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Piety in the Theology of Herman Bavinck:

Trinitarian, Covenantal and Holistic

Israel José Guerrero Leiva

For the Degree of the Doctorate in Systematic Theology

University of Edinburgh

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I declare that this thesis was composed by myself, that the work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or processional qualification except as specified.

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Israel José Guerrero Leiva

Abstract

Despite the considerable growth of research on Bavinck's theology in recent years, there has yet to be a detailed investigation of the place of piety in Bavinck's neo-Calvinism. This study fills that gap in Bavinck's studies, prompted by the reality that piety has been a significant element of the Reformed tradition from its earliest stages.

In his recent dissertation, Cory Brock has described the orthodox yet modern approach of Bavinck's understanding of *general piety* by using Schleiermacher's grammar for what John Calvin (1509-64) described as the *sensus divinitatis*. This study continues to focus on the concept of subjective religion more *specifically*. That is, in elucidating the understanding of the principles and certain practices that make up Bavinck's Christian and Reformed piety. This is done through five chapters.

Chapter one introduces the place of subjective religion within the history of the Reformed tradition by analysing the interpretation of piety in figures such as Calvin and Jan Bavinck (1826-1909) and movements such as the *Nadere Reformatie* and the Secession of 1834. The chapter concludes by arguing that because of the central place in the Reformed tradition occupied by piety, one cannot fully understand Herman Bavinck's neo-Calvinism as a theological movement without paying proper attention to the essential role of piety therein.

Chapter two analyses Bavinck's description of piety in his *Reformed Dogmatics* and *Ethics*, and in articles that deal explicitly with the concept of piety, such as 'Christelijke vroomheid' I and II ('Christian piety,' two articles written in 1900 and 1902) and 'Godsvrucht en wetenschap' ('Piety and science,' 1907).

Chapter three focuses on two of Bavinck's manuscripts that have thus far received no scholarly attention: 'De Godsvrucht in het Studentenleven' ('Piety in the student life' - 1890) and 'Exercitia Pietatis' ('Exercises of Piety - 1896). The *telos* of godliness is explained through the analysis of three further articles, which illustrates the significance of a covenantal view of Bavinck's doctrine of the beatific vision. Ultimately, chapters two and three define the nature of Reformed piety as trinitarian, covenantal and holistic.

Chapter four describes a prominent aspect of *praxis pietatis*: the *cultus Dei* as the practice of piety towards God by exploring the first four commandments of God's law. It also explores the difference between pietism and Reformed piety in Bavinck's thought. Finally, the last chapter describes Bavinck's view of theological training as a means of promoting the practice of piety towards God and others. Bavinck's reception of Calvin's and Voetius'

ideas of the relationship between piety and science is described here to show how experiential and holistic piety is the root of morality and cultural development for Bavinck.

This research concludes by considering a retrieval of Bavinckian ideas of *praxis pietatis* for contemporary neo-Calvinism. At the same time, it also proposes some ideas to explore for future Bavinck scholarship (pneumatology, ecclesiology, Reformed orthodoxy and public theology) by assuming the essential place of subjective Christian religion in Bavinck's theology.

Lay Summary

The concept of piety has played a key role in the historic Reformed tradition. The writings of John Calvin and post-Reformation Reformed theologians present piety as a significant element in their theologies. Essentially, the end of *Praxis pietatis*, or the practice of piety, was the glory of the triune God. This idea is expressed in different theological works that developed from Reformed confessionalism during the seventeenth-century. In this sense, Reformed orthodoxy was cultivated by the unity of academic theology and piety.

The inter-relationship of academic theology and piety was manifested in different spheres of life, that is, in the individual, the family, the church and society in general was consolidated in the Netherlands through a Dutch movement denominated *Nadere Reformatie*. The same holistic vision of Reformed theology was retrieved and contextualised by another movement: Neo-Calvinism. The leaders of the previous theological movement were Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) and Herman Bavinck (1854-1921). Despite the various directions that research related to neo-Calvinism has taken, little has focused on its concept of piety. This thesis explores for the first time the understanding of Christian and Reformed piety in the theology of Herman Bavinck.

For Bavinck, every human being has a feeling of divinity that is previous to all rational proof of God. However, humans need more that a general feeling of absolute dependence of God; they need a saving communion with the triune God revealed in the Scripture. The intimate fellowship between the triune God and each believer is organically structured in the covenant of grace. In fact, a trinitarian covenant theology encourages the experiential and holistic aspect of the Reformed understanding of piety. So too, the objective foundation of piety – the glory of God – not only prevents piety turning into some of the dualistic tendencies of pietism but also to focus on the end of salvation: the beatific vision. In this sense Reformed piety does not aim for the sake of piety itself, but for the knowledge of God in the face of Christ.

In summary, Bavinck's retrieval, and contextualization of Reformed piety – generally represented by the theology of Calvin and Gisbertus Voetius – can be helpful both for further scholarly understanding of Bavinck's neo-Calvinism project, and for contemporary projects based on neo-Calvinistic ideas.

For Camila, Emma and Eilidh

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Therefore, the right kind of thanksgiving requires, first, a knowledge of God's blessings – William Ames

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Soli Deo Gloria

Abbreviations

DGS – De Godsvrucht in het studentenleven. 1890. Manuscript. Uitgave en manuscripten (met aantekeningen) van redevoeringen ter opening van de lessen en een studentenbijeenkomst, 1883-1896., inv.nr. 41 // Hoogleraar, Theologische School te Kampen, 1882-1902. Archief van Herman Bavinck, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. https://sources.neocalvinism.org/herman-bavinck-archive/?tp=1&id_series=45

EP – Exercitia Pietatis. 1896. Manuscript. Uitgave en manuscripten (met aantekeningen) van redevoeringen ter opening van de lessen en een studentenbijeenkomst, 1883-1896., inv.nr. 41 // Hoogleraar, Theologische School te Kampen, 1882-1902. Archief van Herman Bavinck, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. https://sources.neocalvinism.org/herman-bavinck-archive/?tp=1&id_series=45

GA "Geloof en aanschouwing" [I-VI]. De Bazuin 50:42-48 (1902).

GeW "Godsvrucht en wetenschap." De School met den Bijbel 4 no. 26. 1907.

GD^{1} *– Gereformeerde dogmatiek*, Deel 1-4. Kampen: J.H. Bos, 1895-1901. First edition of *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*. References are made by volume and page number.

GD^{2} *– Gerformeerd dogmatiek*, Deel 1-4. Tweede herziene druk. Kampen: J.H. Kok 1906-1911. Second edition of *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*. References are made by volume and page number.

RD –Reformed Dogmatics. Translated by John Vriend. Edited by John Bolt 4 vols. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003-2008. References are made by volume and page number.

GE – Gerformeerde ethiek. Edited by Dirk Van Keulen. Utrecht: KokBoekencentrum, 2019.

RE – Reformed Ethics, Vol. I-II. Edited by John Bolt. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019-2021. References are made by volume and page number.

TWWG – The Wonderful Works of God. 1st edition. Translated by Henry Zylstra. Glenside: Westminster Seminary Press, 2019.

OT – On Theology: Herman Bavinck's Academic Orations. Translated and edited by Bruce Pass. Leiden: Brill, 2020.

*Po*R *– The Philosophy of Revelation: A New Annotated Edition*. Edited by Cory Brock and Nathaniel Gray Sutanto. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2018.

BCB – James Eglinton, *Bavinck: A Critical Biography*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021.

TBR – *The Bavinck Review*.

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CHAPTER I

An introduction to the reformation of piety:

From John Calvin, the Nadere Reformatie *to the Bavincks*

One of the most important parts of Church history is the history of Christian piety. – Herman Bavinck (1854-1921)[1]

The pious person sees God everywhere – within and outside of himself, in his heart and consciousness, in the leading of his life, in the blessings and catastrophes that come to him. There is nothing that is apart from God in our small and large worlds, nothing that does not ultimately carry the stamp of his glory. – Herman Bavinck[2]

These quotations, from the writings of the Dutch neo-Calvinist Herman Bavinck, present piety as an important aspect to be investigated in the context of his Reformed theology. Despite the considerable growth of research on Bavinck's theology in recent years, there has yet to be a detailed investigation of the place of piety in Bavinck's neo-Calvinism. This study seeks to fill that gap in Bavinck scholarship, prompted by the reality that piety has been a significant element of the Reformed tradition from its earliest stages.[3]

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[1] DO: 'Een van de belangrijkste onderdeelen der Kerkgeschiedenis is de historie der Christelijke vroomheid.' Herman Bavinck, "Christelijke vroomheid." Review of *Reformateurs*, by C. B. Hylkema. *De Bazuin* 50:54 (1902), 1-2.

[2] Herman Bavinck, "Philosophy of Religion (Faith)," in *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, ed. John Bolt, trans. by Harry Boonstra and Gerrit Sheeres (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 25-32. Here, 30.

[3] See Richard A. Muller, "Calling, Character, Piety, and Learning: Paradigms for Theological Education in the Era of Protestant Orthodoxy," *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 105-121. Jan van Vliet indicates that the Reformed tradition is highly doctrinal at heart, it emphasizes a life of piety, it places a high priority on ecclesiastical organization and order, and it teaches cultural engagement. See Jan van Vliet, *The Rise of Reformed System: The Intellectual Heritage of William Ames* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2013). Unless otherwise indicated, this study will take as synonymous or distinguish between the terms 'Calvinist' and 'Reformed' according to Bavinck's primary sources. Against the use of the term 'Calvinist' see Willem van Asselt, "Calvinism as a Problematic Concept in Historiography," *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology*, 74:2 (2013), 144-150.

During the last decade, the role of the organic motif in Bavinck's theology, described by James Eglinton,[4] has helped scholars correctly reshape the hermeneutical reading of Bavinck's writings[5] and persona.[6]

This research considers this trinitarian and organic motif in Bavinck studies, which helps us to understand him as a figure who combined experiential piety (often considered a trait of early modern Reformed theology) with a commitment to participation in late modern culture. In this way, for example, Bavinck understood piety in an organic way to describe a particular relationship with God and also organically linked piety with culture. On the one hand, Bavinck writes, God 'establishes his covenant organically with man, in Christ as head…'.[7] Alongside this, he argues, 'the ideal of a Christian Education, in the family, in primary, secondary, and tertiary schools, remains now as ever: true piety organically bound to substantial knowledge and true refinement…'.[8] In short, Reformed piety considers Christians' fellowship with God *and* others in different spheres of life.

This introductory chapter seeks not only to present the figure of Herman Bavinck but also to highlight two critical aspects for this dissertation: i) the state of scholarship related to the research of the concept of piety in Bavinck's theology, and ii) the place of *pietas* in the Reformed tradition, with a particular focus in the theology of John Calvin (1509-1564), the *Nadere Reformatie*, and within the Christian Reformed Seceder circles, specifically in Herman's father, Rev. Jan Bavinck (1826-1909). The current state of Bavinck studies, plus the historical-theological presentation of Reformed *praxis pietatis* set the context to answer the question of this research, what was Herman Bavinck's understanding of Reformed piety? For this, we should consider who Herman Bavinck was.

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[4] James Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism. Towards a New Reading of Herman Bavinck's Organic Motif* (London: T&T Clark, 2012).

[5] See for example Cory C. Brock, *Orthodox yet Modern: Herman Bavinck's Use of Schleiermacher* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2020), Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, *God and Knowledge. Herman Bavinck's Theological Epistemology* (London: T&T Clark, 2020) and Ximian Xu, *Theology as the Science of God: Herman Bavinck's* Wetenschappelijke *Theology for the Modern World* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2022).

[6] See the latest Bavinck's biography by James Eglinton, *Bavinck: A Critical Biography* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020). From hereafter, *BCB*.

[7] Herman Bavinck, *The Sacrifice of Praise: Meditations Before and After Receiving Access to the Table of the Lord*. Ed. and trans. Cameron Clausing and Gregory Parker Jr. (Peabody: Hendrikson Publishers, 2019), 11.

[8] Dutch Original (hereafter DO): 'dat het ideaal eener Chr. Opvoeding, in huisgezin, in lagere-, middelbare- en hooge school nu zoowel als toen blijft: waarachtige godsvrucht organisch met degelijke kennis en echte beschaving verbonden'. Bavinck, "Godsvrucht en wetenschap." in *De School met den Bijbel* 4 no. 26 (1907). Hereafter, *GeW*.

I. Who was the *vrome* Herman Bavinck?

Herman Bavinck was born on 13 December 1854 in Hoogeveen, the Netherlands. He was the son of Geziena Magdelena Holland (1827-1900) and Jan Bavinck (1826-1909), a minister of the German Old Evangelical Church and then of the Dutch *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken* (Christian Reformed Churches). In 1873, Herman enrolled as a student in the Theological School in Kampen, where his father was a pastor. In that year, Bavinck formally joined the Christian Reformed Church through public confession of faith. After one year in Kampen, he decided to pursue more scientific-theological training at Leiden University.[9]

For six years, Bavinck studied under modernist professors,[10] such as Abraham Kuenen (1828-1891), Lodewijk Rauwenhoff (1828-1889) and his doctoral supervisor Johannes Scholten (1811-1885), where he appreciated the scientific approach to theology. And yet, as a theologically conservative student, he did not share their doctrinal positions. Particularly, it was during that period that Bavinck was first influenced by Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920), the orthodox theologian who was developing an attractive Calvinistic and holistic worldview. Significantly, Kuyper was one of the leaders of a movement that came to be known as neo-Calvinism. In 1880, Bavinck obtained his doctoral degree with a thesis on the ethics of Ulrich Zwingli (1584-1531).

His commitment to the Reformed faith and church community led him to be ordained as a pastor of the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken*. Nevertheless, after a year in the pastorate in Franeker, Bavinck was called to teach theology at Kampen. There, he taught dogmatics and ethics, amongst other courses, for almost twenty years. During that period, he married Johanna Adrianna Schippers (1868-1942), published the first edition of his *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*, and applied the concept of catholicity through his involvement in the union of two Reformed denominations in 1892, his own denomination and the *Doleantie* movement

[9] The Dutch term for science *-wetenschap-* includes not only natural sciences (biology, chemistry, physics) but also humanities disciplines developed in the academy, i.e., philosophy and theology. See Herman Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation. A New Annotated Edition*, ed. Nathaniel Gray Sutanto and Cory Brock (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2018), 71. From hereafter, *PoR*.

[10] Dutch modernist theology rejected classic seventeenth-century Reformed orthodox teachings such as the Bible as the revelation of a personal God. For modernist theologians, sin and salvation were considered as old-fashioned ideas. This nineteenth century theology aimed for a Church adapted to modern thinking, denying Reformed confessionalism both from pulpit and academy. See James Mackay, *Religious Thought in Holland during the Nineteenth Century* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1911) and George Harinck and Lodewijk Winkeler, "The Ninenteenth Century", in *Handbook of Dutch Church History*, ed. Herman J. Selderhuis (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 464-467 and 474-477.

led by Kuyper, resulting in the *Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* (Reformed Churches in the Netherland). [11]

From 1902, he began to teach at the Free University of Amsterdam, published the second edition of his *magnum opus*, and produced writings focused more on science, education, philosophy and politics. He was a member of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, and in 1911 was elected as a parliamentarian in the First Chamber. He died in Amsterdam in 1921 at the age of sixty-six.

The picture of Bavinck can be sketched through the recently published critical biography of Herman Bavinck by James Eglinton, where he closes the last chapter describing Bavinck as 'an orthodox Calvinist, a modern European, and a man of science.'[12] One more feature can be added to these three characteristics by highlighting a word used by Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857-1936), a close friend of Bavinck, after visiting Bavinck's deathbed in 1921: 'I am still completely under the impression of my last visit: saddened, but at the same time edified. I have never known my good friend to be anything other than pious (*vroom*).'[13] *Vroom* is the Dutch adjective that Snouck Hurgronje used to describe his friend as a *pious* person. Thus, Bavinck was a *godly* Calvinist, modern European and man of science.

In order to elucidate the understanding of piety in Bavinck's theology, he must be viewed in relation to some of the elements that characterised the neo-Calvinist movement, such as the retrieval of Reformed confessional theology and holistic world-and-life view.[14] Because of their understanding of the Reformed faith, Kuyper and Bavinck articulated a new desire to reimagine each sphere of life under the Lordship of Christ: they were involved in the academy, journalism, politics, art, and theology, and aimed to participate in these in a distinctively modern, Christian way. Alongside this societal transformation programme, Kuyper produced many devotional writings that reflected the spirituality of his neo-Calvinistic programme of reformation. The recent translation of Kuyper's devotional writings,[15] together with other translated works, has helped to further research about

[11] For a brief summary and bibliography of Kuyper and the Doleantie see Harinck and Winkeler, "The Ninenteenth Century", 491-494.
[12] *BCB*, 291.
[13] *BCB*, 290.
[14] These and other elements are described in Cory Brock and Nathaniel Sutanto, *Neo-Calvinism: A Theological Introduction* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2022).
[15] For example, Abraham Kuyper, *Honey from The Rock. Daily Devotions from Young Bavinck* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2018).

Kuyper's notions of spirituality.[16] However, this has not yet been the case regarding the piety of Herman Bavinck.

Considering the challenges and toleration posed by the post-1848 Dutch modern context,[17] which was characterised by its new model of religious pluralism, it is necessary to study how Bavinck understood Reformed piety on the path from (ecclesial) separation to (cultural) integration that marked both his ecclesiastical and family background.[18] Why, for example, did Bavinck relate piety to both theological training, and science?[19] As will be seen, despite the increasing number of Bavinck's works that have been translated into English, and the growing body of scholarly research on Bavinck's theology, no attempt has been made to identify the value of piety in shaping his theological project as a *vrome* scientific theologian in late modern culture.

II. Survey of Scholarship on Bavinck and Piety

Scholarship on Bavinck at the doctoral level began in the 1950s. Early dissertations focused on his covenant theology,[20] the relationship between Christianity and culture,[21] and the relationship between revelation and reason.[22] At the beginning of the 1980s, John Bolt wrote a dissertation on the concept of imitation of Christ 'as a necessary, but a *partial* aspect of Bavinck's cultural-ethical ideal', which reflects a difference between Kuyper's and Bavinck's neo-Calvinism.[23] Bavinck scholarship during the next two decades was focused on the eschatological *telos* of redemption,[24] the importance of *unio mystica* as a motif to

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16 For Abraham Kuyper scholarship on his spirituality see James A. De Jong, "The Heart and Soul of Abraham Kuyper: Reflections on His Meditations," *Calvin Theological Journal* 52.1 (2017): 37-61. From here, *CTJ*.

17 The Constitutional Reform of 1848 offered freedom to 'all religions, with equal rights, equal protection, and freedom to promote their affairs without government interference…for the *Afscheiding* churches, the new constitution signaled the long-awaited full recognition and liberty.' See George Harinck and Lodewijk Winkeler, "The Ninenteenth Century" in *Handbook of Dutch Church History*, 469-470.

18 *BCB*, 291. Eglinton's biography charts Bavinck's origins in a movement of ecclesiastical secession in the mid-19th century that aimed at both separation from the mainstream Dutch Reformed Church, and integration in modern culture.

19 Chapter three analyses some manuscripts related to piety. For example, "*De Godsvrucht in het studentenleven*," 1890 (Piety in the student life) and "*Exercitia Pietatis,"* 1986.

20 Anthony Hoekema, "Herman Bavinck's Doctrine of the Covenant" (ThD dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1953).

21 Bastian Kruithof, "The Relation of Christianity and Culture in the Teaching of Herman Bavinck" (PhD dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1955).

22 Eugene Heideman, *The Relationship of Revelation and Reason in E. Brunner and H. Bavinck* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1959).

23 While this dissertation was written in 1982, it was published in a book format in 2013. See John Bolt, *A Theological Analysis of Herman Bavinck's Two Essays on the Imitatio Christi. Between Pietism and Modernism* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2013).

24 Sydney Hielema, "Herman Bavinck's Eschatological Understanding of Redemption" (ThD dissertation, Wycliffe College, Toronto School of Theology, 1998).

explain aspects of soteriology and sacraments,[25] and finally, a chapter dedicated to Bavinck's understanding of the self-convicting character of the Holy Scriptures.[26]

Following the completion of the translation of the four volumes of *Gereformeerde dogmatiek* into English (*Reformed Dogmatics*, 2003-2008), there has been an increasing amount of scholarly interest in Bavinck's theology, especially during the last decade.[27] In 2008, Brian Mattson's dissertation at the University of Aberdeen described the relationship between *imago Dei* and eschatology in Bavinck's covenantal framework.[28] In 2012, James Eglinton's research at the University of Edinburgh laid a new foundation for studying Bavinck by analysing the trinitarian and organic motif in Bavinck's thought. Eglinton's thesis challenged the old hermeneutic of reading Bavinck, *i.e.*, the 'two Bavincks' hypothesis', where previous scholarship followed the model and distinction between the 'modern' Bavinck and the 'orthodox' Bavinck. From 2012 onwards, Bavinck scholars have followed this trinitarian and organic motif, with New College becoming a nucleus for research on neo-Calvinism, and the study of Herman Bavinck. In that setting, Bruce Pass described the Christocentric character of Bavinck's theology.[29] Nathaniel Gray Sutanto's research presented a new and necessary understanding of Bavinck's epistemology through the organic motif previously described by Eglinton.[30] Finally, following this renewed appreciation of the unity in Bavinck's theology, Cory Brock described how Bavinck appropriated Friedrich Schleiermacher's grammar, further rejecting the antithetical line between the 'two Bavincks' model. The conclusion of his work focused on describing the catholic character of Bavinck's dogmatics, presenting arguments regarding Bavinck's commitment to modernity and orthodoxy.[31]

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[25] Ronald Gleason, "The Centrality of the Unio Mystica in the Theology Of Herman Bavinck" (PhD dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary, 2006). About the concept of 'being in Christ', see Hans Burger, *Being in Christ. A Biblical and Systematic Investigation in a Reformed Perspective* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2009).

[26] Henk van den Belt, *The Authority of Scripture in Reformed Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

[27] For recent Dutch research on Bavinck see Willem J. de Wit, *On the Way to the Living God A Cathartic Reading of Herman Bavinck and An Invitation to Overcome the Plausibility Crisis of Christianity* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2011). Here, de Wit dedicates two chapters to describe some experiences and struggles in Bavinck´s life in the relation with his theology. Another PhD dissertation compares the relation between God and the world in the theology of Herman Bavinck and John Milbank: Wolter Huttinga, "Participation and Communicability: Herman Bavinck and John Milbank on the Relation between God and the World" (PhD dissertation, Kampen Theological University, 2014).

[28] Brian G. Mattson, *Restored To Our Destiny. Eschatology & The Image Of God In Herman Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatics* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

[29] Bruce R. Pass, *The Heart of Dogmatics: Christology and Christocentrism in Herman Bavinck* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020).

[30] Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, *God and Knowledge. Herman Bavinck's Theological Epistemology* (London: T&T Clark, 2020).

[31] Cory C. Brock, *Orthodox yet Modern: Herman Bavinck's Use of Schleiermacher* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2020).

Despite the different approaches to Bavinck's theology and the valuable help provided by the corrected understanding of Bavinck through his trinitarian and organic motif, the lack of scholarly attention concerning the study of Bavinck on piety is striking. What was the place of *praxis pietatis* in Herman Bavinck's theology? Until now, that field has been unexplored, and this lacuna must be filled. Studying Bavinck's view of piety will lead to a better comprehension of neo-Calvinism as a theological movement that aimed for holistic renewal—which is to say, reformation extending from the individual believer's religious heart to the reformation of society.

Before answering the questions of how Bavinck —a late modern Dutch Reformed theologian — defined and applied the concept of piety within his context, it is essential to mention in more detail some approaches to this topic that have been described in the scholarly works previously cited.

Three works must be referenced. The first is John Bolt's PhD dissertation (1983), which was eventually published in 2013. The main title of the book encapsulates its essence: *A Theological Analysis of Herman Bavinck's Two Essays on the Imitatio Christi*. More relevant to this research, though, is the subtitle: *Between Pietism and Modernism.* Although Bolt provides a valuable description and comparison between two writings in two stages of Bavinck's life, his focus is on the ethical-cultural aspect of Bavinck's theology. While he presents clear arguments for his thesis,[32] Bolt also highlights the concept of *pietism.*

In his book, Bolt mentions the words piety/pietism/pietistic mainly to describe (i) Bavinck's ecclesiological context, i.e. the piety of the Secession Christian Reformed Church (*Afscheiding*), [33] (ii) the pietistic theology/vision of the *Nadere Reformatie,*[34] (iii) Bavinck's critiques of some forms of pietism (primarily, the isolation and withdrawal from cultural development),[35] (iv) Bavinck's positive aspects towards pietism,[36] and (v) the spirituality and piety in the *Doleantie* movement that developed through Kuyper's devotional writings.[37] However, Bolt does not explicitly describe piety in Bavinck's theology and life. Despite

[32] The focus of Bolt's dissertation is to 'consider key differences between cultural-ethical ideas of Herman Bavinck and Abraham Kuyper in terms of the imitation of Christ theme. The focus on the imitation of Christ has demonstrated how Bavinck resolves the fundamental tension in his ethics between world-affirmation and world-renunciation. The imitation is a valid and necessary but partial aspect of Bavinck's overall cultural-ethical ideal.' See Bolt, *A Theological Analysis*, 154. Bolt thesis is developed by Jessica Joustra's recent dissertation on the Imitation of Christ. Joustra's dissertation thesis will be analysed later.
[33] Bolt, *A Theological Analysis*, 41-2.
[34] Bolt, *A Theological Analysis*, 42-59.
[35] Bolt, *A Theological Analysis*, 77, 106, 185.
[36] Bolt, *A Theological Analysis*, 115, 351.
[37] Bolt, *A Theological Analysis*, 127.

this, Bolt's book highlights the importance of piety in different periods of the Dutch Reformed tradition, helping us trace and give attention to orthodox sources that inform Bavinck's definition of piety.

The second monograph related in some sense to Bavinck's understanding of piety is Brock's *Orthodox yet Modern: Herman Bavinck's Use of Schleiermacher*. In chapter five, Brock describes the influence of Schleiermacher on Bavinck's definition of true religion as 'absolute dependence,' without rejecting his Calvinistic orthodoxy. For Brock, Bavinck 'consistently displays an effort to translate the theological content of his Reformed orthodox heritage into the grammar of modern thought.'[38] In this case, Brock has in view Bavinck's appropriation of Schleiermacher's concept of *Frömmigkeit* or piety, that is, 'the feeling of absolute dependence'. From this, Bavinck associates piety (*pietas*) with religion (*religio*), proposing that 'Schleiermacher's concept of feeling of absolute dependence, nevertheless, is "most qualified" for describing the notion of *pieta*s in general which manifests itself in outward expressions (knowledge and action) in all religions.'[39] However, for Bavinck, Schleiermacher's error was to build his definition of piety not on the *principia fidei*, but in philosophy, focusing only on the subject.[40]

Because of Schleiermacher's appropriation of the concept of piety, Bavinck defines religion 'both as the feeling of absolute dependence with regard to the subject and as the fact of being in relation with God objectively'.[41] In this way, Bavinck develops his orthodox concept of religion through modern grammar, that is, through his catholic appropriation of Calvin and Schleiermacher.

While one of Brock's contributions (chapter five) is the synonymous use of Calvin's notion of '*sensus'* and Schleiermacher's notion of 'feeling' in Bavinck's definition of religion, Brock's objective is to offer a modern reading (and understanding) of Reformed orthodoxy in Bavinck's theology, rather than to provide a comprehensive definition of piety or spirituality in Bavinck's works: 'Yet, in asking "what is religion", this chapter does not set out to define Bavinck's religion entirely [*in toto*]. Rather, the point is to establish the significance of Schleiermacher's "feeling" for Bavinck's "religion"'.[42] While Brock's focus was the *modern* sources of Bavinck's theology (and the relationship between Calvin's and

[38] Brock, *Orthodox yet Modern*, 263.
[39] Brock, *Orthodox yet Modern*, 231.
[40] Brock, *Orthodox yet Modern*, 231-232.
[41] Brock, *Orthodox yet Modern*, 238.
[42] Brock, *Orthodox yet Modern*, 233.

Schleiermacher's terminology of *religio*), it is necessary to ask what the Reformed orthodox sources in Bavinck's definition of Christian piety are. Apart from recognising the importance of piety in Calvin's theology, the following question must be answered: what were the post-Reformation sources that Bavinck used in developing his theology of Christian religion and piety?

Jessica Joustra's recent PhD dissertation can help us to understand the relevance of research on Bavinck's experiential piety for neo-Calvinist scholarship. In her chapter on 'The imitation of Christ' in Bavinck's theology, Joustra presents clear arguments on the relevance of this theme in Bavinck's works. This theme is important, she argues, because of the close relationship of the imitation of Christ to other central themes in Bavinck's works, for example, in the ideas of 'grace-restoring nature, the gospel as pearl and leaven, and the organic motif, which allows Bavinck to see all of creation in light of its Triune creator.'[43] For Joustra, the imitation of Christ in Bavinck's writings is explicitly and implicitly used in works that reflect the practical application of this theme i.e. 'Christian Principles and Social Relationships', 'Christ and Christianity' and 'The Christian Family.'[44] Following this, Joustra argues that for Bavinck, a correct understanding of the imitation of Christ *is* the shape of the Christian life.

The relevance of the imitation of Christ in Bavinck's theology is part of the answer that Joustra asks regarding the lack of attention to this subject by the Dutch Reformed tradition. As she describes, in the neo-Calvinist tradition, there is a tendency only to highlight the importance of the Ten Commandments, and not the imitation of Christ, in ethics.[45] As a corrective to this, Joustra uses the example of Bavinck as a neo-Calvinist theologian who emphasised the importance of both the law and the imitation of Christ for Christian ethics.

In her conclusion, Joustra describes the relationship between *piety* and *practice* in neo-Calvinism. In this sub-section, there is a substantial argument for intellectual knowledge of God that is 'accompanied by personal piety.'[46] This description of experiential Calvinism in the neo-Calvinist tradition is primarily founded on Kuyper's meditations. For Joustra, the importance of a fellowship with God that avoids both the danger of intellectualism and a

[43] Jessica Joustra, "Following the Way of Jesus: Herman Bavinck and John Howard Yoder in Dialogue on the Imitation of Christ" (PhD dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2018).
[44] Joustra, "Following", 120 – 130.
[45] Joustra, "Following", 7-11.
[46] Joustra, "Following", 356.

cultural engagement that lacks experiential piety, can be found, for example, in Kuyper's meditations. In her words, Kuyper 'not only cautions against the danger of intellectualism, but also cautions against cultural engagement that is devoid of piety. Both cultural engagement and intellectualism may be attractive and compelling, but neither can be sustained without a deep personal piety, communion with the one true God.'[47]

Despite the importance of describing this experiential piety in Kuyper's devotional writings, Joustra's thesis does not mainly focus on describing Bavinck's piety *in toto*. Notwithstanding the above, what is vital for this research is that Joustra mentions that Bavinck stressed piety's relevance, particularly in connection to the *Imitatio Christi*.[48]

Clearly, there are still questions to answer. For example, how did Bavinck describe Reformed piety? How did Bavinck illustrate the importance of an experiential fellowship with the Triune God? If Kuyper warned against cold intellectualism, did Bavinck do the same? Joustra's observations on the necessity of devotion to God as part of the connection between piety and practice are helpful as prompts emphasising the need for more research on the place of *praxis pietatis* in Bavinck's theology.

Summarising the survey of scholarship on Bavinck and the concept of piety, we can conclude that so far, there have not been dissertations devoted to this theme in Herman Bavinck's works and life. However, there has been some research in articles and other dissertations that can help guide this research project.

In 2003, George Harinck published an article titled 'The Reformed Spirituality of Herman Bavinck'. There, Harinck primarily focuses on a biographical description of Bavinck and also provides important quotations that shed some light on the place of piety in Bavinck's life – for example, the description of Bavinck by Snouck Hurgronje as *vroom* at his death bed in 1921. In his conclusion, Harinck defines spirituality as 'the way in which a person experiences God, the world, and himself',[49] calling attention to the experiential and holistic elements thereby entailed. Although this article has been widely cited in subsequent literature on Bavinck,[50] it does not delve into the idea of piety or spirituality in Bavinck in more conceptual terms.

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[47] Joustra, "Following", 356.
[48] Joustra, "Following", 359.
[49] George Harinck, "'Something That Must Remain, If the Truth Is to Be Sweet and Precious to US': The Reformed Spirituality of Herman Bavinck", *CTJ 38* (2003): 248-62..
[50] For example, Brock's *Orthodox yet modern*; Brian G. Mattson, *Restored to Our Destiny* and Joustra's PhD dissertation, "Following the Way of Jesus: Herman Bavinck and John Howard Yoder in Dialogue on the Imitation of Christ".

The English translation of Bavinck's preface to 'The Life and Works of Ralph and Ebenezer Erskine' (2012) contains a short introduction by Henk van den Belt that describes the importance of covenant theology in the renewal of personal life and society.[51] There, van den Belt summarises Bavinck's relevance to the conversion experience in connection with covenant theology, an essential element both in the Scottish Secession tradition (1733) and Bavinck's own branch of the Dutch Reformed tradition. In his conclusion, van den Belt notes Bavinck's concern regarding a certain superficiality in neo-Calvinist circles, in contrast to which Bavinck finds a necessary corrective in Scottish Reformed devotional literature (i.e., the Erskine brothers' works). There, Bavinck identified what he called 'healthy mysticism'.[52] Finally, in another article published in 2011, van den Belt deals with Bavinck's uses of Dutch post-Reformation sources, with a particular focus on regeneration and the notion of internal/external call.[53] While there is no mention of the use and reception of early modern writings regarding piety, this article describes the use of *Nadere Reformatie* sources in building eclectic arguments during an ecclesiastical controversy in Bavinck's context, concerning 'the order in which the benefits of the covenant of grace relate to one another and follow each other, in the mind of God as well as in their application to humanity'.[54]

This survey of previous Bavinck scholarship allows us to delineate some of the elements that this dissertation must consider. As was mentioned previously, both John Bolt and Henk van den Belt mention the *Nadere Reformatie* as a particular movement that was influential in the theology of Herman Bavinck. The theology of this seventeenth-century Dutch movement[55] was influential both for the ecclesiastical context in which Bavinck was raised, and for Kuyper's own theological development. Therefore, alongside Calvin's understanding of piety, it is crucial to consider the theology of piety developed in the *Nadere Reformatie* movement.

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[51] Henk van den Belt, "Herman Bavinck on Scottish Covenant Theology and Reformed Piety" in *TBR* 3 (2012):164-177.
[52] van den Belt, "Herman Bavinck on Scottish Covenant Theology and Reformed Piety", 166-167.
[53] Henk van den Belt, "Herman Bavinck and His Reformed Sources on the Call to Grace: A Shift in Emphasis towards the Internal Work of the Spirit" in *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* Volume 29 Number 1 (Spring 2011), 41-59.
[54] Herman Bavinck, *Saved by Grace. The Holy Spirit's Work in Calling and Regeneration*, ed. J. Mark Beach, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 3. Hereafter, Bavinck, *Calling and Regeneration*. For an introduction about the controversy see the introductory essay by J. Mark Beach at the introduction of *Calling and Regeneration* (pp. ix-lvi), and van den Belt, "Herman Bavinck and His Reformed Sources".
[55] The theology of the *Nadere Reformatie* is described in the following pages.

Attention to Calvin and *Nadere Reformatie* comprehensions of *praxis pietatis* is necessary precisely because, through his understanding of church history and dogmatics, Bavinck formed a theological system drawing from Patristic, Reformation, post-Reformation and Modern sources. In considering this, the results of the analysis of early modern theologians' *praxis pietatis* are indispensable in grappling with the Reformed orthodox sources in Bavinck's elaboration of the concept of piety.

The quest for the influence of Reformed orthodoxy's concept of *pietas* in Bavinck's theology acquires a significative relevance as a post-Reformation orthodox source in light of Cory Brock's thesis. As we saw before, Brock aims to describe the modern reading of Bavinck through the appropriation of Schleiermacher's concept of religion or piety, describing in this way the catholicity of an 'orthodox and yet modern' Bavinck. However, because Brock already identified a *modern* source in Bavinck's theology of religion, it is crucial to identify the Reformed *orthodox* sources in Bavinck's holistic elaboration of the concept of piety. As Bavinck used Schleiermacher's understanding of the feeling of absolute dependence as the foundation of religion in general,[56] we must ask, from which sources does Bavinck develop his understanding of the essence of the Christian religion? The answer to this question is significant for this research because, for Bavinck, the elements concerning the revelation of true religion's essence are, for example, Christ, the gospel, and the covenant of grace.[57] Therefore, covenant theology — as a significative element in post-Reformation Reformed dogmatics — is a crucial concept in understanding the essence of piety. Where can we find these covenantal sources or ideas in Bavinck's works? The answer to this question leads us not only to Calvin[58] but also to Reformed orthodox theologians.

Finally, the answer to the question about the Reformed influences that shaped Bavinck's understanding of piety should not only be founded on theology and church history, but also more immediately on his family and upbringing. In other words, how did his parents understand Christian piety, and to what extent did this influence Herman's life and thought?

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[56] *PoR,* 118. In *RD* I, 242, Bavinck writes that the 'creaturely dependence, though it is not the essence of religion, is its foundation'. See also note 3 in *PoR*, 118.
[57] *PoR*, 158.
[58] For a description of covenant theology in Calvin's theology see Peter A. Lillback, *The Binding of God. Calvin's Role in the Development of Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001).

To accomplish this task, this thesis must begin by setting out the backdrop, before moving on to Bavinck himself. Accordingly, the rest of this opening chapter will briefly describe the place of *pietas* in three critical influences on Bavinck's own account: Calvin's theology of piety; the account found in some representatives of the *Nadere Reformatie* movement; and finally, in the piety found amongst Christians in Dutch Secession of 1834. The latter leads directly into the piety that animated the Bavinck family.

The purpose of introducing the role of the concept of piety in Calvin's theology, some representatives of Reformed Orthodoxy and Herman Bavinck's own father has a double purpose. First, to highlight the relevance of *praxis pietatis* in the Reformed tradition to which Herman Bavinck adhered. Second, to make known some of the experiential and holistic elements that composed the concept of piety in Herman's predecessors and thus, see its continuity with the Reformed and neo-Calvinistic theology of Herman Bavinck.

III. The piety of John Calvin

From the first to the last edition of *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, piety occupies a vital place in the theology of John Calvin. Despite the absence of an explicit definition of piety in the first edition (1536), it is possible to find some concepts that will shape Calvin's definition of piety in his post-1536 theological writings. The subtitle of the first edition is explicit in his intention in this regard:

> *Institutes of the Christian Religion*
>
> Embracing almost the whole sum of piety [*pietatis summa*], and whatever is necessary to know of the doctrine of salvation: A work of most worthy to read by all persons zealous for piety [*pietatis*].[59]

In the dedicatory letter to the French king — reprinted until the last edition of the *Institutes* — Calvin expressed part of this treatise's purpose, namely, that Christians 'might be shaped to true godliness [*veram pietate*]'.[60] At the beginning of chapter one, two key concepts that will form his definition of *pietas* can be observed: the knowledge of God, and knowledge of man.[61] Concerning God, we should first not only learn about him but also 'hold with sure faith [*certa fide*], he is infinite wisdom, righteousness, goodness, mercy truth, power and life.'

[59] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion. 1536 Edition*. Translated and annotated by Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1986), iii.
[60] Calvin, *Institutes. 1536*, 1.
[61] As Ford Battles indicates, 'the emphasis on honoring God and being thankful to him are central themes in Calvin's piety'. Calvin, *Institutes. 1536*, xxvii.

Secondly, he argues, we must learn that everything has been created for God's glory. Thirdly, Calvin states that God is a 'just judge', and finally, he is also 'merciful', ready to save those who put their 'trust [*fiducia*] in him.'[62]

Considering that Calvin begins and ends this section with the concepts of *certa fide* and *fiducia*, some attention should be paid to how Calvin understood faith. In his view, the benefits of Christ — the one who 'put on our flesh, to enter a covenant [*foedus*] with us and to join us close to him — and the Holy Spirit's gifts are ours if we 'embrace and receive them with sure faith [*certa fide*]'. In other words, we must describe Calvin's concept of faith because God leads us to the knowledge of ourselves (created in his image and then fallen in Adam) to then lead us by 'sure faith' to the 'knowledge of his gentleness and of his sweetness'.[63] As this thesis will show, both the certainty of faith (*zekerheid des geloofs*), and the place of covenant for objective and subjective Christian religion, were particular themes in Bavinck's theology.

Calvin describes the nature of faith in chapter two. He defines Christian faith as a 'firm conviction of mind whereby we determine with ourselves that God's truth is so certain, that is incapable of not accomplishing what it has pledged to do by his holy Word.' In other words, 'faith itself is a sure [*securam*] and certain [*certam*] possession of those things God has promised to us' that is 'freely-given' by the work of the Holy Spirit. [64] In summary, some of the elements that will define piety in Calvin's following treatises are i) the knowledge of who God is and what God has done, and ii) a human's response in a faith that contains certainty.

In 1538, Calvin published a Latin Catechism based on the French version (1537). In the preface to the Latin version, Calvin shows the intention of his new theological treatise, which was addressed to those who 'devoutly honor the gospel…and the increase of true godliness [*pietatis*]'. His aim, in this instance, was to seek unity among the different churches. For Calvin, it is to their benefit that 'all churches embrace one another in mutual love'.[65] The zeal for cooperation and peace is given in the urgency of unity of doctrine (*doctrinae*) and minds (*animorum*) in order to advance in the fear of God, genuine holiness

[62] Calvin, *Institutes. 1536*, 15.
[63] Calvin, *Institutes. 1536*, 18.
[64] Calvin, *Institutes. 1536*, 42-43 and 57-58.
[65] I. John Hesselink, *Calvin's First Catechism. A Commentary. Featuring Ford Lewis Battles's translation of the 1538 Catechism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 1.

and sincere piety (*sincera pietate*). From a catholic disposition, Calvin proceeds to define the term *pietas* in his theological writings.

True *pietas* is a 'sincere feeling which loves God as father as much as it fears and reverences him as Lord, embraces his righteousness, and dreads offending him worse than death.'[66] But to beget, nourish and strength piety – *faith* joined with *fear* – we need to know about God from nature, but more so still from his written word. What things should we know about God? Almost the same list of attributes written by Calvin in 1536 is repeated here.[67] Alongside these, his definition of true faith is also echoed. For Calvin, faith is not merely about the brain but the heart. Therefore, Christian faith is not a 'bare knowledge of God or understanding of Scripture which rattles around the brain and affects the heart not at all … but is a firm and staunch confidence of the heart by which we securely respond in God's mercy promised us through the Gospel.'[68] This heartfelt assurance has a trinitarian foundation. Faith is a gift of God, the Lord who covenants with us in Christ – the object of our faith – being applied by the Holy Spirit.[69] The Spirit subjectively applies the objective promises of God's 'Holy Word' in order to bring the certainty of faith to our hearts.[70] This trinitarian concept of piety, where faith has a particular significance, will be further developed in his 1541 French *Institutes* translation from the 1539 Latin edition.

This edition is a fruit of the works previously described and is crucial if one is to understand further editions.[71] Instead of being a catechetical book providing a summary of piety, the *Institutes* now becomes a fundamental instruction to candidates in theology, in order to read the Bible. However, from 1539/41, the focus is 'no longer an instruction in piety'.[72] But, this does not mean that *pietas* is left behind. Rather, the opposite is true. The catechetical intention switched to an instructional one, but piety continued to permeate this treatise until the final edition. In this sense, we can observe that theological education and piety were united in Calvin's theology. This leads us to consider and describe Bavinck's thought regarding the relationship between theology and piety, especially in theology students.

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[66] Hesselink, *Calvin's First Catechism*, 8.
[67] Hesselink, *Calvin's First Catechism*, 8-9.
[68] Hesselink, *Calvin's First Catechism*, 18.
[69] Hesselink, *Calvin's First Catechism*, 18-19.
[70] Hesselink, *Calvin's First Catechism*, 18.
[71] Richard Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 102.
[72] Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin*, 103.

The 1538/41 edition adds new content to the chapters of the 1536 edition, and also includes new chapters.[73] These additions include material dealing with definitions of piety, faith, and the Christian life, for which reason they will be briefly described below.

In the first chapter, we found the introduction of the concept of a 'feeling for divinity' that is common to all people. While this idea appeared first in his 1537/38 catechism, it is further developed here. The seed of religion is rooted in every human mind and firmly fixed in the heart, but because of sin, 'it is incapable of leading us to a true knowledge of [God].'[74] Since this is an 'empty shadow of religion', it is necessary to describe what pure and true religion is. For this, special knowledge of God is needed, where godliness follows from it. This knowledge involves the recognition of God as Lord and Father. These two understandings of God come from the *pietas* definition of 1537/38 and are vital to understanding Calvin's view of Christian and true religion. On the one hand, regarding God as Father leads believers to love and revere him. On the other hand, regarding God as Lord leads them to fear him. Considering this, Calvin proceeds to define true religion: 'faith joined with unfeigned fear of God, the word "fear" compromising both love for his righteousness which God has commanded in his law, and reverence, freely and wholeheartedly given, for his majesty.'[75] Again, together with concepts of fear, love and reverence, faith is vital in his definition of true religion.

