

Gereformeerde Dogmatiek, Volume Two  
Herman Bavinck  
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The first volume of Dr. Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*, noticed in the April number of this Review for 1896 (pp. 356-363), was entirely of an introductory nature and did not enter upon the discussion of the dogma itself. The present volume introduces us into the heart of the matter by bringing the two chapters on God (theology proper) and The World in its Original State. By far the larger amount of space is taken up by the former, the contents of which are divided into nine sections, bearing as titles: The Incomprehensibility of God; The Knowableness of God—(a) *Cognitio Dei insita*,—(b) *Cognitio Dei adquisita*; The Names of God; Classification of the Names of God; The Proper Names of God; The Essential Names of God; The Personal Names of God; The Counsel of God. The chapter on "The World in its Original State" contains six subdivisions entitled respectively: Creation; The Spiritual World; The Material World; The Origin of Man; The Nature of Man; The Destiny of Man. These headings give only a very inadequate idea of the richness and fullness with which the subject is treated in all its parts. The book is so excellent that it seems almost impossible to be too generous in its praise. The breadth of outlook, the lucidity of presentation, the profusion of learning displayed, all equally call for admiration. What has impressed us most is that, while Dr. Bavinck's standpoint is that of a thorough Calvinist, yet in reading him one is conscious of listening not so much to a defense of Calvinism as to a scientific vindication of the Christian world-view in its most catholic sense and spirit. This is far from saying that the work is not also a vindication of the Calvinistic theology. But it is so in the indirect and for that reason all the more telling way of showing how perfectly easy and natural it is to build upon the foundation of the Reformed principles of a system of Christian thought which by its very largeness of grasp and freedom from theological one-sidedness becomes the most eloquent witness to the soundness and depth of the principles underlying it. No higher commendation of Calvinism is conceivable than that it lends itself to being made the basis of a structure of truth so universally and comprehensively Christian in all its lines and proportions.

From a formal point of view the most striking feature of Dr. Bavinck's work is its combination of much material which is usually assigned to the Department of the History of Doctrine with what belongs to dogmatics proper. Attention was already called to this in our review of the first volume. In the volume before us the two elements are similarly intermingled. This method, whatever may be thought of it from the standpoint of theological encyclopedia, obviously has the two great advantages of emphasizing the continuity of dogmatic thought in the church and of guarding against the inevitable one-sidedness of a treatment more directly attaching itself to the data of Scripture. But the masterful manner in which the historico-doctrinal sections are constructed makes one all the more regret that, comparatively speaking, the biblico-exegetical foundation of the dogma appears somewhat neglected. Although the author's work bears ample evidence of a wide and thorough acquaintance with what has of late years been done in the field of biblical theology, yet the exegetical data are not given with the same degree of fullness nor with the same detailed explanation of their historic significance as the facts borrowed from the history of doctrine. Still, even in respect to its handling of the biblical material, the book marks a long step in advance of what has hitherto been customary in handbooks of dogmatics.

The very opening words of the volume show that Dr. Bavinck is profoundly impressed with the

inherent limitations of every scientific discussion of the nature and attributes of God. "Mystery," he says, "is the life-element of Dogmatics." Even for modern agnosticism, in so far as it involves a recognition of this fact, he has a word of appreciation: "To a considerable degree this doctrine of the unknowableness of God can be assented to and cordially accepted" (p. 19). For in its essence the antinomy between absoluteness and personality emphasized by Fichte, Hamilton, Mansel, is precisely the same with what Christian theology has always felt and expressed by distinguishing between a positive and a negative, an apophatic and kataphatic theology. But the pantheistic philosophy confounds mystery and contradiction. Pantheism first imports into the conceptions of infinitude, omnipotence, absoluteness, eternity, its own idea of God as the sum of all being, and then, on the basis of this, declares these attributes inconsistent with theism (p. 20). And, as to modern agnosticism, this is a relapse into the error of ancient gnosticism, which made God ο βυθος αρρητος, eternal σιγη, incapable of revealing Himself. In so far as it still maintains the existence of the Unknowable, it is inconsistent with itself (p. 23). Untenable in itself and shrinking from atheism, it results in point of fact only in commending the pantheistic conception of God (p. 24).

