



Bavinck the dogmatician

The person of Christ

In prior articles on Herman Bavinck's extensive treatment of the doctrine of sin, I noted that Bavinck treats the doctrine of sin as a kind of backdrop to his exposition of the biblical doctrine of salvation through the person and work of Christ, the Mediator of the covenant of grace. As the Mediator of the covenant of grace, Christ restores believers to covenant fellowship with the triune God. Through the person and work of Christ, the last Adam and covenant head of the elect, believers are restored to life communion with God, enjoy the grace of free acceptance with God, and are redeemed from the power and dominion of sin. Through Christ believers are delivered from the guilt of sin and restored to a state of favor with God. And through Christ believers are redeemed from the corruption of sin and granted perfect life and blessing in unbreakable communion with the living God. The two principal effects of original sin, guilt and corruption, are remedied through the comprehensive work of Christ, the Mediator.

Since I have previously addressed at length the opening section of Bavinck's discussion of the work of Christ as Redeemer, which deals with the doctrine of the covenant of grace, I will begin to consider in this article Bavinck's treatment of the person of Christ. In the history of Christian theology, the doctrine of Christ is usually divided into two distinct, though closely related parts: first, the doctrine of Christ's person; and second, the doctrine of Christ's saving work. Although this distinction is somewhat artificial, it serves as a useful way to comprehend (to the extent that this is possible) the extraordinary richness of the biblical testimony to the identity of the person of our Mediator and to the rich, multifaceted nature of his saving work. The doctrine of the person of Christ focuses upon the identity of his person as the Son of God who became incarnate for us and for our salvation. The doctrine of the work of Christ focuses upon the work he performed in order to accomplish the redemption of his people.

Israel's hope for the Messiah

Rather than immediately plunging into the biblical doctrine of Christ's person, Bavinck opens his exposition of the person of Christ by noting that there is a universal awareness throughout human history that human beings need a mediator or savior. While this universal awareness takes a myriad of forms, some of which are far removed from the biblical understanding of our need for redemption through the work of the Redeemer, it is an irrepressible feature of human life. The history of religions bears witness to this sense of our need for restored communion with God as well as deliverance from the power of sin, evil, and death. Throughout human history, we meet in various forms the conviction that the world is not as it should be, that human life is broken and filled with pain and discomfort, and that there must be a deliverer who will bring restoration and blessing.

To illustrate this inescapable sense of our need for a deliverer, Bavinck cites the role of mediators between God and human beings in the history of religions, the recognition of certain persons who are uniquely empowered to reveal the things of God, and the devotion ascribed to religious leaders or founders who are believed to have overcome evil with good.

"In many religions there is even not merely a general expectation that one day good will overcome evil, but that expectation is connected with a specific person: in Indian religion, for example in Krishna; in Persian religion, to Saoshyant; in Egyptian religion, to Osiris; in Norse religion, to Bader."
(RD 3:239)

Among many nations and peoples, moreover, kings and other formative figures were addressed and greeted as saviors or godlike figures, illustrating the desire among the peoples of the earth for someone who would bring blessing to human life and overcome the powers of evil. These expectations and hopes for a deliverer, which are present throughout human history and in the religious aspirations of a variety of peoples, bear witness to the fact that the *"Gentiles hope for the arm of the Lord, and the coastlands await the instruction of his Servant (Isaiah 42:4; 51:5; 60:9)" (RD 3:240).*¹

This universal awareness of a need for a mediator has led many modern scholars to argue that Israel's "striking expectations for the future" were merely an expression of this more common religious phenomenon. In Bavinck's estimation, the similarity between Israel's expectations for the coming of a future Messiah and that of the surrounding nations should not be overstated. The "analogy" between them is an "external similarity," but does not amount to an "identity" (RD 3:241). Even though many people's expectation for a future day of salvation and blessing represents a kind of sinfully distorted reminiscence of the promises of God to his covenant people, Israel, they are not the direct fruit of divine revelation. Rather than viewing Israel's expectations for the coming Messiah as a byproduct of the influence of similar expectations among peoples surrounding her, we should view these expectations, as the Scriptures themselves attest, as the expression of Israel's confidence in the promises of God. The promises of God that were communicated through the prophets in the Old Testament were already given to the entire human race after Adam's fall into sin (cf. Genesis 3:15) and then repeated afterward throughout the history of the covenant of grace. These prophetic promises were not limited in their *"field of vision to the people of Israel and the land of Canaan,"* but extended to "the whole earth." The promise to Abraham included the blessing of all the families of the earth through the "seed" that would be given to him. The expectation of future salvation among the nations is but a faint reflection of the *"universal spiritual kingdom that God promises to his people at the end of history"* (RD 3:243).