At the beginning of chapter four, Calvin rejects the notion of faith as mere belief, because this understanding of faith is void of God's fear and piety. In fact, he argues, Scripture is opposed to this idea of faith, which Calvin attributed to the Sophists and Sorbonists.[76] Therefore, a true definition of faith considers the mind and heart. True faith, derived from God's word is a 'firm and certain knowledge of God's goodwill to us which, being founded on the free promise given in Jesus Christ, is revealed to our minds and sealed in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.'[77]

The pneumatological emphasis is relevant in this chapter. As piety and faith are related, the word and the Spirit must be in close connection. For Calvin, 'the bare word is unavailing without the illumination of the Holy Spirit.'[78] This argument is *contra* Sorbonic theologians

[73] For a description of chapter developments in the *Institutes* see Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin*, 118-139.
[74] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Translated from the first French edition of 1541 by Robert White (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2014), 4-6.
[75] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion. 1541*, 9.
[76] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion. 1541*, 183-185.
[77] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion. 1541*, 187.
[78] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion. 1541*, 198.

who describe faith as a mere assent to God's Word that excludes certainty of heart. In the same way, and *contra* the Sophists, Calvin highlights the subjective activity in believers' hearts when they 'feel the Holy Spirit' dwelling in them to receive the hope of the resurrection. Therefore, without the person and work of the Holy Spirit, 'Christianity does not exist.'[79] In this way, the objective promises of God's word become secure and certain because 'faith is more a matter of the heart than of the brain, more about the inclination than understanding.'[80]

Faith in God and service to his will are practically described in the new and last chapter of the 1539/1541 edition: *De vita hominis Christiani*. There, Calvin argues that the gospel 'is teaching intended not for the tongue but for life.' Regarding piety or religion, he claims that it has a holistic and transformative nature. Therefore, doctrine and life, belief and action, are closely related. In his words:

> In the matter of religion, we have so far given priority to what is taught, since that is the beginning of our salvation. But to bear fruit and to be profitable, what is taught must lodge in the heart and demonstrate its power in our lives. More than that, it must transform us so that its nature becomes ours… for its influence ought to penetrate our inmost heart and take root in our soul a hundred thousand times more powerfully than all the philosophers' admonitions, which in comparison are so very weak.[81]

How is this evidenced in reality? The chapter's structure shows us theological anthropology in two main ideas: (i) To know that we are not ours, but are rather God's, in 'every department of life.'[82] (ii) Everything must be done for God's glory.[83] From this, we should seek to deny ourselves for the sake of others. This involves the cultivation of humility and service to one's neighbour. The foundation of loving and caring for others is rooted in the concept of the *Imago Dei*.[84] Genuine generosity is essential in the Christian life. As he writes, 'the Lord demands more of us than a happy, cheerful face. Christians must first feel

[79] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion. 1541*, 202.
[80] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion. 1541*, 203.
[81] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion. 1541*, 788.
[82] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion. 1541*, 790.
[83] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion. 1541*, 789-791.
[84] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion. 1541,* 794-795.

burdened for the person who is in need of help…they should be moved to aid him by the same feeling of compassion which they would have for themselves.'[85]

Another theme related to piety in this chapter concerns living under the cross of Christ. Suffering is significant in moulding hearts in humility. Recognising that natural inclination flees from suffering, piety leads believers to obey God's will in the midst of difficulties. Together with this, believers must learn a degree of contempt for the earthly life, and meditate on the heavenly life.[86] However, this idea does not mean a literal rejection of the present world, but the opposite. In Calvin's words, 'believers, however, should not develop such contempt for the present life that it produces hatred of it or ingratitude toward God.'[87] In fact, this desire for the life to come is not in contradiction with enjoying earthly things. For Calvin, God did not create food only for our needs, but also for pleasure and refreshment.[88] In other words, creation was made to be enjoyed. Finally, this chapter and book ends with the importance of considering God's calling in 'every act of life'.[89] The importance given to *vocatio* can help us to understand the all-encompassing nature of piety in Calvin's theology which will later influence the neo-Calvinist worldview. In summary, the 1539/1541 edition presents the distinct elements of *praxis pietatis* for the final edition of the *Institutes*.

In the preface of the 1559 Latin edition, a work that reflects Calvin's final satisfaction with it,[90] he continues holding a prominent place of piety both in his *magnum opus* and life. As a teacher in the church, he had 'no other purpose than to benefit the church by maintaining the pure doctrine of godliness.'[91] The prefatory address to King Francis I is reprinted here from the first edition in 1536, indicating the purpose of this book, i.e., that believers might be shaped to true piety. How did Calvin formulate his definition of *pietas* in the final edition? Again, the knowledge of God is related to godliness, because 'we shall not say that…God is known where there is no religion or piety.'[92]

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[85] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion. 1541*, 796.
[86] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion. 1541*, 808-811.
[87] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion. 1541*, 812.
[88] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion. 1541*, 818.
[89] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion. 1541*, 821.
[90] 'I was never satisfied until the work had been arranged in the order now set forth'. See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Ed. John T. McNeill and trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 3. From hereafter, *Institutes. 1559.*
[91] Calvin, *Institutes. 1559*, 4. Unless otherwise stated, we will quote the Book, Chapter and Paragraph from *Institutes* Battles' edition.
[92] *Institutes*, I.2.1.

Calvin proceeds to understand piety as a bridge between a general knowledge of God and religion. In his words, 'For this sense of the powers of God is for us a fit teacher of piety, from which religion is born. I call "piety" that reverence joined with love of God which the knowledges of his benefits induces'.[93] So too, the 'pious mind' contemplates the one and only true God considered both Lord and Father. Besides, 'the pious mind' (a phrase frequently repeated) flees from sin because it 'loves and reveres God as Father' and 'worships and adores him as Lord'. With all these concepts, Calvin now defines religion: 'faith so joined with an earnest fear of God that this fear also embraces willing reverence and carries with it such legitimate worship [*cultum*] as is prescribed in the law'.[94]

In the previous paragraph we can see a movement in the concept of religion/piety in Calvin's *Institutes*. From the *general* to something more *specific*. From a *sensus* to a *disposition* involving love/fear that manifests itself in *cultus*. This movement towards the specific relationship that the believer has with God must be described in Herman Bavinck's concept of piety.

We can observe that Calvin's piety is closely related to religion (and is even used interchangeably with it). From it, both true worship and service to God are born. Concepts such as honour/love and fear/service are related to God as Father and Lord, respectively, in Calvin's understanding of *pietas*. In the same way, faith, as an element included both in piety and religion, has assurance as part of its nature (Book III, chapter 2). In Calvin's view, this certainty is a fruit of the Spirit's work in the mind and hearts of believers. The pneumatological and experiential elements are vital when Calvin describes assurance of faith, especially in moments of temptations:

> It now remains to pour into the heart itself what the mind has absorbed. For the Word of God is not received by faith if it flits about the top of the brain, but when it takes root in the depth of the heart that it may be invincible defense to withstand and drive off all the stratagems of temptation…The Spirit accordingly serves as a seal, to seal up in our hearts those very promises the certainty of which it has previously impressed upon our minds; and takes the place of a guarantee to confirm and establish them.[95]

[93] *Institutes*, I.2.2
[94] *Institutes*, I.2.2
[95] *Institutes*, III.2.36

As such, piety occupies a significant place in Calvin's *magnum opus*. According to John T. McNeill and Ford Lewis Battles, his theology is 'his piety described at length'.[96] This is because it was also developed from experiential piety cultivated in his life. The chapter on 'the Christian life' was added in his period in Strasbourg, where he could develop a pastoral character after being expelled from Geneva. As Battles correctly observed, 'it must be said that the Strasbourg sojourn was crucial in working out pastorally and practically and liturgically the full meaning of *pietas*.'[97] *Praxis pietatis* was a theme ingrafted both in his *Institutes* and his own life, because for Calvin, *pietas* was like the soul of life.[98] The end of piety in life serves the same purpose as creation: both function for the glory of the Triune God.[99] The association between piety and the glorification of God is clearly expressed in Calvin's theology, especially for those who have been created and re-created by, and for, God. In Calvin's words:

> Now the great thing is this: we are consecrated and dedicated to God in order that we may thereafter think, speak, meditate, or do nothing except to his glory …We are not our own: in so far as we can, let us therefore forget ourselves and all that is ours. Conversely, we are God's; let us therefore live for him and die for him. We are God's; let his wisdom and will therefore tulle in all our actions.[100]

Both in Calvin's theology and life, this God-glorifying theology was not merely theoretical, but was also practical at the same time. According to John Hesselink, the language used by Calvin in the aforementioned quote is not simply an illustration of profound rhetoric. It is also a kind of autobiography.[101] This sense of piety permeated both Calvin's theology and life because he 'was constantly overwhelmed by the majesty of God, [because he] consecrated himself and his theology to the glory of God.'[102]

Calvin's focus on piety started in his 'sudden conversion', where he received 'some taste and knowledge of true godliness [*verae pietatis*].'[103] In his *Calvin* biography, Bruce Gordon

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[96] Calvin, *Institutes*, li.
[97] Ford Lewis Battles, *The Piety of John Calvin* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 2009), 31.
[98] See Calvin's commentary on 1 Peter 1:3 in John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*. Ed. and trans. John Owen (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1855), 368.
[99] Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.5.1.
[100] *Institutes*, III.7.1
[101] I. John Hesselink, "Calvin's theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 89.
[102] Hesselink, "Calvin's theology"90.
[103] John Calvin, *Commentary on The Book of Psalms*. Volume I, Translated by James Anderson (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845), xl.

describes Calvin's first years as an author, regarding piety as central in the theology of the young Calvin. Gordon notes that Calvin's French preface to the New Testament was a 'song of praise to the glory of God and creation. The preface is strikingly close to the first edition of the *Institutes*, particularly with its concern for true piety.'[104] Gordon notes the same idea when he refers to another of the young Calvin's works: 'Read together with the *Psychopannychia*, the preface to the Bible shows the depth of Calvin's grasp of theology and of his biblical piety.'[105]

This experiential theology of living a life that belongs to, and lives for the glory of God, was an influential element formulated in the unity and diversity of Reformed confessionalism of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. For example, a year before Calvin's death, the authors of the *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563) composed in its first question and answer the idea the claim that the only comfort for the Christian is to know that he does not belong to himself, but to Christ in body and soul, both in life and death. In the same way, the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (1647) declares in its first answer that 'man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.' Through these confessional statements, we can observe the echo of Calvin's ideas, and other theologians, resounding through the first two questions of both Reformed catechisms. To this extent, the beginnings of post-Reformation Reformed dogmatics were shaped by the concept of *pietas* as a central element in the theological training. As Richard Muller notes, 'the older Protestant educational model inculcated both a rigorous engagement with the technical disciplines and a rigorous cultivation of personal and corporate piety.'[106]

In summary, Calvin's *pietas* could be understood as including the concepts of faith, love and fear, covering both faith and works. Christian piety is both a faithful, loving reverence that leads believers to the practice of *religio* as *cultus Dei*, and also to love neighbours by keeping the Ten Commandments.[107] As we will see, this is exemplified in the *Nadere Reformatie*, a

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[104] Bruce Gordon, *Calvin* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011), 56.
[105] Gordon, *Calvin*, 56. Considering the first edition (1536) of Calvin's *Institutes*, Gordon describes that 'its dedicatory preface to Francis I reveals, the *Institutes* was intended both as an apology for the Reformed faith in France and as a tool of instruction in the essentials of true piety.' See page 57.
[106] Muller, "Calling, Character, Piety, and Learning", 120.
[107] For a description of the piety of John Calvin see Joel Beeke, "Calvin on Piety", in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, ed. McKim, Donald C. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 125-52. For a summary of piety in the Reformed tradition see for example Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics. The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725.*, Second Edition, Volume One. Prolegomena to Theology, four vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 158, 210-213. Hereafter, *PRRD I*. See also Gregory D. Schuringa, 'Orthodoxy, Scholasticism, and Piety in the Seventeenth-Century Further Reformation: Simon Oomius.', in *Church and School in Early Modern Protestantism: Studies in Honour of Richard A. Muller on the Maturation of a Theological Tradition.*, Studies in the History of a Christian Thought (Leiden: Brill, 2013); F. Ernest Stoefler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism* (Leiden: Brill, 1965); Heinrich Heppe, *A History of*

Dutch movement that reflected Calvin's *cri de coeur:* 'the whole life of Christian ought to be a sort of practice of godliness'.[108]

The relevance of considering, in a general way, the understanding of *praxis pietatis* in the *Nadere Reformatie*, lies in the fact that Bavinck was one of those who critically retrieved Dutch Reformed Orthodoxy in the context of late nineteenth and early twentieth century modernism.[109]

IV. A Further Reformation of Reformed Piety: The *Nadere Reformatie*

Reformed theology began developing in the Netherlands between 1545 and 1560, while the consolidation of early Protestant orthodoxy began to mature in Britain and on the rest of the Continent. Dutch Reformed Theology would become a clear example of the progress and international catholicity of Protestant theology during the periods of early, high and late orthodoxy.[110]

By 1572, tensions related to two different understandings of the church arose within Dutch Calvinism. On the one hand, the regional government argued for a national Reformed church within which all Dutch Protestants would become members. On the other hand, Reformed ministers considered the church as the Body of Christ, where only professing believers whose faith was practised could be counted as members.[111] In that year, and despite these internal conflicts, piety was highlighted in Reformed circles.[112]

Thanks to the work of Jean Taffin (1528-1602), from 1586 there was a display of pietistic books, including the translation of English Puritan books into the Dutch language. Puritan

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Puritanism, Pietism, and Mysticism and their Influences on the Reformed Church. A Translation of Heinrich Heppe's German work Geschichte Des Pietismus Un Der Mystik In Der Reformierte Kirche., trans. Blok, Arie. (Leiden: Brill, 1879), viii. See also Jerald C. Brauer, "Types of Puritan Piety", *Church History* 56, n.º 1 (March 1987): 39-58. For a description of Reformed spirituality in Dutch post-reformation theology see Arie de Reuver, *Sweet Communion. Trajectories of Spirituality from the Middle Ages through the Further Reformation.*, trans. James de Jong (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007).

[108] *Institutes,* III.19.2.

[109] Willem van Asselt indicates that during the nineteenth and 'and even into the twentieth century, Reformed Orthodoxy and Scholasticism have remained alive' in the theological works of professors Herman Bavinck. See Willem van Asselt, "Reformed Orthodoxy: A Short History of Research" in *A Companion to Reformed Orthodoxy*. Ed. Herman J. Selderhuis (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 11. The critical reception of Reformed orthodoxy is the first (of sixteen) thesis of Neo-Calvinistic theology according to Brock and Sutanto in *Neo-Calvinism*, 293.

[110] Joel Beeke, "The Dutch Second Reformation (Nadere Reformatie)", *CTJ* 1993:298-327. See also Karel Blei, *The Netherlands Reformed Church. 1571-2005.*, trans. Allan J. Janssen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006). Muller, *PRRD* I, 32, 66-67.

[111] Fred A. van Lieburg, "From pure church to pious culture. The Further Reformation in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic", in *Later Calvinism. International perspectives*, ed. Graham, W. Fred (Kirksville: Sixteenth Century Journal Publisher, 1994), 409-29.

[112] Willem J. op 't Hof, "Puritan Emotions in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Piety", in *Puritanism and Emotion in the Early Modern World*, ed. Alec Ryrie y Tom Schwanda (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016), 213-40.

books dominated the market until 1615, when Dutch pietistic books exceeded the translated ones.[113] This relationship between Britain and the Netherlands – through books and theologians – was fundamental to the international development of Reformed theology and piety.[114]

From that time, the Dutch Reformed pietistic movement took a definitive form through what is called *Nadere Reformatie*. This movement began in the period of early orthodoxy, matured in the period of high orthodoxy and declined in the late period of orthodoxy.[115] *Nadere Reformatie* can be translated as 'Further Reformation' or 'more intimate Reformation'.[116] In response to the growth of nominal Christians inside the Dutch Reformed Church, the Further Reformation sought to apply the doctrine to the heart of believers.[117] Therefore, their goal was to live reformed lives according to their beliefs, as confessed in their Reformed confessions of faith.

Because of this emphasis on piety, the *Nadere Reformatie* called for an experiential fellowship with God, which would bring a reformation in all areas of life.[118] What differentiates the *Nadere Reformatie* from previous pietistic movements, however, was its formal program of reformation. Personal and experiential piety had to be reflected in concrete agendas committed within the reformation of family, church, and politics.[119] Because of this, we can see four features in the Dutch Further Reformation: (i) an experiential and mystical emphasis, (ii) a socio-cultural (moral) reformation, (iii) an ecclesiastical reformation, and (iv) a political (theocratical) reformation.[120] According to the definition provided by the scholars of the *Stichting Studie der Nadere Reformatie* in 1995, the *Nadere Reformatie* was a Dutch Reformed movement in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which,

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[113] op't Hof, "Puritan Emotions", 217.
[114] For connection between Scottish and Dutch Reformed theologians in the seventeenth century see James Eglinton, "Scottish-Dutch Reformed Theological Links in the Seventeethn Century," in *Dutch Crossing* 37:2 (2013): 131-148.
[115] The Nadere Reformation can be divided in early, middle and late stages. For this see Cornelis Pronk, *A Godly Heritage. The Secession of 1834 and Its Impact on Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and North America* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), 11. If we follow the distinction of Richard Muller in his *Post Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, the representatives from the early period are, for example, Jean Taffin (1529-1602) and Willem Teellinck (1579 – 1629). From the high orthodoxy are Gisbertus Voetius (1589 -1676), Herman Witsius (1636 -1708), Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635-1711) and Petrus van Mastricht (1630 -1706). From the late period we can consider Theodorus van der Groe (1705-1784) and the Scottish theologian Alexander Comrie (1706-1774).
[116] See Beeke, "The Dutch Second Reformation".
[117] van Lieburg, "From pure church", 413.
[118] van Lieburg, "From pure church", 414.
[119] op't Hof, "Puritan Emotions", 216-20.
[120] van Lieburg, "From pure church", 414.

> in reaction to the watering down or absence of living faith, placed the personal experience of faith and piety in the centre, and on that basis established substantive and procedural reform programmes, submitted them to the ecclesiastical, political, and social organisms, and/or in that line strove for a further reformation of church, society, and state in word and deed.[121]

In sum, through the *Nadere Reformatie*, Dutch Reformed piety was related to a holistic reformation that began in peoples' hearts and extended outwards to glorify God in every sphere of human life.[122] Highlighting the holistic and experiential conceptualization of piety in the *Nadere Reformetie* is critical to consider when analysing the neo-Calvinist concept of piety in the theology of Herman Bavinck.

How and where was this theological view developed? The answer is found in the understanding of theology, academy and religion that typified the *Nadere Reformatie*.

IV.1 *Praxis pietatis* in the academy and church

In historical terms, the academy was an important place for developing *praxis pietatis* in Reformed orthodoxy.[123] During the first half of the seventeenth century, the establishment of universities played a relevant role in pastoral and theological training.[124] Similarly, in the Netherlands, the theological faculties established in Leiden, Utrecht and Franeker were almost obligatory centres for international students as part of their theological formation in the *peregrinatio academica* context. Besides this, the international teaching staff at these universities, and the scholastic methodology of research and education, positioned Dutch

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[121] Quoted in Andreas Beck, *Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676) on God, Freedom, and Contingency: An Early Modern Reformed Voice* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 139. In his book, Beck provides a relevant summary of *Nadere Reformatie* scholarship, see 127-48.

[122] The *Nadere Reformatie* academy provided the ground for scientific and philosophical training. For example, the natural philosopher Isaac Beeckman (1588-1637) studied in the University of Leiden with Voetius and both defended the *Nadere Reformatie*. See Ben Van Acker, "Isaac Beeckman (1588-1637) and the rise of Modern Science: an exploration of Beeckman's theological thought in the context of his Mechanical Philosophy", M.A dissertation (2019), Evangelische Theologische Faculteit, Leuven.

[123] See Muller, "Calling, Character, Piety, and Learning".

[124] Willem J. van Asselt and Paul H.A.M Abels, "The Seventeenth Century" in *Handbook of Dutch Church History*, ed. Herman J. Selderhuis (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 271.

academia as a valuable place 'for the cultural diffusion and especially for the spread of Reformed thought in Europe.'[125]

During the first quarter of the seventeenth century, four professors at Leiden University composed a theological handbook that reflected the post-Synod of Dort (1618/19) theology in a scholastic fashion.[126] In fact, this treatise resulted from a cycle of public disputations held from 1620 to 1624 in the theological faculty at Leiden. During that century, the 52 disputations were printed five times.[127] After that, there were no more reprints. However, after two centuries, it was reprinted again in 1881 under the editorial eye of a young Herman Bavinck. That particular direct connection means that a summary of the *Synopsis*' description of theology is necessary to understand the connection between the Reformed orthodoxy and Bavinck.

Disputatio I shows a vital aspect of Reformed academy: the close relationship between theology and piety. After presenting the *archetypal/ectypal* distinction,[128] Polyander defines theology - in the *locus* of supernatural revelation – as 'the knowledge [*scientiam*] or wisdom [*sapientiam*] of the divine matters that God has revealed to people in this world through ministers of his word […] to lead them to the knowledge of the truth which accords with godliness [*secundum pietatem*]…'[129] This idea continues after describing theology according to this chief efficient cause [*Deus*],[130] instrumental cause [*Dei Verbum*] and the foremost fruit and goal [*Primus fructus ac finis*] of theology: knowledge of the truth according to godliness. At this point, supernatural truth is distinguished from natural truth, because the latter 'does not have the power to infuse his heart [of man] with godliness [*pietatem*] and true service to God [*verum Dei cultum*].'[131]

While the first disputation describes a second use and goal of theology, it highlights the glory of God as the highest goal of theology (*ultimus theologiae finis*). For our analysis, the previous statement is essential to comprehend the relation – in theology – between piety and the glory of God to answer the question: is theology a theoretical or a practical discipline? The *Synopsis* replies by acknowledging that theology ought to be called

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[125] van Asselt and Abels, "The Seventeenth Century", 272.
[126] Johannes Polyander (1568-1646), Antonius Walaeus (1572-1639), Antonius Thysius (1565-1640), and Andreas Rivetus (1573-1651). van Asselt and Abels, "The Seventeenth Century", 335. See also the introduction in *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae. Synopsis of a Purer Theology. Latin Text and English Translation. Volume 1/Disputations 1-23*. Ed. Dolf te Velde, trans. Riemer A. Faber (Leiden: Brill, 2015). From hereafter, *Synopsis*.
[127] 1625, 1632, 1642, 1652, and 1658.
[128] *Synopsis*, 33.
[129] *Synopsis*, 35.
[130] *Synopsis*, 39.
[131] *Synopsis*, 41.

theoretical *and* practical. Therefore, and because of its double goal, *pietas* is 'placed in the service of our blessedness and God's glory', and knowledge is 'ranked in service to godliness in sacred literature.'[132]

As a result, theology is not a bare and empty theory, but a practical science that 'powerfully stirs the human will and all the emotions of the heart to worship God and to cherish one's neighbour.'[133] In sum, theology expresses this *pietas* element when its focal point is the glory of God – in a theoretical and practical way – and is reflected in adoration to God and the value or love of the neighbour (*proximum diligendum*).

During the same period of the *Synopsis*' disputation cycles, there was another cycle of disputations held at the University of Franeker, leading, as a result, to the production of a book that became influential within the international Reformed community: *Medulla sacrae theologiae* by William Ames (1576-1633).[134]

Ames was an English representative of this international and Reformed orthodoxy, whose theology matured on Dutch soil. Ames' influence is not only seen in the *Nadere Reformatie* or England and New England's Reformed theology, but also in Herman Bavinck's *Gereformeerde ethiek*, especially in the section on human conscience, alongside William Perkins (1558-1602).[135]

Ames studied theology at Cambridge under William Perkins.[136] From 1610 until his death in 1633, he lived in the Netherlands. The year of his arrival is considered crucial for the defence and consolidation of Reformed theology mainly due to the continuing growth in the number of the Remonstrants, the followers of the theology of Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609) and opponents of Calvinistic orthodoxy. Because of his Reformed convictions, Ames 'was tasked with formulating the opposition and advancing the Calvinistic position at the Synod of Dort.'[137] With the victory of the Calvinist party at the Synod of Dordrecht (1618-1619), the Netherlands became an important stronghold of Protestant orthodoxy in

[132] *Synopsis*, 43.
[133] *Synopsis*, 43.
[134] Donald Sinnema and Henk van den Belt, "The *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae* (1625) as a Disputation Cycle" in *Church History and Religious Culture* 92 (2012), 505-537.
[135] This will be analysed in the following chapters.
[136] For a recent introduction to the life and theology of William Perkins see Joel Beeke and Greg A. Salazar (editors), *William Perkins, Architect of Puritanism* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019).
[137] van Vliet, *The Rise of Reformed System*, 171-172 . See also Heppe, *A History of Puritanism*, 78-80.

theology and piety. From Franeker, Ames made valuable contributions to Reformed theology, as is reflected in his *Medulla*.[138]

The *Medulla* (*The Marrow of Theology*) was published in Latin in 1623, and in a short time, had become compulsory reading for Leiden, Cambridge, Harvard, and Yale.[139] The first chapter describes the theological nature of the *Nadere Reformatie* programme: *Theologia est doctrina Deo vivendi* (Theology is the doctrine of living for God). With this approach, Ames continued paving the way for the practical aspect of Dutch Reformed orthodoxy. For him, 'men live to God when they live in accord with the will of God, to the glory of God, and with God working in them.'[140]

A key aspect of Ames' theology was his covenantal formulation. For Jan van Vliet, 'that Ames cast this [experiential Christianity] within a covenantal framework simply confirms the central role given to covenant concept going all the way to Calvin.'[141] The covenantal and Christological heritage can be traced to his mentor, William Perkins. As Richard Muller has described, 'Perkins emphasised the work of Christ and its application in covenant: "The foundation and ground worke of the covenant is Christ Jesus the Mediatour, in whome all promises of God are yea and amen." This balance of system and piety focused on the work of Christ and the covenant was carried forward by Perkins' foremost pupil, William Ames.'[142] In this way, the idea of a covenantal relationship between God and human beings was fundamental to the Christian life.[143] Through covenant theology, both the sovereignty of God and an ethical way of living for God's glory are emphasised.[144] Because of this, the piety reflected in Ames' theology encompassed all the areas of human existence: 'This practice of life is so perfectly reflected in theology that there is no precept of universal truth relevant to living well in domestic economy, morality, political life, or lawmaking which does not rightly pertain to theology.'[145]

The richness of this treatise led Gisbertus Voetius (1589-1676) to recommend to his students that they learn the English language for the study of Puritan divines, and also to

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[138] van Vliet, *The Rise of Reformed System*, 19.
[139] William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*. Translated from the third Latin edition, 1629, and edited by John D. Eusden (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1968), 1.
[140] Ames, *Marrow*, 77.
[141] van Vliet, *The Rise of Reformed System,* 178.
[142] Richard A. Muller, "Covenant and conscience in English Reformed theology: Three Variations on a 17th Century Theme" in *Westminster Theological Journal* 42:2 (Spring 1980), 308-34.
[143] Ames, *Marrow*, 51.
[144] Muller, "Covenant and conscience", 310.
[145] Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 78.

memorise Ames' *Marrow of Theology*.[146] Voetius' relevance to this dissertation lies in the way Bavinck refers to him: 'Voetius was, without doubt, the most solid theologian of the Dutch Reformed Church in the seventeenth century.'[147]

IV.2 Gisbertus Voetius.

Voetius' writings show the theological maturation of the *Nadere Reformatie*.[148] This is reflected in the exposition of two of seventeenth-century Reformed theology's most significant features: scholasticism and piety. In 1634, he gave an inaugural lecture at the University of Utrecht entitled *De Pietate cum Scientia Conjuenda*. He defended the thesis that academic theological study must be intimately related to a life of piety. At the beginning of the inaugural lecture, Voetius explains what piety is (*quid sit pietas*) in biblical terms: faith working through love (*fidem per caritatem efficacem*). Throughout his speech, it is possible to see Voetius' holistic vision when addressing, for example, people with the vocation of lawyers, politicians, and poets. Voetius encourages his listeners to persevere in their studies for the future of the Republic. For this, they should prepare themselves for 'all the duties of piety' (*omnibus pietatis officiis*).[149] At the end of his oration, Voetius addresses theologians. Those who focus on 'spiritual medicine' (*spiritualis medicinae*) should consider all contemplations, disputes, dogmatics, elenctic, ascetics, scholastic theology, and so on as working to worship God.[150]

Voetius goes to the heart of theological students to exhort them to live in harmony with what they preach and how they live. If this is not so, they will be a 'trouble for schools and churches, a cancer to their order' (*scholarum et ecclesiarum gravamina*, *ordinis sui carcinomata*).[151] Voetius includes himself in his exhortation, making it known that the practice of piety must be in the life of the teacher as well as in that of the students. Therefore, piety involves sound dogmatics as well as sound practice:

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146 Muller, *PRRD 1*, 66.
147 DO: 'Voetius was ongetwijfeld de degelijkste theoloog van de Naderlandsche Gereformeerde Kerken in de zeventiende eeuw.' Herman Bavinck, "Gisbertus Voetius." Review of Gisbertus Voetius, by A. C. Duker. *De Bazuin* 41:41 (1893).
148 For recent scholarship about Voetius' life and theology, see the substantial work of Beck, *Gisbertus Voetius*. See also Joel Beeke, "Toward a Reformed Marriage of Knowledge and Piety: The Contribution of Gisbertus Voetius" in *Reformation & Revival* 10:1 (Winter de 2001): 125-55.
149 Gisbertus Voetius, *Inaugurele rede over Godzaligheid te verbinden met wetenschap gehouden aan de Illustere School te Utrecht op de 21ste augustus 1634*. Latijnse tekst opnieuw uitgegeven met Nederlandse vertaling, inleiding en toelichtingen door Dr. Aart de Groot (Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1978), 38.
150 Voetius, *Inaugurele rede over Godzaligheid,* 52.
151 Voetius, *Inaugurele rede over Godzaligheid,* 54.

> Woe to you, woe to me, woe to all theologians, if we are devoted to religion, if we inculcate in others piety that we may have never tasted ourselves…what help is it to have disputed accurately about God, about outward and inward works, about the persons of the Trinity and similar mysteries, if we lack true humility and displease the Trinity?[152]

His emphasis on piety within the academy can also be reflected in a book published in 1644 under the title *Ta aschtika / Exercitia Pietatis* (The ascetic things – the exercise of piety). Interestingly, he made use of medieval mystical literature, English Puritan Reformed books, and Dutch Reformed authors for the composition of this scholastic book. Through Voetius, we can observe a historical and catholic use of references concerning the development of the doctrine of piety, even using some Jesuit sources.[153] This way of interacting with other theological traditions did not mean a rejection of his Reformed convictions, but quite the opposite. For Voetius, Reformed piety is reflected in Reformed catholicity, a disposition also echoed in Bavinck's theology.

Voetius' holistic view of piety was not only exposed in his *Exercitia Pietatis*, but also in *Selectarum disputationum theologicarum* (about ethics), and in *Politicae Ecclesasticae* (which also dealt with the topic of overseas church planting).[154] Voetius intended to connect the academy with the church by training the next generation of theologians and ministers of the gospel. Thus, the fruit of Reformed scholastic and godly theology should be a benefit for the church in general.

As such, in his view, academy and church were joined together by piety. According to F. G. Broeyer, Voetius began a movement of piety with the ministers that he had trained. Broeyer mentions that in Voetius' *Selectae Disputationes* (1655), he 'trained his students to be ministers capable of directing a congregation of church members who hungered and thirsted after a faith that would bring them closer to God.'[155] One of his students was

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[152] LO: 'Vae vobis, vae mihi, vae theologis omnibus, si religioni studemus, si pietatem aliis instillamus, cuius gustum forte nunquam percepimus…Quid iuvabit subtiliter de Deo, de operibus ad extra et ad intra, de personarum Trinitate et similibus mysteriis disputasse, si vera humilitate destituti displicuerimus Trinitati?' Voetius, *Inaugurele rede over Godzaligheid*, 58.
[153] Heppe, *A History of Puritanism,* 84-85.
[154] Beeke, "Toward a Reformed Marriage of Knowledge and Piety", 138. For Voetius' detailed programme of church planting see Jongeneel, "The missiology of Gisbertus Voetius".
[155] F.G.M. Broeyer, "Gisbertus Voetius, God's Gardener" in *Scholasticism Reformed. Essays in Honour of Willem J. van Asselt.* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 130.

Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635-1711), a minister who wrote an influential theological book, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, published in 1700.[156]

IV.3 Wilhelmus à Brakel.

The full title of à Brakel's *Magnum Opus* posits covenant theology as necessary for Dutch Reformed Theology: *The Christian's Reasonable Service, in which Divine Truths concerning the Covenant of Grace are Expounded, Defended against Opposing Parties, and their Practice Advocated as well as The Administration of this Covenant in the Old and New Testaments*.[157]

In this work, covenant theology is presented for the edification of laypeople accentuating experiential theology. Brakel's notion of Reformed experiential piety is indispensable for understanding his rejection of the separatist-pietistic tendencies of 'Labadism'. Jean de Labadie (1610-1674) was the founder of a mystical group that abandoned the Dutch Reformed Church. Prior to his conversion to Protestantism, de Labadie was a member of the Society of Jesus. As a result of his study of the Bible and Calvin's *Institutes*, however, he embraced Protestantism.[158] Because of his biblical knowledge and zeal for further reformation, he was ordained as a minister in the Reformed Church. However, seeing that the church did not exercise what he regarded as proper ecclesiastical discipline, he came to argue that the Reformed church was a deformed church. His zeal for reformation led him to abandon the church communion to begin his own church with strong mystical influences.[159]

What was the response of à Brakel to the separatist and mystical influences of Labadism? Remarkably, in the third edition of *The Christian's Reasonable Service* (1707), à Brakel added a new chapter with a significant title: 'A Warning Exhortation Against Pietists (*Piëtisten*), Quietists, and All Who in a Similar Manner Have Deviated to a Natural and Spiritless Religion Under the Guise of Spirituality.'

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[156] For information about the importance and the several numbers of editions of this book see Willem van Vlastuin, "Spiritual marriage. A key to the theology and spirituality of Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635-1711)", *Journal for the History of Reformed Pietism* 2:2 (2016), note 4.

[157] Wilhelmus a Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*. Ed. Joel Beeke, trans. Bartel Elshout, vol. 1-4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015).

[158] Cornelis Pronk, *A Godly Heritage*, 23-25. For a biographical introduction to the life of Jean de Labadie see Heppe, *A History of Puritanism*, 135-203.

[159] Heppe, *A History of Puritanism,* 148.

Brakel added this new chapter because of the rise of people who were called pietists but in fact, were not because, 'to be a pietist means to be a godly person.'[160] The problem is exacerbated when these mystics 'have in some places affected those of Reformed persuasion.'[161] For that reason, à Brakel distinguished between the truly godly (*ware Godzaligen*) and the mystics (*mystyken*). However, he argued, not all mystical writers were in error. For example, à Brakel was not targeting Thomas à Kempis (1380-1471), the author of 'that excellent treatise The Imitation of Christ in three volumes', even when he knew that Kempis has 'little to say about the Lord Jesus as being the ransom and righteousness for sinners.'[162]

For à Brakel, the difference between genuinely godly people, and pietists and mystics (*nomine Pietistarum, et mysticorum*)[163] consists in this:

> The mystics comprehend, say, and do everything according to their natural intellect, fantasy, and imagination, doing so without the Spirit. They do not make use of the Lord Jesus (that is, as a ransom, and righteousness unto justification and peace), as being the only way of approach unto God, and unto true and genuine sanctification. Such exercises are hidden from them. Those, however are truly godly, regenerate, and who truly believe, live by faith and not by sight. In all things they make use of the Lord Jesus … These are the old paths … From this you can observe that the difference between the mystics and the truly godly is as the difference between imagination and truth … between worldly and heavenly; between seeking an unknown God and serving the true God.[164]

For our study, it is necessary to consider his warning against that kind of pietism for three reasons. First, à Brakel was a minister who desired to keep the true meaning of piety according to the Reformed tradition. He was cautious in not addressing genuine pious people. Therefore, he was not against true piety, but rather, he was against sectarian

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[160] à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, II, 643. For the context and motives in à Brakel's new chapter of *The Christian Reasonable Service*, see Fred van Lieburg, "Warning against the Pietist: The World of Wilhelmus à Brakel", *Enlightened Religion. From Confessional Churches to Polite Piety in the Dutch Republic.* Ed. Joke Spaans and Jetze Touber (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 346-370.
[161] à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 643.
[162] à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 640-641.
[163] van Lieburg, "Warning against the Pietist", 356.
[164] à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, Vol II, 642. With this description, à Brakel had in mind religious groups such as Quakers, Quietists, and mystics.

pietism. This is a pattern also found in Bavinck.[165] Secondly, even when à Brakel was attracted for a time to Labadism, he considered that true piety maintains unity in the confessional Church, in contrast to the separatist tendencies of Labadism. Thirdly, because the two previous points reflect an aspect that Bavinck also shared: a criticism of pietism through the cultivation of catholic piety.

In summary, à Brakel's theology presents a certain contrast between piety and pietism in Dutch Reformed orthodoxy.[166] In fact, piety stands against rationalism and moralism, two aspects that Bavinck also addressed in his modern context. In à Brakel's words: 'May it be useful in defending the truth and true godliness, both of which are under assault in these days. They are assaulted on the one side by people of a corrupt mind who propose reason to be the rule for doctrine and life; on the other side by people who, in striving for holiness and life, set aside the truth and stray towards a religion which proceeds from nature, revolving around the practice of virtue.'[167]

IV. 4 Conclusion

The *Nadere Reformatie* was committed to theoretical and practical theology. This can be observed not only in the aforementioned theologians but also in Petrus van Mastricht's (1630-1706) definition of theology as '*doctrina Deo vivendi per Christum*'. For van Mastricht, Christian theology was *Theoretico-Practica*.[168] In van Mastricht's definition of theology, we can

[165] See chapter four.
[166] Despite some similarities, Dutch pietism was a movement that presented some differences with German pietism. While the latter had a marked Lutheran label and tended to split from the structure of that tradition, Dutch pietism stayed within the Dutch Reformed Church and was accompanied by the *Nadere Reformatie*. According to Graafland, op 't Hof, and van Lieburg, these German and Dutch pietisms stem from different points of origin. On the one hand, they note, references to German pietism can be traced to a letter from a follower of Philipp Jacob Spener in 1680, whose influence was limited among the Reformed in the Netherlands. Conversely, references to pious groups in the Netherlands can be found from the end of the sixteenth century. In general terms, Dutch pietism was a response to a dry orthodoxy were life experience occupied a prominent position in comparison to doctrinal teachings. In faith, the heart was more important than the head, where it was tested from its fruits. For literature regarding Dutch pietism, see Paul H.A.M. Abels and Aart de Groot, "The Eighteenth Century" in *Handbook of Dutch Church History*, ed. Herman J. Selderhuis (Götingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht), 370-373; C. Graafland, W.J. op 't Hof and F.A. van Lieburg, "Nadere Reformatie: opnieuw een poging tot begripsbepaling" in *Documentatieblad Nadere Reformatie*, 19 (1995), p. 109-118 and op 't Hof, "Puritan Emotions", 216-217.
[167] Quoted in Fred van Lieburg, "Warning against the Pietist", 360.
[168] Petrus van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology, Volume 1: Prolegomena*. Edited Joel Beeke, translated by Todd M. Rester (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018).

see an example of the organic development of the definitions of *theologia* through the influence of men such as Perkins, Ames and Voetius.[169]

As was seen earlier in this chapter, piety developed in the Dutch Reformed academy was in part shaped in a covenantal frame. This led the aforementioned figures to consider the importance of both the *individual* and the church *community* in the application of redemption: 'The subject [for the application of redemption] is the church. Therefore, election, redemption, vocation, justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification properly pertain to the same subject, i.e., to the individual men who make up the church.'[170] The piety that marked this development of Reformed theology was focused both on the individual and the community, an aspect also shared by Bavinck, as he indicates in his lecture on *The Kingdom of God the Highest Good*.

For the *Nadere Reformatie*, then, the theology that developed in the academy was also to be lived out. For example, for Herman Witsius (1636-1708), a true theologian was someone who 'imbued with a substantial knowledge of divine things derived from the teaching of God Himself, declares and extols, not in words only, but by the whole course of his life, the wonderful excellencies of God and thus lives entirely for His glory.' In this way, theologians are not concerned with 'curious questions, but in the devout contemplation of God and His Christ.'[171] Because a theologian is a disciple of the Word of God and the Spirit, that theologian 'not only knows and believes, but has also sensible experience of, the forgiveness of sins and the privilege of adoption and intimate communion with God … Many things … cannot be learned but by possessing, feeling, and tasting them.'[172] As with van Mastricht, in Witsius' anatomy of a theologian we can also identify the Voetian influence regarding the union between *scientia* and *pietas*.[173] Remarkably, Bavinck made use of Witsius' description of a *vero theologo* in one of his theological orations. So too, he made use of the works of van Mastricht, Ames and Voetius in his *Gereformeerde ethiek*.

When considering this, we can conclude that there was no antithesis between theology and piety within this stream of the broader Dutch Reformed tradition. The theological

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169 Richard Muller describes Mastricht's definition as Perkinsian. See *PRRD* 1, 156. For a description of Mastricht's theology see Adriaan C. Neele, *Petrus van Mastricht (1630-1706). Reformed Orthodoxy: Method and Piety* (Leiden: Brill, 2009). For Ames' definition see above. For Perkins, theology "*est Scientia beatè viuendi in aeternum.*" See William Perkins, *Armilla Avrea, id est, theologiae descriptio* (Basileae: Per Conradum Waldkirch, 1596), 1.

170 Ames, *Marrow,* 175.

171 Herman Witsius, *On the character of a true theologian.* Ed. J. Ligon Duncan III (Greenville: Reformed Academic Press, 1994), 27.

172 Witsius, *On the character*, 36.

173 de Reuver, *Sweet Communion*, 263.

arguments against rationalism or sectarian pietism were developed in the academy and church by scholastics who 'embedded piety into the task, goals, and content of theology.'[174] Dutch Reformed theologians advocated for what they deemed to be biblical piety through the union of doctrine (*leer*) and life (*leven*). The thesis maintaining a distance between pietist authors and scholastic theologians could be applied to separatistic and pietistic circles as Labadism but not Reformed orthodoxy with its scholastic and catechetical methodology. Reformed piety stands in opposition to separatist mystical pietism, as is reflected in à Brakel and Voetius writings.[175]

It is for that reason that this particular strand of Dutch Reformed piety highlights *Deo vivendi*. As Muller correctly states, this notion of 'living to God' evidences 'the profound connection between the scholastic form of theology propounded by the Reformed orthodox and the development both of Puritan piety in the British Isles and of the parallel *Nadere Reformatie* in the Netherlands.'[176] In fact, the forms of piety found in both movements 'stand not as developments opposed to confessional orthodoxy and scholastic exposition of doctrine but rather as developments integral to confessional orthodoxy.'[177] In light of this, a distance or antagonism between Reformed scholasticism and Reformed piety is hard to maintain precisely because both were part of the same movement. Indeed, recent scholarship also shows this new understanding of the unity between piety and Reformed scholasticism.[178]

It is key to consider that *Pietism* and the *Nadere Reformatie* were two movements between which extensive historical overlap can be observed.[179] While through the studies of H. Heppe (1880), the *Nadere Reformatie* theologians were identified under the umbrella of Dutch pietism, since the middle of the 1990s the *Nadere Reformatie* has been considered as a 'Dutch independent Reformed movement of piety' (*zelfstandige Nederlandse, gereformeerde vroomheidsbeweging*)[180] that, according to Andreas Beck, can also be regarded as part of the

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[174] Ryan McGraw, *Reformed Scholasticism. Recovering the Tools of Reformed Theology.* (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 183.
[175] See also Heppe, *A History of Puritanism*, 171-172, and Carol Pal, *Republic of Women. Rethinking the Republic of Letters in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 241.
[176] Muller, *PRRD* I, 158.
[177] Muller, *PRRD* I, 158.
[178] See for example Schuringa, "Orthodoxy, Scholasticism, and Piety." As Schuringa suggests, 'these theologians were not only *not* in opposing camps as sometimes suggested by the literature, but these theologians – *Nadere Reformatie* representatives and Reformed scholastic – were often the same people!' See also Ryan McGraw, *Reformed Scholasticism. Recovering the Tools of Reformed Theology.*
[179] C. Graafland, W.J. op 't Hof and F.A. van Lieburg, "Nadere Reformatie", 117.
[180] C. Graafland, W.J. op 't Hof and F.A. van Lieburg, "Nadere Reformatie", 117.

wider sense of Pietism's definition.[181] The complexity of the definition of Pietism, as well as some elements that pertain both to Pietism in general and to the *praxis pietatis* of Reformed Orthodoxy, added to some characteristics that distinguish these movements, is critical when it comes to understanding Bavinck's approach both to the *piety of Pietism* and also to *the piety of Dutch Reformed Orthodoxy*.

The holistic reformation programme at the beginnings *Nadere Reformatie* turned in a shift that can be observed in the period of late orthodoxy (from 1725). If early and high Dutch orthodoxy focused both on the individual and the church community, the period of late orthodoxy focused more on the individual's internal experience, forgetting in some sense the call to reform not just the heart, but also the church and society.[182] The essence of a holistic reformation of early-high orthodox theologians was declining in the middle of the eighteenth century. In short, individualism, subjectivism, and an inclination to withdraw from society were some of the tendencies of Dutch Reformed pietism during the second half of the eighteenth century.[183] As we will see in the following chapters, Bavinck's reading of the Dutch Reformed pietistic tradition in that period was not uncritical.

Although Bavinck's assessment of some *oude schrijvers* (old writers) – critiques and appreciation – will be analysed throughout the following chapters, it is necessary to close this section by highlighting the reason for the previous description of the *Nadere Reformatie* and some of its representatives. This is not only because of the lack of previous studies regarding Bavinck's positive and critical appropriation of Dutch Reformed orthodoxy, but also because of two main reasons.