In explaining the knowableness of God it is at the outset emphasized that back of what is and may be known of Him there lies an infinite fullness of power and life not revealed. God cannot fully reveal Himself in and to creatures, for *finitum non est capax infiniti* (p. 25). In the paragraph on the *cognitio Dei insita*, the historical and critical review of the doctrine of the *ideæ innatæ* is of more than ordinary interest. Dr. Bavinck shows quite convincingly that the noncommittal, or even more or less hostile attitude of Christian theology toward this doctrine was based on a religious principle. It was the dread of rationalism and mysticism with their idealistic view of the αυτορκεια of the human mind and their dualistic depreciation of the world of sense that inspired this opposition. Even religiously speaking, therefore, empiricism represents an important truth. "There is no knowledge of the invisible except through the symbol of the visible" (p. 41), although it should be added, the context admits of the restriction of this statement to the present life. *Ideæ innatæ* do not exist as *species impressæ* in consciousness, but only in so far as man has antecedently the *potentia* and *inclinatio* to obtain in his normal development and in the midst of his normal surroundings spontaneously and without scientific reasoning some definite and sure knowledge of God (p. 43). Εμφυτος, *innatus* thus ought to be contrasted not with experience, but with scientific reflection and mechanical revelation. In connection with the *cognitio Dei acquisita*, the important subject of the *theologia naturalis* comes up. The attitude assumed towards this discipline is no more enthusiastic here than in the first volume. Dr. Bavinck thinks that "there is no separate *theologia naturalis* such as could be obtained by man, apart from all revelation, through the reflection of his mind upon the world." Thus formulated, the statement amounts to no more, of course, than a denial of the ultra-idealistic interpretation of the *ideæ innatæ*. We are not aware that even the later Protestant cultivators of the discipline, with whom, as Dr. Bavinck says, *theologia naturalis* became more and more *theologia rationalis*, loosened it in this sense from the general revelation of God in nature. When it is further urged that a sanctified reason and an enlightened eye are necessary to find God in His creatures, this is true in so far as he who stands in the light of supernatural revelation will possess an immense advantage over all others in the theological interpretation of nature and history, but by no means does this prove the impossibility or apologetic uselessness of a scientific treatment of the same subject from the standpoint of common grace. No doubt the *cognitio Dei naturalis* has been incorporated in Scripture, but this is offset by the equally important fact that in its primitive unscientific form it is everywhere presupposed by Scripture; the *theologia revelata* is built on the *theologia naturalis*, as is recognized and well stated by

Dr. Bavinck himself on page 48. If the Reformed theology has always shown a deeper interest in this study than the Lutheran, and if this difference is rightly explained from a wider conception of the image of God in man and a consequently truer appreciation of the witness God still bears to Himself in us, even in the state of sin, it would seem that from the Reformed standpoint itself it is possible to form a somewhat higher estimate of the value of natural theology than is done by the author.