In the Old Testament, all of the promises of the covenant Lord of Israel find their focal point in the coming of the Messiah. According to Bavinck, *"The Old Testament does not contain just a few isolated messianic texts; on the contrary, the entire Old Testament dispensation with its leading persons and events, its offices and institutions, its laws and ceremonies, is a pointer to and movement toward the fulfillment in the New Testament"* (RD 3:243). Although Bavinck does not use the terminology, he interprets the Old Testament in its entirety as a "preparation for Christ" (*preparatio Christi*, to use an expression of Calvin). This is evident especially when we consider the Old Testament prophets, priests, and kings. In each of these divinely appointed office-bearers in the Old Testament economy, we find a prefigurement of the person and work of Christ, the promised Messiah to come.

Perhaps the dearest expression of Israel's expectation of a future Messiah or Savior is connected with the office of kingship in the Old Testament. The theocratic king, embodied and prefigured especially in David, was a type of a future king who would shepherd the people of God and bring the blessings of God's coming kingdom.

"The king is the bearer of the highest of divine dignity on earth. Theocratic kingship ... found its purest embodiment in David; for that reason the kingship will remain in his house (2 Samuel 7:8-16). This promise of God to David, accordingly, is the foundation and center of all subsequent expectation and prophecy."

(RD 3:244)

Throughout the history of revelation in the Old Testament, the promise of a future king in the line of David's house came to include a rich variety of elements. When the house of David would be in disrepair, no more than a "hewn trunk," God would cause a "branch" to grow up and flourish (Isaiah 11:1-2; Zechariah 3:8; 6:12). Out of a state of humility and weakness, God would raise up a son of David who would come from little Bethlehem and whose goings forth were of old (Micah 5:2; cf. 3:12; 4:8, 13). Of this son's kingly rule there will be no end, and he will be called *"Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace"* (Isaiah 9:6-7). When the promise of

the Messiah's coming was fulfilled, he would establish an eternal kingdom of righteousness and peace, and he would extend his rule over the Gentile peoples, even to the ends of the earth (Psalms 2, 45, 72; Ezekiel 37:25; Zechariah 6:13; 9:10).

In the Old Testament, the prophets were preeminently those upon whom the Spirit of the Lord was poured out and who communicated the Word of the Lord to his people. Although the prophets of the Old Testament were not ordinarily installed into their office by means of a ceremonial anointing with oil, they were empowered by the Spirit to communicate the promises and obligations of the covenant of grace. One of the promises regarding the future "day of the Lord" in the Old Testament was the promise of an outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon all of the people of God (Joel 2:28; Zechariah 12:10; 12:2-13:6; Jeremiah 31:34). In addition to this general outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the Old Testament anticipated that the Spirit of the Lord would anoint the servant of the Lord in a special manner (Isaiah 11:2). The Lord would raise up a prophet among his people who would be greater than Moses and through whom his Word would be revealed in fuller measure (cf. Hebrews 1:1-14).

Furthermore, the Old Testament expectation included the provision of a Mediator, or deliverer, who would fulfill not only a kingly and prophetic office but who would be a priest-king (Jeremiah 30:21; Zechariah 3; 6:13; Psalm 110). In this way, the expectations for a future Messianic deliverer came to include the idea of a figure in whom the three offices of prophet, priest, and king would coalesce. Not only would the deliverer be a Messianic king come to establish God's kingdom in its fullness among the nations, but he would also be a bearer of the Word of the Lord and a priest whose suffering would atone for the sins of his people. Especially in the prophecy of Isaiah, the three offices of the Old Testament economy find their completion in the figure of the Suffering Servant of the Lord. While these expectations never reached the kind of clarity as is evident in the fullness of time with Christ's coming, the evangelists and prophets of the New Testament, and particularly Christ himself in his proclamation and teaching regarding the kingdom of God, appeal throughout their writings to the promises of the Old Testament, all of which have their Yes and Amen in Christ (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:20).