First, because of the parallel of theological principles observed in Dutch Reformed orthodoxy and Bavinck's theology. That is, for example, the centrality of the knowledge of God as the principle for dogmatics and ethics, and the place of covenant theology in their respective theological treatises. Secondly, because the *Nadere Reformatie* was part of Bavinck's own tradition. According to the introductory words of the editors of the first English translation of Reformed Dogmatics:

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[181] For a review of the late and recent discussion of the term *Pietism* and *Nadere Reformatie* see Beck, *Gisbertus Voetius*, 127-48.

[182] Cornelis Pronk, *A Godly Heritage,* 21, 36-37. "For Teellink the experience of the heart remained central, but then as a center which penetrated a wide area, including not only the family and the congregation, but also the entire church and nation, politics inclusive. For Schortinghuis subjective experience is the fort which the believers withdraws himself from the world and even from the congregation around him", Graafland, "Kernen en contouren van de Nadere Reformatie", cited in Beeke "The Dutch Second Reformation", 316.

[183] Pronk, *A Godly Heritage*, 21. See also Beeke, "The Dutch Second Reformation", 315-16.

> Herman Bavinck's *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, first published one hundred years ago, represents the concluding high point of some four centuries of remarkable productive Dutch Reformed theological reflection. From Bavinck's numerous citations of key Dutch Reformed theologians such as Voetius, De Moor, Vitringa, van Mastricht, Witsius, and Walaeus as well of the important Leiden *Synopsis purioris theologiae*, it is clear he knew that tradition well and claimed it as his own.[184]

As will be seen, this movement influenced the Christian origins of the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk*, the church where his father, Jan Bavinck, pastored and taught and within which Herman Bavinck emerged as a late modern exponent of that tradition.

V. Reformed Piety in the Bavinck family

Parents are principally instruments in the hand of God, employed to guide the spiritual lives of their children toward maturity.[185]

To understand Herman Bavinck's conception of godliness it is essential to analyse some aspects of the *type* of piety found in the Bavinck family, particularly in Herman's father. The reason lies in Eglinton's observation regarding Jan Bavinck's influence upon his son Herman: 'Jan's career and outlook set the course of Herman's early life…and his influence would eventually extend to the bold choices Herman would make during his own student years.'[186] The close contact between Jan and Herman extended until Jan's death in Amsterdam, twelve years before Herman's death.

The quote at the beginning of this section, taken from Bavinck's book *The Sacrifice of Praise,* points to his belief that parents are vital for developing their children's spiritual lives.[187] Given that view, it is necessary that spirituality should be described in this study. Before

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[184] *RD* I, 11.
[185] Bavinck, *The Sacrifice of Praise*, 17.
[186] *BCB*, 42-43.
[187] As Conrad Bavinck, Herman's younger brother, described: 'They gave us few direct admonitions, but both [Jan and Geziena] worked on us more indirectly through their sincere piety and godly behavior. Father also [influenced] through his mysticism, his fellowship with God and his prayer, that made a deep impression on us as children, while all this was preserved through father's clarity of head for all sickly excesses. Mother [contributed] by her simplicity, truth and sobriety.' DO: 'Directe vermaningen hebben zij ons weinig gegeven, maar des te meer indirect op ons ingewerkt, beide door hun oprechte godsvruct en vromen wandel; vader ook door zijn mystiek, zijn gemeenschapsleven met God en zijn gebed, dat op ons als kinderen een diepen indruk maakte, terwijl dat alles toch door vaders helderheid van hoofd bewaard werd voor alle ziekelijke excessen; moeder door haar eenvoud, waarheid en nuchterheid.' See Valentijn Hepp, *Dr. Herman Bavinck* (Amsterdam: W. ten Have), 22.

that, however, attention must be paid to the understanding of piety found within the ecclesiastical movement within which both Bavincks played prominent roles: Jan and Herman were sons of the Secession.

V.1 The *vroomheid* of the *Afscheiding*

In general terms, from the first decade of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth-century Dutch society, we can identify a conflict between those who applied the ideas of the Enlightenment and Revolution to varying extents to their religious and theological thought and those who opposed it.[188] The Secession of 1834 (*Afscheiding*) was one of the movements that opposed the rationalistic and liberal forms of a national Dutch Reformed Church (*Hervormde Kerk*) dominated by the state's authoritative and administrative regulations.

One of the first leaders of the Secession was Hendrik de Cock (1801-1842). Because of his early approach to liberal ideas, de Cock's early preaching was moralistic. However, at the beginning of the 1830s, de Cock discovered older notions of orthodoxy and piety *via* members of his congregation in Ulrum. Copies of the Canons of Dort and Calvin's *Institutes* – and conversations with members of his congregation – contributed to a change in his understanding of salvation, eventually leading to his conversion to experiential Reformed orthodoxy.[189] Dissatisfied with liberal theology, de Cock led a movement that seceded from the *Hervormde Kerk* in 1834. Despite the state persecution against the Seceders that ensued, this movement not only spread through the rural areas but also influenced the German *Evangelisch-altreformierte Kirche* (Evangelical Old Reformed Church in Lower Saxony), a church that in 1838 seceded from the German *Reformirte Kirche*. Jan Bavinck, a German who later emigrated to the Netherlands, left the German *Reformirte Kirche* to become a member of this local German secession church.

One of the reasons for considering in this study the understanding of piety in the Seceders and Jan Bavinck, is that the roots of the orthodox piety of the *Afscheiding* can be traced both to John Calvin and the *Nadere Reformatie*.[190] The leaders of the *Afscheiding* were well-versed in several texts produced in the *Nadere Reformatie* period. Memorably, it was while

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[188] Michael Wintle, *Pillars of Piety. Religion in the Netherlands in the Nineteenth Century* (Kingston upon Hull: Hull University Press, 1987), xiii.
[189] Harinck and Winkeler, "The Nineteenth Century", 460. See also Pronk, *A Godly Heritage*, 88-89.
[190] T. Brienen, "De invloed van de Nadere Reformatie op de Afscheding" in *Documentatieblad Nadere Reformatie*, 10:1 (1986): 16-24.

imprisoned that de Cock read à Brakel's *magnum opus*.[191] Ministers and congregations read Teellinck, Witsius, à Brakel, and others. Despite the low popularity of dogmatic and Puritan books at the end of the eighteenth century in the Netherlands, plus the removal of pietistic books from circulation until 1795 by the provincial authorities, a direct relationship between the formation of the Secession church and the reprint of *Nadere Reformatie* literature during the 1830s can be observed.[192]

The Secession's culture of piety is also related to the kind of sermons delivered by its ministers. Unlike the Groningen school's moralistic sermons, where 'Christ was a less bleeding Savior than a model of fully realised humanity; the end of religion was less salvation from sin than the achievement of virtue',[193] Secession sermons were rooted in Reformed orthodoxy, and it is worth noting that this revived sense of Reformed experiential preaching was within the framework of the preaching of the *Nadere Reformatie*. In general terms, for the Seceders, a central question was how does a person receive salvation? With this view, the Secession's preachers were 'at the same tone as in the preaching of the *Nadere Reformatie*.'[194]

It should be stated that the *Nadere Reformatie* was not a homogeneous group. As indicated, its holistic view of reformation changed between its early and late periods. So too, there were also differences among its representatives, for example, between Voetius and Cocceius,[195] and between à Brakel and Alexander Comrie.[196] As such, a significant question arises: by which particular seventeenth-century representatives and ideas were the Secession ministers influenced? The answer to this is a complex one. Like the diversity in the *Nadere Reformatie*, there were also 'variants within the circle of the Secession.'[197] In fact, the variety found in the *Nadere Reformatie* influenced the diversity found in the Secession representatives. As van 't Spijker indicates, 'it must be possible to map the mutual

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191 Brienen, "De invloed", 18-19.
192 Fred van Lieburg, "Reforming Dutch Protestant Piety" in *Piety and Modernity. The Dynamics of Religious Reform in Northern Europe 1780-1929*. Ed. Anders Jarlet (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2012), 165-168.
193 James Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America. A History of a Conservative Subculture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), 5.
194 Quoted in T. Brienen, "De invloed", 21.
195 Herman Bavinck's reading of that will be described in the following chapters.
196 See Abraham Kuyper's comparison between Brakel and Comrie in his book *The Work of the Holy Spirit*.
197 DO: 'de varianten binnen de kring van de Afgescheidenen' in J. van den Berg, "De Spiritualiteit van de Afgescheidenen" in *Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift* 92 (1992): 173.

differences between the fathers of the Secession on the basis of their prototypes in the *Nadere Reformatie*.'[198]

Having noted the diversity found amongst the Seceders, we can conclude that there were also diverse understandings of piety in the Secession church, as expressed in their views of modernity and culture. What, in that context, was Jan Bavinck's understanding of piety?

V.2 Jan Bavinck's *praxis pietatis*

> I knew both parents of Doctor Bavinck intimately. They were typical of their environment and cherished all the puritanical and often provincial ideas and ideals of the early Church of Separation. Simple, almost austere in their mode of life, exhibiting something of what the Germans call *Kulturfeindlichkeit* (hostility to culture), they were pious to the core, teaching their children more by example than by precept. – Henry Elias Dosker (1855-1926)

This eulogy, written by Henry Dosker one year after Herman Bavinck's death, illustrates a particular feature that has been ascribed in some quarters to Jan and Geziena Bavinck: a form of piety that was hostile to culture. This anti-culture thesis was described previously by Valentijn Hepp (1879-1950), who published the first biography of Herman Bavinck three months after Bavinck's death.[199] However, this view was challenged by R. H. Bremmer in 1966 and, more recently, by Eglinton. Bremmer states that Jan and Geziena were not narrow-minded.[200] Indeed, their support of their son's decision to study under heterodox theologians at Leiden University shows the opposite of what Hepp posited. Eglinton comments that Jan's influence was directed to support Herman's strivings to be an 'orthodox Calvinist in a late modern culture.'[201] The reason for this, in Eglinton's account, was the particular type of piety seen in Jan Bavinck's life.

Eglinton begins the second chapter of his book (entirely dedicated to Jan and Geziena) by describing Jan as *pious*. This piety, Eglinton argues, is reflected in two things embraced warmly by Jan: experiential Calvinism, and liberal democracy.[202] However, Eglinton does not delve into the essence of Jan's portrayal of piety. Therefore, and because of Jan's

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[198] DO: 'Het moet mogelijk zijn de onderlinge verschillen tussen de vaderen der Scheiding in kaart te brengen aan de hand van hun prototypen in de Nadere Reformatie.' Quoted in T. Brienen, "De invloed van de Nadere Reformatie op de Afscheding", 19.
[199] Hepp, *Dr. Herman Bavinck*, 14.
[200] R.H. Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck en zijn tijdgenoten* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1966), 15.
[201] *BCB*, 39.
[202] *BCB*, 17.

influence upon his son, it is necessary to delve into Jan Bavinck's conception of *praxis pietatis*.

This type of Reformed experiential piety must be appropriately considered according to the Dutch religious context of the second half of the nineteenth century. Within Reformed circles, some people, besides their traditionalism and conservatism, 'identified themselves with the idea of *bevinding* (experience)', where conversion experiences were written in the form of autobiographies.[203] These groups of *bevindelijke gereformeerden* ('experiential Reformed') were characterised by their enthusiasm for old Reformed literature and opposition to Kuyper's neo-Calvinism.[204] Due to their particular vision of the doctrine of divine providence, some rejected cultural and modern advances, including, for example, the use of the steam train.[205] Was this the kind of experiential Calvinism to which Jan Bavinck adhered? Strikingly, his writing—found in his autobiography and sermons—shows the opposite.

Eglinton describes Jan Bavinck's autobiography, 'A Short Sketch of My Life', as demonstrating his identification with late European modernity. Countering the previous example of the *bevindelijke* rejection of train travel, Eglinton identifies a significant detail: Jan's admiration for the steam train on account of its redefinition of how quickly he could move around the world.[206] While the coming of the train 'upset pious souls because of the unnatural acceleration of life',[207] for Jan Bavinck, 'it was a thing of beauty.'[208] Nevertheless, while Jan's autobiography is strikingly modern in many respects, the autobiographical genre was not only a feature of modern culture. It was also used within Reformed pietistic circles. Therefore, 'ego-documents' of this kind can be considered in Jan's example as being both modern in its genre and pietistic in content.

In his 'Short Sketch', Jan describes episodes from his childhood, conversion and adult decisions that shed some light on his understanding and experience of piety. Regarding his infancy, he mentions that while he received a religious education, he was never taught about 'internal' Christianity or things 'experienced' by God's children. Actually, Jan recognises that he was never admonished to believe and repent, or to 'bend his knees' before Jesus to 'seek' and 'desire' him as his saviour. Nevertheless, the 'things of eternity'

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[203] van Lieburg, "Reforming Dutch Protestant Piety", 176.
[204] van Lieburg, "Reforming Dutch Protestant Piety", 176-178.
[205] van Lieburg, "Reforming Dutch Protestant Piety", 181.
[206] *BCB*, 20.
[207] van Lieburg, "Reforming Dutch Protestant Piety", 181.
[208] *BCB*, 20.

weighed on his heart, even though he could recall no mention of true godliness (*godsvrucht*) and piety (*godzaligheid*) in his own upbringing.[209]

His conversion is also another example of experiential faith.[210] This happened under the preaching of a Calvinist preacher – Jan Sundag (1810-1893). His attendance at Sundag's preaching, and after praying several times, led him to leave his former church to embrace the old experiential Calvinist tradition reflected in the seceded German Reformed church. The church he joined (seceded in 1838) was influenced by the Dutch *Afscheiding,* which sent Jan to the Netherlands to receive his theological education in Dutch Secession Church, where Jan eventually became a pastor.

As part of the culture of piety within which Jan emerged, lots were cast both for his appointment to begin his theological training (in 1845), and later in his nomination to be part of the teaching faculty of the Seceder's new Theological School in Kampen (in 1854). Because of this pietistic way of making critical decisions, Jan Bavinck rejected his nomination to teach theology in Kampen—an incident that brought considerable frustration to his life.[211] Providentially, his son would teach in Kampen, where he once remarked in a class on Reformed ethics, that 'casting lots and losing often makes one cantankerous.'[212] Interestingly, in his teaching about casting lots, Herman Bavinck used two *Nadere Reformatie* authors to support the previous idea: Bernardinus de Moor (1709-1780) and à Brakel.[213]

Jan Bavinck's preaching also sheds light on his own view and experience of piety. He recorded of his ministry in Kampen that,

> a great crowd could listen to the preaching and seemed to devour the words of the preacher! There was hunger and thirst for the Word of God, and the words of life were food and drink for hungry and thirsty souls. I may believe that my work in those days was not without fruit and blessing.[214]

[209] Jan Bavinck, *Korte Schets van mijn leven*, 4.
[210] *BCB*, 21.
[211] In Jan's words, 'I had no peace about it [the outcome of the lot], not then or for a long time afterward.' Quoted in *BCB*, 29.
[212] *BCB*, 29.
[213] Herman Bavinck, *Gereformeerde ethiek*, ed. Dirk van Keulen (Utrech: Uitgeverij KokBoekencentrum, 2019), 438. Hereafter, *GE*.
[214] *BCB*, 34.

This reference to himself in the third person asks us about the type of piety in his sermons. In this case, a short analysis of his sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism will be essential to explore the kind of theology he preached.[215]

In 1903 and 1904, while he was living with Herman Bavinck in Amsterdam, a widowed Jan published two volumes on this Reformed catechism. The foreword reveals a neo-Calvinistic tendency in his theology. To enrich his sermons, he not only made use of the works of 'our' Reformed writers (*Gereformeerde Schrijvers*) but particularly consulted the writings of two neo-Calvinistic representatives: *E Voto Dordraceno* by Abraham Kuyper and his own son's *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*.[216] This trend is also manifested in the scope of Reformed truth through his sermons. Not in the spirit of the revolution, Jan argued, but in the gospel of grace are sinners saved. Not through civilisation and Enlightenment, but only through the power of this truth – 'which is there in Christ Jesus our Lord, and which is so beautifully and simply set forth in our Heidelberg Catechism' – *society* can be saved from its confusion.[217] In other words, for Jan Bavinck, Reformed preaching is directed toward the salvation of sinners and society.

The practical piety of Jan's sermons is not only reflected in his call to application and self-examination, but also in the notion of a 'godly walk'. Commenting on question XX, he declares that: 'A testimony in words, that is not confirmed with a godly walk, lacks its power.' Following the same idea, a 'messy and sinful walk' will 'break the power of words' in witnessing.[218] In short, it is through a godly walk (*godzaligen wandel*) that Christians can be helpful to their neighbours.

This focus on the neighbour is reflected in his focus on modern society. Jan Bavinck's holistic piety is also displayed in his vision as editor of a monthly magazine, *The Witness* (*De Getuigenis*). As Eglinton mentions, Jan's attention to the concerns of modern culture is apparent here. In this magazine, 'Jan addressed cultural themes far more directly.'[219] What were the purposes of this publication? According to the editors, among whom we find Jan

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[215] Eric D. Bristley, *Guide to the Writings of Herman Bavinck* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 10.
[216] Jan Bavinck, *De Heildelbergsche Catechismus. In 60 Leerredenen Verklaard*. Deel I (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1903).
[217] DO: 'welke daar is in Christus Jezus onzen Heere, en welke in onzen Heidelberschen Catechismus zoo schoon en eenvoudig wordt uiteengezet.' See Jan's prologue in Bavinck, *De Heildelbergsche Catechismus I*.
[218] Ministers of the Dutch Reformed tradition usually preach through the Heidelberg Catechism every Sunday evening. DO: 'Een getuigenis in woorden, dat niet bevestigd wordt met een godzaligen wandel, mist zijne kracht.' Bavinck, *De Heildelbergsche Catechismus*. Deel II (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1904), 600.
[219] *BCB*, 34.

Bavinck, piety (*Godzaligheid*) stood at the forefront, being explicitly mentioned in the title and end of the opening editorial:

> *The Witness*.
>
> Monthly writing for the sake of the Truth and Piety
>
> … for the dissemination of knowledge, and for the maintenance and defense of His truth, and also for the promotion of true godliness.[220]

In this way, Jan Bavinck's *praxis pietatis* can be described as one that resonated with what later emerged as neo-Calvinism, and the sort of experiential Calvinism drawn from the first generation of Seceders. As Bremmer illustrates: 'His piety was that of the first generation of Secession preachers and had a pietistic character.'[221] However, and according to the diversity of notions of *pietas* found in those particular Reformed circles, Jan's experiential piety was not anti-cultural. He did not support sectarian tendencies which over-emphasised experiential excesses. As his son C.B. Bavinck described, the Bavinck children were influenced by Jan 'through his mysticism, his fellowship with God and his prayer, which made a deep impression on us as children, while all this was preserved through father's clear-headedness for all sickly excesses.'[222]

Jan's piety can be described as Reformed catholic in the sense that, on the one hand, it contained experiential elements associated with the preaching of the *Nadere Reformatie* and *Afshcheiding*, and on the other hand, held to a neo-Calvinistic view of the world and life. As a result, Jan led his family to pursue their development in modern society, that is, to follow the path identified by Vree, and more recently Eglinton, that leads from ecclesiastical separation to cultural integration.[223] In sum, the holistic and experiential characterization of piety in Jan Bavinck are keys to understanding how her son Herman understood piety in his neo-Calvinist vision.

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[220] DO: 'tot verbreiding van de kennis en ter handhaving en ter verdediging Zijner waarheid, en tevens tot bevordering van ware godzaligheid.' Jan Bavinck and Helenius de Cock, "Inleiding" in *De Getuigenis*: *Maandschrift in het belang van Waardheid en Godzaligheid* 1 (1869), 6.
[221] DO: 'Zijn vroomheid was die van de eerste afgeschieden predikantengeneratie en had een piëtistische trek.' Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck en zijn tijdgenoten*, 15.
[222] DO: 'vader ook door zijn mystiek, zijn gemeenschapsleven met God en zijn gebed, dat op ons als kinderen een diepen indruk maakte, terwijl dat alles tech door vaders helderheid van hoofd bewaard werd voor alle ziekelijke excessen'. Hepp, *Dr. Herman Bavinck*, 22.
[223] *BCB*, 39.

VI. Conclusion

As this chapter has shown, for the Reformed tradition, piety occupies an essential place both in theology and life. Tracing a line from the broad historic tradition to the specific context in which we find Herman Bavinck, this idea was expressed by Calvin, expanded through the *Nadere Reformatie* and then stressed in the Secession of 1834, until reaching the Bavinck family. It was experiential, covenantal, and to different degrees, holistic in terms of its influence: the entire person together with his ecclesiastical and social context.

However, piety has not been a mainly studied topic within neo-Calvinism scholarship. In *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition*, Craig Bartholomew ends his systematic introduction to neo-Calvinism by arguing for the need for spiritual formation within the Kuyperian tradition.[224] In his words, 'what we urgently need is a theology of spirituality and a tradition of practices grounded in that theology.'[225] After this, Bartholomew proposes Herman Bavinck's resources for Christian spirituality, considering that neither the writings of Kuyper and Bavinck on spirituality have been prominent in neo-Calvinistic circles, with the exception of John Bolt's thesis on Bavinck's view on the imitation of Christ.[226] Furthermore, Bavinck's recent publication, *Gereformeerde ethiek* (Reformed Ethics, 2019), contains an entire section about the history, nature, origin, activities, pathologies and restoration of the spiritual life that is key for this research.

Regarding the relevance of the trinitarian-organic motif described previously by Eglinton – as a new reading of Bavinck's theology – this thesis will explore the unity between piety and different subjects, such as theology, preaching, worship, and theological training. In this way, studying Bavinck's piety can help us understand the development of neo-Calvinism during the late modern society in the Netherlands as a Reformed theological movement with part of its roots in Calvin's theology and Reformed orthodoxy.

VII. The Way Forward

In order to describe the concept of piety in Herman Bavinck's works and some of his Reformed early modern sources, this study will be structured in a *theoretico-practica* manner. Chapters will progress from definitions to practice, moving from *principles* of piety to the *practice* of piety towards God and people. At the same time, this study seeks to answer

[224] Craig G. Bartholomew, *Countours of the Kuyperian Tradition* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 315-324.
[225] Bartholomew, *Countours of the Kuyperian Tradition*, 317.
[226] Bartholomew, *Countours of the Kuyperian Tradition*, 317.

questions such as what type of piety, a holistic or a narrow view of it, did Bavinck describe and practise? How did Bavinck approach Pietism? Likewise, attention will be paid to the development of specific ideas related to subjective religion to see the continuity or discontinuity in the thought of a 'young' (Kampen period) and 'mature' (Amsterdam period) Bavinck's understanding of piety.

Having considered this organic theoretical-practical model, this study is structured in the following way. In general terms, chapters two and three primarily explore *principles* that define Christian and Reformed piety. Chapters four and five pay more attention to the *practical* aspect of piety in connection to the principles previously described.

In chapter two, I explore Bavinck's definition of subjective Christian religion according to his *Reformed Dogmatics* and *Ethics*. So too, this definition is also explored in articles that deal explicitly with the concept of piety (as it is indicated in their respective titles), such as 'Christelijke vroomheid' I and II ('Christian piety,' two articles written in 1900 and 1902) and 'Godsvrucht en wetenschap' ('Piety and science,' 1907).

At the same time, chapter two describes and compares the concept of piety in different published works by the 'young Bavinck' (from the 1870s to the beginning of the twentieth century)[227] and the 'mature Bavinck' (from the beginning of the twentieth century to his death in 1921).[228] It is vital to pay attention to these periods because they not only reflect his views concerning the catholicity of the church,[229] his observations regarding Methodism,[230] practical implications of covenant theology in the Lord's Supper[231] and assurance of faith[232], but also the maturation of his theological thought. Finally, this chapter will also pay close attention to Bavinck's understanding of covenant theology – a fundamental doctrine in the practical theology of Reformed theology in general – to analyse the organic aspect of piety as a concept that needs to be understood in light of *religio objectiva* and *religio subjectiva*. In summary, this chapter proposes a definition of Christian and Reformed piety according to its principles.

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[227] This includes material published by his consent during his life (i.e., the first edition and second edition of his *Reformed Dogmatics*, his first essay on *The Imitation of Christ*, *The Sacrifice of Praise,* and *The Certainty of Faith*), and also material published after his death (i.e., *Reformed Ethics*, and his two lectures about *The Certainty of Faith*).

[228] For example, the second edition of his *Reformed Dogmatics*, his second essay on *The Imitation of Christ*, *TWWG*, *Guidebook for Instruction in the Christian Religion*, *PoR* and *Calling and Regeneration*.

[229] 'The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church.' Translated by John Bolt. *CTJ* 27 (1992): 220–51.

[230] See his chapter on 'Revelation and Religious Experience' in *PoR* and *Calling and Regeneration*, 125.

[231] Bavinck, *The Sacrifice of Praise.*

[232] Herman Bavinck, *Geloofszekerheid.* Ed. Henk van den Belt. (Soesterberg: Aspekt, 2017).

Chapter three deals with some *unpublished writings*. Here, two manuscripts explicitly related to piety are analysed. These writings on piety and its relation to theological studies have never been analysed by scholars or translated into English: 'De Godsvrucht in het Studentenleven' ('Piety in the student life,' 1890) and 'Exercitia Pietatis' ('Exercises of Piety,' 1896). In this way, this study makes an original contribution to scholarship on neo-Calvinism and Reformed theology more broadly through this archive material. Together with this, the *telos* of godliness will be explained through analysing these three further articles, which illustrate the significance of the doctrine of the beatific vision in Bavinck's theological eschatology – a topic currently under debate by Bavinck scholars. Ultimately, chapters two and three define the nature and end of piety in order to introduce the practice of piety in the following chapters.

The content of chapter four is related to Bavinck's account of the covenantal application of the concept of subjective religion according to the proper relationship of the believer with the triune God (in terms of *religio* or *cultus*). This relationship is described according to Bavinck's understanding of the first four commandments of God's Law. Special attention is given to Bavinck's description, criticism, and catholic appropriation of some elements of Pietism.

Finally, chapter five aims to describe Bavinck's view of theological training as a means of promoting the practice of piety towards ourselves and others. Bavinck's vision of theological education is enriched by the testimony of some of his students. Furthermore, Bavinck's reception of Calvin's and Voetius' ideas of the relationship between piety and scientific theology shows how trinitarian, covenantal and holistic piety is essential to understand Bavinck's neo-Calvinism. In other words, this chapter argues that for Bavinck, covenantal and experiential piety lead Christians to understand God's creational and redemptive works, and to develop an orthodox world-and-life view suitable for the theological/practical challenges of late modern Dutch society.[233]

After setting out the structure of this research, the following chapter will describe the essence of Bavinck's understanding of Christian and Reformed piety.

[233] For example, in his book *Christian Worldview* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2019), Bavinck argues (p. 22) for the existence of 'a disharmony between our thinking and feeling, between our willing and acting. There is a discord between religion and culture, between science and life.'

Chapter II

The essence of Herman Bavinck's Reformed piety

> *The question about the essence or the nature of Piety…is doubtless easier posed than answered…but when you try to describe it, then you feel involuntarily that you lack the language for that purpose* – Jan Bavinck.[1]

> *In the science of Sacred Theology, the interesting but often neglected study of the history of Christian piety deserves a place. This piety does not only have its own character in distinction from the piety that is also found among pagan religions, but it appears also among Christians in all sorts of forms and takes many shapes* – Herman Bavinck.[2]

For the Bavincks, piety is a word that is both challenging to describe and worthy of being considered in theological studies because of the richness of its phenotype. Having considered the place of piety in the history of Reformed theology (in the previous chapter), the question regarding Herman Bavinck's understanding of it deserves to be answered from primary sources, from both published writings and unpublished manuscripts, from his *Reformed Dogmatics* (*RD*) and *Ethics* (*RE*), and other writings. Therefore, this chapter centres on sections related to the essence of piety found in his *magnum opus* and *RE*, while chapter III focuses on the principles/practices and *telos* of piety (the beatific vision) through the analysis of key primary sources, including unpublished manuscripts (never previously analysed by Bavinck scholars) and articles published in Dutch.

Mainly, this chapter focuses Bavinck's understanding of Christian piety or Christian subjective religion as a regenerated disposition and relationship that help us to distinguish it from general religion. So too, Christian piety is described as a covenantal relationship with the triune God that nurtures the spiritual life.

The quotation mentioned above from Herman Bavinck sheds some light on how we can understand his concept of piety. In it, he links the study of piety to scientific theology,

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[1] DO: 'De vraag naar het wezen of de natuur der Godzaligheid… is ongetwijfeld gemakkelijker gedaan dan beantwoord… maar wanneer gij beproeft haar te beschrijven, dan gevoelt gij onwillekeurig, dat de taal u daartoe ontbreekt.' Bavinck, "Het Nut Der Godzaligheid" in *De Getuigenis*, 3.

[2] Herman Bavinck, "Christelijke vroomheid" Review of *Reformateurs*, by C. B. Hylkema in *De Bazuin* 48:12 (1900). Translated by Willem J. de Wit. Accessed July, 2023, https://sources.neocalvinism.org/596-Herman+Bavinck.+Christelijke+vroomheid. Hereafter, Bavinck, "Christelijke vroomheid".

which echoes the place of *pietas* in Dutch Reformed orthodoxy of the seventeenth century. Bavinck then identifies both a general or common piety found even among pagans, and the particular character of Christian piety. But not only that; among Christians, he observes, we can find different expressions of piety. For Bavinck, Roman Catholic piety is different from its Protestant equivalent. In the same way, within Protestantism, there is a diversity and difference in the manifestation of piety between Lutherans and Reformed: '[Piety] takes one character among the Roman Catholics and another among the Protestants; it differs among the Lutherans and the Reformed; it displays different types among the various churches and denominations that have taken risen in Christianity.'[3]

In short, in the quest for Bavinck's understanding of *vroomheid*, we should move from general piety to Christian piety, specifically to Christian and Reformed piety. The movement from a general to a specific description of piety is sustained by this quotation about *Christian piety*, published almost at the end of his professorship in Kampen (1900), and also by the general (but not wholly) description of Bavinck's account of religion in Brock's *Modern yet Orthodox*.

In the last chapter of his book, Brock described the Schleiermacherian modern grammar used by Bavinck to describe his orthodox understanding of religion or piety *in general*. However, Brock does not intend to define Bavinck's conception of religion *in toto*. In the last paragraph of his book, Brock summarised the legacy of Bavinck's dogmatics as someone who regards piety as both the contemporary and old elements of theology. In other words, Bavinck's theology considers the 'social and intellectual trajectories of its today and disciplines them under the exegetically-grounded doctrines of old, doing so with a holistic piety.'[4] Therefore, both modern (i.e. Schleiermacher) and post-Reformation Reformed sources (*i.e.* the *oude schrijvers*[5]) are required to analyse and build a further definition of piety in Bavinck's theology.

In his work, Brock analysed piety in general, equating Calvin's terms, such as *sensus divinitatis,* with Schleiermacher's *feeling of absolute dependence* in Bavinck's theology. At the same time, he accentuates some concepts that can help us frame a fuller picture of Bavinck's view of piety, such as the difference and relationship between

[3] Bavinck, "Christelijke vroomheid."
[4] Cory C. Brock, *Orthodox yet Modern: Herman Bavinck's Use of Schleiermacher* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2020), 270.
[5] This phrase commonly refers to the 'old writers' of the *Nadere Reformatie*.

objective/subjective religion and covenant theology.[6] Even though Brock did not delve into these ideas in their role in shaping Bavinck's understanding of religion, his research leads us to ask and answer the following questions: what are the orthodox sources—apart from Calvin—used by Bavinck in shaping *Christian* and *Reformed* piety? How can we describe the holistic understanding of piety, and how did this idea shape his theological thought?

While Bavinck adopted modern grammar in his conception of universal piety as the *feeling* of absolute dependence, a description of the *relationship* between believers and the triune God—from post-Reformation orthodox sources—must be analysed in order to understand Reformed piety. Particularly, for Bavinck, the type of relationship we have with God determines the relationship we have with creation. As he explained in his review article 'Christelijke vroomheid' ('Christian piety'),

> The relationship in which a human being stands to God determines his relationship to all things. Whoever disrupts the God-given connection between nature and grace, will sacrifice the former to the latter or the latter to the former.[7]

What kind of relationship did Bavinck propose as the true religion? For him, genuine religion is structured in a covenantal way: 'If religion is called a covenant, it is thereby described as the true and genuine religion'.[8] In sum, it is essential to move from a general description of piety toward a definition of Christian and Reformed piety as a trinitarian and covenantal subjective religion.

For this, we will look for a description in documents dealing in particular with the theme in question. These writings can be distinguished as *implicit* and *explicit*. The first group refers to books in which we find a description of piety in some of its chapters, i.e., *Reformed Dogmatics* and *Reformed Ethics*. The second group deals with articles focused on the concept of piety, being explicitly reflected in its titles, i.e., 'Christelijke vroomheid' I and II (two articles written in 1900 and 1902) and 'Godsvrucht en wetenschap' ('Piety and science,' 1907). From these publications, I will synthesise a definition of Reformed piety according to Bavinck's theology. After explaining what *gereformeerde vroomheid* (Reformed piety) is, we will move forward in analysing different elements that expand and link Bavinck's definition of

[6] Brock, *Orthodox yet Modern*, 241-242.
[7] Bavinck, 'Christelijke vroomheid.'
[8] *RD* II, 569.

piety with other theological and practical issues in different articles and books. In this way, the analysis of the previous writings will cover the 'young' and 'mature' periods (Kampen and Amsterdam, respectively) in Bavinck's theological development, providing a picture of the progress of the principles of *praxis pietatis* during his life.

I. Piety in *Reformed Ethics* and *Reformed Dogmatics*

During his period as a professor of theology in Kampen (1883-1902), Bavinck taught dogmatics and ethics. From the beginning, he collected and prepared material for classes and publications. While two editions of *Reformed Dogmatics* were published during his lifetime, *Reformed Ethics* was never completed or released. However, in 2008 Dirk van Keulen discovered the manuscript of *Gereformeerde ethiek*, which was published in its entirety in Dutch in 2019, and partly in English.[9] Despite not being published in Bavinck's lifetime, the analysis of this recent text is relevant for our study since it provides us with material and notes that the young Bavinck used for teaching ethics, alongside the teaching and publication of dogmatics. Comparing these texts helps us see the continuity and discontinuity between a material (for ethics) that Bavinck was beginning to develop with a material (for dogmatics) that he published in two periods of his life.[10]

In 1895, Bavinck published the first volume of *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*, where, in his prolegomena, he describes his understanding of piety and religion. Because neither modern Dutch theology nor a repristination of old theology was competent to answer the needs of the day, a modern orthodox Reformed theology was needed.[11] The result was the first edition of *Reformed Dogmatics*.

In the foreword to the first edition, Bavinck claims that the Reformed faith has experienced a 'lack of progress and even deformation'.[12] This is not because of the adherence to the old Reformed doctrine but because of the absence of development and application of it among Reformed Christian people. In his words, 'To cherish the ancient

[9] For the English versions see Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Ethics. Created, Fallen and Converted Humanity*. Volume I. Ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019) and *Reformed Ethics. The Duties of the Christian Life*. Volume II. Ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021). Hereafter, *RE I* and *RE II*.
[10] John Bolt and Dirk van Keulen comment that maybe Bavinck did not publish his Reformed Ethics because 'he was no longer satisfied with it. Its composition had to be changed, with likely more philosophical input. This is of course a conjecture'. *RE* I, xliii. See also Bruce R. Pass, "Reading Bavinck's Ethics" in *Reviews in Religion and Theology* 27:4 (October 2020), 452-463.
[11] *BCB*, 144.
[12] Herman Bavinck, "Foreword to the First Edition (Volume 1) of the *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*", translated by John Bolt. *CTJ* 45 (2010):9-10.

simply because it is ancient is neither Reformed nor Christian.'[13] Geerhardus Vos (1862-1949) also identified this issue in his review of the first volume of *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*. Amid the revival of Calvinism, where it continued to be treasured in a practical way among pious people, the 'historical enthusiasm for the old Calvinism did not blind men to the fact that with a mere reproduction of the seventeenth-century theology little would be gained.'[14] Because of this, Bavinck wrote that 'a work of dogmatic theology should not simply describe what was true and valid but what abides as true and valid. It is rooted in the past but labors for the future.'[15]

In other words, Reformed theology does not need to neglect the old Reformed theology, or simply repristinate it, but as a living being, dogmatics must be advanced from old theology according to the current challenges of late modernity. Vos also commented in his review that this work is a conscious determination to develop Calvinistic principles and shape Reformed dogma to the consciousness of late Dutch modernity.[16] The result of the first volume of *Reformed Dogmatics* led Kuyper to write that 'the Calvinists in this country and all over the world may give themselves in to high-pitched gratitude, now that a theological work has been published, that will lift up our Reformed theology from decay, and restore her place of honor within the realm of science.'[17] Regarding his notes on Reformed ethics, they never saw the light in a published format.

While the manuscript of *Reformed Ethics* was not intended for publication, we should not neglect its study. This is so for two reasons. First, in Bavinck's thought, dogmatics and ethics are two disciplines that are closely related to each other. For Bavinck, theological ethics is totally rooted in dogmatics. Their separation creates a dualism between God and the human being, the individual and community, and salvation and life.[18] Despite being distinguished, dogmatics and ethics form a single system where,

> Dogmatics describes the deeds of God done for, to and in human beings; ethics describes what renewed human beings now do on the basis of and in the strength of those divine deeds. In dogmatics human beings

[13] Bavinck, "Foreword to the First Edition".
[14] Geerhardus Vos, Review of "Gereformeerde Dogmatiek – Vol. One" in *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 7 (1896): 356-363.
[15] Bavinck, "Foreword to the First Edition", 10.
[16] Vos, "Gereformeerde Dogmatiek – Vol. One".
[17] Quoted in John Bolt, "Bavinck Tributes" in *The Bavinck Review 3* (2012):178-84. From here, *TBR*.
[18] *RD* I, 58.

> are passive; they receive and believe; in ethics they are themselves active agents.[19]

Second, we should consider studying the manuscript of *Reformed Ethics* because of the similarities that are found with *Reformed Dogmatics*. For example, in *Reformed Ethics*, the relationship/distinction between both disciplines is almost identical to *Reformed Dogmatics*:

> In dogmatics we are concerned with what God does for us and in us…we are passive. In ethics, we are interested in the question of what it is that God now expects of us when he does his work in us…here we are active. In dogmatics, God descends to us; in ethics, we ascend to God…In dogmatics God loves us; in ethics, therefore, we love him.[20]

In the previous case, the unpublished ideas of *Reformed Ethics* present substantial similarities with the published lines of *Reformed Dogmatics*. This leads us to ask about parallels or differences in his definitions of piety and religion in both treatises.

Considering the importance of both published and unpublished works, and the close and organic unity asserted by Bavinck between both disciplines, we proceed to answer the question about the nature of piety described in *Reformed Dogmatics* and *Reformed Ethics*.

I.1 Piety as *different* and *synonymous* with religion

Before giving his own definition of piety, Bavinck describes the biblical terms related to it and provides an overview of the church's historical understanding of religion. This is found in *RE* § I.1.7.1 (Book I, Chapter 1, Section 7.1) and *RD* § I.8. [70-72] (Volume I, Chapter 8, Sections [70-72]). The order in both treatises is similar, with slight differences. On the one hand, in *RE*, Bavinck begins the section on 'relation to God' or 'religion' with church history. He then moves to the Hebrew and Greek terminology. After this, he highlights some church Fathers' definitions of *religio*, and introduces Schleiermacher to the discussion. Finally, he gives his own description of religion and piety. On the other hand, in *RD*, he starts with religion as defined by some of the Church Fathers. Following this, he describes the Old and New Testament words related to the theme. Then again, he moves to church history to define piety influenced by Schleiermacher and the *Nadere Reformati*e theologian Johannes Hoornbeek (1617-1666). As we will see below, and despite the similarity of order,

[19] *RD* I, 58.
[20] *RE* I, 22.

we can see more advanced development of concepts in both editions of *Gereformeerde dogmatiek* (*GD*[1] and *GD*[2]).

Because piety is mainly described within the religion section, it is critical to determine whether Bavinck refers to both concepts—*pietas* and *religio*—as synonyms, or as two different words related to different ideas.[21] The answer is both.

In the first place, Bavinck differentiates between religion and piety. For this, he mainly makes use of Protestant Reformers to indicate the distinction between *pietas* and *religio*. Reformed theologians distinguished between the *beginsel* (principle) and *actio* (act) of *religie*; between the *pietas* (principle) and *cultus* (act) of religion. As is described in the previous chapter, Calvin also distinguished between piety and religion. In *RE* and *RD*, Bavinck describes this distinction, indicating that Calvin defines religion as 'the sense of God's excellencies'.[22] This feeling is an *idoneous* teacher of piety (*pietatis magister*), from which religion is born. Therefore, Bavinck highlights three aspects/movements of Calvin's understanding of religion/piety: 1) *semen religionis* (seed of religion, the knowledge of God, the sense of his attributes) is the appropriate teacher of *pietas*, and 2) from piety 3) *religio*, in the sense of worship (*cultus*), is born. Significantly, Calvin's definition of piety appears in both *RE* and *RD*.[23] Likewise, Bavinck also identified the distinction between *cultus* (effect) and *pietas* (cause) in the theology of Amandus Polanus (1561-1610) in *RE* and *RD*.[24] In summary, worship (*cultus*) is the fruit of religion or piety in the Reformed tradition, where at the same time, *cultus* can be distinguished into internal and external worship.[25]

This analysis of biblical terms also leads to another distinction in religion, namely, between objective and subjective religion. Although we do not find a 'name' (*RE*) or 'definition' (*RD*) to describe the phenomena of religion in the Scripture, we find words or expressions to describe its objective and subjective sides. In *RE*, the young Bavinck is concise.

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[21] In chapter five of *Orthodox and yet Modern*, Brock uses the concepts of religion and piety interchangeably in describing Bavinck's reception of Schleiermacher's definition of piety.
[22] *RE I*, 51. A better translation could be 'the feeling of God's virtues' (*gevoel der deugden Gods*) indicating an appropriation of Schleiermacher's grammar.
[23] *RE* I, 51; *RD* I, 241.
[24] *RE* I, 52; *RD* I, 241.
[25] In *RE*, Bavinck highlights three features regarding this Protestant view. First, Lutherans and Reformed start from true religion, and after considering the essence of it, determine what false religion is. Second, religion in the Reformed tradition rests and originates from knowledge of God. Third, the essence of religion is not abstract knowledge but is rather knowledge and act (*kennis en daad*). Interesingly, the argument of the first point is maintained in the first of edition of *RD*, but in the second edition, Bavinck moves from general concept of religion to Christianity as the true religion. For a discussion of this, see Henk van den Belt, "Religion as Revelation? The Development of Herman Bavinck's View from a Reformed Orthodox to a Neo-Calvinist Approach" in *TBR* 4 (2013): 9–31.

Objective religion is God's revelation in the first table of the Decalogue. It is the worship of God (*cultus Dei*),[26] objectively indicated in Holy Scripture. Subjective religion in the Old Testament is described in expressions such as 'walk with God', especially the 'fear of the Lord'. In the New Testament, words such as faith (*pistis*) and godliness (*eusebia*) denote the subjective side of religion.[27]

The same concepts found in this section are further enriched in *RD* by the use of covenantal language. On the one hand, in the Old Testament, objective religion is identical to God's revelation shaped in covenantal terms (*berith* and *diatheke*). Therefore, the ordinances of the covenant (commandments, statutes, decrees) correspond to the objective side of religion. On the other hand, the fear of the Lord expresses the inner disposition of the 'pious' (*vrome*) Israelites toward the objective covenantal ordinances. Notably, the fear of the Lord is related to leaning on and loving God. Because the Lord is not outside his people, God becomes the object of their love.[28] In the New Testament, the objective religion is not contained in a series of laws but 'in the person of Christ'. The word of God is focused on the person and work of Christ, therefore, the subjective side of religion is mainly described with faith (*pistis*) in Christ, which produces love in believers' hearts. In this sense, *pistis* and *agape* (faith and love) are the basic attitudes inherent in Christian piety (*vroomheid*), where *latreia* refers to the worship (*cultus*) offered to God *from* the *principle* of faith.

In summary, the biblical terminology indicates a cause and effect in the pious Christian. Therefore, adoration of God is the effect of a disposition (fear of, love to, and faith in God) objectively regulated by God's covenant. Significantly, this section about the terminology of the Old and New Testament does not present an extensive modification in the second edition of the *RD*.[29]

However, in the second edition of *RD*, Bavinck expands a paragraph that develops the distinction between objective and subjective religion in the time of the early church.[30] Bavinck explains Lactantius' definition of religion as 'the right manner of knowing and serving the true God'. In *GD*[1], he mentions that while that definition is maintained in his era, it is not exempted from criticism. This is because it does not say something about the

[26] The English version of *GE* translated *cultus Dei* as 'service of God'. See Bavinck, *RE* I, 56.
[27] *RE* I, 54-56.
[28] *RD* I, 238.
[29] See § 8.1 and 2 of the first edition of *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*. Deel 1 (1895) and section [70] of the second edtion of *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*. Deel 1 (1906).
[30] This addition can only be noticed when comparing the Dutch editions of *GD*[1] and *GD*[2].

subjective disposition (*subjectieve gezinheid*), which is needed for the service of God, it does not point out the connection between knowing and serving, and it does not mention other elements in religion.[31] In the second edition of *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*, Bavinck addresses the criticism described in the first edition of it.