From the discussion of the twofold form of the knowledge of God, we pass on to that of the content of this knowledge as derived from revelation. The whole of this is subsumed under the category of the divine names. All these names are anthropomorphisms—"the whole of Scripture is anthropomorphic" (p. 65). Though, owing to this, our knowledge of God is subject to inevitable limitations, it is nevertheless true knowledge because God has in creation impressed His own image upon the beings from which these anthropomorphic forms of speech are taken. A quiddative, essential knowledge of God, either by mystical contemplation or by abstract thinking, is impossible. But the opposite extreme of declaring all knowledge of God symbolic is equally to be avoided. Theology is not symbolic, but ectypical, analogical (p. 77). The distinction between God's being and attributes and all attempts at defining the former apart from the latter by such phrases as *ens spirituale*, *ens infinitum*, *ens absolutum*, are inconsistent with the principle of God's incomprehensibility (p. 88). To Ritschl is given the credit of having clearly perceived that in this way a philosophical definition is obtained such as can no longer lay claim to expressing the biblical conception of God. Only Ritschl himself errs when he finds the whole content of the conception of God in love, whereas in Scripture God appears throughout in the fullness of His attributes. After thus insisting upon the *simplicitas*, Dr. Bavinck reviews the various schemes of classification of the divine attributes and reaches the conclusion that they are all open to the same objection of dividing the divine Being into two halves: that the one group professes to be obtained from the revelation of God in His created works, the other to describe what God is in Himself, which latter is impossible because we know nothing of the hidden life of God (p. 99). All that ought to be attempted is to establish a certain order in our treatment of the many divine names. Dr. Bavinck on this principle deals with the *nomina propria*, next with the essential names of God (God the one Being, *aseitas*, unchangeableness, eternity, omnipresence), thirdly with God as Spirit (*simplicitas*, incorporeal nature, invisibility), fourthly with God as Light (consciousness, knowledge, wisdom, truthfulness), fifthly with God as the Holy One (goodness, holiness, glory, righteousness), finally with God as Sovereign (will, omnipotence). This classification, while escaping the objection brought against the others, seems to us to have some disadvantages of its own. The proper names emphasize certain aspects of the divine nature which ought to be discussed in connection with the attributes they represent, e.g., Jehovah in connection with the unchangeableness or faithfulness, Jehovah of Hosts in connection with the glory or sovereignty or omnipotence of God. The restriction of the name Light to the intellectual attributes takes this designation in a much narrower sense than the Bible is accustomed to do, as Dr. Bavinck himself observes on page 192. The divine holiness also is wider in its biblical conception than the scheme adopted allows it to appear: it has its associations with eternity and omnipotence as well as with goodness, glory, righteousness, and it is awkward to make holiness at the same time the comprehensive name for the entire group of ethical attributes and a single one of these attributes coordinated with goodness, glory, righteousness. Another point which may appear questionable is the subsumption of the divine **אמת** or **אמונה** under the attributes of the intellect. The close association of these terms with such conceptions as **חסד** and **צדקה** is not in favor of this.

With the personal names of God the author proceeds to the discussion of the dogma of the Trinity, to the history of the development of which much space is devoted. As especially instructive we note the critical comparison between the Philonic and the scriptural conceptions of the Logos and Wisdom (pp. 235-237). The fundamental difference is found to reveal itself mainly in this that with Philo, the apocryphal writers and the Jewish theologians, the dualistic doctrine of intermediate beings led to an almost total neglect of the Holy Spirit, whereas the New Testament Logos idea has given a new impulse to the appreciation of the immanent functions of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, Dr. Bavinck admits that the doctrine of the Trinity is of the greatest importance for the biblical idea of creation. As Athanasius already observed, the principle of the divine fruitfulness eternally renders possible the divine self-communication to a creature externally (p. 310). The intertrinitarian communication of God is in accordance with the idea of St. Augustine to be considered the model and archetype of God's work in creation.

In the chapter on the Divine Counsel, the comparison instituted between the infralapsarian and supralapsarian theories of predestination is the most interesting portion. Dr. Bavinck finds elements of truth in both positions and does not definitely choose between them. The appeal to Scripture yields no solution (p. 360). Logically both theories are equally unsatisfactory. Dr. Bavinck's chief criticism of the supralapsarian scheme is that it too rashly and too absolutely identifies the supreme end of all, the Glory of God, with the particular manner in which hereafter this glory of God will be revealed in the eternal state of His reasonable creatures (p. 362). This eternal state is not the final end itself, but only a means. Further, it is not true that God reveals in the eternal state of the lost His justice only, in that of the elect His mercy only. And both supra- and infralapsarianism erred in this, that they placed everything preceding the final end in subordination not merely to this end, but also its various parts in mutual subordination to one another. Creation is more than a means to the fall, the fall more than a means for the revelation of grace and pardoning, and these again are more than means to eternal happiness and perdition. The decrees are equally rich as the history of the universe, and who would undertake to comprehend the latter in a logical table of single conceptions? (p. 366). There is some force to these considerations. Undoubtedly the old way of tabulating the order of the decrees fostered the misapprehension that creation and sin subserve the glory of God only indirectly, in so far as they furnish the theater for the display of His mercy and righteousness. This was a hypersoteriological one-sidedness. The decrees in reference to both have also their direct relation to the glory of God, and are therefore to be represented also as coordinated with those of election and reprobation as means to this end. But coordination and subordination in different respects can exist side by side. In view of the actual development of history supralapsarianism has rightly insisted that creation and the entrance of sin must be in order to redemption, though not in order to redemption alone. Nor do we see how one can escape from closely identifying the supreme end of God with the final state of His reasonable creatures, seeing that the latter is not merely a means to an end, but obviously in the development of the world-drama the final and eternal means to the final and eternal end. A certain degree of this tendency to concentrate the whole interest of history upon the issues of eternity in their dualistic character is certainly justified by Scripture. Finally it can hardly be called a merit of infralapsarianism that it insisted upon the coordination of the decrees with reference to the glory of God. Its motive in doing so was not so much a positive desire to vindicate an element of truth which supralapsarianism had neglected, but the merely negative one of escaping from what seemed to it the excessive harshness of the supralapsarian position. In other words, while supralapsarianism may have been partial and one-sided, infralapsarianism was agnostic in its