The centrality of the incarnation

I will consider Bavinck's more systematic treatment of the doctrine of Christ's person in the face of some important developments in modern theology, especially those that deviate from the historic consensus of the Christian church. In the modern period, the classic formulation of the doctrine of Christ's person — that he is both true God and true man, the incarnate Son of God, the two natures of deity and humanity concurring in his one person — has often been compromised or abandoned in ways that imperil the gospel of Jesus Christ in the most fundamental way. Such departures from the historic Christian confession of Christ's person represent a denial of the centrality of the incarnation in biblical revelation.

The doctrine of the person and work of Christ lies at the heart of the whole system of doctrine that may be derived from Scripture, which finds its classic formulation in the confessions of the church. Even though the usual order of treating topics in doctrinal studies does not begin with the reality of the incarnation, all of these topics find their center and focus in the person of Jesus Christ. As Bavinck observes,

"The incarnation is the central fact of the entire history of the world; then, too, it must have been prepared from before the ages and have its effects throughout eternity."

(RD 3:274)

At no point in Christian doctrine may Christ's person and work be regarded as an afterthought or postscript in God's plan of redemption, for all of the triune God's works in creation and redemption find their beginning and their ending in Jesus Christ. For this reason, Christian theology must always guard against any suggestion that the incarnation of the Son of God was not the central event in all of history under God's sovereign administration. In order to demonstrate the centrality of the incarnation in biblical teaching, Bavinck considers four ways in which it is expressed.

Incarnation and trinity

First, the incarnation in its biblical meaning has its *"presupposition and foundation in the trinitarian being of God"* (RD 3:274). In Deism and pantheism, there can be no place for the incarnation of the Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. In Deism, God always remains removed and separated from the world and the human race. The "god" of Deism is not triune and does not exercise any direct influence upon the course of events in history. Deism is unable to speak of God's coming to dwell with us through the incarnation of the eternal Word, or Son. On the other hand, pantheism, as its name suggests ("god is all" or "all is god"), simply identifies God's being with the history of the world. In a pantheistic worldview, "god" has no distinct being or independence in relation to the creation that comes to be through his decision to call it into being out of nothing (*creation ex nihilo*). The Christian doctrine of the Trinity, however, is able to explain how God can remain who he is as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and yet determine to create the world and glorify himself in the works of his hands. Within the Godhead, the persons of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit enjoy the fullness of love in the communion they enjoy in their mutual relations with one another. The triune God does not need the world in order to be perfected or to express his love and overflowing goodness. And yet, because God enjoys the fullness of being and the perfection of love within himself, he is able to communicate that love freely when he determines to create the world and to create human beings, with whom he wills to enjoy covenant communion, after his own image and likeness.

It is no accident, therefore, that the reality of the incarnation stimulated the Christian church to formulate more fully the doctrine of the Trinity. Over against the heresy of patripassianism (literally, "Father-suffering"), which taught that the person of the Son who suffered upon the cross was identical with the person of the Father, the church recognized that scriptural teaching could only be understood within the framework of a clear distinction between the three persons of the Trinity. The history of redemption recounted in Scripture requires that a distinction be drawn between the person of the Father who sends the Son in the fullness of time, the person of the Son who voluntarily condescends to assume our humanity, and the person of the Holy Spirit who equips the incarnate Son for his mediatorial work and communicates the benefits of it to believers. It is simply impossible to do justice to the data of biblical revelation without acknowledging the distinction of the three persons of the Holy Trinity, who remain one in being, purpose, and love in all of their respective works.

Furthermore, even though the church has always insisted that all of the works of the triune God are indivisibly the works of the holy Trinity, the church also taught that the economy of redemption distinguishes the three persons in their respective works. As Bavinck notes,

The Father could not be sent, for he is the first in order and is self-existent; the Spirit proceeds from the Son, succeeds him, and is sent by him. But the Son was the one suited for the incarnation. In the divine being he occupies the place between the Father and the Spirit, is by nature the son and image of God, was mediator already in the first creation, and as Son could restore us to our position as children of God.