For Bavinck, the objections against Lactantius are not well grounded because the law God gave to serve him was to be understood both literally and spiritually. This means that it claims the whole person, body and soul. Moreover, the service to God must be done not only with external actions but 'above all with a sincere faith, firm hope, and ardent love'.[32] Therefore, 'religion, accordingly, was not exhausted by external observance (*cultus externus*) but consisted above all in internal devotion (*cultus internus*), a knowing and serving of God from the heart.'[33] Having considered this, Bavinck finishes this new paragraph by presenting an idea that will be recurrent in his writings: the harmony between our will and God's will, between subjective and objective religion.

> Essential in religion is first of all the manner in which God himself wills and determines that people shall know and serve him. Hence in the first place it is also a duty with which God confronts us human beings in the first table of his law, a duty to which subjective religion in human beings must correspond. It is the inner disposition and motivation to know and serve God in the way he has revealed in his Word.[34]

Having considered the above, we can conclude that religion can have a different meaning to piety when religion is considered in its objective sense. Nevertheless, religion is subjectively equivalent to piety in two senses. The first is when they are related to Calvin's *sensus divinitatis* or Schleiermacher's definitions of piety. Cory Brock presents this in *Orthodox and yet Modern*, that is, universal piety[35] or religion: the absolute feeling or intuition that every human has regarding the Infinite Being. But the second instance where piety is equal to subjective religion is where it refers to the Christian's disposition to know and act according to objective religion. This is what Bavinck expressed in 1902 in his speech 'Religion and Theology':

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[31] Herman Bavinck, *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*. Deel 1 (Kampen: J. H. Bos, 1895), 177. Hereafter, *GD*[1] I.
[32] RD I, 239.
[33] RD I, 239.
[34] RD I, 239.
[35] Brock, *Orthodox yet Modern*, 229-230.

> This objective religion (*religio objectiva*), religion in the sense of the word, is distinct from subjective religion (*religio subjectiva*), piety (*de pietas*), the religiosity that consists in the upright inclination of the heart to know and serve God as He has revealed himself in His Word.[36]

In other words, general religion/piety is mainly related to the intuition of divinity, whereas specific and Christian religion/piety focus on the inclination and acts of believers according to God's objective Word. Remarkably, in the abovementioned paragraph inserted in the second edition of *Reformed Dogmatics*, Bavinck quotes his 'Religion and Theology' oration, a speech that marks the beginning of the mature period in Amsterdam. Therefore, the importance of this point should not be ignored; when Bavinck refers to subjective religion, he also refers to piety in a specific sense and not only as general or common piety. But what is Bavinck's understanding of Christian piety or specific subjective religion?

I.2 Christian Piety as regenerated disposition and relationship

While Bavinck defines religion (*godsdienst*) in *RE* as a distinct relationship or position of humans to God, expressed in all of life, based on the distinctive relationship of God to humans,[37] in *RD,* subjective religion or piety is defined as a *habitus*, a state of being or disposition that passes into action as a consequence of the influence of objective religion. Because of the fall, this universal disposition is corrupted in every human being. At the same time, and under the influence and fertilisation of a false objective religion, this *habitus* produces idolatry.[38]

What are the things necessary for a pure religion? At least two things. On the one hand, an objective religion that originates outside (*buiten*) human beings, making God known as he really is. On the other hand, the corrupted disposition of religion (*habitus religionis*) must be regenerated and renovated. In this sense—and quoting the Dutch Reformed theologian Johannes Hoornbeek (1617-1666)—*religio subjectiva* is a 'virtue infused by the Holy Spirit.'[39] While this definition does not say enough, it does not mean it is inadequate, as the English edition of *GD*[2] put it.[40] It is incomplete because one can have piety or reverence towards creatures. However, it is important to differentiate between the feelings that someone has

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[36] Herman Bavinck, 'Religion and Theology' in *On Theology: Herman Bavinck's Academic Orations*. Edited and translated by Bruce Pass (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 113. Hereafter, *OT*.
[37] *RE* I, 59.
[38] *RD* I, 241.
[39] *RD* I, 242.
[40] The English version translates the Dutch phrase '*Toch is hiermee nog niet genoeg gezegd*' as 'but this definition is inadequate'. An optional translation could be, 'however, still, with this [definition] not enough has been said'.

towards creatures and towards God, and between *cultus civilis* and *cultus religiousus*.[41] The distinction lies in the *absoluta* factor. Only in religion does 'the *absolute* dignity and power of God and *absolute* subjection on our part comes into play'.[42] The English reader could think that Bavinck considers Hoorbeek's definition as inadequate; however, the idea of 'absolute' is also identified in the same *Nadere Reformatie* theologian—an idea that is further developed by Bavinck's appropriation of Schleiermacherian grammar. This provides another example of Bavinck as orthodox and modern.

In this *habitus*, the absolute dependence towards God does not exclude freedom. Because humans were created as rational and moral creatures, the 'denial of this dependence never makes us free, while the acknowledgement of it never reduces us to the status of a slave'. In fact, 'in the conscious and voluntary acceptance of this dependence, we human beings arrive at our greatest freedom. We become human to the degree that we are children of God.'[43]

While general piety or the feeling of absolute dependence is found in every human and therefore, in every religion, only the Christian religion provides a reconciliation between dependence and freedom.[44] In this sense, the name of the *disposition* that a Christian feels toward God and his revelation receives the name of faith. However, it is crucial that feeling and faith are not confused. If general piety is associated with a feeling, then Christian piety should be identified with a regenerated faith that involves the *whole* person. In this sense, one should talk about faith in the first place, and then, as Bavinck says in *RE*, that 'feeling is a fruit and reflection of faith', where the 'Reformed definition is far better than Schleiermacher'.[45]

This idea is also found in *Philosophy of Religion (Faith)*, a short article published in 1918. Here, Bavinck explains that because faith is a regenerated habit or act, where conversion affects the will, faith freely 'reaches out to have fellowship (*gemeenschap*) with God'. In this sense, faith 'is not a mood, inclination, or sensation, but binds us to an object and thus protects us

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[41] Herman Bavinck, *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*. Deel 1. 2e druk (Kampen: J. H. Bos, 1906), 213. Hereafter, *GD*[2] I.
[42] *RD* I, 242. Original emphasis.
[43] *RD* I, 243.
[44] On the one hand, in Christianity, the recognition of God's dependence is connected to the benefits of the pardon of sins, adoption as children and salvation by grace. On the other hand, the concept of freedom is associated with the conscious and voluntary acknowledgement of our dependence on God of those delivered from the demand and the curse of the law. Thus, Christians – in freedom – voluntarily desire to serve God according to his law in the context of the covenant of grace. See *RD* I, 241-42, *WWoG* 71, 448-49, 463-72. For Bavinck's reading of Scheleiermacher's presentation of freedom and dependance see Brock, *Orthodox yet Modern*, 171-263.
[45] *RE* I, 57.

from dangerous subjectivism'.[46] Similarly, Bavinck describes in *RD* that the significant error of Schleiermacher and romanticism is the division between faith and feelings. Therefore, in Christian religion, faith—and not feeling—is primary. This does not mean a rejection of feelings, but the opposite. Faith impacts feelings, and because of this, feelings 'occupy an important place in religion'.[47] In this sense, there is a close relationship between terms such as subjective religion, feeling, piety and faith, that, depending on the case, must be distinguished and defined, especially when the object of faith is considered in connection with piety.[48]

When objective religion impacts subjective religion, the disposition passes into actions such as internal and external worship. Again, religion and *cultus* are treated as cause and effect, respectively. If a corrupted disposition leads to idolatry, a regenerated disposition leads to living according to all of God's commandments.[49] In this way, a regenerated heart has the disposition to live corresponding to objective religion. In other words, there is a harmony between objective and subjective religion; between God's will and the human's will. This relationship between objective and subjective religion is also described in *RE*. Although subjective religion is not the cause of objective religion, where the latest is 'the pure and adequate form of the subjective…both are intended to permeate each other with increasing intimacy'.[50]

Bavinck ends this section of subjective/objective religion in *RD* summarising the twofold aspect of true religion: a disposition rooted in 1) a deep sense of the absolute dependence on God as Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier and 2) a sincere desire to live according to God's commandments.[51] In *RE* we find the same idea in other words, where religion is thus the relationship of the whole person to God, governed by the standard of God's will.[52]

Despite the similarities in both definitions, there is a difference between the thought reflected in *RE* and in what is published in *RD*. In the first one, Bavinck concludes that religion is a relationship to God, yet, it 'should not be defined as communion with God

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[46] Herman Bavinck, "Philosophy of Religion (Faith)," in *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*. Ed. John Bolt, trans. Harry Boonstra and Gerrit Sheeres (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 30. Hereafter *ERSS*.
[47] *RD* I, 266-267.
[48] *RD* I, 266-267. The relationship between faith and piety can already be identified in his doctoral thesis. See Herman Bavinck, *De ethiek van Ulrich Zwingli* (Kampen: G. Ph. Zalsman, 1880,) 48.
[49] *RD* I, 244.
[50] *RE* I, 57.
[51] Ibid., Interestingly, in *GD*[2] he finished this idea and section [73] by adding a definition of religion according to the answer 94 of the Heidelberg Catechism.
[52] *RE* I, 59.

(*gemeenschap met God*)'.[53] Nevertheless, and while in *GD*[1] and *GD*[2], Bavinck describes religion as a relationship to God (*de religie als Verhouding tot God*), he also mentions that 'religion (*de religie*) aims at nothing less than eternal blessedness in communion with God (*gemeenschap met God*),'[54] therefore, true religion consists in 'communion between God and human creatures'.[55] The same idea of religion as communion, is described in *The Certainty of Faith* (both in his 1901 and 1903 editions), as an example of a publication between the period of the young and the mature Bavinck,[56] and also in his Stone Lectures in Princeton, where the Christian religion is about the 'eternal fellowship (*gemeenschap*) of God and humanity', regarding the whole of a person.[57]

Christian religion as *communion* with God —where in *Calling and Regeneration* (1903) Bavinck describes it in a covenantal language, being the essence of Christian religion as 'nothing less than communion with God'— indicates two things. First, the change and development of Bavinck's thought from *RE* to *RD*. Whereas in *Reformed Ethics*, religion is a relation to God, but not communion with God, in *Reformed Dogmatics,* subjective religion is both the *relation to*[58] and *communion with* God.[59] Secondly, in his younger and mature phases, Bavinck expresses the same definition of subjective Christian religion in both editions of *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*. In short, in this specific section, there is a change of thought from *RE* to *RD*. At the same time, this development from *RE* to *RD* shows an identical thought from *GD*[1] to *GD*[2]. This way of describing subjective religion (in terms such as disposition and relationship/fellowship) permeates his published works in both Kampen and Amsterdam.

In summary, Christian piety or subjective religion indicates the *habitus* of the entire person, which in freedom and in *relation to/communion with* God, passes into action under the influence of objective religion. Considering this, it is essential to describe what Christian objective religion is to understand in more detail the relationship with Christian subjective religion or piety. But before that, we will analyse Bavinck's understanding of piety in three articles related explicitly to this theme.

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[53] *RE* I, 58.
[54] Bavinck, *GD*[1], 202 and *GD*[2], ; *RD* I, 268-269. See also Pass, "Reading Bavinck's Ethics", 463.
[55] Bavinck, *RD* III, 305.
[56] 'The Christian religion teaches us that the highest good for man is found in God alone, in his communion (*in zijne gemeenschap*), in heavenly salvation'. See Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, 79. The English version translates *in zijne gemeenschap* as 'in fellowship with Him'.
[57] *Po*R, 178, 188-89.
[58] *RD* I, 268.
[59] *RD* I, 277.

II 'Christelijke vroomheid' (1900/1902) and 'Godsvrucht en Wetenschap' (1907)

While the previous section analysed the concept of the subjective Christian religion through *RD* and *RE*, we will now focus on three articles – written in his Kampen and Amsterdam period – that explicitly deal with piety, as their titles indicate: 'Christian Piety I/II,' and 'Piety and Science'.

II.1 'Christian Piety' (1900): Relationships and unhealthy pietistic piety

In 1900, as editor of the Reformed newspaper *De Bazuin* (*The Trumpet*),[60] Bavinck wrote an article that reveals some of his criticism towards a pietism nurtured by a non-Reformed comprehension of piety. The article reviews the first volume of *Reformers: Historical Studies About the Religious Movements in the Latter Days of Our Golden Age*[61] by C. B. Hylkema. Interestingly, this article is titled 'Christian Piety'. The short review could be divided into four parts: an introduction to the subject of piety, a review of Hylkema's dissertation, a parenthesis about the relationship between grace and nature, and finally, a subtle critique of the title of Hylkema's book.

At the beginning of the article, Bavinck identifies a lacuna in scientific-theological studies: the history of Christian piety. This involves not only the study of *general piety* that is found in pagan religions, or the shape that Christian godliness takes in different groups, but also the distinction of piety among Protestants, namely, between Lutherans and Reformed. While Bavinck does not provide these distinctions here, he does so in a previous article ('Romish, Lutheran and Reformed') published in 1897.[62]

Bavinck describes Hylkema's dissertation as a study of the spiritual revivals that took place in the Netherlands during the seventeenth century, mainly outside of the Reformed church. Hylkema focuses on Remonstrants and Mennonites with their free prophecy, Quakers and the gospel of inner light, Spinoza's philosophy in pious circles (*vroome kringen*), and Labadie calling for secession.[63]

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[60] For Bavinck's editoship of this newspaper see *BCB*, xii, 210-13. 228.
[61] DO: '*Reformateurs: Geschiedkundige studiën over de godsdienstige bewegingen uit de nadagen onzer gouden eeuw*.' Translation by Willem van de Wit. The following quotes are from this translated article. Accessed July, 2023, https://sources.neocalvinism.org/913-Herman+Bavinck.+Christelijke+vroomheid
[62] For "Roomsch, Luthersch en Gereformeerd", see the conclusion of this chapter and the following one.
[63] For a short description of Labadie see the previous chapter.

Next to this, Bavinck provides a paragraph which is significant for the present research. As we saw before, subjective religion or piety is defined as disposition/relationship. In any case, it is a *habitus* that passes into action under the influence of objective religion. Significant in this article about Christian piety is the twofold connotation of the term *relationship*. The first is about the relationship between 'creation and recreation, etc'. Particularly, how a person puts these things – creation and recreation – into a relationship that influences his religious life. Secondly, it is 'the relationship (*relatie*) in which a human being stands to God [that] determines his relationship to all things.' In other words, piety, as the relationship with God, is the foundation for any other relationship. In the same way, it affects the view of the relationship (*verhouding*) between nature and grace, and earthly and heavenly vocation.

What is the consequence of breaking the relationship between nature and grace? According to Bavinck, it is 'the sacrifice [of] the former to the latter or the latter to the former'. In which groups did he observe this? 'Socinianism and Anabaptism, Rationalism and Mysticism are then the side roads into which the Christian strays'. The movements described in Hylkema's book commit the same mistake: they set nature and grace in irreconcilable conflict, where under 'the appearance of honouring grace,' they 'suppress and kill' nature. This view of nature and grace explains both the rejection of participation in ecclesiastical and civil issues, and the mystical experiences and fanaticism that, in different degrees, are common in those circles.

The article ends with gratitude towards Dr Hylkema, but at the same time with a subtle and vital critique: 'the name *Reformateurs* (Reformers) is hardly appropriate for people who knew how to break down but were not able to build up'. Even when these groups talked about reformation, 'they were not Reformers in the *actual* sense. For they were the mouthpieces of principles that, time and again throughout history, had already been proven to be destructive for church and state and society'.[64]

In summary, the relationship in which a person stands towards God influences any other kind of relationship, including the personal view between creation and recreation. In Bavinck's view, it is hard to see the church and society being edified by the kinds of pietistic people who set God's works in creation and salvation in tension, even if they do so

[64] Emphasis mine. de Wit translated '*in eigenlijken zin*' as 'in the thorough sense of the word.'

with the intention of honouring God's grace. In short, the nature-and-grace relationship plays an essential role in understanding piety.

II.2 'Christian Piety' (1902): Normal or abnormal piety for preachers and congregations

In this second article,[65] Bavinck reviewed the second volume of Hylkema's *Reformateurs*. Here Bavinck begins with a remarkable statement: 'One of the most important parts of Church history is the history of Christian piety. For a long time, and to the detriment of the health of spiritual life, it has been neglected.'[66] In this way, Bavinck identifies the importance of piety for Church history and personal spirituality.

In the second volume, Hylkema continues illustrating the men and women involved in different pietistic movements in order to understand their principles and describe them with appreciation. While there is a relationship among them, there is also a wide variety. Therefore, Bavinck highlights that Hylkema should have changed the book's title because it is incorrect to designate people such as Labadie and others under the name of 'Reformers'. This is the second time this point has been highlighted. He argued that a proper name for this type of piety could be 'Mennonite *vroomheid*'.

Common to all these movements is dissatisfaction concerning the condition of the church and society. In this line, the Reformers were not sufficient for them. In Bavinck's words: 'The Reformation disappointed them. Luther and Calvin stayed in a halfway house, and their sons fell back into almost worse errors than those that were opposed and rejected in Rome.'[67] Because everything is corrupted—'ministers and elders, the service of the Word and sacraments; church government and discipline, school and academy, doctrine and life'[68]—pietistic groups do not find 'sincere piety' (*oprechte godsvrucht*) anywhere. As a result,

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[65] Herman Bavinck, "Christelijke vroomheid." Review of *Reformateurs*, by C. B. Hylkema in *De Bazuin* 50:54 (1902), 2-3. The following quotes are translated from this article.

[66] DO: 'Een van de belangrijkste onderdeelen der Kerkgeschiedenis is de historie der Christelijke vroomheid. Zij is lang en tot schade voor de gezondheid van het geestelijk leven verwaarloosd.' Bavinck, "Christelijke vroomheid", 2.

[67] DO: 'De Hervorming heeft hen teleurgesteld. Luther en Calvijn zijn halverwege blijven staan en hunne zonen zijn in schier nog erger dwalingen teruggevallen, dan die door hen in Rome bestreden en verworpen werden.' Bavinck, "Christelijke vroomheid", 2.

[68] DO: 'de predikanten en de opzieners; de bediening des Woords en der sacramenten; de kerkregeering en de tucht; de scholen en de academies; de leer en het leven.' Bavinck, "Christelijke vroomheid", 2.

godly Christians cannot live in these corrupt circles and therefore must turn their back on the whole world and find their strength in isolation.

In theological matters, Bavinck argued, doctrine and confession have no value for these movements. In fact, 'there is no place for church government and the ministry of the Word, and for the office and sacrament. The life of piety takes on its own organisation in gatherings and free prophecy.'[69] Finally, for this type of piety, it is not doctrine, but life, that is central. In his words, 'the life of Jesus is worth more than His death; His example has more power than His sacrifice.'[70]

This is what Hylkema describes in his work. For Bavinck, though, Hylkema's book dealt exclusively with the *abnormal* phenomena, dedicating little attention to the *normal* development of piety, a concern also shared by Kuyper. In Bavinck's words: 'the literature available for us about the normal development of the type of piety in different institutions of the Christian Church is particularly poor'.[71] That is why Bavinck asks where one can find literature about the Reformed type of piety (*Gereformeerde vroomheidstype*), as found in Calvin in distinction to Rome, or in Luther and Zwingli or about the changes of this type of piety in France, Netherlands, Scotland, England, Switzerland and America. Specifically, Bavinck asks about the necessity of research regarding sound devotional literature: 'where are the studies that introduce us to the height of the richly edifying literature which has only seen the light in our homeland, and with which the godly people still today, to an ever lessening degree, are nourished?'[72]

Why are these studies necessary? Because for Bavinck, following Kuyper, the study of Christian piety will be of great use for preaching. In this sense, the preacher's calling is not only to proclaim the truth objectively. He must also offer guidance to the congregation for their personal piety. He can reach that by 'following the history of piety through the

[69] DO: 'Voor eene Kerkregeering en bediening des Woords, voor ambt en sacrament blijft er geen plaats over. Het leven der vroomheid geeft zich eene eigene organisatie in particuliere samenkomst en vrije profetie.' Bavinck, "Christelijke vroomheid", 2.
[70] DO: 'Het leven van Jezus is meer waard dan Zijn sterven; Zijn voorbeeld heeft meer kracht dan Zijne offerande.' Bavinck, "Christelijke vroomheid", 2.
[71] DO: 'Bijster schraal daarentegen is de litteratuur, die ons ter beschikking staat voor de normale ontwikkeling van het vroomheidstype in de verschillende instituten der Christelijke Kerk.' Bavinck, "Christelijke vroomheid", 3.
[72] DO: 'Waar zijn de studiën, die ons op de hoogte stellen van de rijke stichtelijke litteratuur, die alleen in ons Vaderland het licht heeft gezien, en waarmede het vrome volk nog heden ten dage, zij het ook in steeds mindere mate, zich voedt?'. Bavinck, "Christelijke vroomheid", 3.

centuries',[73] distinguishing between the formation and deformation of piety. In other words, the study of piety can benefit ministers and church members.

In conclusion, in this article—written around the time of his move from Kampen to the Free University of Amsterdam—Bavinck differentiates between an abnormal and normal status of Christian piety. For this, he calls his readers to pay attention to church history, especially the piety of John Calvin and the 'richly edifying literature' produced in the Netherlands. As we saw in chapter one, these include the *Nadere Reformatie* authors. One of Bavinck's goals in promoting the study of Reformed piety is to bring the objective truths of Reformed theology into the hearts of the preacher and the congregation. However, piety does not stop there. Piety impacts and is connected to other spheres, such as *wetenschap* or *science*.

II.3 'Godsvrucht and Wetenschap':

Piety and Science in the formation of personality

In 1907, Bavinck wrote an article – 'Godsvrucht en wetenschap' ('Piety and Science') – in response to a request from a schoolteacher in his Reformed denomination. The concern was about a difficulty that this teacher found in reading one of the chapters of Bavinck's *Paedagogische Beginselen* (Principles of Pedagogy). Again, the main issue can be summarised with the problem described by Bavinck seven years before, in 'Christelijke vroomheid'. Here, the issue was the relationship between piety and science (*de verhouding van godsvrucht en wetenschap*) or the relationship between grace and nature.

The difficulty, according to this teacher, is found on page 53 of Bavinck's *Principles of Pedagogy*. He says:

> the ideal of a Christian Education, in the family, in lower, middle ages and high school both now and then remains: 'true piety, organically bound to substantial knowledge and true refinement', and just previously on page 52, you said that piety itself should be organically connected with knowledge of the matters, with wisdom and science, and that this piety and science, through godly sanctified science, may not remain

[73] DO: 'dat hij de geschiedenis der vroomheid in den loop der eeuwen vervolge.' Bavinck, "Christelijke vroomheid", 3.-

> existing outside and above us, but must become a formative power in us, that it must be spiritually assimilated.[74]

Before explaining the relationship between godliness and science, Bavinck provides an explicit definition of what piety is for the readers of the journal *De School met den Bijbel* (The School with the Bible):

> The word piety (*godsvrucht*) is synonymous with piety (*vroomheid*), godliness (*godzaligheid*), service of God, fear of God, expressions which all are given on page 52 to explain [the meaning] of 'pietas'. By this, we think immediately of the practice of the Christian, on his occupation and behaviour, on deeds, which he performs, and all this is fruit from faith, which lives in him. The Catechism speaks of the part of gratitude. It is also spoken of as Sanctification.[75]

In this context, Bavinck consults the third volume of Kuyper's *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, quoting sentences from its chapter on 'Sanctification and Faith' to argue for the importance of dogma and the preaching of dogma. A dogma is 'a fire that radiates glow, a lamp that shines all the time, a living water that bubbles up restlessly. A dogma, a doctrine that would lie idle and frozen in the dust before him, is a pure absurdity to him. Now, where every dogma is a living, spiritual real thing, it cannot remain without appropriate working and working out.'[76] Agreeing with Kuyper, Bavinck describes the result of preaching dogma (*prediking van het dogma*): 'Therefore, the result of the preaching of dogma: life, application, elaboration, good fruits, a godly walk.'[77]

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[74] Herman Bavinck, *Paedagogische beginselen* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1904). DO: "'Op bladz, 53 van uwe Paedag. Beginselen staat, „dat het ideaal eener Chr. Opvoeding, in huisgezin, in lagere, middelbare en hooge school nu zoowel als toen blijft: waarachtige godsvrucht, organisch met degelijke kennis en echte beschaving verbonden", en even daarvoor op blz. 52 zegt u, dat godsvrucht zich organisch behoort te verbinden met kennis van zaken, met wijsheid en wetenschap en dat deze godsvrucht en wetenschap, deze door de godsvrucht geheiligde wetenschap, niet buiten en boven ons mag blijven bestaan, maar een vormende kracht in ons moet worden, dat zij geestelijk moet worden geassimileerd.' See *GeW*, 1.

[75] DO: 'Het woord godsvrucht is synoniem met vroomheid, godzaligheid, dienst van God, vreeze Gods, uitdrukkingen, die alle op blz. 52 worden gegeven ter verklaring van de „pietas". Bij deze worden denken we dadelijk aan de practijk van den Christen, aan zijn handel en wandel, aan de daden, die hij verricht en dit alles als vrucht van het geloof, dat in hem woont. De Catechismus spreekt van het stuk der dankbaarheid. Ook wordt gesproken van de Heiligmaking'. *GeW*, 1.

[76] DO: 'Een dogma is een vuur, dat gloed uitstraalt, een lamp, die aldoor schittert, een levend water, dat rusteloos opborrelt. Een dogma, een leerstuk, dat werkeloos en verstijfd voor hem in het stof zou liggen, is voor een pure ongerijmdheid. Waar nu elk dogma een levend, geestelijk werkelijk iets is, kan het niet zonder toepasselijke werking en uitwerking blijven.' *GeW*, 1. Unfortunately, the English translation does not provide an accurate translation of this section. Compare with Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, translated by Henri de Vries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing co., reprinted 1969), 437.

[77] DO: 'Daarom is het resultaat van de prediking van het dogma: leven, toepassing, uitwerksel, goede vruchten, godzalige wandel.' *GeW*, 1.

After this, Bavinck further develops the concept of piety. In fact, he continues to provide the same idea found in *GD*[1], GD[2] and *RE*. There is a proper distinction between religion as *godsdienst* and piety as *religio*. The first one generally indicates what God demands of us according to what he considers the relationship in which we stand to him. This is what Bavinck defines in his *magnum opus* as objective religion. In this article, he writes that 'this requirement is defined in His Word, further in the first table of His law, furthermore, deposited by us in our confession and in part in the Church with her ministry of the Word and Sacraments, objectively outside and against us.'[78] This demand must be performed in service to God with all our mind, soul and might. In this way, service to God is not performed mechanically but is a matter of the heart and the whole life. Then religion becomes for us what it must be, turning to all God's commandments with joy, desire and childlike fear and humility. Again, Bavinck highlights the relationship between objective and subjective religion.

The previous subjective disposition (*subjectieve gezindheid*), where objective religion is true for us, being a matter of the heart, 'is usually identified with the name of piety (*godsvrucht*) (religion, piety, fear of God, truly saving faith, etc).'[79] Nevertheless, Bavinck does not stop here. He argues for another distinction, namely, between the relationship of religion with science (*den godsdienst en de wetenschap*) and the relationship between piety and science (*de godsvrucht en de wetenschap*). In other words, how do objective religion *and* subjective religion relate to science?

The first one points out the relationship between God's word and law, where he regulates the human's relationship to himself, and the connection of the human being to all kinds of research objects. The second one indicates the difficulty articulated by the aforementioned schoolteacher, namely, that piety (*godsvrucht*), 'which indicates a disposition in man, cannot be connected with science outside of man and subsequently forms man's personality.'[80] For Bavinck, this is what the teacher overlooked on page 52 of *Principles of Pedagogy*.

On that page, Bavinck presents an essential difference between the upbringing/education ideal (*opvoedingsideaal*) between the Reformed (*Gereformeerde*) Christian and the pietist. The

[78] DO: 'Deze eisch is omschreven in Zijn Woord, nader nog in de eerste tafel van Zijne wet, wordt voorts door ons neergelegd in onze belijdenis en staat ten deele in de Kerk met hare bedie ning van Woord en Sacrament objectief buiten en tegen ons over.' *GeW*, 1.
[79] DO: 'wordt, gewoonlijk met den naam van godsvrucht (religie, godzaligheid, vreeze Gods, waarachtig zaligmakend geloof, enz.) aangeduid.' *GeW*, 1.
[80] DO: 'die eene gezindheid in den mensch aanduidt, toch niet eerst buiten den mensch met de wetenschap verbonden kan worden en daarna des menschen persoonlijkheid vormen kan.' *GeW*, 1.

Reformed has a holistic conception of piety, whereas the pietist does not. In this sense, the significance of piety reaches the believer's heart and social context. For the Reformed, 'the essential and main goal of education is sincere piety, true godliness, where piety must not remain isolated, or remain isolated, just as wished for by asceticism and pietism.'[81]

As we have seen, however, Bavinck identifies a problem with those who assert hostility between grace and nature, or divide the relationship between creation and recreation, namely, dualism. Here he detects two types of dualism. On the one hand, by those who deny the objective relationship between religion (*godsdienst*) and science, *i.e.*, between religion and politics, as the liberals do in the Netherlands. On the other hand, 'one can also subjectively cut the subjective bond that there is between the personal piety and the practice of science, art, etc.'[82] The latter, he argues, has been done by pietistic and ascetic people in the Christian church.

What was the educational ideal of the Reformation? To connect piety with the practice of any earthly calling. Piety must be vital in the Christian life, but it must never be isolated from other spheres. In Bavinck's words:

> Piety in the first place, but then that piety not having been kept separate from, but rather placed in an organic relation to that calling with which God has entrusted us here on earth! Piety and science must not keep standing alongside one another separately, but one must inspire and sanctify this [other]. The Christian must not be satisfied with what he possesses in his religion, but just must gather from nature and history everything that can contribute to the increase of his knowledge for the vocation which he has to fulfil. Everything is his, because it is Christ's.[83]

However, for Bavinck, there is more. A Christian has not yet reached the ideal of education even if he has 'organically connected piety with science and science with piety.'[84] Both, as a

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[81] DO: 'de opvoeding oprechte vroomhied, waarachtige godsvrucht de hoofdzaak en het hoofddoel, die godsvrucht mag toch niet geisoleerd blijven, niet op zichzelve blijven staan, gelijk het ascetisme en piëtisme dit wil.' *GeW*, 1.

[82] DO: 'Maar men kan ook onderwerpelijk en subjectief den band doorsnijden, die er tusschen de persoonlijke godsvrucht en de beoefening van wetenschap, kunst enz. behoort te staan.' *GeW*, 1.

[83] DO: 'Godsvrucht in de eerste plaats; maar dan ook die godsvrucht niet gescheiden gehouden van, maar in organische verhouding gezet tot die roeping, welke God ons hier op aarde toebetrouwd had! Godsvrucht en wetenschap mogen niet los naast elkaar blijven staan, maar gene moet deze bezielen en heiligen. De Christen mag niet genoeg hebben aan wat hij in zijn godsdienst bezit, maar moet juist uit natuur en geschiedenis alles vergaderen, wat tot vermeerdering zijner kennis voor de roeping, die hij te vervullen heeft, bijdragen kan. Alles is het zijne, omdat Christi is.' *GeW*, 1.

[84] DO: 'godsvrucht met wetenschap en wetenschap met godsvrucht in zijn persoon organisch verbonden heeft.' *GeW*, 1.

unity, should influence the formation of the whole person. Nevertheless, and because piety is by nature a 'power in life', some distinctions must be made.

First, 'real piety' (*echte godsvrucht*) is manifested in affections and actions, in faith, trust, the study of God's word, prayer, etc. Second, this piety expresses moral feelings and actions, i.e., love for neighbour, obedience, etc. However, the connection between piety and moral acts could be looser than the activities of the first point. Bavinck highlights that everyone knows that some pious people fall short in their moral life. But in the third place, it is possible for someone to acquire the necessary knowledge about his profession or calling, and 'that his own formation as a human being leaves much to be desired by his piety and knowledge.'[85] This indicates that piety and knowledge do not stay completely outside of his life and profession or calling, but 'but still outside in a smaller or larger area of his own personality.'[86] In other words, piety plays an essential role in Christian personality.

That is the way Bavinck concludes this article. There are people who are truly religious and moral in life, however, they fail to work on the 'forming and civilising' (*vorming en beschaving*) of their personalities. What is missing is the 'pleasantness, politeness and friendliness in interaction, which so often attracts and fascinates us in the children of the world. They are behind others in culture, in "self-cultivation"'.[87]

In summary, piety as subjective religion is organically and holistically connected to other spheres of life and society. *Godsvrucht* is related to our relationship to God in worship, towards others in morality and earthly vocations, and to ourselves in playing a key role in the formation of our personality. Thus, the holistic understanding of the regenerated subjective religion considers the whole person in every kind of relationship:

> Religion is not limited to one single human faculty but embraces the human being as a whole. The relation to God is total and central. We must love God with all our mind, all our soul, and all our strength. Precisely because God is God he claims us totally, in soul and body, with all our capacities in all our relations…. Head, heart, and hand are all equally –though each in its own way–claimed by religion; it takes the whole person, soul and body, into its service.

[85] DO: 'dat zijn eigen vorming als mensch door deze zijne godsvrucht en kennis toch nog veel te wenschen overlaat.' *GeW*, 1.
[86] DO: 'maar toch nog wel buiten een kleiner of groter gebied van zijne eigen perssonlijkheid.' See *GeW*, 1.
[87] DO: 'aangenaamheid, beleefdheid en vriendelijkheid in den omgang, welke zoo dikwerf in de kinderen der wereld ons aantrekt en boeit. Zij staan in beschaving, in "Bildung" bij anderen achter.' *GeW*, 1.

> For that reason religion also comes into contact with all the other cultural forces, especially science, morality and art…Religion extends its power over the whole person, over all of humanity, over family and society and state.[88]

Because of this holistic view of *praxis pietatis*, piety is 'good and necessary before all things' (*Godsvrucht is goed, is vóór alle dingen noodig*). Because piety and knowledge in connection with each other help forming human personality,[89] Bavinck claims that both must be revived. In this sense, a theoretical-practical theological knowledge is necessary for the cultivation of Christian piety. But what things should be further analysed in order to deepen Bavinck's understanding of Christian piety? In which kind of relationship are absolute dependence and freedom experienced? What particular type of relationship helps us to understand the movement from a general piety to a distinctively Christian and Reformed piety? In the rest of the chapter, we will pay attention to Bavinck's covenant theology and the nature of spiritual life as part of Christian piety.

III Covenant as the essence of true religion

> If there is truly to be religion, if there is fellowship between God and man…then religion must be the character of a covenant.[90]

The subject of Herman Bavinck's covenant theology inaugurated the scholarly study of his thought through Anthony Hoekema's (1913-88) doctoral dissertation in 1953. After this, the examination of Bavinck's understanding of covenant focused on a critical approach to his doctrine of the *pactum salutis* by Loonstra in 1990. A decade after that, the emphasis has continued in studies of Bavinck's formulation of the intratrinitarian covenant, election, and covenant theology in general.[91] Significatively, Brian Mattson provides an overview of Bavinck's covenant theology, mainly from *Reformed Dogmatics*.[92]

Despite these publications, there has not been sufficient attention to the importance of and relationship between covenant theology and piety or subjective religion in Bavinck's

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[88] *RD* I, 268-69.
[89] In *Paedagogische beginselen* (pages 52-53), Bavinck indicates that piety united with knowledge shapes our entire personality (*onze gansche persoonlijkheid te vormen*), in appearance, word and deed.
[90] *RD* II, 569.
[91] For descriptions of Bavinck's coventant theology see Cornelis P. Venema, "Covenant and Election in the Theology of Herman Bavinck" in *MAJT* 19 (2008), 69-115, and chapters 4 and 5 of his book *Christ and Covenant Theology: Essays on Election, Republication and the Covenants* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2017) and Laurance O'Donnell, "Not Subtle Enough: An Assessment of Modern Scholarship on Herman Bavinck's Reformulation of the Pactum Salutis contra 'Scholastic Subtetly' in *MAJT* 22 (2011):89-116.
[92] See Mattson, *Restored to Our Destiny*, chapters two and six.

scholarship. While Bruce Pass mentions the covenantal dimensions in religious subjectivity, he does not delve into the role of these dimensions in piety. However, when we consider the essential place of Christology in Bavinck's dogmatics and religion,[93] and his trinitarian approach to Christology as a 'covenant Christology',[94] it is crucial that the covenantal aspect of piety should be investigated.

At the same time, it is vital to identify both the role of Bavinck's covenantal piety for the development of theology in Dutch late modernity, and some of the early modern Reformed influences in Bavinck's formulation of religion as a covenant. As Laurence O'Donnell concludes in his analysis of the covenant of redemption *contra* Loonstra's critique, 'an adequate historical assessment regarding both the role that Bavinck's formulation of the *pactum salutis* plays in twentieth-century Dutch theology and the nature of his appropriation of seventeenth-century formulations of the *pactum salutis* contra "scholastic subtlety" requires more subtlety than it has received heretofore.'[95]

III.1 The place of the covenant in Bavinck's theology

Between 1901 and 1902, in the transition from Kampen to Amsterdam, a maturing Bavinck made an important statement regarding covenant theology. In his efforts to nurture communion between those who were part of the church union of 1892—that is, between Seceders and *Doleantie* churches—but maintained theological differences about supralapsarianism, justification from eternity, presupposed regeneration as the ground for infant baptism, and immediate/unmediated regeneration, Bavinck highlighted the doctrine of the covenant of grace as a means to bring resolution to the conflict.[96]

In simple theoretical and practical terms, he argued, Reformed theology can only be understood in connection with covenant theology. In that setting, he wrote of

> the deep and glorious concept of the covenant, which occupies such an important place in Reformed doctrine. Other churches know nothing of this concept, or ascribe to it merely a subordinate value. But apart from

[93] Pass, *The Heart of Dogmatics*, 73.
[94] See Mark Jones, "Covenant Christology: Herman Bavinck and the Pactum Salutis" in *Five Studies in the Thought of Herman Bavinck, A Creator of Modern Dutch Theology*. Ed. John Bolt (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2012), 129-152.
[95] O'Donnell, "Not Subtle Enough," 106.
[96] For Bavinck's work for the union see *BCB*, 158-61. For a thorough examination of this, see J. Mark Beach 'Introduction,' in Bavinck, *Calling and Regeneration*, ix-lvi.

> this doctrine of the covenant, the Reformed confessions and Reformed theology cannot be understood at any point whatsoever.[97]

With this statement, Bavinck understood covenant theology as an essential part of the Dutch Calvinistic revival in late modern society that came to be known as neo-Calvinism. While Hoekema indicated that Bavinck's covenant theology does not present originality, this does not mean it is merely a repristination of early modern theology. As we will see, he not only used covenant theology to understand true religion, but also to develop an essential feature of Dutch neo-Calvinism, namely, the doctrine of common grace.

Before describing the relationship between covenant and piety, it is essential to state this doctrine within the Reformed tradition. While it is beyond the scope of this research to delve into this issue, covenant theology has been essential in the development of Reformed orthodoxy. As stated, in Bavinck's branch of Reformed theology, 'Reformed theology is covenant theology.'[98] It is impossible to understand the consolidation of early modern Reformed theology in the seventeenth century without a covenantal framework. In Muller's words, 'both in Britain and on the continent, the development of covenant theology and the inclusion of large-scale covenantal structures in Reformed dogmatics, was largely the work of the high orthodox era.'[99]

On the one hand, the place of federal theology in Britain is also described by Bavinck in the foreword for the Dutch edition of the works of Ralph (1685-1752) and Ebenezer (1680-1754) Erskine. There, Bavinck identified the role of the covenant in Scottish Reformed orthodoxy for religion and society: 'The history of the church and theology in Scotland after the Reformation is wholly dominated by the idea of the covenant. From the beginning there was not only a deeply religious but also a national and political element in the concept of that covenant.'[100] On the other hand, and in order to construct the sections of covenant theology in his Reformed dogmatics, Bavinck uses a good number of *Nadere Reformatie* authors, such as Herman Witsius, à Brakel, Campegius Vitringa (1669-1722), Petrus van Mastricht and Voetius.

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[97] Bavinck, *Calling and Regeneration*, 66.
[98] Ligon Duncan, "Covenant Theology," in *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Guy Waters, J. Nicholas Ried, and John R. Muether (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020), 24.
[99] Muller, *PRRD* I, 78.
[100] Herman Bavinck, "Preface to the works of Ralph and Ebenezer Erskine," translated by Henk van den Belt in *TBR* 3 (2012):164-77.

As we saw in the previous chapter, British and continental early modern dogmatic theology—from early, high and late orthodoxy—is intimately related to piety. In this way, covenant theology was a promoter of piety in the theological academy in Scotland and the Netherlands. Richard Muller states that 'both the Puritan piety and the piety of the *Nadere Reformatie* stand not as developments opposed to confessional orthodoxy and scholastic exposition of doctrine, but rather as developments integral to confessional orthodoxy that addressed issues of spirituality in literary genres that were not specifically "scholastic"'.[101] The orthodox theology nurtured in the academy was transposed into the 'life of the church by means of a reformulated or reformed piety that emphasised the use of doctrine in life'.[102] In other words, covenantal piety was crucial both for cultivating theology as a science and for cultivating a theology for all of life that aimed for the glory of God. In this sense, a young Bavinck started his professorship in Kampen by addressing his audience by quoting in Latin the definition of a *vero theologo* by Herman Witsius, considered in that setting to be a key representative of Reformed orthodoxy and covenant theology. A theologian, according to Witsius, is:

> Whoever is instructed with true knowledge of God and divine matters—God himself being the Teacher—not just in words alone but in the entire institution of his life, who puts into practice God's praiseworthy virtues, and who is complete for His glory.[103]

In 1909, a mature Bavinck described an *echt Godgeleerde* (true theologian) in a similar way to the *Nadere Reformatie* theologian quoted in 1883: 'A theologian, a true theologian, is one who speaks out of God, through God, about God, and does this always to the glorification of his name.'[104]

This theoretical-practical emphasis echoes, and is related to, the objective and subjective sides of religion—a distinction that is properly understood in Bavinck's theology by covenant theology.

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[101] Muller, *PRRD* I, 158.
[102] Muller, *PRRD* I, 158.
[103] *OT*, 55. For the complete oration see Herman Witsius, "De Vero Theologo" in *Miscellaneorum sacrorum libri IV* (Franciscus Halma: Amsterdam, 1700), 850-870.
[104] Herman Bavinck, *The Wonderful Works of God: Instruction in the Christian Religion according to the Reformed Confession*. Translated by Henry Zylastra (reprinted Glenside: Westminster Seminary Press, 2019), 59. Hereafter, *TWWG*.

III.2 Covenant as objective religion

As we previously noted, Bavinck distinguished between objective and subjective religion, where only the latter is categorised as a synonym for piety. Moreover, in *RD* he labelled objective religion in the Old Testament as a covenantal religion. As he put it in *Magnalia Dei*, the heart and core of Israel's religion is 'that God who is one, eternal, righteous, and holy had bound Himself in covenant to be Israel's God.'[105]

This objective religion is expressed in the New Testament in the person of Christ. Therefore, in order to have a correct Christology, Bavinck first presents the doctrine of the covenant before the doctrine of Christ. This is done in his three theological treatises: *Reformed Dogmatics*, *Magnalia Dei* (1909), and *Guidebook for Instruction in Christian Religion*[106] (1913). With this structure, he initiates his Christology by first describing Christ as the Mediator of the Covenant, then by writing about the person of Christ and the work of Christ in his offices, and his states of humiliation and exaltation. Furthermore, for the Old Testament prophets, psalmists, and Jesus and the apostles in the New Testament, the content of revelation does not consist primarily in the law, but 'principally in the promise, in the covenant of grace, and in the gospel.'[107] In this way, the *evangelion* is revealed in an objective and gracious covenant.

Hence, in Bavinck's view, objective religion must be a covenantal objective religion because the eternal Divine Being reveals his triune existence in a covenantal way. In this sense, the doctrine of the Trinity and covenant go together to properly understand Christian and Reformed piety. We know what God is and what he is for humanity 'only when we know and confess Him as the Triune God of the Covenant, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.'[108] This idea is developed in *RD* when he refers to the intratrinitarian covenant not only as the ground of the work of redemption but also to make known to us 'the relationship and life of the three persons in the Divine being as a covenantal life, as a life of highest self-consciousness and of highest freedom'.[109]

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[105] Ibid., 59.
[106] Herman Bavinck, *Handleiding bij het Onderwijs in den Christelijken Godsdienst*. Second edition (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1932).
[107] *PoR,* 158.
[108] *TWWG*, 126.
[109] DO: 'Het pactum salutis doe ons de verhouding en het leven der drie personen in het Goddelijk wezen kennen als een verbondsleven, als een lever der hoogste zelfbewustheid en der hoogste vrijheid.' See Bavinck, *GD*[2] III, 194. The English translation (*RD* III, 214) reads 'the relationship*s* and life of the three persons in the Divine being as a covenantal life, as a life of *consummate* self-consciousness and freedom'. Emphasis mine. See also *TWWG*, 255.