tendency. Even that element of truth which it seemed specially called upon to maintain, the glory of God as directly subserved by creation, it has done no more to develop than the opposing theory.

The section on Creation opens with a penetrating criticism of pantheism and materialism as theories of cosmogony. Especially the speculative character of the latter is clearly exposed. "Atoms as such can have no metaphysical attributes." In so far as physical science ascribes to them such qualities as are not taught by experience, it becomes a philosophy. Strictly speaking, atoms themselves are already metaphysical entities and ought to be contraband to every strict materialist. The thought here recurs that without the generation of the Second Person of the Trinity the creation *ad extra* would be impossible. This is, however, carefully guarded against confusion with the gnostic view, as if generation were for the sake of creation, and the Son that intermediate being through whom alone God can enter into contact with the world. Under the head of the Spiritual World the doctrine of the angels is treated with an exquisite sobriety and a simple beauty which makes it stand out even among the many other beautiful passages of the volume. Interesting is the statement (p. 443) that though some features of the image of God may be traceable to the angels, yet not they but man alone is the image of God. The divine image consists not merely in what angels and men have in common, but equally in what differentiates them. As such are mentioned: the body and its significance for man's dominion over the earth; blood-relationship between man and man, which is in man a reflection of the intertrinitarian relationship in God; the generic unity of the human race corresponding with the representative position of Adam and Christ, and in connection with this the soteriological prominence of humanity; finally the superiority of human existence to that of the angels, if not in point of intellect and power, yet in the depth and richness of that spiritual life which is developed by the complex relations of sex and family, state and society, by the pursuit of labor, art, and science.

In the sphere of the material world theology comes in conflict with modern philosophy and science. After arguing that Genesis 1:1 teaches *creatio ex nihilo* as an act not falling within but preceding the six days, Dr. Bavinck enters upon the discussion of the hexaemeron itself. Against Dr. Draper (*History of the Conflict between Religion and Science*) the very pertinent remark is made that it was not the church and orthodoxy as such which opposed the Copernican system, but the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic philosophy, which in every department of science as well as religion, in art as well as in church life, sought to maintain itself over against the modern views (p. 465). The Kant-Laplace nebular hypothesis is intelligently criticized (pp. 467-469). More extensively the author deals with the relations between geological and paleontological science and the account of Genesis 1. It is admitted that here the conflict between science and revelation assumes a more serious character, especially on the two points of the antiquity of the earth and the order of the origin of created beings. In succession the various theories framed in the interest of reconciliation are reviewed, the ideal theory, the restitution theory, the concordistic theory, the antigeological theory. In all of these an element of truth is recognized: in the first in so far as Scripture speaks not in scientific, but in popular language; in the second in so far as the waste and void condition of Genesis 1:2 precedes the hexaemeron; in the third in so far as the creative days must be understood of creative periods; in the fourth in so far as the identification of the deluge (taken as universal) with the glacial period still remains a possible view. Taking all this in consideration, no contradiction between the facts of geology and the statements of revelation need be admitted. Only the ascertained facts and the philosophical hypotheses of science should be sharply distinguished; the necessity of such distinction is elaborately urged under twelve heads. "Geology has become dependent on paleontology, and the latter is at