(RD 3:276)

This is also the basis for the Reformed doctrine of a covenant of redemption (*pactum salutis*). In the covenant of redemption, the three persons of the Trinity concur in their purpose to redeem an elect people, but also concur in their purpose to accomplish redemption through the appropriate works of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, respectively.

"In the Son, the Father is from all eternity the Father of his children; the Son is eternally their guarantor and mediator; the Holy Spirit is eternally their Comforter. Not just after the fall, not even first at the creation, but in eternity the foundations of the covenant of grace were laid."

(RD 3:276)

The centrality of the incarnation rests upon the biblical doctrine that God eternally exists in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And it rests upon the biblical doctrine that the

incarnation was specifically an act whereby God, in the person of the Word, or Son, assumed our human nature.

Incarnation and creation

Second, the centrality of the incarnation is also presupposed and prepared for in the way the triune God created the world, and especially human beings as his image-bearers. Even though there is a great distance between the infinite, triune God and the finite creature whom he calls into being, the creation of the world provides a context within which God can relate to his creatures, or the works of his hands. This is especially true in respect to the one creature whom God created uniquely to bear his image and reflect something of his likeness. Precisely because God created man in his own image, there is the possibility of God entering into communion with the human race, not only in the original order of creation before the fall but also in the renewal of creation after the fall. Because God created human beings to be like him, to bear his image and enjoy fellowship with him, it is not impossible for God to enter into union with them through the incarnation of the eternal Son of God. The doctrine of the creation of man as the one creature who properly reflects God's likeness provides a basis for the possibility of the incarnation. The uniqueness of man as God's image-bearer also explains why *"the question whether God can take on the nature of a stone, a plant, or an animal ... is out of order"* (RD 3:277).

The relation between the biblical doctrine of creation and the central reality of the incarnation includes a further consideration. From the beginning, the triune God ordered his work of creation in a way that would ultimately serve his purposes for the redemption and perfection of the world in Christ. Even the "first things" of creation must be viewed in relation to the "last things," especially Christ's work in realizing through redemption God's purpose for human life in the state of glory. Bavinck explains:

Creation itself already must be conceived in infralapsarian fashion, and Adam was already a type of Christ. This view is unacceptable from the standpoint of those who think that God proceeded to the work of creation without a plan or decree and at the creation passively awaited to see what humans would do. But Scripture teaches us otherwise. In the act of creation, God already had Christ in mind. In that sense creation itself served as preparation for the incarnation. The world was so created that when it fell, it could again be restored: humanity was organized under a single head in such a way that, sinning, it could again be gathered together under another head. Adam was so appointed as head that Christ could immediately take his place; and the covenant of works was so set up that, broken, it could be restored in the covenant of grace.

(RD 3:278)

In this wonderful summary, Bavinck does not mean to say that the incarnation would have taken place whether or not Adam (and the human race in him) sinned. Nor does he mean to say that the fall into sin should be viewed, somehow, as a blessed event, since it served within God's all-encompassing purpose to be the occasion for the incarnation of the Redeemer. In the history of the church, such sentiments have doubtless been expressed. However, we do not need to speculate about such matters, but only remember that nothing takes place in creation, the fall, or redemption, apart from God's eternal counsel and will.

And within his counsel "there is no room for any reality other than the existing one. Accordingly, however much sin entered the world by the will of the creature, it was nevertheless included in God's counsel from eternity and to him was not contingent or unforeseen."

(RD 3:279)

Viewed from the perspective of what we know of God's eternal counsel in Scripture, we may properly affirm that creation itself was "infralapsarian": God designed the creation and placed Adam in his position as the covenant head of the human race in a manner that would serve his ultimate purposes in redemption. Christ is the fulfillment of what was typified in the person and office of Adam, namely, the blessedness of living in communion with God and obtaining eternal life

in the way of perfect obedience. Only in Christ — and surely, that was God's ultimate intention from the first — are human beings, the elect people of God, brought to their God-appointed destiny. Creation itself must be viewed through the lens of re-creation or, more specifically, through the truth as it is in Jesus Christ. Christ is, as the apostle Paul says in Colossians 1:15-17,

"the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together".