If God is the God of the covenant, and the revelation of objective religion is covenantal religion, did Bavinck refer to piety as a covenantal subjective religion? The answer is yes. God reveals himself in a covenantal way to his people, and the response to his God is also in a covenantal manner. For Bavinck, the covenant embraces the spectrum of a theoretical and practical theology: 'For dogmatics as well as for the practice of the Christian life, the doctrine of the covenant is of the greater importance.'[110]

III.3 Covenant as subjective religion

A significant difference in anthropology lies between Roman Catholics, Lutherans and Reformed. Although this thesis aims not to describe Bavinck's theological anthropology, it is critical to consider some points. Regarding human destiny, the first group considers *donum superadditum* as central in their doctrine, whereas in Bavinck's view, Rome distinguished between the image of God in a broader and narrower sense.[111] Regarding the latter sense, the added gift corresponds to a *gratia elevans*, something added to and elevating above nature. The result of this, he argues, is a dualism, where the world and nature 'are not sinful in themselves; only they are lower order, of a secular nature, and, unless consecrated by the Church, easily become an occasion for sinning.'[112]

Regarding Lutheranism, the creation of Adam after God's image was the realisation of the highest idea of man, therefore, 'a higher state is not possible.'[113] In practical terms, Lutheranism mainly focuses on justification or forgiveness of sin through faith, separating religious life from other spheres of life. For Lutherans, 'the religio-moral life of man is held to be a special and isolated area. It is not related to, and it exercises no influence upon, the work to which man is called in state and society, and in art and science.'[114] Neither Roman Catholicism nor Lutheranism offers a doctrinal construction that satisfies the human's relationship with God and creation. Hence, which view emphasises, on the one hand, a fellowship with the triune God, and on the other hand, a relationship with creation and

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[110] *RD* III, 212.

[111] *TWWG*, 190-91. For Bavinck's understanding of the Roman Catholic's *donum superadditum* see also "Common Grace", translated by Raymond Van Leeuwen in CTJ (1989), Vol 24:1 45-46. For a succinct and contemporary definition of *donum superadditum* see Richard Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology*. Second Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 98-99.

[112] Bavinck, "Calvin and Common Grace", translated by Geerhardus Vos in *The Princeton Theological Review* (1909), 437-65.

[113] *RD* II, 572.

[114] *TWWG*, 190. The same idea is repeated in *RD* II, 572-573

every sphere of life and society? For Bavinck, the answer is found in the Reformed doctrine of the covenant of works.

In the chapter on 'human destiny', in *RD* II, Bavinck not only recognises again the idea that covenant is the revelational and relational form in which God relates to his people, that is, as objective religion, but also describes subjective religion. In his words, 'the relationship in which believers have to come to stand to God by Christ is repeatedly described in Scripture with the term "covenant".'[115] Therefore, covenant can be used to describe the direction of God's relationship and revelation *to* Adam (in the covenant of words) and believers (in the covenant of grace); and also the fellowship *of* Adam (in the covenant of works) or believers *to* God (in the covenant of grace), that is, subjective religion. Because of this, the covenant is, for Bavinck, the essence of true religion.[116]

But 'why should this be?' Bavinck asks. He replies with the following reasons. The first is related to the distance between Creator and creature. Here is what Bruce Pass describes as knowledge as 'negation of space' through covenantal dimensions.[117] In fact, covenant allows believers to have fellowship with God and their neighbours. It is all-encompassing. In other words, for Bavinck, covenant describes the essence of true fellowship. Thus, religion in the sense of fellowship between God and man (*gemeenschap tusschen God en mensch*), a relation (*verhouding*), that of a 'master to his servant, of a king to his people, of a father to his son, of a mother to her child, of a hen to her chicks'; not just in one single relationship (*relatie*), but all relationships of 'dependence, submission, obedience, friendship among humans find their fulfilment in religion, then religion must be the character of a covenant…if religion is called a covenant, it is thereby described as the true and genuine *religie*.'[118] Religion has a covenantal character because God is the God of the covenant.[119]

The second reason why subjective religion is described in covenantal terms lies in the origin of the covenant: 'the condescending goodness and grace of God'.[120] The final reason is related to the rational and moral nature of human beings. Because God does not coerce men and women, but instead wants from them a willingly reasonable service in freedom and love, religion is freedom and love, where its

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115 *RD* II, 569.
116 *RD* II, 569.
117 Pass, *The Heart of Dogmatics*, 73.
118 *RD* II, 569.
119 *RD* II, 570.
120 *RD* II, 570.

> very nature takes the shape of a covenant in which God acts, not coercively, but with counsel, admonition, warning, invitation…and in which humans serve God, not under duress or violence, but willingly, by their own free consent, moved by love to love in return…for that reason religion is conceivable only in the form of a covenant and comes to its full realisation only in that form.[121]

When piety is understood in trinitarian and covenantal terms, the history of redemption also takes a covenantal dimension. When Adam broke the covenant of works, he became a sinner. However, a sinner is still a human being. In the same way, and despite the effects of sin, all other creations (such as earth, nature, plants, animals, etc.) remain the same in terms of substance. In other words, the *materia* of all creation remains the same. However, and with Bavinck supporting his position by quoting Gisbertus Voetius, 'the form (*forma*), given in creation, was deformed (*gedeformeerd*) by sin in order to be entirely reformed (*gereformeerd*) in the sphere of grace.'[122] This reformation is done by grace, where from the first moment of its revelation, 'grace assumes the form of a covenant.'[123] Therefore, if true religion is a regenerated *habitus*, this is performed in the context of the covenant of grace.

III.4 Piety as covenantal relationship

Having its roots in the eternal *pactum salutis*, the covenant of grace begins immediately after the fall. The main content of this covenant is the promise 'I will be your God, and you and your descendants will be my people.'[124] This promise contains both the objective and subjective sides of religion. Objective religion reveals an 'I will be a God unto thee, and ye shall be my people', as having the central and high point of this revelation in Jesus Christ as Immanuel, God-with-us.[125] In response to this, as subjective religion, the church, through the ages declares, 'Thou art our God, and we are Thy people, and the sheep of Thy pasture.'[126] Therefore, the confession that God himself comes to dwell by his Spirit in the believer's regenerated heart—in the doctrine of internal grace—is understood 'within a covenantal fellowship'.[127]

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[121] *RD* II, 570-71.
[122] *RD* II, 574. See also *RD* III, 578.
[123] *RD* III, 197.
[124] *RD* III, 221.
[125] *TWWG*, 8.
[126] *TWWG*, 9.
[127] Bavinck, *Calling and Regeneration*, 26.

This assertion of God as '*our* God' is not a mere head-knowledge scientific doctrine. Therefore, even if some science could provide a pure concept about God, this cannot satisfy the greatest need of every human being, namely, the covenantal declaration that God is a *personal* God with whom humans have fellowship by way of religion. This statement is indispensable to have a correct Christian worldview, as a mature Bavinck wrote in his 1904 book *Christian Worldview*, and maintained in its second edition in 1913:

> The thirst of the [human] heart goes forth not primarily for a pure concept of God [*Godsbegrip*] but for the living God himself. The human being finds no rest until God becomes *his* God and *his* Father. While philosophy may have such a glorious task and calling, we ourselves do not find God [when led] by her hand; we approach him, we enter into fellowship with him, only by way of religion.[128]

This declaration of faith is not a mere rational concept for the church, but confessional exultation of both a felt reality and a conviction of reality in the daily experience of life. In this sense, Yahweh, the God of the covenant, is for the church a 'living, personal force, a reality infinitely more real than the world around them.'[129] Because this covenantal relationship cannot be broken by the faithful God, even when his people may become unfaithful, Bavinck declares that the glory of the Christian religion lies in the doctrine of the covenant of grace.[130] So important is this doctrine for Bavinck that he discusses the chapter of *ordo salutis* under section VIII of Volume III of both his editions of *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*. Strikingly, the significance of the covenant in Bavinck's theology is thus less evident to readers of the English version because the name of this section was not translated in the English version of the *Reformed Dogmatics*: *'Over de weldaden des Verbonds'*[131] or '*About the benefits of the Covenant'*.

As we have seen, covenant is essential for objective religion and subjective religion. In this sense, the transcendent and objective love of God is an immanent reality in the heart of every covenant member. In Bavinck's words, 'God is love…this love is not subject to time and space, but stands above it and comes down out of eternity into the hearts of the children of God'.[132] Furthermore, this covenantal love, rooted in the unchangeable Being

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128 Bavinck, *Christian Worldview*, 52.
129 *TWWG*, 9.
130 *RD* III, 204.
131 Bavinck, *GD*1 III, 425 and *GD*2 III, 482
132 *TWWG*, 255.

of God, is the basis of election: 'I am that I am and the name (of Jehovah) designates God's unchangeable faithfulness in His relationship (*verhouding*) to Israel. Jehovah is the God of the covenant who, according to His sovereign love, has chosen his people and made them His own.'[133]

Again, the connection between election and covenant are not abstract doctrines but are elemental concepts for *praxis pietatis*.[134] Thus, any minor weakening between the close relationship between election and covenant, not only deprives one about the true insight of the acquisition and application of salvation, but also 'robs the believers of their only and sure comfort in the practice of spiritual life'.[135] In short, the covenant doctrine cannot be only an objective concept, but it must become in a subjective reality: 'If the covenant is a reality and not just an idea, it includes the obligation and inclination to live in accordance with the requirement of the covenant.'[136]

Now the question is, how does the objective reality of the covenant become a subjective reality in the believer's heart? In other words, *who* applies the objective benefits of Christ into the soul of man and *what* is the result of this application? For Bavinck, it is not enough to consider the benefits of the covenant objectively both in eternity (in the decree) and in history (incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ); the benefits of the covenant should be subjectively experienced. In Bavinck's words, 'this objective union with Christ is not enough; it must also be brought about subjectively. Acquiring salvation comes first, but it ought still to be followed by its application. As such, the question arose: How does this subjective application of the benefits of the covenant begin?'[137] The answer given by Bavinck is the third person of the Trinity. If God is the Triune God of the covenant, and Christ acquired the benefits in a covenantal way, therefore, the Holy Spirit must subjectively apply them in the same manner:

> Just as surely as the re-creation took place objectively in Christ, so surely it must also be carried out subjectively by the Holy Spirit in the church. But just as the acquisition of salvation took place in the way of a

[133] *TWWG*, 120.
[134] One of the conclusions of Bavinck's doctoral dissertion focuses in the doctrine of election, and providence, as a the ground for moral life, developing a world-and-life view consecrated by the gospel. See Bavinck, *De ethiek van Ulrich Zwingli*, 172-74.
[135] *TWWG*, 121.
[136] *RD* III, 494.
[137] Bavinck, *Calling and Regeneration*, 16.

> covenant, that is by Christ as the mediator of the covenant, so also its application must take place in that manner.[138]

Therefore, and because the *Holy Spirit* applies the objective realities of the covenant, the result is the implantation of *spiritual life* in the covenant members. In other words, 'the Holy Spirit is the Factor and Implementer of regeneration and faith…not only is the spiritual life quickened by Him, but it is also continuously maintained and led by Him.'[139] But, in which context does the Holy Spirit originate this new life? This occurs, 'in the circle of the covenant of grace and in the gospel dispensation'.[140] In sum, piety embraces covenantal and trinitarian aspects where Christology and pneumatology play an essential role in Christian and Reformed subjective religion.

What is the nature and first activity of the spiritual life? This will be now described according to Bavinck's *Reformed Ethics*.

IV. Spiritual life and piety

The recently published and translated manuscript *Gereformeerde ethiek* contains various chapters dedicated exclusively to spiritual life. Therefore, this content analysis is indispensable for understanding Bavinck's view of true Christian piety as a regenerated disposition in the human heart. Regeneration is a monergistic work of the Holy Spirit that brought into reality a walk in the Spirit, another way Bavinck uses to describe spiritual life in *Reformed Ethics*. In other words, the spiritual life is born of the Spirit and is developed in the Spirit.

Because of the theoretical-practical aspect of theology, this must be connected with the realities of life. As Bavinck describes, 'the theoretical knowledge of the doctor is doubtlessly very important, but his worth and the worth of his science only comes into its own when he heals people… similarly, theology must prescribe medicine for the ailments of the soul'.[141] This medical aspect of theology is reflected in ministers' correct understanding of the significance of spiritual life. Pastors must recognise, nurture and be able to restore any sickness in spiritual life. Interestingly, and to uphold this idea, Bavinck refers to Campegius Vitringa, a *Nadere Reformatie* theologian and a disciple of Witsius. In

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138 *RD* III, 524.
139 *TWWG*, 383.
140 RD IV, 99.
141 Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, 18.

fact, Vitringa's book *The Spiritual Life* is the most quoted author in the entire chapter on 'the spiritual life'.

Regarding piety, it is possible to highlight three things in Vitringa's preface to his book. The first is one of the definitions of spiritual life (*geestelijke leven*) as piety (*godsvrucht*). The second is to identify a certain deformation in the Christian religion, indicating its negative consequences regarding *praxis pietatis*. In his words, 'nothing has been more exposed to the instability of the human mind and the mockeries of ignorant men that the exercise of piety (*oefening van godzalighied*).'[142] Despite this, Vitringa acknowledges that the nature of true piety has been the same 'in every age of the world since its beginning'. Thirdly, the unchanging nature of piety is related to imitating the most perfect example of every virtue: Christ.

Bavinck also identified these ideas. Regarding a certain deformation of piety into pietism, this is described both in *RD* and *RE*.[143] On the subject of *Imitatio Christi*, this is done in his writings of 1885 and 1918, analysed by John Bolt and Jessica Joustra.[144] However, the analysis of spiritual life in connection with subjective religion has not been documented. Therefore, it is necessary to explore the nature and activity of the spiritual life described in *RE* in order to have a complete definition of piety.

IV.1 The nature of spiritual life

Because the Holy Spirit regenerates humans' religious disposition, rendering it into true piety, the spiritual life has a pneumatological dimension. It is *spiritual* life because 'it is a life *from*, *through*, and *in* the Spirit of God'.[145] This is essentially connected to the concept of freedom previously described in Bavinck's definition of true religion. In this sense, freedom is only experienced in a covenantal context. Here, Bavinck connects a subjective free consciousness, considering the will in a state of *liberty*, because it is 'a state of the *Spirit*.' In this way, 'freedom is a profoundly pneumatological reality.'[146] In short, freedom is a

[142] Campegius Vitringa, *The Spiritual Life*. Ed. and trans. Charles Telfer (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), 3. In the preface of the Dutch edition (1717), and after the phrase '*oefening van godzalighied*' there is an insert that is not found in the English translation. It says 'Oeffeninge van Godfaligheid [ofte de betragtinge des Geeftelyken Leevens] or 'the practice of piety [or the practice of spiritual life]. For Vitringa, this indicates the close relationship between piety and spiritual life.
[143] Bavinck's critiques of pietism and methodism will be discussed in chapter four.
[144] See the previous chapter.
[145] *RE* I, 244. Emphasis by the editor.
[146] *RE* I, 242-43.

covenantal spiritual reality. As Bavinck put it in his devotional book, *The Sacrifice of Praise*: 'through the covenant, God raises up his children to freedom and independence.'[147]

Before describing in more detail what spiritual life is, Bavinck defines what *life* is. For him, life is not merely a *state*, but also *action*, an activity of movement. While Bavinck does not quote Vitringa here, the influence of the *Nadere Reformatie* theologian is unquestionable regarding spiritual life as a liberated state of action. As Vitringa describes it, 'the spiritual life [is] the status of man in Christ who has been liberated from slavery…into communion with God…the spiritual life is a state of action, a state of continual and conscious activity.'[148] Immediately after this, Vitringa describes the different types of life, such as natural life, social life and the life of sin. This is what exactly Bavinck does in *RE*. Just as Vitringa expresses that spiritual life does not stay in conflict with natural and social life, but only to the life of sin,[149] Bavinck does too, but in a more developed manner:

> Of course, there are various kinds of life…of plants...of animals…the rational life now comes to expression in various life-spheres: in marriage, family, society, art, and science…the spiritual life differs from all of these…[but] it does not exclude the previously mentioned kinds of life and is not ill disposed toward them. The spiritual life can and may be associated with them and even adopt them as instruments for itself by completing, purifying, and perfecting them for the glory of God...the spiritual life completely excludes and is diametrically opposed only to the life of sin.[150]

The holistic nature of piety and spiritual life permeates all of life. This is because its life-principle comes from God, the only one who has life in himself. The triune creator God is the source of every kind of life. And regarding the spiritual life, the objective origin is characterised by election. The Father gave the elect to the Son from eternity.[151] The idea here is the explicit doctrine of the *pactum salutis* developed in his *RD*. The second objective cause is the meritorious cause, referring to the obedience of Christ. Here, Bavinck again depends for his ethics lectures on Vitringa, where the latter connects Christ's obedience in

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147 Bavinck, *The Sacrifice of Praise*, 15.
148 Vitringa, *Spiritual Life*, 9-10.
149 Vitringa, *Spiritual Life*, 10-11.
150 *RE* I, 245-46. This paradigm is repeated in *RD* III, 577: 'Grace is opposed not to nature' and in "The Catholicity of Christianity", where Bavinck indicates that 'our conflict is not with anything creaturely but against sin alone.' See "The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church". Translated by John Bolt. *CTJ* 27 (1992): 220–51
151 *RE* I, 253.

accordance with 'the laws of the eternal covenant contracted between Himself and His Father.'[152] The third objective cause is the Holy Spirit. In this sense, the objective cause of the spiritual life is entirely trinitarian. Within the economy of the Trinity, Bavinck mentions regeneration as a work of the Holy Spirit. When the Spirit is considered the source of all spirituality, it is possible to talk about the subjective side of spiritual life. If, objectively speaking, the foundational principle of spiritual life has a trinitarian character, then the subjective spiritual life also has a trinitarian nature rooted in love.

The love for God, a love of God, poured out in rational beings by the Holy Spirit, is a principle that permeates all of life, including thoughts and deeds in an organic way. In his words, 'this love gives stature and form to the spiritual life; it organises and inspires it, turning it into one beautiful organic whole.'[153] This love consists of fellowship with God and with believers. The close relationship between love and fellowship is only assumed in rational beings, that is, persons who know themselves and give themselves to each other. Therefore, spiritual life is a 'communal life' where believers have fellowship (*gemeenschap*) with each person of the Trinity.[154] This aspect confirms Reformed piety as a trinitarian subjective religion.

When Bavinck refers to fellowship with the Father, he explicitly connects it with piety: 'Godliness (*godzaligheid*) flows forth itself from the exercise of this fellowship and the desire to strengthen it.' Because this fellowship is a great reality, it is described with experiential terminology. Because of his Spirit, we 'believe (*geloven*) and feel (*gevoelen*) all of this in our heart. We embrace him and reach out to him, live and walk in him.' [155] Even when Bavinck describes a subjective activity, this is not separated from the objective work of the Father. In fact, there is a reciprocal objective/subjective dynamic. In other words, this fellowship assumes God giving himself to his people, and his people taking God into their hearts. Then, his people give themselves entirely to God, and the Father, from his side, accepts them in love.[156]

Regarding fellowship with Christ, Bavinck first describes it in terms of union with Christ. Union brings forth communion with Christ. This fellowship consists of a reciprocal

[152] Vintringa, *The Spiritual Life*, 21.
[153] *RE* I, 248.
[154] *RE* I, 248.
[155] *RE* I, 249.
[156] *RE* I, 249.

interchange 'from us to Christ and from Christ to us'.[157] Believers receive and take the whole Christ (*ganse Christus*) and wholly and entirely (*geheel en al*) give themselves to Christ. While this fellowship does not involve any deification of the believer, this spiritual fellowship is not merely a moral one (agreement of mind and will), but 'real fellowship of Christ's person and our persons, the closest union of Christ and us, through and in love, as in marriage.'[158]

Concerning fellowship with the Holy Spirit, and while Bavinck mentions the Spirit as the one who convicts of sin, righteousness and judgments, this pneumatological section has a high trinitarian emphasis. In other words, his pneumatology leads to fellowship with the Triune God as the purpose of human life. In fact, spiritual life means living in fellowship with the Triune God, namely, *in* the Holy Spirit, *through* Christ *with* the Father.

While this fellowship is one and yet different regarding the three persons of the Godhead, the believers experience 'the life of God himself: from the Father through the Son in the Spirit, and, conversely, in the Spirit through the Son to the Father.'[159] In this sense, the life of God, defined as 'the perfect activity of God through which he perfectly knows and loves himself and lives according to his holy nature and in blessedness'[160] is the archetypical example for us, while the spiritual life of believers is only a shadow of God's life.

While Bavinck refers to a quotation from Vitringa asserting the spiritual life as an imprint of God's life, he does not quote Vitringa in his description of God's life. However, his resemblance to the *Nadere Reformatie* theologian is remarkable. According to Vitringa, 'the life that God produces in a person by generation is an ectype or reproduction of the most perfect life of God…the life of God is that perfect and blessed state of activity in which God perfectly contemplates and loves Himself.'[161] In short, the spiritual life has its foundation and goal in the trinitarian life of the God of the covenant.

In summary, without considering the Trinity as the objective foundation of the subjective spiritual life, there cannot be true piety regarded as a regenerated disposition by the Holy Spirit that leads to acting in union with Christ to the glory of God. If this disposition and action have God, and God alone, as the *principium* of man's highest good, then 'it is in the

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[157] Bavinck, *GE*, 175. DO: '*van ons aan Christus en van Christus aan ons*.' This sentence is not found in the English translation.
[158] *RE* I, 249.
[159] *RE* I, 250.
[160] *RE* I, 249-250 and 263.
[161] Vitringa, *The Spiritual Life*, 28.

way of the covenant that He causes us to walk through His word and Spirit.'[162] Therefore, if both religion and spiritual life have fellowship with God as part of their definitions, it means that piety/subjective religion and spiritual life are closely related to each other. Piety is the regenerated disposition that under the covenantal objective religion (in the power of the Holy Spirit), passes into action designated as a walk in the Spirit or spiritual life that is also developed in the covenant of grace.[163] Piety is so related to spiritual life that Bavinck also describes a covenantal religion with an experiential terminology, just as was previously described:

> For according to its essence, religion is nothing less than fellowship with God, the most deep, inward, and tender fellowship that can be imagined and understood second only to the fellowship between the three persons of the Godhead and the fellowship between the two natures of Christ. That is what Scripture expresses in its beautiful doctrine of the covenant. For the covenant refers to that act of God whereby God places man as His image in relationship to himself and causes him to dwell continually in His fellowship. That fellowship is more intimate and tender than the fellowship between husband and wife…Scripture can hardly find words or metaphors sufficiently powerful and clear to make us understand something of that fellowship.[164]

V. Conclusion

Bavinck's understanding of Christian piety should be grasped in a trinitarian, covenantal and holistic framework. Objectively, it is trinitarian because the Trinity is the archetype of piety and spiritual life. Subjectively, it is developed with a lively fellowship with each person of the Godhead, being an ectype of the divine life.[165] Therefore, without an orthodox and experiential knowledge of the Trinity, it is difficult to cultivate a sound understanding of Christian and Reformed piety.

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[162] TWWG, 488.

[163] Vitringa mentions that the spiritual life is the fruit from certain good capacities and *habitus*. See *The Spiritual Life*, 15.

[164] Bavinck, *Calling and Regeneration*, 25

[165] Distinctive communion with each person of the Trinity is a theme developed in high and late post-Reformation orthodoxy, such in John Owen (1616-1683). See Joel Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 101-116.

Organically, piety is connected with all of life and with every sphere of life. Piety is cultivated in the heart of human beings, and because it even helps to shape human personality, it impacts different activities developed by human beings. Explicitly, Bavinck used the word 'organic' to describe the relationship between *godsvrucht* and *wetenschap*, and between piety and culture. Therefore, the trinitarian and organic motif remains essential to have a holistic comprehension of piety and, in this sense, to avoid narrow views of piety by some pietists who separate nature and grace. In other words, Bavinck's holistic understanding of piety is given by his trinitarian and organic understanding of theology. This leads us to the third characteristic of his comprehension of piety: the *type* of both the relationship with the Triune creator and saviour God, and with creation. What type of relationship does Bavinck use for determining a sound communion with God and human beings? The answer is the covenant.

In a Reformed way, subjective religion is covenantal because it is shaped by the objective covenantal religion revealed by the triune God in the covenant of grace. Fellowship with God, and with creation is adequately understood when the doctrine of the covenant is brought to the front.

As we saw in his 'Christelijke Vroomheid', the type of relationship that humans have with God determines the type of relationship they have with creation. And this view is vital in understanding what piety is. This idea is also found in *Reformed Ethics*. For Bavinck, 'the relation in which we subjectively stand toward God determines all our relations toward every creature.'[166] As was described in this chapter, the Christian subjective relationship or religion is Christian piety. And that type of piety is covenantal in its nature. In fact, Bavinck uses the doctrine of the covenant to emphasise both *cultus* and *culture*. In *RE* he claims: '[the covenant of works] involves becoming the image of God more and more through procreation, worship and culture.'[167] For developing this doctrine of the covenant in *RD*, *RE* and *Calling and Regeneration*, Bavinck mainly refers to *Nadere Reformatie* theologians.

This influence leads us to confirm the importance of early modern Dutch Reformed theologians upon Bavinck's formulation of subjective Christian religion, as in the case of Vitringa and Hoornbeek. In the first case, this is so regarding spiritual life, and in the second, with the concept of the *absolute* as part of the definition of religion.

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[166] *RE* I, 104. See *GE*, 60.
[167] *RE I*, 43. The English translation omits *aarde beheersen* or *dominion of the earth.*

While Brock rightly described the influence of Schleiermacher on Bavinck, the importance of *feeling* in the conceptualisation of *religio* should not be limited to the German theologian. The subjective side of religion, regarding one's immediate self-consciousness and *praxis pietatis*, has also occupied a key place within the Reformed tradition: 'whoever imagines that nobody had recognised this before Schleiermacher and that earlier theologians consisted in scholastic, vain hairsplitting is very mistaken. It was the distinguishing feature of Reformed theology, that it was genuinely practical…and was orientated toward life. Most certainly, praxis must stand upon sound theory, but his must lead to good praxis.'[168] The Reformed influence, from Calvin and Reformed orthodox theologians, can lead us not only to consider the appropriation of seventeenth-century theologians in covenant theology, as O'Donnell suggests, but also the theoretical-practical role and application of covenant theology for the late modern Dutch context. The theoretical-practical aspect of covenant theology is expressed in the doctrine of common grace.

Although it was Kuyper who developed this doctrine as a feature of neo-Calvinism in his three volumes of *Common Grace* (1902-1904), Bavinck also wrote about the theme in 1894. In the rectorial address titled 'De Gemeene Genade' (Common Grace), Bavinck begins exposing this doctrine with strong covenantal language.

It is crucial to highlight that in order to develop this doctrine of common grace, Bavinck built it on the objective and subjective side of covenantal religion. Actually, the idea mentioned in his later work *Philosophy of Revelation,* regarding the difference and distinction of the covenant of grace and gospel in Israel's religion is already found in Bavinck's much earlier work, 'Common Grace'. For him, the main difference between Old Testament religion and pagan religions is the concept of *gratia specialis*. Importantly, this special grace comes in the way of the covenant or *foedus gratie*. The objective side of the covenant is determined by 'something marvelous and new, established by God with Abraham and his seed. Elohim, the God of creation and of nature, makes himself known to Israel as Yahweh, the God of the Covenant.'[169] The same idea of Christ as the objective revelation of the New Testament is considered within the covenant: 'Christ is the ultimate content of the *foedus gratie'*. Subjectively considered, '[God] is the one and only, the highest good for the pious (*vroome*) of Israel'.[170] In short, for Bavinck, Reformed Christian piety, and also the doctrine of common grace, is adequately understood within the doctrine of the covenant.

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168 *OT*, 54.
169 Herman Bavinck, "Common Grace", 35-65.
170 Bavinck, "Common Grace", 43.

The similarities between the conceptualisation of subjective religion in the young (GD^1) and the mature (GD^2) Bavinck, and the specific differences between *RE* and *RD* lead to conclude that he maintained and developed the kernel of Christian piety: a regenerated disposition that enables the heart to have a covenantal relation to and communion with God, highlighting a harmony between the will of God (objective religion) and the will of human beings (subjective religion).

As we saw in GD^2, a mature Bavinck further develops Lactancius' definition of *religio* by emphasising subjective religion only when objective religion is firmly considered as the foundation of piety. Actually, this point is the main difference between Roman Catholic and Lutheran pieties and their Reformed equivalent.[171] As Bavinck put in an article titled 'Romanist, Lutheran and Reformed', Calvin was not guided by a subjective experience, but by an objective principle. What is that unchanging and objective principle? In Bavinck's words: 'the honour [glory] of God. This is the central thought of Reformed piety.'[172]

The above quotation can help us understand why Bavinck began to talk about religion as *gemeenschap* or fellowship with God in *RD*, which he refused in *RE*. One reason for this is that for the young Bavinck, this definition 'excludes all objective religion and makes it seem as if objective religion is a matter of indifference and inferior'.[173] Interestingly, in the same manuscript of *RE*, the young Bavinck is able to talk about 'communion' with God in the section on spiritual life, something that both in GD^1 and GD^2, Bavinck explicitly affirms both for subjective religion, and in this case, for spiritual life: 'The life of spiritual persons, also after its origination, cannot for a moment be separated from God and his fellowship (*gemeenschap*)'.[174] Thus, and because in regeneration the disposition is renewed and the spiritual is implanted in the heart,[175] one is able to relate terms such as the spiritual life and piety of a Christian closely.

In summary, we can synthesise a definition of Bavinck's essence of Christian Reformed piety as *the regenerated disposition that passes into action in a covenantal relationship with the triune God, and holistically to other creatures in morality and culture*. Piety regarding the covenantal fellowship with God is expressed in *cultus internum* and *externum*. Piety, regarding its holistic aspect with

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171 Herman Bavinck, "Roomsch, Luthersch en Gereformeerd." Review of *Symbolik: Vergleichende Darstellung der christlichen Hauptkirchen nach ihrem Grundzüge und ihren wesentlichen Lebensäusserungen*, by E. F. K. Müller. *Tijdschrift voor Gereformeerde Theologie* 4 (1897): 213–28.
172 DO: 'de eere Gods. Deze is de centrale gedachte van de Gereformeerde vroomheid.' Bavinck, Roomsch, Luthersch en Gereformeerd", 226
173 *RE* I, 58.
174 *RD* IV, 98.
175 *RD* IV, 98.

creatures, is expressed in morality and culture. Because piety is shaped in an objective and subjective trinitarian and covenantal organic structure, *cultus*, morality and culture aim for the glory of God. In short, subjective Christian and Reformed piety is trinitarian, covenantal and holistic.

By which means does this regenerated *habitus* pass into action in the practice of piety towards God (worship) and towards the neighbour (morality and culture)? How does piety shape the understanding of internal/external worship, theology and culture? What is the difference between Reformed piety and Pietism/Methodism? In which context can candidates for the ministry learn about this conceptualization of piety? What is the end of Reformed *praxis pietatis*? These questions will be answered in the following chapters. Specifically, the next chapter will deal with the development of the spiritual life in students of divinity, as well as the final and theocentric purpose of piety: the beatific vision. This is done through i) the analysis of unpublished and unresearched manuscripts explicitly related to piety and ii) Dutch articles that deal with the *visio Dei*.

Chapter III:

The practice and chief end of Bavinck's Reformed piety

> *Not to a lesser, [but] to a greater struggle I call you, to more serious combating of sin always and everywhere, to daily and the constantly ongoing war against the flesh. For I do not call you to separation, but to reformation, not to avoidance, but to enjoyment.*[1] – Herman Bavinck.

> *The contemplation of God is promised to believers [in the] hereafter as the climax of all salvation.*[2] – Herman Bavinck.

Herman Bavinck's published writings show that Christian piety is a regenerated disposition that passes into action in a trinitarian and covenantal way. Hence, in his view, a God-glorifying objective religion is essential for understanding the nature of subjective religion in its covenantal, experiential, holistic expression.

While the previous chapter sought and synthesised a definition of the essence of piety, this chapter continues to delve into the elements that constitute Christian piety in order to move into the practices and end of piety. On the one hand, some of the aspects regarding the practice of piety are described through the analysis of two manuscripts, the titles of which are explicitly related to the concept of piety: 'De Godsvrucht in het Studentenleven' ('Piety in the student life,' 1890) and 'Exercitia Pietatis' ('Exercises of Piety,' 1896). The ideas found in these manuscripts will help us understand principles related to the practice of piety (in a theological training context) described in this thesis's last chapter. On the other hand, the elements that constitute the essence and end of piety will be explained by analysing three articles that illustrate the significance of the doctrine of the beatific vision in Bavinck's theological eschatology: *De eere Gods* ('the honour or glory of God'), *Kennis en leven* ('knowledge and life'), and finally *Geloof en aanschouwing I-VI* ('faith and contemplation I-VI'). The analysis of these writings will show the consistency of the main ideas identified in the previous chapter that compose his understanding of piety. At the same time, this

[1] DO: 'Niet tot kleiner, tot grooter strijd roep ik u, tot ernstiger bestrijding van de zonde altijd en overal, tot dagelagkschen en voortdurenden kamp tegen het vleesch. Want ik roep u niet tot afscheiding maar tot hervorming, niet tot mijding maar tot genieting'. Herman Bavinck, "De Godsvrucht in het studentenleven", (manuscript), 12. Hereafter, *DGS*.

[2] DO: 'de geloovigen hiernamaals de aanschouwing Gods als het toppunt van alle zaligheid wordt beloofd'. Herman Bavinck, "Geloof en aanschouwing" [I-VI] in *De Bazuin* 50:44 (1902). Hereafter, *GA I-V*.

chapter will provide the path for approaching in more detail the aspects of the practice of piety described in chapters four and five.

I. Piety in the Student's life in the Reformed tradition

The discussion about the importance of piety in theological students has occupied a key place within the Reformed tradition. As indicated in chapter I, Calvin wrote his *Institutes* for the training of new ministers, where *pietas* in the Christian life was a prominent theme. In the same line, British Puritanism and *Nadere Reformatie* theologians put great emphasis on the same subject. Piety was vital in the life of the theological student. As Andreas Beck indicates, writing of the early modern Dutch Reformed theologian Gisbertus Voetius,

> [Voetius] recommends an evaluation process based not only on the candidates' giftedness for study, but especially on their spiritual motives and piety (*pietas*) – yet without consideration of their social status. …Voetius finally emphasises the *caritas* needed for the entire study. A decisive requirement in this is the "practice of piety" (*praxis pietatis*), which both students and professors are to exercise in order to draw nearer to God.[3]

Despite the separation between classic Christian dogmas and Christian piety endorsed by liberal theologians during the nineteenth century, different Reformed theologians continued to emphasise the idea of living communion with God as part of the practice of piety rooted in Christian Creeds and Confessions of Faith. In North America, the Princeton theologian Archibald Alexander (1772-1851) addressed candidates for the ministry in 1831 about 'the importance of aiming at eminent piety in making their preparation for the sacred office'.[4] Later, in 1911, Benjamin Warfield (1851-1921) would discuss the seriousness of theological studies in the context of devotion to God by addressing 'the religious life of theological students'.[5] In the Netherlands, the preeminence of piety in the second half of the nineteenth century was also highlighted by Herman's father, Jan Bavinck. In 1883 he addressed the theological students of Kampen by saying,

> This Church [Reformed] has need, a great need of godly, solid and scientifically educated ministers of the Gospel. Intentionally, I put the

[3] Beck, *Gisbertus Voetius*, 109.
[4] See *The Pastor. His call, character and word by Faculty and Friends of 'Old' Princeton*. Introduced by Sinclair Ferguson (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 2020), 49-66.
[5] Benjamin B. Warfield, "The Religious Life of Theological Students" in *Themelios* Volume 24. Issue 3 (1990), pages 31-41.

> attribute 'pious or godly' in the first place because I believe that true and genuine piety is a main requirement in him who acts to proclaim the Gospel as a minister of Christ.[6]

In light of this, Herman Bavinck's two manuscripts show us that the *praxis pietatis* of theological students was also an essential aspect for him to consider as a teacher. In fact, in 'The Future of Calvinism' (1894), it is possible to find a key idea that connects both unpublished manuscripts of 1890 and 1896. The idea refers to maintaining the old Reformed experiential orthodoxy in the new context of late modernism. While different modernist theologians accentuated a moralism uprooted from classical orthodoxy (i.e. P. Hofstede de Groot and J. Scholten),[7] Bavinck emphasised the Calvinist mysticism that grew out of Reformed orthodoxy. In his words,

> There is an immense difference between the conception of Christianity of former ages and that of the present time. Formerly Christianity was preeminently religion, now it is chiefly morality…Once heaven was represented as the final goal; now it is earth…old religion was essentially mystical, a life in communion with God; today it is mostly moral idealism, a life in the service of humanity…Calvinism maintains the independent value of religion, and does not suffer it to be swallowed up by morality. It has a vein of deep mysticism and it cultivates a devout godliness (*godsvrucht*). It considers God alone as the highest good, and communion with Him as supreme happiness. Calvinism sets the rest of being over against the restlessness of becoming, and makes us feel the pulsation of eternity in every moment of time.[8]

The following manuscripts show Bavinck's commitment to the experiential and holistic nature of Reformed piety—in this case, on the necessity of practical piety in the lives of his students.

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[6] DO: 'Die Kerk heeft behoefte, groote behoefte aan godvruchtige, degelijke, wetenschappelijk-gevormde dienaren des Evangelies. Met opzet plaats ik het attribuut 'vrome of godvruchtige' voorop, omdat ik meen, dat ware en echte vroomheid een hoofdvereischte is in hem, die optreedt om als een dienaar van Christus het Evangelie te verkondigen'. See Jan Bavinck, *De Christ. Geref. Kerk en De Theologische School. Twee Toespraken, Gehouden den 9. Jan. 1883 bij de Installatie van de drie leeraren aan de Theol. School, door W. H. Gispen en door J. Bavinck* (Kampen: G. Ph. Zalsman, 1883), 19.

[7] For an introduction of the Groningen school (Hofstede de Groot) and the Leiden school, regarding the rejection of classical Christian dogmas, see Harinck and Winkeler, "The Nineteenth Century", 464-67 and 474-76.

[8] Herman Bavinck, "The Future of Calvinism.," trans. Geerhardus Vos. *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 5 (1894), 19-20.

I.1 Piety in student life (1890)

At the beginning of the 1890 academic year, Bavinck chose to talk to his students about a 'serious subject' (*ernstig onderwerp*): piety in student life. He gave three reasons why *godsvrucht* is a crucial topic to address.

The first is related to the vitality and place of piety in the Theological School of Kampen. For Bavinck, this piety was in danger of dying because it was 'languishing' (*kwijnen*). While scientific knowledge had been slowly increasing at the seminary, that was not the case regarding spiritual life.[9] The 'inner piety' (*innige godsvrucht*) was not lacking, 'but it no longer dominates as it used to be previously'.[10] This attitude had direct consequences for the church. There was an increasing distance between the students and the ordinary members of Christian Reformed congregations. In fact, the companies of pious people (*gezelschappen van vroomen*) were no longer visited by the students.[11]

The second reason is connected to the idea that there is a sense of atrophy (*atrophie*), that is, much knowledge but not faith, much head but not heart, i.e., 'theory but not practice' (*thoerie maar geen praktijk*).[12] Finally, Bavinck mentions the difference between the ideal and place of piety in the life of any person, and also in the life of the theological student—in his words, 'what should it be, and what place should it occupy'.[13] That is to say, the expressions of piety for daily life differ between people. Significantly, Bavinck declares that his conception of piety differs from the 'later Reformed' (*later Gereformeerde*) but not from the 'older' (*oudere*) Reformed. In fact, what Bavinck is addressing to his students is his own 'confession' (*confessie*) about piety in the student life. That confession is divided into three parts.

The first section develops the last point mentioned above regarding the ideal of piety in different groups. Bavinck mentions that many people are 'bitterly disappointed' (*bitter teleurgesteld*) when they enter the theological student environment. At the seminary, they thought that they would find seriousness regarding spiritual things. However, they found

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[9] In the context in which this talk is given, the concept of piety was important in the Seceders' theological education in Kampen. As I noted previously, seven years earlier Jan Bavinck spoke about the priority of true *vroomheid* for ministers of the gospel. So too, Jan Bavinck spoke of the use of piety twenty-one years earlier. Piety in theological education will be developed in the next chapter.

[10] DO: 'maar het domineert toch niet meer als vroeger'. *GeW*, 1.

[11] The *gezelschappen van vroomen* were conventicles integrated by members from different church congregations (with their roots in the *Nadere Reformatie* conventicles) where evidence of regeneration was necessary for admittance. See James Robert Tanis, *Dutch Calvinistic Pietism in the Middle Colonies. A Study in the Life and Theology of Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen* (Netherlands: Springer Netherlands, 2012), 158.

[12] *DGS*, 2.

[13] DO: 'Wat moet ze zijne, en welke plaats moet ze innemen'. *DGS*, 2.

the opposite: 'Little seriousness and much jesting; little conversations about the spiritual life but much about study, science, little [about] Christ'.[14] Bavinck mentions that if 'the pious core of the congregation' (*de vrome kern der gemeente*) knew about the lives of the town's theological students, they would be also 'bitterly disappointed' (*bitter tegenvallen*). While Bavinck acknowledges the truth of the above phenomenon (*verschijnsel*), he also saw the importance of distinguishing between the ideal of the congregation and the true Christian ideal to teach well about piety.[15]

For Bavinck, the congregation — and those who come to Kampen with a 'serious mood' (*ernstige stemming*) — unconsciously form an ideal of piety to which they have no right. In the same way, the congregation idealises the 'domestic life' (*huiselijke leven*) of the minister. They only know about the minister as someone 'spiritual' (*geestelijke*), that is, someone in his office, in the pulpit, in the catechism class and in household visitation. Nevertheless, they do not know that the minister has a 'natural carnal side' (*natuurlijke vleselijke zijde*), that is, that he is a 'human being' (*mensch*) who also has weekdays (*werkdagen*) and not only Sundays. In fact, Bavinck remarks that some of the pious people disappoint others when their sins go together with their piety—in his words, when 'selfishness, harshness, greed, deceit, gossip, go hand in hand with piety among the pious'.[16] Therefore, the ideal of piety that separates spiritual and natural things is not the true and complete Christian ideal of piety.

Bavinck also differentiates the ideal of piety according to Roman Catholicism, Anabaptism, Asceticism, and Pietism from the Protestant, Reformed ideal of piety, which Bavinck judged to be the better expression of the Christian ideal of it. The problem with the first group, in his view, is what was mentioned in the previous chapter: 'a dualism and contradiction between the spiritual and natural that must not exist'.[17] This dualism has consequences for the Christian life because it cultivates the unnatural (*onnatuur*), falsehood (*onwaarheid*), hypocrisy (*huichelarij*) and therefore cannot 'cultivate and maintain true piety' (*de ware godsvrucht te kweken en te onderhouden*).[18] In summary, the piety of student life should not be ultimately determined by the congregation or by dualistic and pietistic ideals of

[14] DO: 'Weinig ernst en veel scherts; weinig sprake van het geestelijke leven maar veel van studie, wetenschap, weinig Christus'. *DGS* 2.
[15] This distinction is encouraged by the Latin motto 'Qui bene distinguit, bene doceit'.
[16] DO: 'zelfzucht, hardvochtigheid, gierigheid, bedriegerij, achterklap gaat bij de vrome menschen met hut godsvrucht gepaard'. *DGS*, 3.
[17] DO: 'en dualisme en tegenstelling aan tusschen het geestelijke en het natuurlijke dit niet mag bestaan'. *DGS*, 5.
[18] *DGS*, 5. The non-rejection of nature is encouraged by the Latin motto 'naturam expellas furca, tamen usque recurret'.

godliness. Thus, he argued, Reformed theological students should consider the Protestant and Reformed ideal of piety.

The second section of this speech describes the solution to this dualism, where the contradiction between the spiritual and natural is solved. Nevertheless, and because Bavinck admits that he is not a Monist (*à la* Scholten), a certain opposition (*tegenstelling*) must be acknowledged. The antithesis is not between grace and nature but between the Kingdom of God and other kingdoms, between grace and sin, between the 'service of God' (*dienst Gods*) and the 'service of the world' (*dienst der wereld*), between the flesh and the Spirit, between the folly of the cross and the wisdom of the world. In other words, it concerns an antithesis 'that continues along every field' (*doorgaande op ieder terrain*).[19] Because of this, Christians must 'forsake the world to kill the flesh … to take up the cross and follow Jesus. [Because] he who is a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God'.[20] Bavinck acknowledges a contrast between good and evil, virtue and sin—namely, an 'ethical contradiction' (*ethische tegenstelling*).

The non-contradiction between nature and grace or between creation and re-creation has a trinitarian foundation. The archetypal diversity in unity located by Bavinck in the Triune God has direct implications for ectypal non-opposition between the spiritual and natural in the creation. The God who is one in essence and three in persons is in complete harmony. Therefore, there are no contradictions within God where the 'three are one' (*drie zijn één*). Because the Son is eternally begotten from the Father, the Son is not outside nor opposed to the Father. Therefore, the Son did not come to destroy the Father's works, but rather set himself against the devil's works. In this way, 'the three persons do not work against each other' (*de drie personen werken niet tegen elkaar in*) but work 'to make creation the Kingdom of God and the temple of the Lord'.[21] In this way, classical Christian doctrines, such as the Trinity (and the *trinitatis ad extra* indivisible works) and the eternal generation of the Son, constitutes firm foundations for Christian piety and life-and-worldview.

Notably, the trinitarian work has a direct implication for the Christian life. Strikingly, Bavinck claims that the actual blessed life, the communion with Christ and the life of the Spirit in us is 'not an end but a means' (*is geen doel maar middle*). In other words, it 'is not the highest' (*is het hoogste niet*) stage of the spiritual life. As in *Reformed Ethics*, Bavinck here

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[19] *DGS*, 6.
[20] DO: 'om de wereld te verlaten oms vleesch te dooden… het kruis op ons te nemen en Jesus natevolgen… Wie vriend der wereld is, wordt vijand Gods gesteld'. *DGS*, 6.
[21] DO: 'om de schepping te maken tot een Koninkrijk Gods tot en tempel des Heeren'. *DGS*, 7.

indicates that spiritual life begins with regeneration and conversion brought by the Holy Spirit, highlighting the work of the triune God in the life of the believer. Thus, the Son's activity regarding the *unio mystica* is considered in the mysticism of Song of Songs.[22] But there is also an activity of the Father: the 'Spirit and Son bring and lead us to the Father'.[23] When this is considered, Bavinck concludes that the highest Christian life is not a life of 'feeling, mystical or life of experience' (*geen gevoels-, geen mystiek, geen bevindingsleven*), but a life as a 'child' (*kind*). In some sense, Bavinck understands believers who find comfort in the spirituality of the Song of Songs. Still, the highest life is the 'child's life before the Father' (*kinderleven voor den Vader*). The *kinderleven* concept helps Christians to cry out that 'we do not rest until we rest under God's fatherheart!'[24] This, Bavinck judged, is the ground for a healthy balance between a contemplative and active life.

