.”³⁰ Hence, Mondrian wrote that as “the spiritual began to merge with the secular, it became more and more apparent that the spiritual did not reside in *religious* subject matter exclusively; otherwise, with the decline of religious subjects, all spirituality would have gone out.”³¹ One recognizes something of a parallel to Bavinck's *Philosophy of Revelation* here: revelation's impact spills into every realm of life, whether consciously or unconsciously.

30. Joseph Maschek, “A Christian Mondrian,” *The Bavinck Review* 6 (2015): 52; see also 37–72.

31. Piet Mondrian, *The New Art—The New Life: The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian*, ed. and trans. Harry Holtzman and Martin S. James (Boston: Hall, 1986), 81; cited in Maschek, “A Christian Mondrian,” 52 (emphasis original).

This desire to reveal that which is in plain sight is demonstrated in Mondrian's grid-based geometric abstractions, such as the design seen on the cover of this book. Mondrian's return to primary colors and straight lines display his desire to identify and distill the most basic relations of color and shape, which make all other visual forms possible. Through conjoining primary colors with straight vertical and horizontal lines, Mondrian exposes those elements that contain all other aesthetic relations. These "abstract icons" instantiated unalterable relations whereby we could see with new eyes that which was presupposed within more complex visual forms.³²

Similarly, Bavinck's focus on revelation as larger than one *loci* within theology—indeed, as the ground of not only theology but all of life—demonstrates Mondrian's impulse; namely, an overriding desire to return to the source that makes all theological reflection possible. Indeed, like Mondrian, Bavinck believed that once revelation was reclaimed as the unalterable source, it redirected the mind to vital tasks. Revelation from Bavinck's vantage point was not merely a reality on which religion depends, but the secret behind all of life—that which makes every area of life possible in the first place.³³

We hope that the introduction, annotations, and edits to Bavinck's text will provide an improved reading experience, facilitate comprehension, and increase appreciation for *the* Dutch dogmatician and intellectual of the modern age.

32. See Jonathan A. Anderson and William A. Dyrness, *Modern Art and the Life of a Culture: The Religious Impulses of Modernism* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 174–85.

33. Our thanks to Robert Covolo, a faculty member at Biola University's Torrey Institute, for help in this section.