present entirely subservient to the doctrine of evolution. The order and antiquity of the earth-strata are established on the basis of the assumed evolution of organic beings, and, vice versa, the order of the strata is appealed to in proof of evolution, a clear *circulus vitiosus*" (p. 485). The conclusion is that from Genesis 1:1 (i.e., from some point indefinitely preceding the hexaemeron) till the deluge, there is ample space for all the events and phenomena established by modern science.

The same controversy reappears in the even more acute form of Darwinism versus revelation, when the origin of man is considered (pp. 490-508). In view of the premonitions of an approaching reaction against materialism and Darwinism, Dr. Bavinck thinks that in many instances modern theologians have too hastily adjusted their teaching to the principles of evolution. The weak points of evolution are well brought out.

With the *Nature of Man* and *The Destiny of Man* the debate returns from these apologetic outposts to the heart of the Christian and Protestant position. The Romanist doctrine of the *dona supernaturalia* is shown to have two roots, one in the neo-Platonic idea of a mystical deification as the true destiny of man, the other in the Pelagian principle of the meritoriousness of good works. If man is to earn the *status gloriæ* which is supernatural, he can do so only by employment of a principle likewise intrinsically supernatural, the *gratia infusa* or *gratia gratum faciens*. The Reformed dogma of the covenant of works differs from this in that according to it eternal life was not to be earned by Adam *ex condigno*, but *ex pacto* (p. 524), not by supernatural, but by natural means. Virtually Rome eliminates all grace, for there is no reason to call the *donum superadditum* grace, in any other sense than life, intellect, wisdom, power were grace to Adam. Christianity may, according to Rome, be in an incidental and subordinate way a soteriological scheme: primarily it aims not at *reparatio*, but at *elevatio naturæ* (p. 528).

Still, the Reformed theology has this in common with Rome as over against the Lutherans that it distinguishes between the original state of man in which he was placed by creation and the ideal destiny he was yet to obtain through obedience. From the Reformed standpoint this is expressed in the conception of the *fœdus operum*. Dr. Bavinck ably vindicates the federal character of all true religion.

The last question with which the present volume deals is that of Creationism versus Traducianism. The author thinks that neither the scriptural nor the philosophical grounds used on either side are sufficient to lead to a decision. If nevertheless the Greek, the Roman, and the Reformed theologians have unanimously declared in favor of creationism, and the Lutherans stand alone in their advocacy of the other view, there must be a deeper reason for this. This deeper reason, he thinks, is to be found in the one-sidedness of the Lutheran conception of the image of God and the destiny of man. By restricting the *imago Dei* to the religious-ethical qualities, the Lutherans naturally incline toward considering the question, how man *as such*, destitute of the divine image, originates, an unimportant question. On the other hand, because, according to the Reformed, man is, even apart from his ethical-religious nature, specifically distinct from angels and animals, he must have a distinct origin also, such as can be maintained on the basis of creationism only. It will be observed that this line of thought implies the adoption of traducianism in reference to animals. Dr. Bavinck further thinks that the principle of moral solidarity of the human race, as most clearly expressed in the federal theory, predisposed both Romanists and Reformed in favor of creationism. All that can be said here, it

seems to us, is that the anti-federalist needs traducianism to maintain his position. But the federalist is by no means thus dependent on creationism. While traducianism has been frequently exploited to controvert the federalistic view, this has always been done at the expense of logic. Federalism *as such* can with equal ease be combined with the traducianistic and creationistic theory. Still, it remains possible that the immanent tendency of every doctrinal development to advance its position beyond the range of possible attack has influenced the Reformed in this point. For, although traducianism can be held consistently with federalism, creationism may in so far have appeared preferable as it positively requires the federalistic principle in order to explain the connection between Adam's fall and the sinfulness of his descendants.