Bavinck is critical and appreciative of Roman Catholic and Protestant views regarding the purpose of the Christian life. On the one hand, he describes the final goal (*einddoel*) of Roman Catholicism in terms of *visio Dei*, enjoyment of God (*genieten* or *fruitio Dei*), the contemplation of God (*de aanschouwing Gods*), rest, silence, silent meditation and *contemplatio*. With these terms, Bavinck describes the highest life already here on earth and especially in heaven according to Romanism. On the other hand, Bavinck points out that Protestantism has a different conception of the Christian life. Activity, labour, and the service of God are more prominent, 'not quietism and mysticism' (*niet het quiëtisme en mysticisme*). Bavinck also diagnoses the condition of the time in which he lived. In an active and restless age, with missions, philanthropy and civilisation, there is no time for a 'peaceful', 'quiet' and 'contemplative life'. In consequence, 'our century is not religious, but it is moral. Not dogmatic, but ethical. Not contemplative but active'.[25]

Importantly, and because the comprehension of the idea of heaven has direct implications on life here on earth ('as one imagines heaven, so is the Christian ideal that one pursues here,')[26] both views (contemplative and active) must be united with their respective distinctions. That is, while religion (*godsdienst*) should not merge with morality (*zedelijkheid*),

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[22] Herman Bavinck seems to indicate the language used by some *Nadere Reformatie* theologians to describe the experiential fellowship between believers and God. As Arie de Reuver has documented in *Sweet Communion*, there is a continuity between the spirituality of Bernard of Clairvaux/Thomas Kempis and the *Nadere Reformatie* theologians. In particular, the language of the Song of Songs was characteristic between the continuity of Clairvaux mysticism and theologians such as Gisbertus Voetius. This is expressly mentioned in his inaugural oratio (1634). See Voetius, *Inaugurele rede over Godzaligheid,* 56 and 70.
[23] DO: 'Geest en Zoon brengen en leiden ons tot den Vader'. *DGS*, 8.
[24] DO: 'We rusten niet voor we rusten onder Gods Vader hart!'. *DGS*, 8.
[25] DO: 'Religieus is onze eeuw niet, maar wel zedelijke. Niet dogmatisch maar wel ethisch. Niet contemplatief maar actief'. *DGS*, 9.
[26] DO: 'Zoals men den hemel zich voorstelt, zou is het christelijke ideaal dat men hier nastreeft'. *DGS*, 9.

Sunday and working days are both necessary. Thus, 'giving' and 'receiving', the 'active' and 'passive', should go together. At this point, the concept of harmony summarises Bavinck's understanding of piety in the Christian life: 'union, the harmony of both [contemplative and active] is the highest. Head, heart, hand must be in agreement'.[27] In summary, the contemplative-active harmony is the life of God's children according to Bavinck's Reformed piety.

The meaning of *kinderleven* is further developed according to the harmony previously mentioned. The life of a child is a life given, received, and adopted from God (*leven gegeven, ontvangen, aannemen, van God*) in his revelation in nature and Scripture. Therefore, the person is always and everywhere 'small' and 'humble', including in the context of studies. As God's children, theological students see (*ziende*) and enjoy (*genietende*) God.[28] Thus, with a broad vision, pure heart and open eyes, Christians should embrace everything in which they see something of Christ. This includes art, science, recreation, play, wine, and all the things in which there is a love and interest for all ordinary and natural life. In this sense, the *kinderleven* concept helps Bavinck to develop a holistic understanding of Christian life.

Thus, piety is understood as a balance of children who 'fall on their knees before God' and 'enjoy everything' (*alles genieten*) of God's cosmos, learning to live as 'strangers on earth' (*vreemdelingen op aarde*) that yet make it their home. Therefore, there is no tension in Bavinck's ideal of Christian life but harmony—the concord of being 'Christian' and therefore 'truly human' (*waarachtig humaan*), 'supernatural' (*bovennatuurlijke*) and therefore 'truly natural' (*waarlijke natuurlijke*).[29] In summary, a harmonious person in every place. In his words,

> In a word, always and everywhere ... in church and home, in fasting and table, at the sacrament and while enjoying a glass of wine; in a conversation about spiritual things ... always and everywhere, simple, natural, Christian, men but men of God.[30]

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[27] DO:' Vereniging, harmonie van beide is het hoogste. Hoofd, hart, hand moeten in overeenstemming zijn'. *DGS*, 9.
[28] *DGS*, 10.
[29] *DGS*, 10. Almost two years before this address, Bavinck wrote to Snouck Hurgronje about his desire to be 'a human in the fullest sense of that word' and also 'a child of God in all things'. See Eglinton, *Bavinck*, 205.
[30] DO: 'In een word, altijd en overal... in kerk en huis, in vasten en tafel, aan het avondmaal en onder het genot van een glas wijn; in een gesprek over geestelijke dingen...altijd en overal waar, eenvoudig, natuurlijk, Christelijk, menschen maar menschen Gods'. *DGS*, 10.

Remarkably, and because this ideal is very high, he judged orthodox Christology to be essential for this holistic understanding of Christian piety. In other words, the full harmony of piety is found only in the person of Jesus, the one who is simultaneously the Son of God and the Son of man. In Christ, we find the union of contemplative and active. From this reflection, Bavinck moves into the third and practical aspect of his address.

The purpose of putting this ideal very high is to point first to Christ and then to challenge and exhort his students to live according to what they are learning. It is much easier to avoid the world than to be involved in it. For some pious believers, separation from the world is safer than the reformation of the same. While conversion brings a sense of separation from the world's vanity and desire to be in fellowship with Christ —to the point of serving the Lord 'in a little corner with a little book (*met een boekje in een hoekje*)'[31] —the words of Psalm 73:25 ('there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you') should not be interpreted in a wrong way.[32] In fact, everything can and must be sanctified by the word of God and prayer. Again, this sanctification has a holistic aspect, while the spiritual is first, and the natural follow. This includes the sanctification of 'study, art, politics, philosophy, wine and love'.[33] The highness of this ideal should be pursued with all the more vigour if it is to be maintained under increasing strife. It is at this point that Bavinck addresses his students in a pastoral and exhortative manner:

> Not to a lesser, [but] to a greater struggle I call you, to more serious combating of sin always and everywhere, to daily and the constantly ongoing war against the flesh. For I do not call you to separation, but to reformation, not to avoidance, but to enjoyment.[34]

Recognising that students conform their sphere (*kring*) with their particular spirit and direction, Bavinck reminds his audience that this group must still be Christian.[35] However, Bavinck asks, should this be done in an American-Methodist manner? While he admitted that this way has its fruits, Bavinck detects something unnatural and unhealthy in Methodism that could bring some division between the students in an *ecclesiola in ecclesia*

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[31] It seems that Bavinck is referring in part to the Latin phrase 'In omnibus requiem quaesivi et nusquam inveni nisi in angulo cum libro' attributed to Thomas à Kempis.
[32] *DGS*, 11.
[33] *DGS*, 11.
[34] DO: 'Niet tot kleiner, tot grooter strijd roep ik u, tot ernstiger bestrijding van de zonde altijd en overal, tot dagelijkschen en voortdurenden kamp tegen het vleesch. Want ik roep u niet tot afscheiding maar tot hervorming, niet tot mijding maar tot genieting'. *DGS*, 12.
[35] The notion of 'sphere sovereignty' is foundational to the neo-Calvinist movement. Abraham Kuyper spoke of this concept at the inauguration of the Free University of Amsterdam and Herman Bavinck makes reference to it in 'The Kingdom of God, The Highest Good'.

sense. Therefore, Bavinck proposes four points to finish and summarise his understanding of piety in student life.

The first is related to spiritual things. Bavinck proposes that it should be more natural and common among the students to talk about the things of God, including both reading of God's word and 'good edifying writers' (*goede stichtelijke schrijvers*),[36] also communal prayer and interest in church history and missions. Thus, students must build each other up in faith and love, acknowledging failures and knowing that 'the frivolous must not win among us'.[37] Second, Bavinck invites students to a greater correspondence of truth and natural life. That implies a 'better taste', 'more classical sources' and 'nobler civilisation' where the natural is not killed but sanctified. This view should lead students to keep alive their studies, Bible reading and 'sing cheerfully, drink a glass of wine and talk about love'.[38] The enjoyment of natural things should not be less, but must be made in a godly manner. Third, while there is no opposition or separation between the spiritual and natural, they must be distinguished. In other words, the 'sacred must be kept sacred', and the spiritual and natural should not be mixed and confused. Finally, in three lines, Bavinck highlights that study is our service to God, to the point of claiming that 'he who does not study is not converted'. With this phrase, Bavinck points out to his students the necessity and seriousness of studies in ministerial formation as a fruit of being converted.[39]

In summary, the first manuscript calls the students to remain alert to the lack of piety among them. However, the recovery of practical piety should not be made according to the parameters of some pietistic groups, but according to their own Reformed heritage. That means seriously considering the necessity of contemplative and active life in harmony with the Christian life in a way that regards the person of Christ as the best example of piety.

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[36] *Stichtelijke schrijvers* is another expression of *oude schrijvers* (old writers), which refers to the devotional writers of *Nadere Reformatie*, Puritanism used in Secession circles. See C. Graafland, "Jodocus van Lodenstein (1620-1676) in *De Nadere Reformatie. Beschrijving van haar voornaamste vertegenwoordigers*. 's-Gravenhage, Boekencentrum, 1986, 120.

[37] DO: 'De lichtzinnigen mogen het niet onder ons winnen'. *DGS*, 15.

[38] DO: 'vroolijk zingen en een glas wijn drinken en over de liefde spreken.' *DGS*, 15-16.

[39] DO: 'Wie niet studeert is niet bekeerd'. *DGS*, 16. Jan Bavinck also expressed in his *oratio* (1883) that a minister must possess substantial, solid, and scientific knowledge (*flinke*, *degelijke*, *wetenschappelijke kennis*) of the things related to his office. Thus, both Jan and Herman Bavinck argued for more formal studies as part of ministerial training, as opposed to more pietistic groups who saw no need for scientific training in ministers. Regarding the origin of this phrase, there are some who trace its origin to Luther (see *De Zondagsbode*; *doopsgezind weekblad*, jrg 40, No. 10, 9 Januari 1927). Pierre Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye relates it to an expression by J.H. Gunning (See *Onze Eeuw*. Jaargang 17, 170). J. J. van Oosterzee used it at the end of his speech for the Utrecht High School opening academic year (J. J. van Oosterzee, *Hooger onderwijs* (Amsterdam: Het Evangelish Verbond, 1876).

I.2 *Exercitia Pietatis* (1896)

Compared to the previous manuscript (17 pages), this is a shorter version of a subject that echoes the title of some *Nadere Reformatie* or puritan writings.[40] In six pages, Bavinck condensed some key ideas he portrayed in 'Piety in the Student Life' six years beforehand. Interestingly, some of these concepts are also mentioned in his *Reformed Ethics*, indicating that a young Bavinck held a very similar view regarding the importance of piety, the harmony of piety, the diseases and the identification of remedies for the spiritual life in order to distinguish between Roman Catholic and Protestant (Reformed) devotion.

Again, the topic is treated in a meeting with students. In that setting, Bavinck described the benefit of meeting and talking about 'spiritual concerns' (*geestelijke belangen*). The reason for this lies in the incalculable importance of the field of spirituality. Actually, he argued, the religious life is 'richer and more multidimensional' (*veel rijker en veelzijdiger*) than art and science. Bavinck even rhetorically asks about the different understandings of piety found not only among religions but even among different Christian denominations and groups.[41] But the focus lies in the 'exercise of piety in general' (*exercitia pietatis in het algemeen* or *oefeningen der godzaligheid*) from a Christian (and Reformed) perspective. For this, Bavinck regards the uniqueness and importance of *praxis pietatis*. For him, 'the spiritual life is unique, it has its own origin, its own character, its own purpose; it is from the regeneration by the Holy Spirit, it is eternal endless immortal life; it is the life of God in his image and likeness'.[42]

As in other places, Bavinck analogically compares the spiritual life with the natural one. This includes the birth, development, stages — babes, young and adults — infirmities and means for recovery. Nevertheless, before explaining the last two, Bavinck highlights one of the key ideas regarding piety that was described in the previous manuscript and in the previous chapter: the concept of harmony. Thus, the normal or healthy state of piety or spiritual life consists in harmony.

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[40] For example, Voetius' *De praktijk der godzaligheid* (ΤΑ ΑΣΚΗΤΙΚΑ sive Exercitia pietatis – 1664) and Lewis Bayly's *The Practice of Piety*.

[41] Such as for example between Buddhism, Jewish, Islam, pagan and Christian. Among Christianity, between Roman Catholics, Lutheran, Reformed, Pietist, Salvation Army, and Darby. Bavinck, *Exercitia Pietatis*, 1. Hereafter, *EP*. As I indicated in the previous chapter, this same view was published in "Christelijke vroomheid I"

[42] DO: 'Het geestelijk leven is eigensoortig, het heeft eigen oorsprong, eigen karakter, eigen doel; het is uit wedergeb[oorte] door den H. Geest, het is eeuwig eindeloos onsterfelijk leven; het is leven Gods naar zijne beeld en gelijkenis'. *EP*, 1.

Harmony is best understood as the balance of all faculties: head, heart, and hands. In other words, *sana mens in sano corpore*. Thus, all these faculties are 'equally developed and formed' (*gelijkelijk ontwikkeld en gevormd*) to their highest degree. Importantly, pious people find this harmony in the person of Christ because he is the 'harmonious man' (*harmonische mensch*) and the 'ideal of the Christian life' (*het ideaal van het christelijk leven*). For Bavinck, there was nothing 'exaggerated' nor 'unnatural' in Christ. Furthermore, 'serving God' (*God te dienen*) was Christ's 'desire' (*lust*) and 'life' (*leven*). At the same time, this harmony is identified throughout Church history. Despite the diversity of temperaments and personalities, there was nothing 'unnatural' (*onnatuurlijks*) from the patriarchs to the prophets and the apostles. In this way, they were 'ordinary' (*gewone*) people, not 'fictional heroes' (*romanhelden*) but 'men of God' whose characteristics were also reflected in men like Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, but especially in Luther, Zwingli and Calvin.[43]

Bavinck explicitly classifies the harmony of the Christian life as 'classical piety' and 'godliness' (*klassieke vroomheid*, *godsvrucht*), calling all the students – including himself – to consider this as their ideal too. Nevertheless, he recognises that usually, they are 'one-sided' (*eenzijdig*), where the spiritual life develops particular pathologies.

There are many reasons for spiritual illness, i.e., the struggle of flesh and spirit, temptations of Satan, spiritual desertions, the desires of the flesh and the eyes, and the pride of life. Notably, the idea of distinct spheres or circles (*kringen*) is also mentioned here. Every circle has its own dangers and objections, struggles and difficulties, including the student life circle, where they form their own world separated from the church (*gemeente*), people and family. Remarkably, the diseases that the spiritual life faces are the same mentioned in *Reformed Ethics*. These diseases are classified into three. 1) Sickness of the head (*hoofd*): intellectualism, gnosticism, rationalism, dead orthodoxy, spiritual aridity; 2) sickness of the heart (*hart*): mysticism, sentimentality, dreams, visions, and hallucinations and 3) sickness of the hand or will (*de hand (den wil)*): moralism, holiness or righteousness by works (*werkheiligheid*).[44] Furthermore, Bavinck also detects a 'great deterioration' (*groot bederf*) among the students as exhibited in the division between the intellectuals (*verstandelijken*) and the unpretentious students; between the free spirits (*vrijen*) and the pious (*vromen*). However,

[43] *EP*, 2.
[44] In Bavinck's English translations *Werkheiligheid* is translated as 'righteousness by good works' (TCF, 37) or 'works righteousness' (RE, 423).

this should not be the case. Bavinck opposes any kind of separatist conventicles. In his words, 'no *ecclesiola in ecclesia*. Not even among the students'.[45]

Next, Bavinck proceeds to talk about the means for the recovery, healing, and advancement of spiritual life amongst his students. Notably, this is where he distinguishes Roman Catholic piety and Protestant piety. On the one hand, he argued, Roman Catholicism has its own means, such as devotion, contemplation, ectasis, self-torture, fasting, vows, chastity and all kinds of abstinence, including separation from the world.[46] On the other hand, Protestantism has broken with all the previous ways because it has another ideal of spiritual life and, therefore, other means for recovery. The Protestant means include prayer, meditation, reading of the Bible (*lectio verbi divini*) and edifying writers (*stichtelijke schrijvers*), fasting, vigil and *meditatio mortis*. Those means (*middelen*) are not discussed in the address. Nevertheless, Bavinck devotes the rest of his time to talking about one means of restoration: devotion (*devotie*).

In Bavinck's view, the Roman Catholic understanding of devotion was adopted from the old Romans, who solemnly devoted themselves to the gods through a voluntary death. Consequently, Roman Catholicism affirms that every person has something he possesses that can be refused voluntarily. Thus, 'the more asceticism, the more religion'.[47] More devotion means to live narrowly or in a more limited manner in the religious life, characterised by a gentle mysticism, quiet resignation, and a consecrated life embodied in the figure of Madonna, in *Maria semper virgo*. Thus, this kind of devotion, says Bavinck, 'has no place with us' according to what is explained by Calvin's *Institutes* IV.13.6 in Bavinck's reading.[48]

Bavinck's understanding of devotion is also reflected when a person gives himself entirely to God in a trinitarian-holistic way. That is, a Christian belongs to the Lord both in life and death because Christ bought him completely, God loves him completely, and the Holy Spirit regenerates him completely. Therefore, Christians glorify God in body and soul. This reality of belonging to Christ is also reflected in a theological student's attitude to his studies because 'our whole life is a service to God', expanding religion 'to all areas!' (*tot alle terreinen!*). How this is experienced is not something 'special, supernatural, [or] unnatural', but falls under the banner of enjoying all gifts with thanksgiving. However, this does not

[45] DO: 'Geen ecclesiola in ecclesia. Ook niet onder de studenten.' *EP*, 3.
[46] *EP*, 4.
[47] DO: 'Hoe meer ascese, hoe meer religie'. *EP*, 5.
[48] DO: 'heeft bij ons geen plaats'. *EP*, 5. That Institutes section describes the 'lawful vows in general'.

mean an easy task. Again, Bavinck implicitly points out the 'high ideal' of Reformed piety. In his words, 'this Reformed devotion is not easier but much more difficult and serious'. He expands this idea by saying that:

> It is much easier to abstain than to carry positively in all areas the principle of the glory of God… much easier to do nothing about politics at all than to develop our principles on all sides in the political field: much easier to neglect our study and evangelise than to glorify God in the study. Vows, abstinence are, therefore, in Reformed abstinence, never an end, always a means…[49]

Particularly, Bavinck ends this address by referring to Puritan piety. For him, this kind of devotion has led the Reformed (*gereformeerde*) to 'puritan modesty, austerity, simplicity, temperance'.[50] For Bavinck, Puritanism is not asceticism nor abstinence. Therefore, in some sense, Reformed Puritanism is necessary for the student life's piety. In fact, this is how Bavinck ends his speech on the practice of godliness:

> But a little more Puritanism in our circle would not hurt. Puritanism in our speech: no profanity, no triviality, no sexual allusions. Puritanism in our feasts: moderation in drinking, a symposium is in the first place of all a convivium, a colloquium. Puritanism in our assembly: more interest in missions, Kingdom of God, experience; the religious life...[51]

In conclusion, these two addresses show us the significance of piety or spiritual life above all other areas where, at the same time, there is no rejection of what is natural. Instead, from communion with God – as children of God – there is a holistic sanctification of every aspect of life. This is done correctly when the priority of communion with God is maintained by knowing God by faith here on earth and eternally in heaven by vision and enjoyment. In other words, the holistic nature of piety is nurtured by first regarding the

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[49] DO: 'Deze gereformeerde devotie is niet makkelijker maar veel moeilijker en ernstiger. Het is veel makkelijker zich te onthouden dan positief in alle terreinen het beginsel der eere Gods in te dragen…veel lichter om heel niet aan politiek te doen dan om op politiek terrein onze beginselen tot alzijdige ontplooing te brengen: veel lichter ons studie te verwaarloozen en te gaan evangeliseeren dan in de studie God te verheerlijken. Geloften, onthouding zijn dus bij Gereformeerde onthouding, nooit doel, altijd middel…'. *EP*, 6.

[50] DO: 'puriteinsche ingetogenheid, soberheid, eenvoud, matigheid'. *EP*, 6.

[51] DO: 'Maar iets meer puritanisme in onzen kring kan geen kwaad. Puritanisme in ons spreken: geen profanie, geen trivialiteit, geen seksuele zinspelingen. Puritanisme in onze feesten: matigheid in het drinken, een symposium zij in de eerste plaats een convivium, een colloquium. Puritanisme in onze samenkomsten: meer belangstelling in zending, kon. Gods, bevinding; het relig. leven…'. *EP*, 6. In *Christianity*, Bavinck indicates that 'Puritanism is a brainchild of Calvin'. See Herman Bavinck, "Christianity" in *What is Christianity?* ed. and trans. Gregory Parker Jr. (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2022), 46.

theocentric aspect of the experiential knowledge of God from regeneration, conversion, and sanctification on earth to glorification in heaven to see and enjoy God forever. However, it is precisely the point of view related to the beatific vision in Bavinck's theology that has been questioned to varying degrees lately. Therefore, if the concept of piety is essentially related to the knowledge of God, the doctrine of the beatific vision must be considered in this research.

II. The purpose of piety: knowing God by faith and by vision to the glory of God

Up to this point, I have shown that according to Herman Bavinck, Reformed piety or subjective religion is trinitarian, covenantal and holistic. It is a disposition that encompasses all the faculties of man to serve God in the context of a covenantal fellowship with the Triune God. At the same time, it is organically connected to every sphere of life. And finally, this *praxis pietatis* has the glory of the triune God as its ground and *telos*. Particularly, Bavinck's view of theology is developed and applied according to a late modern grammar that has Reformed orthodoxy in its essence. Thus, Bavinck's piety is also orthodox and modern. Does it mean that this way of understanding Reformed theology and piety involves a certain abandonment of the doctrine of the beatific vision?

Despite Bavinck's emphasis on the doxological and theocentric nature of piety, his eschatological view has recently been criticised by Hans Boersma and Michael Allen. Specifically, both – in different ways – have highlighted the lack of development in Bavinck's doctrine of *visio Dei* in his *Reformed Dogmatics*. For Boersma and Allen, the neo-Calvinistic understanding of the beatific vision has brought a kind of 'eschatological naturalism' (in Allen's language) to contemporary evangelicalism.[52] One of the arguments for this is that, according to Boersma, Bavinck 'sidelines the doctrine of the beatific vision',[53] and even when Bavinck refers to the *visio Dei*, his references 'are just passing remarks'.[54]

However, these observations should be challenged in light of other Bavinck's writings, especially when he explicitly wrote that the doctrine of the beatific vision is of the utmost importance. In Bavinck's words, 'the contemplation of God (*aanschouwing Gods*) is promised to believers [in the] hereafter as the climax of all salvation'.[55] If this is the case, the question

[52] Michael Allen, Grounded in Heaven. Recentering Christian Hope and Life on God (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 7-8.
[53] Hans Boersma, *Seeing God. The Beatific Vision in Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 14.
[54] Boersma, *Seeing God*, 34.
[55] DO: 'de geloovigen hiernamaals de aanschouwing Gods als het toppunt van alle zaligheid wordt beloofd'. See *GA III*.

of Bavinck's view of the beatific vision merits a more nuanced treatment. This answer will serve not only to challenge Boersma's and Allen's understanding of Bavinck's *visio Dei*, but also to show that for Bavinck, Reformed piety aims to glorify God and enjoy him forever through an intimate knowledge of God by faith here on earth, and *per visio* in heaven.

For this, I will briefly summarise Boersma's and Allen's arguments for Bavinck's apparent 'eclipse of heaven'. Following this, I will analyse three specific contributions by Bavinck that, until now, have been neglected in this debate: *De eere Gods* ('the honour or glory of God'), *Kennis en leven* ('knowledge and life'), and finally *Geloof en aanschouwing I-VI* ('faith and contemplation I-VI'). From these articles, I will present a line of argumentation that goes from the objective principle of Reformed piety (the glory of God) to the subjective experience of knowing God by faith and vision. To put it another way, I argue that Bavinck's Reformed piety aims to glorify God (*de eere Gods*) and enjoy him forever in knowing God (*God kennen*) while we live by faith here on earth, and by contemplation (*aanschouwing*) in heaven.

II. 1 Less than enamoured with beatific vision because of eschatological naturalism?

In his book *Seeing God*, Hans Boersma invites Christians to consider the significance of the doctrine of the beatific vision. Notably, he argues that seeing God is the purpose of human existence. In Boersma's words, 'the final end of human beings is the vision of God'.[56] From early Christian thought and medieval theologians to Protestant thought (including Calvin, the Puritans and Abraham Kuyper), Boersma presents a helpful summary of traditional teachings on the beatific vision. However, he detects a declension of this doctrine within Roman Catholic and Protestant circles in figures such as Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988) and Herman Bavinck, respectively. Part of Boersma's criticisms is centred on his own expectations. Boersma expected that both would speak 'more positively about the beatific vision than they did'. However, in his view, both 'opted mostly to criticise the tradition on this topic'.[57]

Regarding Bavinck, Boersma mentioned at different points that the neo-Calvinist theologian sidelines the doctrine of the beatific vision. In fact, and regarding the movement led by Kuyper and Bavinck, Boersma claims that 'Dutch neo-Calvinism has been less

[56] Boersma, *Seeing God*, 17.
[57] Boersma, *Seeing God*, 28.

enamored with the traditional teachings of the beatific vision'.[58] Interestingly, Boersma's critique excludes Kuyper. For Boersma, the progenitor of Dutch neo-Calvinism 'is one who, along the great tradition of the church, regarded the beatific vision as the ultimate goal of the Christian pilgrimage'.[59]As such, his opinions are diverted, especially towards Bavinck and contemporary theologians that, in Boersma's view, are classified as or influenced by neo-Calvinists, such as N.T Wright and J. Richard Middleton.

Concerning Bavinck, on two pages, Boersma claims twice: 'Bavinck was sharply critical of the theology of the beatific vision in the Christian tradition'.[60] However, and as Boersma rightly notes, Bavinck did not oppose to the concept of the *visio Dei* per se. At the same time, Boersma describes Bavinck's objection to four aspects of Roman Catholic teaching of the beatific vision. First, Bavinck objected to the teaching that in heaven, believers would come to know the very essence of God, erasing the Creator-creature distinction by a melting union. Second, Bavinck opposed to the doctrine of the *visio Dei* where the *donum superadditum* elevates the intellect to see the essence of God. Third, *visio Dei per essentiam* as the result of merit (*ex condigno*). And finally, Bavinck objected to the Christ-lacking immediate character of Rome's beatific vision.[61]

The last point serves to develop Boersma's verdict on Bavinck. While Boersma remarks that for Bavinck, eschatology is essentially Christological – the Son as the *mediator reconciliationis* and *mediator unionis* – Bavinck himself did not elaborate on how and in what sense Christ mediates in the beatific vision. Accordingly, on the one hand, Boersma recognises Bavinck's 'slightly longer discussion of the beatific vision', where Bavinck speaks of contemplation (*visio*), understanding (*comprehension*), and enjoyment of God (*fruitio Dei*). Nevertheless, on the other hand, Boersma asserts that Bavinck 'nowhere explains in any detail how he himself positively understands the doctrine'.[62] For Boersma, this is 'particularly odd' because Reformed scholastics and Puritans would give Bavinck the tools to develop this doctrine. Likewise, Boersma highlights that Bavinck never reflected on Easter Orthodox discussions regarding the *visio Dei*.

In conclusion, Boersma suspects that the reason why Bavinck did deepen in developing the beatific vision is that 'his eschatology is simply too this-wordly to do so'. In other words,

[58] Boersma, *Seeing God*, 33.
[59] Boersma, *Seeing God*, 340.
[60] Boersma, *Seeing God*, 33-4.
[61] Boersma, *Seeing God*, 34-7.
[62] Boersma, *Seeing God*, 38.

'Bavinck was simply too much interested in the hustle and bustle of human activity in the hereafter to give any real thought to a positive articulation of the beatific vision'.[63] This assessment reflects Allen's concern: eschatological naturalism.

Michael Allen's book *Grounded in Heaven* presents a helpful calling to contemporary evangelicals to consider the Reformed and catholic doctrine of the beatific vision as the foundation for the Christian life. In the same line as Boersma, he calls attention to the 'eclipse of heaven' among neo-Calvinist movements of today through an inclination to earthy, cultural and political issues. While Allen describes this attitude in Rob Bell, N.T. Wright and J. Richard Middelton, he also explores the origin of what he calls 'eschatological naturalism'.

In his words, this terminology refers to a 'telos or end of our hope' that has been articulated in 'a naturalistic or materialistic manner'. For Allen, even when neo-Calvinists are Reformed and believe, accordingly, in divine sovereignty, there is a recurrent problem in their eschatology. In his words, 'when it comes to the climax of redemptive history, neo-Calvinists often turned from focus upon communion with Christ, the presence of God, or the beatific vision (the classical image for the eschatological spiritual presence of the Almighty) to focus instead upon the resurrected body, the shalom of the city, and the renewal of the earth'.[64] In sum, for Allen, the neo-Calvinist telos may be described as eschatological naturalism.

Throughout the book, Allen uses terms such as neo-Calvinism and Kuyperianism interchangeably. In doing so, he criticises the eschatology of these movements. This is crucial to highlight. Allen is not against the neo-Calvinist emphasis on the lordship of Christ over all spheres. The problem he perceives is a Kuyperian eschatology that emphasises the earthiness of Christian hope and has 'undercut the catholic tradition's emphasis upon communion with God and the ultimate bliss of the beatific vision'.[65] In this sense, there is a relation between how we live here and the eschatological hope, between ethics and eschatology. To solve this issue, Allen calls readers to remember the heritage of the *Nadere Reformatie* or the combination of pietism and cultural reflection of the English Puritans in order to retrieve an evangelical ascetic way of life with God (chapter 3) through self-denial (chapter 4).

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[63] Boersma, *Seeing God*, 38, 40.
[64] Allen, *Grounded in Heaven*, 6.
[65] Allen, *Grounded in Heaven*, 23.

In conclusion, both Boersma and Allen express their concerns about the lack of heaven-mindedness in neo-Calvinism or Kuyperianism.

However, it is critical to distinguish between movements and representants. As justified as his arguments regarding contemporary neo-Calvinism may be, it is essential to question the idea that this could effectively apply to Herman Bavinck. Whether any of the recent neo-Calvinist theologians (or people influenced by neo-Calvinism) have constructed a particular naturalistic eschatology to varying degrees is another matter that will not be discussed here. In the same vein, I will not examine the accuracy of Bavinck's views regarding neo-Thomism and Roman Catholic doctrine regarding the beatific vision. Rather, I will indirectly respond to the opinions of Boersma and Allen regarding 1) the lack of development of the doctrine of the beatific vision in the theology of Herman Bavinck, and 2) his supposed eschatological naturalism. It is an indirect response because the rest of the chapter will mainly focus on the purpose of Bavinck's concept of piety both on earth and in heaven: to glorify and know God here on earth by faith and by vision in heaven.

II.2 The glory of God as the foundation and end of piety

In the previous chapter, I concluded that in Bavinck's view, the objective principle for Christian experience and life is the glory of God. In the 1897 article 'Roomsch, Luthersch en Gereformeerd' ('Roman, Lutheran and Reformed') Bavinck indicates that the principle of the honour/glory of God is the main difference between the *vroomheid* of these groups. This is why Calvin, according to Bavinck, was not guided by 'subjective experience, but by an objective principle, i.e. the glory of God. This is the central idea of the Reformed piety'.[66] In this sense, God is the origin (*oorsprong*) and goal (*doel*) of all things. From this principle, all dogmas and spheres of life take a different meaning. Notably, Bavinck indicates that the differences between Roman, Lutheran and Reformed are not found mainly in single points or isolated dogmas but are rooted in an organic principle (*organisch principe*) that affects or works through all articles of faith and all moral, social, political life. In sum, the glory of God – as the objective and organic principle – permeates everything. But how does this principle shape the Christian life? A young Bavinck responds to this question in a neo-Calvinist approach in a short article called 'De eere Gods' ('The honour/glory of God') published in 1883.[67]

[66] DO: 'een subjectieve ervaring, maar door een objectief beginsel, n.l. de eere Gods. Deze is de centrale gedachte van de Gereformeerde vroomheid'. Bavinck, "Roomsch, Luthersch en Gereformeerd.", 226.
[67] Herman Bavinck, "De eere Gods." In *Kennis en leven: opstellen en artikelen uit vroegere jaren, verzameld door Ds C.B. Bavinck* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1922), 106–14

At that point, Bavinck was beginning his career as a Reformed theologian: he was appointed to teach in Kampen in 1882 and began there early in the following year. In this piece, Bavinck claims that true theology is God-centred, seeking in all things to maintain his honour (*eer*). That is why God's honour is the guideline (*richtsnoer*) and goal (*doel*) of all things. To understand this concept, Bavinck moves from the general concept of *eer* to God's *eer*. First, because honour is a 'tender, holy good' (*teeder, heilig goed*) it always presupposes virtue (*deugd*) and value (*waarde*). This applies to humans, where 'honour is nothing but the reflex of virtue, the radiance and reflection of the light, that we spread around us through our value, through our lives'.[68] Essentially, if honour is lost, all is lost.

If this is so among humans, it is even more remarkable regarding God's honour. If *eer* presupposes virtue, then the glory of God is the greatest because he possesses all virtues in the most perfect way. In fact, God is 'the Love, the Grace, the Mercy, the Righteousness and the Holiness'.[69] While all human attributes (*eigenschappen*) are derivate, God is the 'full overflowing fountain' (*gansche overvloeiende fontein*) of all these. In the same way, and because God's glory has been revealed in his creation, his honour presupposes creatures that reflect God's own virtues. While all creation preaches God's honour, this glory (*heerlijkheid*) becomes especially manifest in creatures gifted with self-consciousness (*zelfbewustzijn*) and will (*wil*). Thus, the glory returned to God by humans must be bestowed with some of the elements that are part of the exercise of covenantal piety, i.e., consciousness (*bewustzijn*) and freedom (*vrijheid*). In summary, to glorify or honour God presupposes two things. Objectively, it presupposes God as the glorious one who possesses all virtues. Subjectively, it presupposes creatures made after God's image and likeness that possess a 'conscious' (*bewusten*), 'God-knowing' (*God kennenden*) and 'God-beholding' (*God aanschouwenden*) mind (*geest*). Only when this is considered (i.e. a conscious person who in freedom knows and contemplates the virtues of the glorious God), then

> there is glory brought to God, when the creature that is made in His image beholds God, and sinks down in speechless admiration of His

[68] DO: 'eere is niets anders dan de reflex van de deugd, de afstraling en weerkaatsing van het licht, dat wij door onze waarde, door ons leven, rondom ons verspreiden.' Bavinck, "De eere Gods", 107.
[69] DO: 'Hij is de Liefde, de Genade, de Barmhartigheid; de Rechtvaardigheid en de Heiligheid'. Bavinck, "De eere Gods", 107.

> splendid virtues, or exclaims in adoration: Thy name, Thy great Name be the honour![70]

It is significant to highlight that Bavinck twice connects God's glorification with the concept of *aanschouwing*, a Dutch term that can be translated into English as contemplation, beholding, or vision. Actually, at the end of this article, Bavinck ends indicating that God shows his face in all those who have the Son's name on their foreheads. But before doing that, Bavinck emphasises the prominent place of the glory of God and its connection with subjective religion.

Regarding the first, the *telos* of all God's works is his own glory. If there is another end, then God is not being honoured. Therefore, the most terrible (*schrikkelijkst*) thing is to seek human honour at all costs. In the same line, God's majesty and the honour of being created after God's image are dishonoured when people do not feel the slightest shame when indulging in the most shameful sins, lust and sensual pleasure, and opulence and excess.[71] In other words, to deprive God of his glory is the 'most heinous sin' (*gruwelijkste zonde*). On the contrary, because there is no egoism or selfishness when God seeks his honour and justice, but love, the church responds in 'thanksgiving and worship' (*dank en aanbidding*) because all that the church is – her existence (*bestaan*), growth (*wasdom*), building (*opbouw*) and final fulfilment (*eindelijke voltooiing*) – is due to the glory of God.[72] Therefore, glorifying God is the highest and only duty (*hoogste, onze eenige plicht*) in everything the Christian does, at every time and circumstance.

For Bavinck, the principle of the glory of God – as a 'poignantly beautiful and unbeatably strong' principle – has essential implications for the understanding of life and thinking of the Reformed Church. Importantly, this is understood in a neo-Calvinist way, helping us to understand the holistic character of Reformed piety:

> The Reformed Church was indebted to this principle, which, more than other Churches, allowed it to control her life, thinking and aspirations, her strength and greatness. To that honour she has claimed not only the

[70] DO: 'Dan eerst is er sprake van eere, die Gode gebracht wordt, als het schepsel, dat naar Zijn beeld is gemaakt, God aanschouwt en in sprakelooze bewondering Zijner schitterende deugden nederzinkt of in aanbidding uitroept: Uw Naam, uw grooten Naam zij de eer!' Bavinck, "De eere Gods", 108.
[71] Bavinck, "De eere Gods", 109.
[72] Bavinck, "De eere Gods", 110-11.

> Church, but also the family, the state, and society; the arts and science, the rich, full life in its complete depth and breadth.[73]

This organic and holistic theocentric principle allowed Reformed churches better to understand religion (*godsdienst*) in the same all-encompassing way. Therefore, religion is not just a part of life confined only to Sabbaths in the house of prayer, but religion was the life (*godsdienst hèt leven was*), that all life must be one service (*één dienen*), one praising (*één prijzen*) and one glorifying of God (*één verheerlijken Gods*). Thus, this principle should not be excluded anywhere but be freely spread in all creational spheres.

In conclusion, when the glory of God – as an organic principle that permeates everything – is considered within a context of a closer relationship (*verhouding*) with God, a naturalistic eschatological view does not find a place in Bavinck's theology as expressed in either his young or mature phases. As was indicated before, this article finishes with a Christological emphasis where the Father puts the name of his Son on believers' foreheads and shows his 'glorious face' (*heerlijk aangezicht*).

For a mature Bavinck, Psalm 73:25 is essential for understanding Christian communion with God both here and in heaven. In 1909, he wrote in his article 'Calvin and Common Grace',

> Whatever material or ideal possessions the world may offer, all these taken together cannot outweigh or even be compared with this greatest of all treasures, communion with God; and hence, in case of conflict with this, they are to be unconditionally sacrificed. "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee."[74]

Two years earlier, in *Magnalia Dei*, in the chapter on the knowledge of God, and after quoting the same verse plus verse 26 ('…and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever'), Bavinck connects the idea that God's presence is what makes heaven heavenly.

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[73] DO: 'Aan dat beginsel dankte de Gereformeerde Kerk, die meer dan andere Kerken daardoor haar leven, denken en streven liet beheerschen, haar kracht en grootheid. Voor die eere heeft zij opgeeischt niet slechts de Kerk, maar ook het huisgezin, den staat en de maatschappij; de kunst en de wetenschap, het rijke, volle leven in zijne gansche diepte en breedte'. Bavinck, "De eere Gods", 111.
[74] Bavinck, *Calvin and Common Grace*, 2.

The presence and glory of God eliminate any sign of eschatological naturalism. Bavinck's eschatology is absolutely theocentric. In his words,

> For the saint, heaven in all its blessedness and glory would be void and stale without God; and when he lives in communion with God he cares for nothing on earth, for the love of God far transcends all other goods.
>
> Such is the experience of the children of God. It is an experience which they have felt because God presented Himself to them for their enjoyment in the Son of His love. In this sense Christ said that eternal life, that is, the totality of salvation, consists for man in the knowledge of the one, true God and of Jesus Christ whom He has sent.[75]

What is the meaning of knowing God and his Son Jesus Christ? To this, I will turn now in order to delve into the experiential, and theocentric development of Reformed subjective religion or piety.

II.3 Knowing and living by faith and sight

Eschatological naturalism could not have a place in Bavinck's theology because it does not have a place in his anthropological theology. To put it briefly, a mature Bavinck wrote in his *Guidebook for Instruction in the Christian Religion* (1913) that Adam's 'origin was divine, his nature was kindred with the divine, and his destiny was the vision of God (*aanschouwing Gods*)'.[76] If Adam's origin and destiny are related to the vision of God, then the Christian life has the same goal: to glorify God by living and knowing God by faith and sight. This idea is previously developed in two articles: 'Kennis en leven' (Knowledge and Life, 1900) and 'Geloof en aanschouwing' (Faith and Contemplation, 1902). The analysis of these writings is critical for understanding Bavinck's theocentric piety and eschatology.

II.3.1 *Kennis* and *Leven*

Despite the nineteenth century's advancements in knowledge and science, Bavinck recognises a critical problem at the end of that century: the expansion of cultural knowledge was not keeping pace with the enrichment of life. The Enlightenment (*verlichting*) did not help in making people better (*beter*), happier (*gelukkiger*) and more

[75] Bavinck, *TWWG*, 10.
[76] Herman Bavinck, *Guidebook for Instruction in the Christian Religion*. Translated by Gregory Parker Jr and Cameron Clausing. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2022), 85. Hereafter, Bavinck, *Guidebook*.

satisfied (*tevredener*). In fact, Bavinck goes deeper regarding man's psychological, spiritual, and ethical aspects. Satisfaction of heart and tranquillity of conscience has not been pleased to the same extent as intellectual knowledge. Head knowledge has increased, but it seems that is not the case with the spiritual life. Bavinck asks, 'has life become deeper, richer, more intimate, for God and for people?'[77] One of the problems he identified is the misunderstanding of both knowledge and life, especially in their rights and mutual relationships. While people put *kennis* (knowledge) and *leven* (life) against each other, the Scripture put them very close, having their origin in God. In fact, in God, they are one.[78] Therefore, to have a sound understanding of knowledge and life, Bavinck turns to the theocentric aspect of theology to explain this relationship.

For Bavinck, God is the fountain of all life. This encompasses all kinds of life, from angels to insects, persons and animals, natural and spiritual, science and art, and moral and religious life. The reason lies in the claim that God is 'pure being' (*louter zijn*) and 'pure life' (*louter leven*). For a proper understanding of the relationship between knowledge and life in rational creatures (humans), Bavinck turns explicitly to the orthodox teaching of the doctrine of God and Christology.

Regarding the doctrine of God, Bavinck highlights the unchangeableness, richness and diversity of Divine life. For Bavinck, this life is so rich and full that it exists in three persons that express unity and diversity: 'As the Father has life in himself, so he has also given the Son and the Spirit to have life in themselves. It is the life of the highest unity and of the richest diversity.'[79] Importantly, Bavinck relates God's life as simple light (*enkel lich*) to explain God's simplicity and the relationship between the three persons of the Trinity: 'The Father knows the Son, and the Son knows the Father, and the Spirit searches the depths of God. God knows himself completely'.[80] In the same paragraph, Bavincks mentions that God's self-knowledge (*zelfkennis*) is equal to his essence (*wezen*), where God's self-consciousness (*zelfbewustzijn*) is as infinite as his being (*zijn*). In other words, 'knowledge and life are one in Him'.[81] So too, in Christ, knowledge and life are one (*één*).

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[77] DO: 'Maar is het leven dieper, rijker, inniger geworden, voor God en voor menschen?'. Herman Bavinck, "Kennis en Leven." In *Kennis en leven: opstellen en artikelen uit vroegere jaren*. Ed. C.B. Bavinck (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1922), 204.

[78] Bavinck, "Kennis en Leven", 205.

[79] DO: 'Gelijk de Vader het leven heeft in zichzelven, zoo heeft Hij ook den Zoon en den Geest gegeven, het leven te hebben in zichzelven. Het is het leven der hoogste eenheid en der rijkste verscheidenheid'. Bavinck, "Kennis en Leven", 207.

[80] DO: 'De Vader kent den Zoon en de Zoon kent den Vader, en de Geest onderzoekt de diepten Gods. God kent zichzelven volkomen'. Bavinck, "Kennis en Leven", 207.

[81] DO: 'Kennis en leven zijn in Hem één'. Bavinck, "Kennis en Leven", 207.

Again, Bavinck's Christology is essentially orthodox. The doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son – where the Father communicates his life to the Son – is the foundation (*grondslag*) of all revelation, in creation and re-creation.[82] Essentially, life is light at the same time, and this light is related to knowledge (*kennis*) and truth (*waarheid*). This is important because there is only knowledge of God by communion with God's Word. In other words, because the Son is the Word of God, where in him God the Father has expressed (*uitgesproken*) and given (*gegeven*) himself, and communicated (*medegedeeld*) his infinite knowledge (*oneindige kennis*) and infinite life (*oneindig leven*), 'there is no knowledge in men, however small, of the divine essence, but by the Word, which was at the beginning with God and was itself God.'[83] The last idea is crucial. Bavinck acknowledges the knowledge of the essence of God in Christ. But before answering how this is, he also considers the role of Christ's incarnation.