Incarnation and the history of revelation

Third, the centrality of the incarnation is dearly affirmed in the history of revelation. From the first pronouncement of the promise of the covenant of grace in Genesis 3:15, the so-called first gospel or proto-evangelium, and throughout the revelation that God gave his people Israel, the history of revelation focuses upon the coming of the promised Savior.

Within the wisdom and purpose of God, the history of revelation culminates in the coming of Christ in the "fullness of time" (Ephesians 1:10; Galatians 4:4). Even the language, "fullness of times" reminds us that God the Father was preparing to send his Son throughout the entire course of the history of redemption after the fall into sin.

"By all sorts of means and ways, the ground-work for the incarnation first had to be laid in the preceding history. Just as the incarnation presupposes the generation (of the Son) and the creation (of humans in the image of God), so now there is added still another presupposition and preparation: revelation."

(RD 3:280)

In the prologue to the Gospel of John, we are told that the eternal Word of God, who was with God in the beginning and through whom all things were created, is the light who enlightens all peoples. After the fall into sin, God revealed himself in various ways and times through the prophets of the Old Testament economy.

Though this manifold revelation was especially given to his covenant people, Israel, to whom God came in the form of theophany, prophecy, and miracle, it was intended to prepare the way for his coming to all peoples, Jews and Gentiles alike.

As Bavinck describes it, "(i)n that manner the Son prepared the whole world, including Jews as well as Gentiles, for his coming in the flesh. The world and humanity, land and people, cradle and stable, Bethlehem and Nazareth, parents and relatives, nature and environment, society and civilization these are all components in the fullness of the times in which God sent his Son into the flesh."

(RD 3:280)

The entire history of revelation, indeed the history of the world under God's superintendence, was a history of God's communication of himself as the sovereign Redeemer. And thus, when Christ entered the world through his incarnation in the fullness of time, all the promises and preparations for his coming were brought to their appointed end. From the beginning, God purposed to make his dwelling with his people, and this purpose was realized when he "tabernacled" with us when the Word became flesh (John 1:14). The coming of Christ in his incarnation was no afterthought in the history of revelation, but rather ties together in the form of fulfillment all that God had spoken throughout this history.

The history of revelation is, therefore, a history of preparation for the coming of Christ who was "born of a woman, born under the law" (Galatians 4:4). The "election and favoring of Mary as mother of Jesus" represents the culmination of God's purpose to dwell with us in the person of the incarnate Son. Even though in the history of the church, Mary's role as the instrument through whom the incarnation was achieved has been exaggerated, the Protestant church also

acknowledges her blessedness as the chosen vehicle for the incarnation. In this role, Mary serves God's purposes of grace, and her place within redemptive history is properly recognized. And yet, the role of Mary in the incarnation is not that of one who was "immaculately conceived" or "immediately assumed" into heaven, as though she were a kind of "co-mediatrix" who contributes something of her own to the person and work of the incarnate Son of God. The Roman Catholic Church's dogmas of Mary's immaculate conception and bodily assumption into heaven represent the logical development of its theological emphasis upon the *"idolization of the human"* (RD 3:282).

In Roman Catholic dogma, Mary, together with the church's hierarchy and the "merits" of the saints, cooperates with and merits God's favor and grace. But this strikes at the heart of the gospel as a story of God's sheer grace and unmerited favor. Mary's role in the incarnation does not consist in her good works or merit before God, but in her trust in the favor and promise of God to her. Nonetheless, Bavinck recognizes that the Protestant churches may properly hold her in "high esteem" without ascribing any independent value to her co-operation with God's grace. After all,

"Christ himself desired her to be his mother, who conceived him by the Holy Spirit, who carried him beneath her heart, who nursed him at her breast, who instructed him in the Scriptures, in whom, in a word, the preparation of the incarnation was completed."

(RD 3:282)

Incarnation and the testimony of Scripture

And fourth, the centrality of the incarnation is confirmed by the compelling testimony to the deity of Jesus Christ in Scripture. Though it is important to recognize that the entirety of the history of revelation prepares the way for the incarnation of the Son of God in the fullness of time, the great event of the incarnation is absolutely unique and unparalleled. There are no parallels to the incarnation, which involved nothing less than the condescension of the eternal Son of God, who assumed the fullness of our human nature through his birth of the virgin Mary.