The incarnation of the Logos has a double purpose: to declare the Father and give eternal life. In other words, Christ reveals the truth (as an object of faith) and gives eternal life. Bavinck mentions that for the apostle John, truth is not a moral idea in the Kantian sense but an intellectual concept (*intellectueel begrip*) that belongs to the area of understanding (*gebied des verstands*), which must be taken up into the consciousness (*bewustzijn*).[84] When this is connected to the person and work of Christ, it is not possible to find a place for any idea that over-emphasises creation over the Creator in Bavinck's theology. In his incarnation, Christ proclaimed the truth that he saw and heard from God. This is because Christ was with God, in communion with him, in his Father's bosom and contemplated (*aanschouwde*) him. To put it otherwise, the content of Christ's proclamation was mainly theocentric, about 'heavenly things' (*hemelsche dingen*) and specifically about 'the essence and the name of the Father'.[85] Clearly, there is an emphasis on Bavinck on heavenly things over earthly things. Prominently, this heavenly, theocentric and Christocentric truth encompasses all the life of the person, exerting influence, determination and control in life. Thus, for the apostle John, truth is not only a matter of head, but also of the heart (*hart*) and hand.[86]

Bavinck interprets the Johannine concept of death as the 'unholy condition of life' (*onzaligen levenstoestand*), which stands outside communion (*gemeenschap*) with Christ and the

[82] Bavinck, "Kennis en Leven", 208.
[83] DO: 'is er in menschen geen kennis, hoe gering ook, van het Goddelijk wezen, dan door het Woord, dat in den beginne bij God en zelf God was'. Bavinck, "Kennis en Leven", 209.
[84] Bavinck, "Kennis en Leven", 210.
[85] DO: 'bepaaldelijk het wezen en de naam des Vaders'. Bavinck, "Kennis en Leven", 211.
[86] Bavinck, "Kennis en Leven", 212.

Father. Thus, Christ – who is life itself – is the one who gives life to those who are spiritually dead. The life that Christ gives to believers on earth begins here with faith and coincides with eternal life. In fact, there is no difference in 'principle and essence' (*beginsel en wezen*) between the life that believers share (*deelachtig*) here on earth and the life that they receive (*ontvangen*) in heaven, but 'only in degree' (*alleen in graad*). How can we understand this dynamic of knowing God on earth and in heaven? Again, Christology matters. From John 17, Bavinck proceeds to talk about this communion with God.

It is in the prayer of Jesus ('this is the eternal life, that they may know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent') that Bavinck recognises the 'more beautiful and stronger' (*schooner en sterker*) connection between knowledge and life. Immediately Bavinck identifies John as someone with a 'contemplative' (*contemplatieve*) nature. This is key to understanding the concept of knowing God. John knew no greater joy than to lie in Jesus' bosom and 'to behold the glory' (*de heerlijkheid te aanschouwen*) of the Word made flesh. Therefore, John bears witness according to what he heard and saw (*gezien*) with his eyes, that which he beheld (*aanschouwd*) and with his hands touched. Therefore, John declares that as he himself had, others may have fellowship (*gemeenschap*) with Christ and the Father.[87]

This fellowship is related to believing. And this believing (*gelooven*) has three elements: a knowing of God (*kennen van God*), a vision (*aanschouwen*) of the divine glory in Christ, and communion (*gemeenschap*) with the Father and the Son. Notably, we can identify objective reality as the foundation for the subjective element in this idea. For Bavinck, with the same act of the soul, the believer embraces the gospel as the word of God and Jesus as the Christ. However, faith does not stop there. From, and through the testimony of Christ, it focuses on the person of Christ (objective reality) and penetrates through the word to Christ and enters into communion with the Father and the Son (subjective reality).[88] Nevertheless, to understand the difference between faith and vision, Bavinck distinguishes between faith and knowledge.

Because from accepting and trusting (faith), the believer – through the witness of the word as the objective element – enters into a 'life communion' (knowing) with Christ, who is the content of the word, then here on earth in principle, faith passes into knowledge.[89] Now, this *kennis* is an act of the whole man. Because of this, it is impossible to understand *kennis*

[87] Bavinck, "Kennis en Leven", 220.
[88] Bavinck, "Kennis en Leven", 221.
[89] Bavinck, "Kennis en Leven", 222.

in a merely intellectual sense. In Bavinck's words, 'Such a purely intellectual activity is not worthy of the name of knowing… such a knowing is actually a lying'.[90] Essentially, *kennis* is a connection (*aansluiting*) to the person himself, and again, a 'contemplation of God' (*aanschouwen van God*) and 'communion with God' (*gemeenschap met God*) where there is no antithesis between theory and practice, but rather, where head and heart are both involved. That is the knowledge that, according to Jesus, is eternal life.[91]

So too, because faith and knowledge have the same object, both alternate and merge here on earth. Even though some people confuse and misunderstand the relationship between faith and knowledge, it is key to consider two things. Believing and knowing are not the same; however, since believers do not see God here on earth, faith is the only way they know God. In Bavinck's words, 'all knowledge (*kennis*) here on earth is faith-knowledge (*geloofskennis*)."[92] However, in heaven is not the same. This is why the doctrine of the beatific vision matters for Bavinck.

In heaven, believing passes into vision (*aanschouwen*). Therefore, this *vision* of God is another way of *knowing* God. That is why knowledge is more than faith. Faith is the way to knowledge. Knowledge remains even when faith ceases and passes into vision (*aanschouwen*)—the same with eternal life, which begins on earth and is completed in heaven. [93] In other words, while there is a close connection between faith and knowledge here on earth, there is a difference. To put it simply, faith is the way and means to life. Knowledge is more than a means, knowledge is 'an element, a component of eternal life. Eternal life consists in the knowledge of the one and true God, and of Jesus Christ, whom he has sent'.[94]

Significatively, the idea of the connection between 'knowledge', 'eternal life', the 'whole person', 'joy' and 'contemplation' is emphasised in several places in this article. Therefore, there can be no doubt about the experiential theocentrism in Bavinck's theology of Christian life on earth and heaven. In his words,

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[90] DO: 'Zulk eene louter intellectualistische werkzaamheid is den naam van kennen niet waard… Zulk een kennen is eigenlijk een liegen'. Bavinck, "Kennis en Leven", 222.
[91] Bavinck, "Kennis en Leven", 222.
[92] Bavinck, "Kennis en Leven", 224.
[93] Bavinck, "Kennis en Leven", 224-25.
[94] DO: 'het is een element, een bestanddeel van het eeuwige leven. Het eeuwige leven bestaat in kennis van den eenigen waarachtigen God en van Jezus Christus, dien Hij gezonden heeft'. Bavinck, "Kennis en Leven", 224.

> For in John, religious knowledge is not a matter of the head, not an intellectual knowledge, but an activity of the whole person, consisting in the contemplation of the true reality. And life with him is not a naked existence, not a pure being, but life and joy of life together, undisturbed delight, eternal bliss. Anyone who in this way knows God, the only true God in the face of Christ, and therefore not any creature, but the Creator Himself, the fountain of life and light, lives at that very moment and is blessed in that life. He lives because and insofar as he knows. His knowledge is his life, the heart, the focal point and center, the sun, the life of his life. He who knows God lives; he who does not know Him is dead.[95]

In conclusion, Bavinck indicates that eternal life always consists in knowing (*kennen*), enjoying (*genieten*), and contemplating God (*aanschouwen van God*). This is why in heaven, Christians will see God's face, and his name will be on their foreheads. But how is this? What is the effect of this vision of God? Bavinck answered these questions in a series of short articles titled 'Geloof en aanschouwing' (Faith and Contemplation) in 1902.

II.3.2 Faith, vision and transformation

In the transition period between Kampen and Amsterdam, Bavinck wrote six articles titled 'Faith and Contemplation' in his last year as editor of *De Bazuin*. It is essential to consider that by publishing these articles in a newspaper – where in some sections, the doctrine of the *visio Dei* is explicitly presented – Bavinck is considering a broader audience than the readers of his *Reformed Dogmatics*.

These articles were devoted not only to rejecting a presumed contradiction between perception and thinking but, in this case, to disprove another contradiction, namely, between faith and vision. In the first article, Bavinck mentions that these two are essentially two ways to obtain representations (*voorstellingen*) and acquire knowledge (*kennis*). In other words, Bavinck describes the relationship between concepts such as 'the word and the

[95] DO: 'Want de religieuse kennis is bij Johannes geen zaak van het hoofd, geen verstandelijk weten, maar eene werkzaamheid van den ganschen mensch, bestaande in aanschouwing der waarachtige werkelijkheid. En leven is bij hem geen naakt bestaan, geen puur zijn, maar leven en levensvreugde saâm, onverstoorbare blijdschap, eeuwige zaligheid. Wie op deze wijze God kent, den eenigen waarachtigen God in het aangezicht van Christus, en dus niet eenig schepsel maar den Schepper zelven, de fontein van leven en licht, die leeft op datzelfde oogenblik en is in dat leven zalig. Hij leeft, omdat en inzoover hij kent. Zijne kennis is zijn leven, het hart, het brand- en middelpunt, de zon, het leven van zijn leven. Wie God kent, leeft; wie Hem niet kent, is dood'. Bavinck, "Kennis en Leven", 226.

thing, the ear and the eye, faith and sight'.[96] Where many contrast these two and overemphasise one over the other, 'for us', says Bavinck, 'there is no contradiction'. Even when, for Paul, there is a distinction between both (Christians walk here on earth by faith and not by sight), Bavinck believed there is no contradiction. Quoting 2 Corinthians 5:7, 1 Corinthians 13:12 and 2 Corinthians 3:18, Bavinck explains that believing is in a sense also seeing (but through a mirror), and the knowledge received by faith on earth is not different in 'nature and essence' (*natuur en wezen*) from that of the blessed in heaven, an idea explained before in 'Kennis en leven'. Nevertheless, there is a difference between knowing by faith and by vision.

In the second article, Bavinck mentions that according to 2 Corinthians 5:7, faith refers to saving faith. Because Paul deals with Christian sufferings in the previous two chapters, Bavinck explains that believers know that while they dwell in the body, they dwell away from the Lord. Here on earth, the body keeps them temporally away from 'immediate communion' (*onmiddellijke gemeenschap*) with God; therefore, Christians live by faith. Here on earth, they do not see their object of faith, i.e., Christ; nevertheless, they 'behold his glory' (*aanschouwen zijne heerlijkheid*) through the mirror of his word. This faith, as in other parts of Bavinck's works, involves the whole person and is grounded in the truthfulness of God, his words and will according to Scripture's testimony. After describing the meaning of saving faith, Bavinck is ready to discuss the meaning of seeing God in heaven in the following article.

In the third part of 'Faith and Contemplation', Bavinck devotes more than ten paragraphs to discussing God's vision for all kinds of readers. Bavinck calls attention to the peculiarity of not living by sight or vision here on earth. By explaining the meaning of the Greek word 'sight' as the 'appearance' (*verschijning*), 'figure' (*gestalte*) and 'shape' (*gedaante*), Bavinck deduces from the context that this appearance and form refers to Christ, the same object of faith. Bavinck is emphatic on this. However, believers do not see Christ here on earth. Nevertheless, that will change when they die and go to dwell with the Lord. Relevantly, and because they are with the Lord, the 'form' and 'appearance' of the Lord in heaven, who is at the right hand of the Father, that 'form and figure shall then give to their lives a peculiar character'.[97] In heaven, the saints will be surrounded by the appearance of Christ; they will 'walk in the light of his countenance, dwell in his immediate presence, dwell day and night

[96] DO: 'het woord en de zaak, het oor en het oog, het geloof en de aanschouwing'. *GA* I, 2.
[97] DO: 'die verschijning en gestalte zal dan aan hun leven een eigenaardig karakter geven'. *GA* III, 1.

in his tent.'[98] Now, believers rest on the testimony of the Apostles, but in heaven, that word will be 'unnecessary' (*onnoodig*). Why is this? Because of the Christocentric character of the beatific vision, because 'they themselves shall see Christ face to face'.[99]

This vision of Christ will bring transformation in believers. Again, orthodox Christology is important for developing this doctrine.[100] Christ took a human nature, our flesh and blood and was made like unto us, so that those foreknown by God should also be conformed to the image of the Son. For Bavinck, this can only be possible because one day, they will see Christ 'face to face' (*aangezicht tot aangezicht*). This transformation has already begun in believers on earth by contemplating Christ's glory in the mirror of his word. But in heaven, the saints will be 'wholly and completely' (*geheel en volkomen*) like Christ when 'they see him as he is' (*zij Hem zien zullen, gelijk Hij is*).[101]

Remarkably, Bavinck closely relates the association between 'beholding' and 'transformation'. For him, the contemplation of Christ has a special meaning in Scripture. It has 'an equalising, salvific, glorifying power [that] proceeds from it'.[102] This is because of the effect of the object on the beholding subject. For Bavinck, we became what we contemplate: 'All seeing is more or less a conformation of the subject to the object'.[103]

The psychological explanation is key for understanding the importance of the beatific vision. Bavinck claims that there must be a 'relatedness (*verwantschap*) and 'correspondence' (*overeenstemming*) between the 'seeing eye and the object seen' (*het ziende oog en het geziene voorwerp*). To go deeper into this idea, Bavinck mentions that when we see more closely, we take a clearer image of the object into our consciousness (*bewustzijn*), and we become like that object. Importantly, this conformation by vision begins here on earth. To see the glory of Christ in heaven, we must know him first by faith on earth and, in principle, have already experienced the transformation into Christ's image by the Holy Spirit to finally, in heaven, have a completed and crowned conformity by 'the vision of Christ' (*aanschouwing van Christus*).[104]

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[98] DO: 'wandelen in het licht van Zijn aanschijn, verkeeren in Zijne onmiddellijke tegenwoordigheid, dag en nacht wonen in Zijne tente'. *GA* III, 1.
[99] DO: 'zij zullen zelven Christus zien van aangezicht tot aangezicht'. *GA* III, 1.
[100] That is, Christology described in the Nicene Creed.
[101] *GA* III.
[102] DO: 'Er gaat eene gelijk-, eene zalig- en heerlijkmakende kracht van uit'. *GA* III, 1.
[103] DO: 'Alle zien is meer of min eene conformatie van het subject naar het object'. *GA* III, 1.
[104] *GA* III, 1.

The beatific vision is not only Christocentric but also theocentric. That is, saints will see Christ and God himself. For Bavinck, the Old Testament shows some reminiscences of this idea through visions, dreams, etc. However, these do not act upon a direct and immediate (*rechtstreeksch en onmiddellijk*) vision of God. Besides, God has no form (*gedaante*) to be perceived by the corporeal person. Nevertheless, Bavinck explains that in the New Testament, the promise for believers is the 'contemplation of God' (*de aanschouwing Gods*) as the 'climax of all salvation' (*het toppunt van alle zaligheid*). Strikingly, Bavinck does not emphasise a physical vision but a spiritual one, not by the eye of the body but through the 'eye of the soul' (*het oog der ziel*), through 'the sanctified mind' (*het geheiligd verstand*) and by 'the pure heart' (*het reine hart*). Therefore, sanctification on earth is vital for a correct understanding of the beatific vision. By using biblical references, Bavinck claims that without sanctification (*heiligmaking*) no one will see God. Thus,

> To perceive God, to notice His presence, to enjoy His favor, one must be related to Him. The unclean in heart is not allowed, but also, he cannot and dares not see God either. But the pure in heart, who according to the glorious word of Peter has become partaker of the divine nature, may and dares to, and can see God. He sees God already here on earth in the mirror of Holy Scripture, in the experiences of his mind, in the guidance of his life.[105]

Believers on earth see God by faith, however, in heaven, they will behold God gloriously and more richly. Essentially, in this vision of God, saints acquire a knowledge (*kennis*) of God which will not be equal to the knowledge that God has of himself. When this is considered, one can say that the blessed 'truly' (*waarlijk*) and 'essentially' (*wezenlijk*) contemplate the face of the Father daily because they see him not with the eye of the body, but with the soul. Interestingly, just as Bavinck talks about enjoying God as part of knowing God, he highlights the intellectual aspect of the *visio Dei*.

Even when beholding or seeing is naturally associated with the physical eye, it is much more obvious 'to call the immediate perception of persons or things by the intellect an

[105] DO: 'Om God waar te nemen, om Zijne tegenwoordigheid op te merken, om Zijne gunst te genieten, moet men Hem verwant zijn. De onreine van hart mag niet, maar hij kan en durft ook God niet zien. Maar de reine van hart, die naar het heerlijke woord van Petrus der Goddelijke natuur deelachtig is geworden, deze mag en durft en kan God zien. Hij ziet God hier reeds op aarde in den spiegel der H. Schrift, in de ervaringen zijns gemoeds, in de leidingen van zijn leven'. *GA* III, 2.

observation'.[106] Bavinck acknowledges a metaphorical meaning that, however, does not violate the natural meaning of the word, because this 'immediate knowledge' (*onmiddellijk kennen*) through the understanding (*verstand*) is an 'observation' with the eye of the soul. Importantly, the archetype of this idea is found in the omniscient God, who is an infinite and perfect spirit that sees everything. In other words, for redeemed creatures, the eye is an instrument, but the beholding activity belongs to the soul. In fact, it is the 'I' (*Ik*) of the person that sees through the eye. That is why for Bavinck, it is not absurd to call the immediate perception a vision.

By considering the previous ideas, it is clear that Bavinck does not 'eclipse heaven' or express any kind of eschatological naturalism. The idea that both Boersma and Allen propose regarding the vision of God as the purpose of humans is explicitly claimed by Bavinck. For Bavinck, the neo-Calvinist theologian, the vision of God is the 'climax' (*toppunt*) of all salvation promised by God. Contrary to what Allen affirms – that Bavinck's 'eschatology is not consistently fixated upon God and the presence of God in a way that would help avoid what I've called "eschatological naturalism" – Bavinck is consistently theocentric in his eschatology in the writings already described. Even the honour of God emphasises God himself in the knowledge and vision of God because it presupposes a *God*-knowing (*God kennenden*) and *God*-beholding (*God aanschouwenden*) mind. Thus, Bavinck is absolutely theocentric in his theocentric view of Christian life and eschatology. In other words, we can even say that it is mainly not about the *vision* of God; but the centre is on God, in the vision of *God* by the *knowledge of God*. This is in line with Boersma's claim that 'it is not our vision but God in Christ…at which we aim'.[107]

So too, Bavinck's 'Eere Gods,' 'Kennis en leven' and 'Geloof en aanschouwing' show the inconsistency of Boersma's claim that Bavinck 'nowhere explains in any detail how he himself positively understands he doctrine'.[108] At the same time, these writings show that Bavinck's neo-Calvinism does not 'undercut the catholic tradition's emphasis upon communion with God and the ultimate bliss of the beatific vision'.[109] In fact, many of Allen's claims regarding the importance of a heavenly-mindedness for a 'serious moral

[106] DO: 'om de onmiddellijke waarneming van personen of zaken door het verstand eene aanschouwing te noemen'. *GA* III, 2.
[107] Boersma, *Seeing God*, 11.
[108] So too, Boersma's concern regarding the lack of use of Puritan or Reformed post-Reformation theologians by Bavinck is partly answered in the last footnote of *RD* 4. There, Bavincks refers readers to Polanus, Waleus (*Synopsis purioris theologiae*), Petrus van Mastricht, Turretin, de Moor and C. Vitringa on the topic of 'heavenly blessedness'. Bavinck, *RD* IV, 730. Bavinck also includes Augustine, Lombard, Aquinas, Bonaventure, and others.
[109] Allen, *Grounded in Heaven*, 23.

engagement now' are found in Bavinck's theology of Reformed piety. In its entirety, Bavinck's holistic and neo-Calvinistic project has its foundation in God and heavenly realities that, in the meantime, believers experience by faith here on earth. In the fourth article of 'Geloof en aanschouwing', and after talking about God's invisibility, aseity, God's self-contemplation, the eternal generation of the Son, the procession of the Holy Spirit, and creation, Bavinck claims that,

> Faith has for its object invisible things… but faith has for its object the invisible Christ, the heavenly kingdom, the world of unseen and eternal goods… By such faith, which is the solid ground of things which one hope, and the evidence of things which one cannot see, all the pious (*vromen*) have walked here on earth.[110]

By analysing these articles, we can conclude that Bavinck certainly did not set aside the doctrine of the beatific vision. In fact, it is possible to describe the essence of his doctrine in a general way by considering these and other writings.

II.3.3 Beholding Bavinck's doctrine of the *visio Dei*

Michael Allen's argument regarding Bavinck's 'minimal attention' to the doctrine of the beatific vision reveals some inconsistency considering Bavinck's broad publication *corpus*. Nathaniel Sutanto has rightly answered the question of *what* exactly Bavinck's doctrine of the beatific vision entails by analysing Bavinck's Christology, including Bavinck's interaction with Eastern Orthodoxy (contrary to Boersma's claim), Roman Catholicism and other elements of Protestant tradition. At the same time, Sutanto presents an affinity between Bavinck's account of the beatific vision and John Owen's Christological understanding of the *visio Dei*. In this way, Sutanto rightly presents a mystical, personal, ethical, religious, and covenantal description of Bavinck's doctrine of the beatific vision.[111]

Nevertheless, recently Allen wrote that this is an 'implicit doctrine of the beatific vision' in Bavinck's *magnum opus*.[112] However, this cannot be considered 'implicit' when this doctrine has been historically described in different *loci* through many treatises of dogmatics in the

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[110] DO: 'het geloof heeft onzichtbare dingen tot voorwerp… het geloof heeft tot voorwerp den onzichtbaren Christus, het hemelsch Koninkrijk, de wereld der ongeziene en eeuwige goederen… door zulk een geloof, dat een vaste grond is van de dingen, die men hoopt en een bewijs der zaken, die men niet ziet, hebben alle vromen hier op aarde gewandeld'. Bavinck, *GA* IV, 2.

[111] See Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, "Herman Bavinck on the Beatific Vision" in *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, August 2022, 18.

[112] Michael Allen, "On Bavinck, the Beatific Vision, and Theological Practice" in *Reformed Faith and Practice* 7:1 (2022): 57-62.

Reformed tradition. As Allen has rightly noted, this doctrine had played a role in prolegomena, ethics and eschatology. So too, Joshua Schendel indicates that the beatific vision can be discussed under at least one of three *loci*: 1) prolegomena, 2) doctrine of God and 3) doctrine of last things.[113] Therefore, the understanding of this doctrine cannot be fully understood if it is only considered in the *locus* of eschatology; it must be found in different degrees elsewhere. Consequently, it is essential to look at some of these *loci* to obtain a clear image of Bavinck's doctrine of *visio Dei*.

First, the doctrine of the *visio Dei* is explicitly mentioned in Bavinck's theological prolegomena. In the first chapter of volume one of the *Reformed Dogmatics*, Bavinck specifies the theocentric *end* of theology when it is connected with the blessedness of eternal life: 'to know God in the face of Christ—by faith here on earth, by sight (*door aanschouwen*) in the hereafter —not only *results* in blessedness but *is* as such blessedness and eternal life'.[114]

At the same time, Bavinck's theological dogmatics is the foundation for ethics. Thus, 'theological ethics…is totally rooted in dogmatics'.[115] Importantly, the theocentric and experiential nature of Bavinck's scientific dogmatics is key to understanding its connection with ethics. On the one hand, this experiential character is reflected in adoration: 'Dogmatics, therefore, is not a dull and arid science. It is a theodicy, a doxology to all God's virtues and perfections, a hymn of adoration and thanksgiving, a "glory to God in the highest"'.[116] On the other hand, the relationship between dogmatics and ethics is seen as a single organism where,

> dogmatics sets forth what God is and does for human beings and causes them to know God as their Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier; [and] ethics sets forth what human beings are and do for God now; how, with everything they are and have, with intellect and will and all their strength, they devote themselves to God out of gratitude and love.

Importantly, Bavinck indicates in his *Reformed Ethics* that *meditatio mortis* is useful in humbling ourselves. For this, Bavinck refers to Calvin (*Institutes*, III. ix) in his calling to despise this life and meditate on eternal life without denying that life is a blessing and gift

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[113] Joshua Schendel, "The Reformed Orthodox and the Visio Dei" in *Reformed Theological Review* 77:1 (2018):24-44.
[114] *RD* I, 53. Emphasis by Bavinck.
[115] *RD* I, 58.
[116] *RD* I 112.

from God. Interestingly, this is the same section Allen uses to argue for an evangelical asceticism contra Bavinck's view of asceticism. While Allen rightly notes the negative terms used by Bavinck's conception of all asceticism as a 'self-willing religion', Bavinck is, in some sense, in accordance with Allen's retrieval of evangelical practices of renunciation reflected in repentance, self-denial, devotion to God, cross-bearing, praying, the importance of Sabbath and other practices are present in different ways in Bavinck's *RE* and other writings.[117]

For example, in *The Christian Faith* (1883), Bavinck claims that while the superficiality of some confessors of Christ is manifested in a lack of 'serious self-examination' or in a confession 'without glow', the 'true, genuine Christian faith…is a complete renunciation of all things, a crucifixion and burial of oneself, a spiritual experience in which everything we previously trusted in disappears'. Importantly, the 'congregational experience' is grounded in a theocentric and trinitarian confession of faith. Thus, the church 'lives from God, it rests in him, it speaks of him, of his being and attributes…in the Trinity of his existence'.[118]

At the same time, Allen's call to retrieve the 'catholic commitment to heavenly-mindedness identified in the Puritans, early Reformed and *Nadere Reformatie* theologians is also reflected in Bavinck's *RE* and the two manuscripts previously described. For the same section of 'mediation on death', Bavinck is wholly based on Vitringa, Perkins and Voetius. This shows that while Bavinck wrongly rejected *all* asceticism, he simultaneously welcomed the practical piety of theologians that Michael Allen advocates for contemporary evangelicals and Reformed Christians. In summary, Bavinck's theological prolegomena provide the basis for ethics and God's knowledge by faith or vision.

In *RD* II, Bavinck deals with the doctrine of the beatific vision, especially in describing God's invisibility. Contrary to what G.C. Berkouwer would later argue against God's invisibility, Bavinck claims that this attribute is expressly taught by Scripture and directly implied in the spirituality of God and God's simplicity.[119] Therefore, if we speak of 'seeing God', this is restricted to the possibility of 'seeing him with the eye of the soul', which he also commented on in his 'Geloof en aanschouwing' article. However, this vision is not *per*

[117] Prayer is described in more detail in the following chapter.
[118] Herman Bavinck, *What is Christianity?* Ed. and trans. Gregory Parker Jr. (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2022), 64, 70 and 74.
[119] Bavinck, *RD* II, 182, 187. For a description and comments on Berkouwer's doctrine of invisibility see Allen's *Grounded in Heaven*.

essentiam as it is understood as a beholding of God in his essence, 'as he is in himself' in Roman Catholic fashion.[120]

Generally, Bavinck opposes this particular view because in this conception of *visio Dei*, God does not come down to humans, but humans – by their own merits – are *elevated* to God and *divinised* by a supernatural gift, generally conceived of as a created light of glory (*lumen gloriae*). In other words, for Bavinck, Rome's *visio Dei* focuses on merits (*ex condigno*) where humans become like God, erasing the boundaries of the Creator-creature distinction. Thus, Bavinck supports the Reformed position regarding the *visio Dei* where some conceived i) the possibility of an essential vision of God and the majority ii) rejected the vision of God in his essence. For the first small group, Bavinck includes the *Synopsis purioris theologiae*, and for the second group, he regards Turretin, Hoornbeek, de Moor, Vitringa and 'especially G. Voetius'.[121] This observation is key to highlight because we can observe that Bavinck encapsulates the essence of those Reformed theologians to propose his own view of the *visio Dei*.

As was described above, and also in the previous chapter, the main point for Bavinck is the experiential knowledge of God or communion with God by faith here on earth or by vision in the hereafter. This is in line with the *Synopsis,* which considers eternal life as fellowship with God *per fidem* on earth or *per visionem* in heaven.[122] At the same time, the saints will see the physical nature of Christ (as an instrument united to his divinity) with physical eyes enlightened with heavenly light (*coelesti luce*) to see God's majesty. However, the beholding of God is not restricted to the physical eye but to the eye of the soul. Importantly, the *Synopsis* relates 'knowledge and vision' (*cognitionis et visionis*) as similar terms here. This is in agreement with Bavinck; he acknowledges that in heaven, believers will have 'the vision of Christ' (*aanschouwing van Christus*) and also, they will experience the contemplation of the face of the Father in a 'true' (*waarlijk*) and 'essential' (*wezenlijk*) manner. Notably, while the *Synopsis* opposes the notion of seeing God through some spiritual splendour and radiance of the essence of God that is distinct from it (for example, *lumen gloriae*), it acknowledges that an extraordinary light (*lumen extraordinarium*) has to be imprinted in the human's intellect 'to take hold of the divine essence as a beatific object by means of an intuitive seeing, in the same way as in this life there is need of supernatural

120 RD II, 187-191.
121 *RD* II, 190.
122 *Synopsis Purioris Theologia/ Synopsis of Purer Theology: Latin Text and English Translation: Volume III, Disputations 43-52.* Ed. Harm Goris, trans. Riemer A. Faber (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 585.

light in man's intellect in order for us to be able to have true fellowship with God through faith'.[123] In other words, some Reformed scholastics mentioned a kind of light that does not divinise human nature (in a Roman Catholic sense).

Importantly, Bavinck acknowledges a certain elevation but according to the Reformed mysticism of the Reformation, not the 'Neoplatonic mysticism adopted by Rome'. In other words, Bavinck adopts a posture that includes (as was showed above) a spiritual and ethical transformation without involving an ontological change. In his words,

> For in [Roman] Catholic theology human beings are raised above their own nature by a supernatural gift (*donum supernaturale*), thus actually making them different beings, divine and supernatural humans (*homo divinus et supernaturalis*). But regardless of how high and glorious Reformed theologians conceived the state of glory to be, human beings remained human even there, indeed raised above "their natural position" but never "above their own kind" and "that which is analogous to that." Humanity's blessedness indeed lies in the "beatific vision of God," but this vision will always be such that finite and limited human nature is capable of it.[124]

The criticism of Rome's idea of the *status gloriae* resurfaces in Bavinck's anthropology section. For Roman Catholicism, the essence of the status of glory is a *visio Dei per essentiam* involving a 'melting union with God' in consideration of the meritorious nature of good works.[125] In other words, this vision of God can be merited (*ex condigno*) by good works done through the *donum supperadditum*. Importantly, Bavinck emphasises that there is no disagreement between Rome and the Reformed position in participating in the divine nature in the doctrine of the vision of God or eternal life. The problem is with i) the Neoplatonic view of the mystical fusion of the soul with God and ii) the concept of that in justification, humans receive infused grace, performing good works which *ex condigno* merits the *visio Dei*. In sum, Rome's view has an ontological and man-centred issue with which Bavinck disagrees.

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[123] *Synopsis* III, 593. For Bavinck, 'even where Protestants retained the expression "supernatural gifts," they meant something else by it', see *RD* II, 549.
[124] *RD* II, 191.
[125] *RD* II, 539.

Therefore, in which sense the promise of eternal life should be understood? In Bavinck's words: not *ex condigno* but *ex pacto*.[126] Therefore, covenant theology is essential in understanding Bavinck's view of the *visio Dei*: 'Both in the covenant of works and that of grace, Scripture knows but one ideal for a human being, and that is eternal life'.[127]

Why covenant? Because while people pantheistically destroy the distinction between God and creation or deistically elevate God endlessly above the creature, true religion holds a true fellowship between the Creator-Redeemer God and humans in a covenantal way. Therefore, true covenantal religion 'has its origin in the condescending goodness and grace of God'.[128] This is critical for understanding some truth in Rome's conception of the *donum superadditum*: 'there is no natural connection here between work and reward'.[129] However, when Rome introduced the meritoriousness of good works (*ex condigno*), Reformed theologians maintained that a 'higher state of blessedness' could never be merited but can only be granted 'by a free dispensation of God'.[130]

In other words, it is not about humans' meritorious elevation to God, but God graciously coming to humans. God's condescendence is manifested in the covenant of works, being the road to heavenly blessedness. From this, it is assumed that Adam did not yet possess the highest kind of life. Indeed, for the Reformed, part of this eternal life consisted in 'being elevated absolutely above all fear and dread, above all possibility of falling. This highest life is immediately bestowed by grace through Christ upon believers'. In this sense, Christ does not merely restore believers to Adam's pre-fall state, but Christ 'acquired and bestows much more, namely, that which Adam would have received had he not fallen'.[131] In other words, for Bavinck 'to elevate' should be understood in the sense that grace 'repairs and perfects nature' (*gratia reparat et perficit naturam*).[132]

Prominently, from the beginning, grace assumes the form of a covenant.[133] Therefore it is through the covenant of grace that the elect will attain their destiny, eternal life. In this way, this eternal life is related to the *visio Dei* in a covenantal context. Both the covenant of works and grace have 'but one ideal for a human being, and that is eternal life'.[134]

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126 *RD* II, 544.
127 *RD* II, 565.
128 *RD* II, 570.
129 *RD* II, 571.
130 *RD* II, 571-72.
131 *RD* II, 573.
132 *RD* III, 226. *GD*2 III, 207.
133 *RD* III, 197.
134 *RD* II, 565.

According to his *Guidebook*, Adam's destiny in the covenant of works was 'the vision of God' (*aanschouwing Gods*).[135] Thus, an experiential covenantal religion allowed Bavinck to keep the Creator/creature distinction, the intimate fellowship between the Triune God and believers and their non-ontological but spiritual transformation on earth (sanctification) and in heaven (glorification) by faith and vision, respectively.

Finally, when considering the essence of Bavinck's doctrine of eternal life, it is key to consider the seat of this beatific vision, *i.e.*, the intellect, the will, or both. Although Bavinck briefly mentions the three historical positions (Aquinas, Scotus and Bonaventure), his understanding can be inferred from what he previously asserts to be the essence of eternal life: 'Contemplation (*visio*), understanding (*comprehensio*), and enjoyment of God (*fruitio Dei*) make up the essence of our future blessedness'.[136] *Visio* and *comprehensio* could be related to the intellectual activity of the soul,[137] an aspect described above in Bavinck's *Faith and Contemplation* and also in this section of *RD*:

> The redeemed see God, not—to be sure—with physical eyes, but still in a way that far outstrips all revelation in this dispensation via nature and Scripture. And thus they will all know him, each in the measure of his mental capacity, with a knowledge that has its image and likeness in God's knowledge—directly, immediately, unambiguously, and purely.[138]

In this sense, it is possible to notice a Thomistic-like view of the beatific vision in Bavinck's understanding of the *visio Dei*. Nevertheless, *fruitio* is also an aspect of the essence of our future blessedness. Seen as such, is the beatific vision's enjoyment an intellectual or volitional activity? For Bavinck, 'enjoyment' is part of the will. In *RD* II, he describes rest and enjoyment as 'the highest and most powerful activity of the will'. In fact, that enjoyment is closely related to love. Therefore, the activity of resting and enjoying is 'simply the love that embraces its object and is blessed in so doing'. In this sense, 'true blessedness, far from destroying the will, in fact raises it to its highest level of activity, for love is the most abundantly powerful energy of the will.'[139] In other words, in real essential knowledge (*het echte wezenlijke kennen*), or in a contemplation of God and fellowship with God (*een aanschouwen van God en eene gemeenschap met God*), there is a simultaneous activity of

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[135] Bavinck, *Guidebook*, 85.
[136] *RD* IV, 722.
[137] In *GD*[2] II, 156, Bavinck indicates that 'visio per essentiam en comprehensio zijn immers volkomen gelijk'.
[138] Bavinck, RD IV, 722.
[139] Bavinck, RD II, 231-33.

the intellect and will, as Bavinck indicates in *Kennis en leven*: ' [real knowledge] embraces head and heart together and employs both mind and will'.[140]

When this is considered, we can deduce that for Bavinck, the knowledge of God *per visionem* in heaven involves both understanding and the will.[141] In his words: 'Thus contemplating and possessing God, they enjoy him and are blessed in his fellowship: blessed in soul and body, in intellect and will'.[142]

In sum, Bavinck's theology, from the beginning (prolegomena) to the end (eschatology), is grounded in heaven because the object of faith and vision is the triune God. In this sense, God has graciously established a covenant to know his people in a sense 'that he turns to them, that he appropriates them, that he eliminates all distance and every obstacle that separates them, and that he unites himself with them in love'.[143] This is the foundation of Bavinck's covenantal piety and *visio Dei per pactum*.

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[140] DO: 'omvat hoofd en hart te samen en neemt verstand en wil beide in dienst'. Bavinck, *Kennis en leven*, 222.
[141] It is possible to establish a parallel between faith and vision with respect to the place of the faculties of the soul. For Bavinck, faith involves the whole man, that is, head and heart, knowing and trusting. In other words, intellect and will. In the same way, the *visio Dei* involves not only an intellectual aspect but the whole man, as stated in *Kennis en Leven*: 'For in John, religious knowledge is not a matter of the head, not an intellectual knowledge, but an activity of the whole person, consisting in the contemplation of the true reality' "Kennis en Leven", 226.
[142] *RD* IV, 722. Therefore, adopting in some sense the position of Bonaventure and Gisbertus Voetius. For example, Bavinck states that 'much sounder, therefore, is the position of Bonaventure, who saw the intellect and the will as being conjointly the seat of blessedness' (see *RD* II, 212). Andres Beck indicates that 'formally happiness (*beatitudo*) is, as Voetius indicates in opposition to Aquinas, not to be located exclusively in human reason but partly or perhaps even entirely in the will' (see Beck, *Gisbertus Voetius*, 218-19 and 199-200). Regarding the analysis of Bavinck's doctrine of the *visio Dei*, it is important to highlight at least two points that need further investigation when considering Bavinck as orthodox and modern at the same time. First, the use and continuity of theological and psychological concepts from medieval and Reformed Scholasticism sources (i.e., Bonaventure, Aquinas, Scotus,Voetius) to formulate his understanding of the beatific vision in different *loci*. Second, the relationship between the intellect and the will in the beatific vision in the 'I' (*Ik*), shows the importance that Bavinck gave to psychology for theological and ethical formulations. Although 'the study of the historical and psychological phenomena of religion is absolutely not a theological subject' (*OT*, 124), this does not imply a rejection of the study in psychological investigations for a more precise understanding of theoretical-practical dogmatics (see for example his writings about 'Psychology of Religion', 'Trends in Psychology', 'Conscience', 'The Unconscious', 'Primacy of the Intellect or the Will', 'Foundations of Psychology', and 'Biblical and Religious Psychology'). In this sense, Bavinck's theological anthropology shows us at least the use of and the distinctions/relationships in the faculties of the soul in conjunction with the physical body (in a 'dualistic holism' sense, for this see Thiago Silva, 'Herman Bavinck's Anthropology and the Recent Body-Soul Debate' in *Puritan Reformed Journal* 9, 2 (2017): 226–240), for Bavinck's theological psychology see Matthew A. Lapine, *The Logic of the Body* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2020), 205-11) in conjunction with a modern grammar in psychological terms that cannot be avoided for future research. At the same time, the doctrine of the beatific vision helps to understand his theological anthropology in its relational and participatory aspects in covenantal terms.
[143] DO: 'dat Hij zich tot hen henen wendt, dat Hij hen zich toeëigent, dat Hij allen afstand en elke hindernis, die scheiding maakt, verwijdert, en dat Hij met hen in liefde zich vereenigt'. Bavinck, "Kennis en Leven", 233.

III Conclusion

A certain lack of piety among Reformed students, and the dualistic and separatist tendencies of some pious people led Bavinck to consider the importance of a healthy understanding of Reformed piety. The topic of *Exercitia Pietatis* – and the invitation to read more 'edifying authors' – reflects the necessity of retrieving and contextualising the old Reformed approach to the practice of piety, namely, the preeminence of fellowship with God. While Bavinck indicates in his manuscript 'Piety in student life' that communion with God is not the end, but being children of God, this should not be considered as a contradiction. In fact, and because Bavinck overemphasises the concept of 'fellowship with God in Christ' throughout various of his writings, both themes should be understood together. As he wrote in *Magnalia Dei*,

> For the saint, heaven in all its blessedness and glory would be void and stale without God; and when he lives in *communion with God* he cares for nothing on earth, for the love of God far transcends all other goods.
>
> Such is the experience of the *children of God*. It is an experience which they have felt because God presented Himself to them for their enjoyment in the Son of His love. In this sense Christ said that eternal life, that is, the totality of salvation, consists for man in the knowledge of the one, true God and of Jesus Christ whom He has sent.[144]

Thus, the 'children of God' aspect of the Christian life helps to understand both the affective and holistic characterisation of Reformed piety. On the one hand, expressions such as 'we don't rest until we rest under God's fatherheart!' or, 'there is glory brought to God, when the creature that is made in His image beholds God, and sinks down in speechless admiration of His splendid virtues, or exclaims in adoration: to Thy name, Thy great Name be the honour!', reflects the experiential language of the Reformed tradition. On the other hand, statements such as children who 'fall on their knees before God' and 'enjoy everything' shows the importance of fellowship/enjoyment of God and also the enjoyment of creation reflected, for example, in the repeated idea of drinking a glass of wine with moderation.

In this way, Bavinck secures the priority of fellowship with God that leads holistically to sanctifying all areas of the creational order through the harmonious development of all

[144] *TWWG*, 10. Emphasis mine.

faculties of life. Essentially, this is done when the objective principle of the covenantal subjective religion is maintained from beginning to the end. That is, the glory of God as an organic principle that secures and promotes the i) experiential knowledge of God by faith on earth or by vision in heaven, and ii) the holistic aspect of Reformed piety in all human faculties and every sphere of life.

These themes, the practice of piety toward God, and the practice of piety towards neighbours will be developed in the chapters IV and V, respectively.

Chapter IV

The practice of piety towards God or *cultus Dei*

> *Whatever material or ideal possessions the world may offer, all these taken together cannot outweigh or even be compared with this greatest of all treasures, communion with God; and hence, in case of conflict with this, they are to be unconditionally sacrificed. "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee"*[1] – Herman Bavinck.

As I described in chapter two, in Bavinck's writings, piety can be considered in broad or narrow ways. In a general sense, it is the feeling or *sensus* that every person has towards God. In a narrow way, Christian piety is the regenerated *habitus* that, under the objective covenantal word, passes into subjective covenantal practices towards God and creatures. Now, I turn to the practice of piety towards God. In particular, this chapter describes the duties that express the worship of God according to the first four commandments of God's law. Before that, however, it is crucial to understand Bavinck's criticism of certain forms of Pietism concerning its understanding of the focus and practice of piety. By doing so, we see that Bavinck's catholic disposition allows us to pay attention to the appropriation of some aspects of Pietism in his works.

I. Deformation in the practice of piety: Pietism

In December of 1888, Herman Bavinck wrote the following words to his friend Snouck Hurgronje:

> You have surely received my oration. Imagine with this lecture that it is primarily intended as a medicine for the separatist and sectarian tendencies that sometimes appear in our church. There is so much narrow-mindedness, so much pettiness among us, and the worst thing is that it is regarded as piety (*vroomheid*).[2]

[1] Bavinck, *Calvin and Common Grace*, 2.
[2] Quoted in *BCB*, 161.

The context of this letter is Bavinck's lecture 'The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church' (1888). From his words, we notice two things: an illness and medicine. The illness: separatism and sectarianism under the label of piety. The medicine: a call for catholicity. Therefore, for Bavinck, there is something that pretends to be piety but is not. In other words, there is a deformation of piety, something he detected in Pietism.[3]

To understand, in general terms, the essence of Pietism as understood by Bavinck, I will describe its origin and features according to *RE* and *RD,* amongst other publications, focussing on his critiques towards this movement. However, not everything was negative. Bavinck was able to acknowledge some truth found within Pietism. Therefore, I will finish this section by highlighting a catholic appropriation of some aspects of Pietism that Bavinck called attention to for his neo-Calvinist context.

I.1 Pietism in *Reformed Ethics*

In *RE*, Bavinck's description of Pietism is found in two places: first, in the section of 'Life in the Spirit in the Church's History', occupying more pages than—and at the same time relating it to—mysticism and Methodism; and second, in the section on 'Pathologies of the Christian life'. According to Bavinck, and as we saw in chapter two, the history of Christian piety deserves to be studied. In the same way, he indicated that this study helps distinguish between piety in its healthy and abnormal states for the minister as a preacher and pastor.

In his church history section, the term 'pietist' can be described differently depending on whether we refer to Lutheran Pietism or Reformed Pietism. As a general description, Pietism aims for perfection, seeking to complete the Reformation of the sixteenth century by cultivating piety to the everyday. In this line, Pietism assumes a dead orthodoxy from a Reformation that focused only on doctrine. Therefore, the continual reformation strives for piety through *praxis pietatis*.[4] In other words, the focus of the pietist person is to experience this piety, religion or fellowship with Christ, turning the emphasis to the subject.

Bavinck dedicates only two paragraphs to Lutheran Pietism, mentioning that Jean Labadie influenced Philipp Jacob Spener (1635-1705). This Pietism was a movement within and against the church, emphasising subjective experience and rejection of doctrine.

[3] In Bavinck's view, other deformations are Methodism and Mysticism. See also *RE* I, 428-35.
[4] *RE I*, 288-290.