In his treatment of the testimony of Scripture to the deity of Jesus Christ, Bavinck observes that there have been many attempts in the past and the present to deny the compelling truth of Christ's deity. Over against these attempts, he notes that the church in its confessions has always held to the certainty and truth of the incarnation:

"The faith with which the church appeared in the world was a simple one, but of one thing it was sure: in Christ, God himself had come to it and taken it into his fellowship. That was certain; that was something it would not let itself be deprived of and that it defended against a wide range of attacks and formulated plainly and clearly in its confession. In the doctrine of the deity of Christ, it maintained the character of the Christian religion, the reality of its fellowship with God."

(RD 3:284)

Unlike the founders and teachers of other world religions, the Christian doctrine of Christ's person does not simply view him as a great teacher or a formative influence. Christ is nothing less than the "content" of the Christian faith. The confession of Christ's deity is not restricted to his "office as though he is the one who performs the task that God assigned to him. Christ fulfills his task as the true Son of God, as the apostle Paul makes clear when he speaks of "God reconciling the world to himself" in the person of his Son. Nor is the confession of Christ's deity merely a matter of expressing his religious "significance" or "value" to Christian believers. Christ has value and unsurpassed significance to believers because he is God become man in order to accomplish the redemption of his people. When it comes to the deity of Jesus Christ, it is all or nothing. Either he is the eternal Son of God, the only Redeemer and Mediator who answers to our need as sinners, or he is merely a human being who cannot reveal God to us or perform the work needed to procure our redemption.

The testimony of the Scriptures to Christ's deity is so pervasive that it can scarcely be denied. And yet, because we are so familiar with the rich scriptural proofs for the deity of Jesus Christ, these proofs no longer impress us with their clarity and force. If Christ's own self-testimony, as it is

represented to us in the New Testament Gospels, is untrue, then the only conclusion we could read is that he was guilty of "insane fanaticism or horrendous blasphemy" (RD 3:283). To illustrate the pervasiveness and clarity of the Bible's testimony to Christ's deity, Bavinck offers the following compelling summary:

Scripture attributes to Christ not in a few instances but repeatedly personal preexistence (John 1:1; 8:58; 17:5; Romans 8:3; 2 Corinthians 8:9; Galatians 4:4; Philippians 2:6), divine sonship in a supernatural sense (Matthew 3:17; 11:27; 28:19; John 1:14; 5:18; Romans 8:32), the creation and sustaining of all things (John 1:3; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Ephesians 3:9; Colossians 1:16-17; Hebrews 1:3; Revelation 3:14), the acquisition for all and everyone of all weal and salvation (Matthew 1:21; 18:11; John 1:4, 16; 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Corinthians 1:30), kingship in the church (Matthew 3:2; 5:11; 10:32, 37; John 18:37; 1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 1:22; Colossians 1:18), dominion over all things (Matthew 11:27; 28:18; John 3:35; 17:2; Acts 2:33; 1 Corinthians 15:27; Ephesians 1:20-22; Philippians 2:9; Colossians 2:10; Hebrews 2:8), and judgment upon the living and dead (John 5:27; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Romans 14:10; 2 Corinthians 5:10); it calls him directly and unambiguously by the name "God" (John 1:1; 20:28; Romans 9:5; 2 Thessalonians 1:12; Titus 2:13; 2 Peter 1:1; Hebrews 1:8-9). (RD 3:283)

Even a cursory reading of all these passages will be enough to show that all the threads of scriptural revelation, when woven together to form a rich tapestry of God's redemptive work, serve to point everywhere and always to the great and central truth of God's being "with us" by means of the incarnation of the Son of God.

Failure to acknowledge the clear testimony to the deity of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, does not merely imperil the gospel. It represents the loss of the gospel entirely. Such a denial of the deity of Christ and the centrality of the incarnation strikes at the heart of the good news of God's coming to us in the fullness of time in order to restore us to life-communion with himself.

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¹ It is characteristic of Bavinck's Dogmatics that he often finds broad parallels between the Christian faith, as it is founded upon the inscripturated special revelation of God in the Bible, and the tenets of world religions and historic religious practice. While Bavinck always appeals to Scripture as the supreme norm for Christian theology, he has a lively appreciation for the way God's general and special revelation finds a sinfully distorted expression outside of the Christian faith and church.