Particularly, at this point, Bavinck mentions an aspect shared with other pietistic movements: 'the covenant idea was not decisive'.[5]

Regarding Reformed Pietism, Bavinck dedicates more pages to describing the names and characteristics of this group. Its origin in the Netherlands can be traced to the 'Brownists' or 'Independents'—a distinct type of Puritans.[6] Bavinck includes a long list of prime movers among other English Puritans, such as William Perkins, Richard Sibbes (1577-1635), Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680), and John Owen. Bavinck summarised their teaching by mentioning that a) they were Reformed in doctrine, b) this truth has to be reflected in daily life through the practice of godliness, c) the starting point that every person is in a state of condemnation or grace, therefore d) the necessity of self-examination, through e) the distinguishing marks.[7]

Because the spiritual life is the object of reflection, this creates the occasion to discuss spiritual life with other people, leading to *ecclesiolae in ecclesia*. However, it is significant to mention that these writers—who encouraged *praxis pietatis* by an active life—were preachers 'zealous in making home visits, maintained church discipline, and did much to evangelise the people, especially the lower classes, and who established catechism instruction classes and school'.[8] Therefore, in the analysis of Bavinck's approach to Pietism it is critical to distinguish between the *writers* and the *readers* of literature related to *praxis pietatis*.

English Puritanism was carried over to the Netherlands by William Ames. Consequently, Gisbertus Voetius became familiar with English Puritanism by reading Willem Teellinck (the '*Reformed* Kempis'), Bayly, and Perkins.[9] Other Dutch authors Bavinck included in this section are Johannes Hoornbeek, Herman Witsius, and Campegius Vitringa. The result of these writings was a Puritan lifestyle in many circles, where 'dancing and theater attendance (Voetius) were shunned', and Sunday observance was rigorous. However, the practice of piety was developed in a healthy way, where Bavinck acknowledges that Voetius was not a mystic. On the contrary, according to Bavinck, Voetius 'detects mysticism in Labadie, and claims that Labadie introduced it into the Reformed Church and that until that time it had

[5] *RE I*, 290.
[6] Regarding the concept of Dutch Puritanism see Keith L. Sprunger, *Dutch Puritanism: A History of English and Scottish Churches of the Netherlands in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 1982).
[7] *RE I*, 293-294.
[8] *RE I*, 295.
[9] *RE I*, 297. The English translation omits the 'Reformed Kempis' reference to Teellinck.

been absent'.[10] This is an essential point to differentiate not only between writers and readers of devotional literature but also between authors of the same period.[11]

Furthermore, Bavinck continues describing and distinguishing different exponents of the *oude schrijvers*. Not only between Voetius and Labadie, but also between the mystical and pietistic tendency that could be seen in some of Voetius's contemporaries, for example, in Johannes Teellinck (1623-1674), Theodorus à Brakel and Jodocus van Lodestein (1620-77). Van Lodestein studied under Voetius and Cocceius and was influenced by Labadie. Through Labadism, pietistic and mystical tendencies were stressed in promoting conventicles.[12] Consequently, pious people withdrew from the church. This difference seems to appear in some ministers of the high-last period of the *Nadere Reformatie*, i.e., Willem Schortinghuis (1700-1750),[13] Benedictus Pictet (1655-1724) and Friedrich A. Lampe (1683-1729), overlapping the same late period of the decline of orthodoxy.[14] In Lampe, Bavinck thought, it is possible to discern elements of Pietism, mysticism and Cocceianism, influencing a particular and experiential view of salvation that, according to Bavinck, 'is cherished among the pious, especially in Holland'.[15]

While Bavinck justified mysticism and pietistic opposition to rationalism and dead orthodoxy, he highlights six points of critique: a) feeling as the faith's seat of mysticism and Pietism; for which reason, pietists do not embrace 'the fullness of our humanity', the result of which is, on the one hand, b) the negation of the objective element (the Word of God, sacraments, doctrine), and on the other hand, c) the formation of separated groups. With this, d) 'the covenant idea is lost', resulting in e) a religion limited to the Scripture reading, prayer and Sundays disconnected from the rest of the week. Finally, f) experience is the norm for the exegesis of Scripture, knowledge and faith.[16]

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[10] *RE I*, 297.
[11] This idea is further developed in Bavinck's review of A.C. Duker's biography of Voetius. There, Bavinck explicitly indicates that Voetius was not a pietist. See Review of Gisbertus Voetius, vol. 2, part 2, by A. C. Duker. *Hollandia* 23:942 (1907). See also chapter five for Bavinck's reception of Voetius' theology.
[12] During the seventeenth-century, conventicles consisted in private meetings guided by the minister on Sundays or during the week. In the conventicle people used to read the Bible, sing, pray and discuss spiritual matters. However, gradually 'they came close to being *ecclesiolae in ecclesia*, or small churches within the territorial church. While membership in the latter was based upon baptism and confirmation, conversion was considered the basic condition for acceptability within the *ecclesiolae'*. See Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism*, 160.
[13] *RE I*, 305.
[14] *RE I*, 301.
[15] *RE I*, 302.
[16] *RE I*, 309.

In the section on the 'pathologies of the Christian life', Bavinck argues that, like the natural life, the spiritual life is subject to all kinds of hazards. This idea is again sustained by using Vitringa's *Spiritual Life*. Then, he explains that illness is a disruption, whereas health 'consists in the harmony of the organism'.[17] As I showed before, harmony between objective and subjective religion is vital for understanding Bavinck's concept of piety. In the same line, here Bavinck argues for the *harmony-health* relationship as the reception of the Word of God (objective religion) into a person's consciousness in order to have fellowship (subjective religion) with God in a Trinitarian way:

> The ideal—harmony and health—consists in this, that the Word of God, which is the meat and drink of the spiritual life—or if you will, that Christ himself, who is the bread of life—is received into our consciousness by the mouth of faith, is taken into our hearts and there transformed into communion with God through Christ in the Holy Spirit.[18]

The goal of this harmony is an outward manifestation of good works in loving God and our neighbour. The latter is displayed in 'all spheres of life, such as family, community and society'.[19] Finally, before describing spiritual pathologies, Bavinck refers to Jesus as the perfectly healthy one. Because of this, Christians are healthy when they imitate Christ as the model of spiritual life.[20]

When Bavinck refers to spiritual illness, he describes it as a 'morbid form of piety' (*ziekelijke vroomheid*). In fact, when these pathologies begin as *eenzijdidheid* (one-sidedness)—when diversity in unity is eradicated, and emphases on a distinctive element go too far—Bavinck once again describes them as symptoms of 'morbid piety' and 'spiritual disease'.[21] In this sense, he describes three major spiritual illnesses related to the intellect, heart and will. Pietism is considered in the last two, but mainly in the area of will.

In discussing the pathology from the side of the will, Bavinck notes that for Pietism, the vital matter is piety itself: 'Piety alone has value, and piety alone is ever its only concern'. Because of its exclusive and narrow view, pietistic people manifest a twofold separatism:

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[17] *RE I*, 417.
[18] *RE I*, 418.
[19] *RE I*, 418. Interestingly, while this expression is characteristic of Bavinck's neo-Calvinism, the main idea is also found in Vitringa's book, that is, neighbour's edification as part of piety.
[20] *RE I*, 418-419.
[21] *RE I*, 422.

from the world (nature, science, history and art) and from the church into small conventicles. In his words, 'the Pietist is always a separatist'.[22]

While Bavinck mentions Pietism in the mysticism section (in the margin of the manuscript), he differentiates between both. Mysticism emphasises God in us while Pietism focuses on the subject that actively works to be *vroom* or godly. In other words, the first is passive, and the second active by rescuing people—through education, missions and philanthropy—from the world to their circles. Because of this, he judged, Pietism has an affinity with Methodism. However, there are still some differences between the last two. Methodism is even more practical and outward than inward Pietism. At the end, 'every pathology is a deviation from the right path of development, a wrong direction from a sound starting point',[23] where the main cause of it is sin.[24]

In sum, in *RE,* Bavinck describes Pietism as piety focusing on piety, lacking the holistic-covenantal essence of Christian Reformed subjective religion.[25] The pietistic detachment of objective elements—such as the word, sacraments, doctrine and church—leads to a subjectivism that focuses more on the *experience* or *practice* of piety than the objective principle of *praxis pietatis*, i.e., the glory of God. This disconnection runs between the separation between Sunday and the rest of the week, developing a spiritual illness or morbid piety. Therefore, for pietistic people, there is no harmony between the relationship with God and creation. This morbid piety also creates disharmony in personality. In Bavinck's words, Pietism is 'anxious, smug, narrow-minded'.[26]

Another aspect that must be considered is Bavinck's references to, and opinions on post-Reformation theologians. It is possible to observe that Bavinck differentiates between *pietistic elements* in some authors from *pietistic authors* themselves. On the one hand, he mentions Wilhelmus à Brakel as someone who 'took a firm stance against mystics and Pietists but nevertheless included pietistic elements here and there'.[27] On the other hand, Labadie's mysticism and Pietism led to 'Labadism', influencing congregations and ministers.

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[22] *RE I*, 432.
[23] *RE I*, 419.
[24] *RE I*,436.
[25] Pietists and Methodists 'acknowledge only the religious life and underestimate the moral life. They make everything religious, think only of the soul, not the body; only of eternity, not of time'. See *RE* II, 101.
[26] *RE I*, 433.
[27] *RE I*, 301.

However, that was not always the case, and because Bavinck includes various authors in the same section, his criticism towards Pietism is not suitable for some of the theologians in view. For instance, after naming some English Puritans, and Samuel Rutherford as a Scottish representative, he mentions that 'they are and remain entirely Reformed in their understanding of doctrine'.[28] Nevertheless, at the end of this section, Bavinck criticises Pietism's denial of objective elements, such as the word of God, church and 'even doctrine'.[29] In other words, while in some places Bavinck differentiates between pious authors and their pietistic readers, sometimes he presents a broad view that includes both authors and popular godly readers, leading him to make some inconsistent observations in his interpretation of Pietism.

Considering the above, it is necessary to elucidate if Bavinck criticism is directed more towards theologians of devotional literature (*oude schjrivers*) or towards their popular *readers.*[30] In other words, the question concerns whether the authors *or* the readers were classified as pietistic by Bavinck. For this it is necessary to analyse his *magnum opus* amongst other publications.

I.2 Pietism in *Reformed Dogmatics*

The first approach to Pietism is in Volume I, specifically in the history of Reformed dogmatics. 'The seventeenth century was still the century of objectivity'—that sentence is crucial regarding subjectivism identified in Pietism. Bavinck describes Reformed orthodoxy within that period, highlighting that 'the most important theologians in the Netherlands' were the authors of the *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae*, Hoornbeek, Ames, Voetius, van Mastricht, J. H. Heidegger, and others.[31] In England, Puritan Calvinists opposed Arminianism and gained strong recognition were Calamy and Owen. In Scotland, the dogmatic life of Calvinism 'found a receptive soil and was further developed along rigorous, positive lines'. Here, Bavinck names Robert Rollock (1555-1559), John Welsh of Ayr (c. 1570-1622) and some delegates to the Westminster Assembly. In fact, the positive development of Reformed dogmatics reached its high point and terminus in Reformed confessionalism represented by the Canons of Dort, the Westminster Confession and its Catechism, the Consensus Helvetica and the Walcherse Articles.[32] Interestingly, some of

[28] *RE I*, 293.
[29] *RE I*, 309.
[30] For example, Bavinck mentions an example of idolatry when 'pious people' idolize "the old writers" (*oude schrijvers*)'. See *RE* II, 143.
[31] *RD I*, 181.
[32] *RD I*, 183.

the Reformed theologians (or 'Reformed scholastics') described in this section of *RD*[33] were classified within the 'Pietism' section of *RE*.

The principles that brought Reformed theology into decline in the same century were from Anabaptist and Socinian tendencies, representing the mystical and rational elements in religion and theology, respectively. Bavinck identified dualism in both groups: whereas 'Socinianism abandons grace in favor of nature, Anabaptism sacrifices nature to grace'.[34] In general, both tendencies led to subjectivism, influencing the domain of philosophy and theology. In philosophy, rationalism was expressed in Cartesianism, whereas Cocceianism was akin to the new philosophical method in the field of theology. Because of the victory of Cocceianism, Voeitian authors were forced to retreat. So too, the dogmatics of Brakel and Marck were devoid of the vigour of their predecessors, despite being written on Voetian lines. In this context, Bavinck identified the development of pietist ideas in authors such as Jodocus Lodenstein (1620-1676), Labadie, Schortinghuis and others.[35] Significantly, Voetius is not mentioned on the list.

'Around 1750 Reformed theology everywhere fell into decay'. This is Bavinck's judgment after Cocceianism and the beginning of the Era of Toleration in the Netherlands.[36] In this period, people abandoned the church's confessions and doctrines characteristic of the Reformed faith, such as 'original sin, the covenant of works, limited atonement, etc'.[37] People became nominal professors of Reformed religion, where 'they no longer had their hearts in it, nor did they any longer speak out of its content', excepting theologians such as Alexander Comrie (1706-1774) with his *A.B.C. of Faith* (1739). For Bavinck, Comrie was one of the few that 'clung heart and soul to the old Reformed doctrine, defending and developing it with talent.'[38] However, as he indicates at the end of Volume I, an opposition between doctrine and life became apparent in this period, in which Pietism emerged:

> Orthodoxy ended up in rationalism on the one hand and Pietism on the other. Doctrine and life increasingly distanced themselves from each

[33] The heading 'Reformed Scholasticism' [55] is an insert of the English translation.
[34] *RD I*, 184.
[35] *RD I*, 186.
[36] Despite some exceptions, Richard Muller notes the decline of orthodox Reformed confessionalism after 1725. See Muller, *PRRD* I, 32.
[37] *RD I*, 189.
[38] *RD I*, 189.

> other. Head and heart vied for priority. Theology and religion became polar opposites. Even now we have not yet overcome this polarity.[39]

In Volume III, Bavinck dedicates section [422] to describe Pietism and Methodism within the *ordo salutis* chapter. Through the influence of the anti-Aristotelian theology of Peter Ramus, a practical school gained acceptance in Reformed circles. This was developed through Perkins and Ames, who described theology as 'the doctrine of living for God, the pursuit of piety'.[40] From this arose in England a practical and pietistic direction represented by Baxter and other practical authors favoured in the Netherlands by theologians and ministers such as Brakel, Witsius, Vitringa, and Schortinghuis.

Because of dead orthodoxy, practical authors emphasised the necessity of genuine conversion, differentiating temporary, miraculous and historical faith from true/saving faith. The essence of faith was not intellectual assent, but trust, where its 'seat is more in the heart and the will than in the head'. However, there is no immediate certainty (*certitudo*, *zekerheid*).[41] According to Bavinck, 'there is much similarity between false and true faith' for these writers. Therefore, constant self-examination and searching for the marks of spiritual life is vital for Pietism.[42] Consequently, assurance of salvation comes from extraordinary experiences (i.e., visions, voices, etc) after a long period of doubts and conflicts in the Christian life.[43]

Notably, Bavinck acknowledges that Pietism and Methodism were correct in opposing dead orthodoxy. The initial intention of these groups was to apply the confession of the Reformation in life. However, the focus switched from 'the objective to the subjective work of salvation'. In connection with subjectivism, these movements lack an organic element: 'even though Pietism and Methodism did not deny the acquisition of salvation by Christ, they did not use this doctrine or relate it in any organic way to the application of salvation'.[44]

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[39] *RD I*, 613.
[40] *RD* III, 535. Interestingly, Bavinck criticizes in a sense part of William Ames's theology by saying that his theology exhibits 'one-sidedness' (*eenzijdigheid*). One reason is that for Bavinck, Ames makes the will the 'subject of theology' (het subject der theologie). Likewise, Bavinck considers that the knowledge of God (*kennisse Gods*) has its seat (*zetel*) not in the will but in the consciousness (*in het bewustzijn*). See Herman Bavinck, "Eene Leidsche Dissertatie." Review of Guilielmus Amesius, by H. Visscher, in *Bazuin* 42:41 (1894). For a contemporary account of the moderate nature of Ames's voluntarism see Takayuki Yagi, "'Doctrina Deo vivendi": William Ames, the Nature and Sources of His Voluntarism' in *Reformation & Renaissance Review* (2020), 22:1, 64-79.
[41] *RD* III, 536.
[42] *RD* III, 536.
[43] *RD* III, 537.
[44] *RD* III, 567.

In terms of the organic motif identified by Eglinton, it is possible to identify the lack of an organic approach in Methodism and Pietism – according to Bavinck – in doctrines related to Christian salvation. For example, the concept of unity-in-diversity can be related to the fact that there is only one way to heaven, while 'many are the leadings of God both before and on that journey'. According to Bavinck, different people in the New Testament were brought into the kingdom of God in different ways, and each of them performed different offices in the service of God. At this point, Methodism and Pietism 'tend to ignore these leadings, limit God's grace, and want to convert and mold everyone according to a single model'.[45] Consequently, people were not led to Christ but to themselves, either withdrawing from the world (Pietism) or acting aggressively in the world (Methodism).

In summary, the organic, Christological and Pneumatological focus of Bavinck's understanding of Reformed piety is not adequately understood in pietistic circles. Thus, these movements cannot 'lead to a truly developed Christian life' that erases the dualistic view. Consequently, Pietism differs from Bavinck's organic and holistic view of Reformed piety. In his words, Pietism 'does not have an organic impact on the family, society, and the state, on science and art.'[46]

Finally, in Volume IV Bavinck presents elements absent in pietism that form his understanding of piety, such as a definition of faith that, as a benefit of the covenant of grace, includes certainty.[47] In fact, when the covenant of grace was taken more seriously, being brought to practical terms such as paedobaptism, Reformed churches continued to the unbroken continuity of the spiritual life for those children. However, when the decay came to Reformed churches in the midst of the seventeenth century, and the boundary of the covenant grace was almost wholly erased because of the lack of discipline, the path towards these pietist groups began to form.[48] Although these pietist movements had a 'legitimate' and 'healthy' reaction to the indifference of the established churches, their protest became a system that, in some cases, led them to be 'seriously one-sided'. In his words, 'it proceeded from distrust toward God's promise, denying the truth of the

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[45] *RD* IV, 40. So too, for example, the covenant of grace and the organic approach differentiates Reformed education from other movements: 'But it characterizes Reformed education and upbringing in distinction from that of Anabaptists and Methodists; maintains the bond between nature and grace; proceeds from the reality of the covenant of grace and baptism; believes in the unity and organic development of the spiritual life; and fully recognizes that God does not always work faith and repentance in the human heart suddenly, but often—indeed as a rule—causes them to proceed and develop from the implanted life gradually, by a psychological and pedagogical process'. See *RD* IV, 125.
[46] *RD* III, 568.
[47] *RD* IV, 130-31.
[48] *RD* IV, 154.

covenant of grace and weakening the meaning of baptism'.[49] Finally, the denial of the covenant of grace in the Christian family had effects on children's psychology, making them 'anxious, fearful, and nervously introspective',[50] an observation also indicated in his *RE*.

In general terms, Bavinck's description of pietism is similar in *RE* and *RD*, that is, emphasis of the subject (subjectivism) and the absence of organic understanding of the covenant, leading to a conflict between nature and grace or between the works of creation and recreation. At the same, a mature Bavinck (*in Reformed Dogmatics*) seems to understand better the different representatives of the *oude schrijvers* and their pietistic readers than what he labelled in his *Reformed Ethics*' general critique of Pietism, which, inappropriately, sometimes includes both writers and readers.

I.3 Pietism in other publications

A young Bavinck talked about Pietism in 'The Kingdom of God' (1881), calling his audience to be on guard against two errors: on the one hand, theoretical or practical materialism, and on the other hand, various pietistic/methodistic dualistic emphases. Interestingly, we also see another call from Bavinck: to be pious all the time. In the same paragraph where he declares that 'the church aims to consecrate people to God, not only in their religious life but also, proceeding from that source, in their natural life, moral life, civic life, and political life', Bavinck mentions that 'the church is what she is supposed to be when she labours beyond herself and is not satisfied when people are pious on Sundays in church.'[51] However, and importantly, the published English translation missed the Dutch word *alleen*, or 'only'. Therefore, a better translation could be 'the church is not satisfied when people are *only* pious on Sundays in church'. In this way, the church fulfils her calling when people are godly on Sundays and during the whole week. This is confirmed by the previous paragraph, where Sunday must sanctify the rest of the week. In other words, the dualism expressed in Pietistic circles sacrifices six days for one day. On the contrary, pious people use one day—Sunday—for the benefit and sanctification of the rest of the week.

The same critique is present in 'The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church' (1888), where Bavinck adds what is missing in Pietism: organic connection. Because of its Anabaptist origins, Pietism seeks to rescue individuals but lacks an 'organic reformation of

[49] *RD* IV, 154.
[50] *RD* IV, 155.
[51] Bavinck, "The Kingdom of God," 159.

the whole cosmos, of nation and country.' At the same time, Pietism fights against individual sins 'while the root of all sins is often left untouched.' Again, the lack of organicity leads to rejecting science and public life: 'Satisfied with the ability to worship God in their own houses of worship, or to engage in evangelism, many left nation, state and society, art and science to their own devices'.[52] In sum, this separation tendency misses the whole meaning of organic Christianity.

This separatist tendency is applied to the world itself and the church. Anyone who does not want to enjoy the church's catholicity and, on the contrary, gathers in small churches, has never experienced the power and the comfort of the church's beauty. In fact, 'such a person shortchanges the love of the Father, the grace of the Son, and the fellowship of the Spirit and incurs a loss of spiritual treasures that cannot be made good by meditation and devotion. Such a person will have an impoverished soul'.[53] So, for Bavinck, Christians can develop a spiritual illness if sectarian tendencies lead them to focus exclusively on isolated forms of meditation and devotion.

As we saw in chapter two, the type of relationship that humans have with God determines their relationship with creation. As he explained in his review article 'Christelijke vroomheid' (1900), 'the relationship in which a person stands to God determines the relationship to all created things'.[54] Thus, 'who disrupts the God-given connection between nature and grace, will sacrifice the former to the latter or the latter to the former.' It is in Pietism's concept of *relationship* that Bavinck detects its failure. That is, the dualistic relationship with God and creation, the tensional relationship between nature and grace, religion and culture, contemplative life and active life. The previous idea is identified in 'Common grace' (1894), where in Pietism and secularism, 'the harmony of life is broken'. At the same time, when Anabaptism influenced Reformed people, Bavinck argued that the result was,

> a denigration of the office of minister of the Word; the belittling of the objective ordinances of God for church and covenant, for the sacraments and offices; the preference for closed societies; the rejection of art, scholarship, science, culture, and all the goods of earthly life…all

[52] Bavinck, "Catholicity", 246.
[53] Bavinck, "Catholicity", 227.
[54] "Bavinck, "Christelijke vroomheid". Trans. de Wit.

> these are fruits not of healthy Reformation but of the unsound Anabaptist tradition.[55]

Particularly, Bavinck mentions an essential aspect of Christian Reformed piety to the long list of rejected aspects: the covenant. This missing element is also highlighted in his *RE* and *RD,* as was described before. This lacking covenantal aspect is emphasised in two important publications.

In *Calling and Regeneration* (1903), Bavinck indicates in the context of the catholicity and holiness of the church that 'Anabaptism and Methodism, and movements associated with them, misperceive the covenant'.[56] In terms of Methodistic/Pietistic sermons, the covenantal aspect is not considered. In Bavinck's words, 'such preaching attaches no value to the person having been born and included within the covenant of grace'.[57] It is not surprising that in the following paragraph, Bavinck comments on the consequences of this, such as the surpassing value of evangelism and missions over family, career, state, society, science, and art.[58]

In *Philosophy of Revelation* (1909), Bavinck expands the covenant-lacking idea in Methodism by using organic language. For him, 'the error of Methodism does not exist in the fact that it awakens sleeping churches and exists to stir up the unconscious life into conscious action; but it is a fault if the organic existence of the church is insufficiently recognised, involving as this does a misunderstanding of the covenant of grace'.[59] In sum, Pietism and the movements associated with it do not possess holistic-covenantal piety, an aspect that even affects the view of the certainty of faith.

The assurance of faith was a significant theme in Bavinck's theology. In 1891, he delivered two lectures that became the basis for his book *De zekerheid des geloofs* (1901). As Henk van den Belt has well described, there is a more critical description of pietism in the manuscript of his lectures than in the published book.[60] In fact, Bavinck compares the Reformation and pietism. In the first place, the Reformation was born out of the need for assurance of salvation. While the reformers experienced temptations and struggles, 'not doubt and fear,

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[55] Bavinck, "Common Grace", 54.
[56] Bavinck, *Calling and Regeneration*, 125.
[57] Bavinck, *Calling and Regeneration*, 119.
[58] Bavinck, *Calling and Regeneration*, 119.
[59] *PoR*, 186.
[60] Henk van den Belt, "Herman Bavinck's Lectures on the Certainty of Faith (1891)" in *TBR* 8 (2017), 35-64 and by the same author, *Herman Bavinck Geloofszekerheid. Teksten ingeleid en geannoteerd door Henk van den Belt* (Soesterberg: ASPEKT, 2018).

but steadfastness and certainty was the normal condition of their spiritual life'.[61] Second, because of the harmony between head, heart and hands, the Reformers were neither pietists nor mystics nor intellectualists nor moralists. Furthermore, this harmony was connected to a holistic view of creational needs. They were not pietists 'with only an eye and heart for the religious life', but because the Reformers were 'all of a deeply religious nature…they kept their eyes open to the needs of family, societal, economic and political life.' In reality, they were not pietists because all 'unnatural, unhealthy *piety* (*vroomheid*) was foreign to them'.[62] At the same time, the Reformers had healthy piety (*godsvrucht*) that differed from Roman Catholicism. In sum, Bavinck believed, the Reformers possessed a holistic view of piety, whereas the pietists did not.

In the next section, Bavinck discusses the origin of Pietism. Here, he pays attention to what happened after Dort (1619). On the one hand, rationalism emerged. On the other hand, a reaction to rationalism from the circle of pious people became apparent. These people sought the *essence* of piety (*godzaligheid*) in experience, developing into Pietism.[63]

The result was a loss of the certainty of faith, where self-examination was guided by reading pious writers (*godvruchtige schrijvers*). According to Bavinck, 'never before or since has the hidden life of fellowship with God been studied more deeply and earnestly'.[64] Who were these writers? He does not mention them in his published book, but he does in one of his unpublished lectures: Udemans, Brakels, Teellincks, Voetius and Lodenstein.[65] In them, there is a 'rich treasure of spiritual psychology to find; in knowledge (*kennis*) of the human heart, in the study of all the states of the soul, in the analysis of all experiences they go far beyond our superficial preaching'.[66] However, the goal of their doctrine of 'marks of grace'—in connection to the certainty of faith—has not been achieved. On the contrary, it fostered uncertainty.[67] Therefore, in pietistic circles, the assurance of faith was presented as an extraordinary grace after a long life experience.

The principles and beginning of the doctrine of 'marks of grace' are located in the seventeenth century with the Teellincks (father and son), Voetius, Cocceius and Labadie.

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[61] Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, 39.
[62] Emphasis mine. The English version translates *vroomheid* as pietism. This is not correct.
[63] The English version translated *wezen der godzaligheid* as 'the essence of salvation', which does not turn out to be a good translation in terms of this research.
[64] Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, 42.
[65] Bavinck, *Geloofszekerheid*, 172.
[66] *DO*: 'een rijke schat van geestelijke zielkunde te vinden; in kennis van het menschelijk hart, in bestudeering aller zielstoestanden, in ontleding aller ervaringen gaan zij onze oppervlakkige prediking zeer verre te boven'. Bavinck, *Geloofszekerheid*, 172.
[67] Bavinck, *Geloofszekerheid*, 172.

However, it flourished in the following century with people like Schortinghuis. Here Bavinck detects a significant switch: an emphasis and diversion from Christ to the Christian, where faith becomes an experience.[68] While in the second lecture and the published version Bavinck does not mention any names, the main argument is similar, where at the end, 'family and society, science and art, state and church were given up to unbelief and revolution' by pietists whose spiritual lives 'were nurtured only through small group discussions and by reading old authors (*oude schrijvers*)'.[69]

Thus far, we can summarise Bavinck's general critique of Pietism that, as a reaction to dead orthodoxy, turned its emphasis on the experience of the subject, resulting in a rejection of the organic view of the covenantal aspect of objective and subjective religion. Regarding Bavinck's view on devotional writers and their readers, it is necessary to notice the change from the first manuscript of *The Certainty of Faith* to the second one, and finally to the published version. In the first one, Bavinck explicitly englobed authors such as Voetius, à Brakel and Labadie as figures who, in their readings, fostered uncertainty; whereas in the second manuscript and the published version, he did not give names. At the same time, Bavinck seems to differentiate between generations of devotional writers, such as Voetius and Schortinghuis.

Particularly, while a slightly more negative trend can be seen in specific sections on pietism in *RE* and *RD*, elsewhere in these works, it is possible to find positive appreciations of this movement. Therefore, it is indispensable to highlight some positive aspects that he appreciated from this pietism in order to be applied to neo-Calvinist circles.

I.4 A catholic appropriation of Pietism

Bavinck's catholicity is an essential aspect of his theology. His eclectic and organic worldview allowed him to build from and connect his theology to different Christian traditions and spheres of life.[70] In the same line, Brock and Sutanto concluded that Bavinck's catholicity 'must also include fair attention to those thinkers that many argue cannot be included within the boundaries of Reformed orthodoxy'.[71] Therefore, if Bavinck

[68] Bavinck, *Geloofszekerheid*, 174.
[69] Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, 45.
[70] For Bavinck on catholicity see Cory Brock and Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, "Herman Bavinck's Reformed eclecticism: On catholicity, consciousness and theological epistemology" *in Scottish Journal of Theology*, Volume 70, Issue 3, August 2017, 310 – 332.
[71] Brock and Sutanto, "Herman Bavinck's Reformed eclecticism", 332.

differentiates pietism from the Reformed tradition, it is required to describe the aspects of pietism that Bavinck's catholicity could embrace.

In *The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church*, we find some positive aspects that Bavinck will recall again in later writings. These can be summed up in two parts. On the one hand, he points to a reaction against worldliness and rationalism within the church and, on the other hand, to their passionate devotion to God as an essential aspect of the spirituality of the Christian life. For example, after naming 'Fox, Wesley, Spener, Labadie, Darby, Moody, Booth', and others as gifts that God gave to the church in 'times of decline', Bavinck asks, 'who would deny the rich blessing that often rested in their work?', adding that

> their passion, courage, faith and love were admirable. Their protest against the worldliness and corruption of the church was not without foundation. Often they were seized by a holy passion for the honour of God, and the salvation of people or else, withdrawing to a life of solitude, they excelled in many Christian virtues.[72]

Even when Bavinck criticised Pietism's and Methodism's subjectivism, he argues in *RD* that they were right in their opposition to dead orthodoxy,[73] and that their conventicles and revivals 'always have right and reason to exist' in a context where the world penetrates the church, especially when there are not fruits of faith and repentance. Therefore, these groups insisted that true conversion involves an experiential heart-knowledge of saving truths.[74]

As was described before, Bavinck sometimes grouped authors and their readers loosely under the term 'pietist'. In other places, he distinguished Dutch Reformed devotional literature (*oude schrijvers*) by *authors* (i.e., Voetius and Labadie), *periods* (seventeenth or eighteenth century), or by their *readers* (pietistic people). Bavinck also used some of these theologians to counteract some pietist ideas. For example, when discussing the time of conversion, Bavinck holds that what is essential is not the time of conversion but the fact of it. And to affirm that conversion can 'also occur slowly, little by little, and smoothly', he directly quotes Voetius to affirm that this experience is not always accompanied by 'perceptible shakings and violent pullings'.[75] In the same line, Bavinck continues quoting 'a man like Voetius' to urge moderation. According to this *Nadere Reformatie* author, 'such

[72] Bavinck, "Catholicity", 245-46.
[73] *RD* III, 567.
[74] *RD* III, 584.
[75] *RD* IV, 162.

moderation must be maintained that vehemence and exaggeration do not harm either body or soul to such a degree that we are rendered unfit for the worship of God (*cultum Dei*) or the service of our neighbor in love (*servitium proximi per caritatem*)'.[76]

In *The Certainty of Faith*, we can see another example of catholic appropriation of pietism. After criticising pietistic Christians for acting as though the religious and spiritual life is the 'only true life', Bavinck switches his critique towards his own context. In fact, the only necessary thing that pietistic people overemphasised is lacking in contemporary life, that is, a true conversion that reflects our belonging to Christ both in life and death. In effect, Bavinck's words resemble the practice of self-examination in things related to salvation:

> While these nineteenth century Christians forgot the world for themselves, we run the danger of losing ourselves in the world. Nowadays we are out to convert the whole world, to conquer all the areas of life for Christ. But we often neglect to ask whether we belong to Christ in life and in death. For this is indeed what life boils down to. We may not banish this question from our personal or church life under the label of pietism or methodism. What does it profit for a man if he gain the whole world, even for Christian principles, if he loses his own soul?[77]

As van den Belt has rightly described, Bavinck's criticism towards pietism became milder in his later years, to the point that he sometimes even made use of features of pietism to correct some attitudes found within neo-Calvinistic circles.[78] This is also reflected in the foreword for the works of the Erskine brothers—Scottish theologians read by pious Dutch people. Again, Bavinck calls attention to something that is lacking in contemporary devotional literature and that these theologians have: 'the spiritual knowledge of the soul'.

> It seems as if we no longer know what sin and grace, what guilt and forgiveness, what repentance and regeneration mean. We know them theoretically, but we no longer know them in the awesome reality of life. That is the reason why the devotional literature of former days leaves an entirely different impression than that of recent times.[79]

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[76] *RD* IV, 162.
[77] Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, 94.
[78] van den Belt, "Herman Bavinck's Lectures on the Certainty of Faith (1891)", 62.
[79] Bavinck, "Preface to the life and works of Ralph and Ebenezer Erskine". Translated by Henk van den Belt. *TBR* 3 (2012), 175.

In the same foreword, Bavinck mentions that while people read the *oude schjrivers*, 'we feel …that they offer us a piece of life; it is the reality itself that is given to us to behold'.[80] Thus, Bavinck acknowledges that Dutch people refresh their souls by reading the devotional literature of former days.

Interestingly, Bavinck can also identify some necessary pietistic elements in L.G.C Ledeboer (1808-63), a deposed minister from the Dutch Reformed Church who established some congregations (Ledeboerians) and that for some time held relationships with the Secession Church.[81] After writing a review of Ledeboer's biography (1900), Bavinck wrote a foreword for the second edition (1910). While Ledeboer belonged to a group of men who 'care very little about state and society, about church and school', they revived religious life for their context.[82] This was because piety (*vroomheid*) was one in those men. In fact, piety was the 'characteristic of their personality'. For Bavinck, there is so much to learn in this biography to know more about a 'living, practical Christianity', from the 'Christian, Reformed piety' (*de Christelijke, de Gereformeerde godsvrucht*) of these circles. Strikingly, Bavinck mentions that we can learn from the one-sidedness of that form of piety and 'what we lack ourselves'. Finally, Bavinck ends this foreword by describing the result of absorbing and passing this experiential piety into the soul: 'we gladly return to the faith language of the Heidelberg Christian… we return to breathe and live. May that be the fruit, also of this biography!'[83]

In summary, Bavinck's catholicity led him to highlight some over-emphasised elements in pietistic circles that were necessary for his own neo-Calvinistic circles. This is an aspect identified by one of Bavinck's students, Gerrit Brillenburg Wurth (1898-1963), at the Congress of Reformed Students (1918), where, despite all the scientific and cultural progress they have made, there is something that the old Seceders had: 'they still knew what sin and grace were. Do we not sometimes run the danger that we, by all our increased knowledge and cultural insight, will forget that one thing?'[84] This is probably one of the

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[80] Bavinck, "Preface to the life and works of Ralph and Ebenezer Erskine", 175.
[81] For a brief biographical account of Ledeboer see Pronk, *A Godly Heritage*, 297-308 and Harinck and Winkeler, "The Ninenteenth Century", 479
[82] Herman Bavinck, foreword in Johan Herman Landwehr, *L.G.C. Ledeboer in zijn leven en arbeid geschetst* (Rotterdam: Bolle, 1910), v–vii. DO: 'die zich om staat en maatschappij, om kerk en school, zeer weinig bekommerden'
[83] DO: 'dan keeren wij gaarne tot de geloofstaal van den Heidelberger Christen… Wij herademen en leven weer op. Moge dat de vrucht, ook van deze levensbeschrijving, zijn!'. Bavinck, *Ledeboer*, vii.
[84] Gerrit Brillenburg Wurth, "Ter gedachtenis van Dr. Herman Bavinck', in: *Gereformeerd Weekblad*, X/24, (1954), 185. DO: 'die wisten nog wat zonde en genade was. En lopen wij wel eens niet het gevaar, dat wij, bij al onze toegenomen kennis en cultureel inzicht, dat ene gaan vergeten?

reasons why Bavinck, according to a biographer, spoke of adopting some of the Methodist 'mystical experiences' when he attended a prayer meeting in America in 1909.[85]

In conclusion, when we consider that the honour of God is the objective principle of Reformed piety, it is essential to ask what are the healthy duties that conform to the proper worship of God or *cultus Dei* as a practice of piety or subjective religion towards God. To this, I will turn in the next section.

II. Duties or practice of piety towards God

As described in chapter two, subjective religion or piety manifests into action due to the impact of objective religion. In the Reformed understanding of Christian religion, both objective and subjective religion must be understood in covenantal terms, where the law plays an essential role in Reformed piety. This is because Bavinck refers to Christian piety as harmony with the law or the will of God. In this sense, the law reveals how God determines the way of knowing and serving him. Therefore, there is a relationship between objective duty and subjective duty. In Bavinck's words,

> Essential in religion (*godsdienst*) is first of all the manner in which God himself wills and determines that people shall know (*kennen*) and serve (*dienen*) him. Hence in the first place it is also a duty (*plicht*) with which God confronts us human beings in the first table of his law, a duty to which subjective religion (*religio subjectiva*) in human beings must correspond.[86]

Therefore, in subjective religion, there is an inner disposition and desire to know and serve God according to what he has revealed in his word. In this sense, covenantal objective religion claimed the person in a holistic way, that is, the whole person's faculties to serve God with a 'sincere faith, firm hope, and ardent love, with worship (*aanbidding*) in spirit and truth… in internal devotion (*cultus internus*), a knowing and serving of God from the heart'.[87]

Properly understood, religion (*religio*) and worship (*cultus*) are related as cause and effect, differentiating between internal and external *cultus*. The first one embraces 'faith, trust, fear, love, prayer, thankfulness, etc.,' while external worship 'manifests itself in confession,

[85] A.B.W.M. Kok, *Dr Herman Bavinck* (Amsterdam: S.J.P. Bakker, 1945), 69.
[86] *RD* I, 239.
[87] *RD* I, 239.

prayer, song, the ministry of the Word and sacraments, making vows, fasting, watching, etc.'[88] Therefore, if piety is understood as a regenerated disposition where believers receive a 'sincere desire to live in perfection not only to some but according to God's all commandments',[89] it is essential to describe this devotion (*cultus*) to God both in its internal and external expressions.

For this, I will analyse some of the elements previously named for internal and external worship in the context of Bavinck's understanding of the first table of the law according to his *Reformed Ethics*.

II.1 *Cultus* as the practice of piety towards God

Because piety manifests in actions corresponding to God's law, it is crucial to describe its importance in understanding the proper worship of God. In *Reformed Ethics*, Bavinck devotes a substantial description of the first four commandments related to man's duties to God or worship. But before describing the law's first table, the whole law's relationship must be analysed in connection with some of the elements that form Bavinck's description of piety.

In chapter two, I presented some features that shape Reformed Christian piety: for example, the freedom and obligation that true covenantal religion brings in an organic and trinitarian way. In other words, freedom and duties must be realities exercised in the covenant of grace. Remarkably, these subjective covenantal elements found their parallel in God's law. The objective freedom from the curse of the law that Christ acquired is subjectively received 'in and through the Spirit'.[90] However, 'this freedom of faith does not abolish the law but upholds it'.[91] In this way, covenant theology plays a significant role here because believers are free from the law as 'law of the covenant of works' to obey it as a 'rule of life',[92] exercising that liberty for the flourishing of the Christian life in them and others.[93]

Likewise, these elements—covenant, freedom, obedience—can also be observed in *Magnalia Dei* (*MD*). When the core of Israel's religion is identified with the gospel/covenantal relationship of God with his people,[94] this 'covenantal relationship now

[88] *RD* I, 244.
[89] *RD* I, 244.
[90] *RE* II, 10.
[91] *RE* II, 10-11.
[92] *RE* II, 18.
[93] *RE* II, 50.
[94] *TWWG*, 60.

requires a more specific order of obedience'.[95] Importantly, this obedience should always be understood in the context of the covenant of grace. In this sense, the law is 'also a law of liberty'[96] because it is previously considered in a way entirely 'permeated by the thought: Jehovah first loved you, sought you out, redeemed you, took you up into His covenant'.[97] Therefore, the believer must respond to this covenantal reality by loving God with all his heart, soul, and strength.

This understanding of love becomes essential in Bavinck's description of the Christian's duties according to God's law. In fact, in *RE*, Bavinck states that there is only one duty and one object of that love, namely, God. Therefore, all things must be loved 'only in God and for God', having the glory of God as the sole end.[98] The 'all-things' idea includes ourselves, neighbours and the state. Thus, the law is distinguished according to our relationship toward God, and toward neighbour, that is, between religion (*religie*) and morality, respectively.[99] Still, and as Bavinck mentions in *MD*, the ethical, civic and social prescriptions toward our neighbour have a religious foundation because the law is 'religious through and through'. Thus, because of its covenantal aspect, the law regulates the way how God's people should live 'according to the requirements of the promise'.[100]

Only when the law is considered in the covenant of grace is it possible to analyse the impact of objective religion on subjective religion to pass into actions that reflect the devotion to God. This is because for Bavinck, on the one hand, a 'religion (*godsdienst*) without *cultus* and without ritual and regulation is unthinkable anywhere, particularly in antiquity and in Israel' and, on the other hand, because the religious character of the law regulates the 'public worship' (*eerediens*t).[101] In this way, it is possible to describe internal and external *cultus* according the first four commandments. For this, I will use as a frame of reference some ideas that Bavinck exposes of each commandment according to *Reformed Ethics*. At the same time, these points will be developed from other writings in order to present a correlation between *RE*'s ideas and Bavinck's published material.

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95 *TWWG*, 67.
96 *TWWG*, 71.
97 *TWWG*, 69.
98 *RE* II, 101.
99 *RE* II, 104.
100 *TWWG*, 69.
101 *TWWG*, 68-69.

II.2 First commandment: Relationship to the true God

If true religion is about serving God, idolatry is about not serving God.[102] Consequently, after discussing different forms of idolatry, Bavinck describes what is ordered in the first commandment. This is done by indicating two things related to what was presented in chapter two about Bavinck's understanding of subjective religion: i) the true God and ii) the proper relationship to him. In other words, how the objective principle—God—is the ground for piety or subjective religion.[103]

In *RE*, what must be considered in the first place is the doctrine of the Trinity. In his words, 'First, the true, living God whom we must serve is not only Father, but the Triune God. If not triune, then he is not the complete, true God'.[104] Only when the Triune God is considered as the object of man's religion, Bavinck gives a list of how this relationship 'is expressed by knowing, believing, trusting, relying, hoping, fearing, confessing', and so forth.[105] Essentially, these are not 'tautological terms but a series of subtle distinctions and nuances of that one great relationship that we must have with God' that may be reduced to three, namely, faith, hope and love.[106] These will now come into focus.

II.2.1 Faith and Knowledge

While this point occupies almost three pages in *Reformed Ethics*, the place of faith fills a prominent place in Bavinck's published material. Significantly, the *RE*'s elements of faith are further developed in *Magnalia Dei*, *Guidebook for Instruction in Christian Religion* (*GICR*), *The Christian Faith* and *The Certainty of Faith*. These elements are knowledge (*kennen*) and trust (*vertruowen*), which will be explained by using the aforementioned publications.

The idea that the highest good for man is God, and God alone, is found at the beginning of the first two chapters of *MG* and in the first chapter of *Guidebook for Instruction in the Christian Religion* (*GICR*), where *MD*'s second chapter and *GICR*'s are explicitly related to the 'knowledge of God' (*de kennis Gods*). Notably, the knowledge of God presented in *RE* is not about the historical knowledge (*historisch weten*) of God that precedes faith, but the knowledge (*kennen*) that follows faith, and that is eternal life as Bavinck also indicated in *Kennis en leven*. This aspect is explained both in *MG* and *GICR*.

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[102] *RE* II, 126.
[103] See also the section about the *eere Gods* in the previous chapter.
[104] *RE* II, 145.
[105] RE II, 145.
[106] *RE* II, 145.

Remarkably, in *MG,* Bavinck foregrounds two key moments, the beginning and end of redemptive history, or creation and eternity. On the one hand, God created man to know him (*kennen*), love him and live with him in eternal blessedness (*zaligheid*). On the other hand, the inhabitants of the new Jerusalem 'shall see God face to face and shall have His name upon their foreheads'.[107] This is also indicated in *GICR*, where people cannot wholly eradicate and destroy their divine origin and divine relationship because of the *imago Dei*. Even after the fall, the 'small traces' of the attributes of knowledge, righteousness and holiness remind him about his 'heavenly destination'.[108] In this way, for Bavinck, there is a connection between knowing God and heaven's reality, as shown in the previous chapter. This can also be seen in *Calvin and Common Grace* (1909), where Bavinck's neo-Calvinist project is rooted in the pre-eminence of fellowship with God above everything:

> Whatever material or ideal possessions the world may offer, all these taken together cannot outweigh or even be compared with this greatest of all treasures, communion with God; and hence, in case of conflict with this, they are to be unconditionally sacrificed. "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee"[109]

In what do the knowledge of God and the knowledge of everything else differ? In *MD* and *GICR*, Bavinck mentions four things: the origin, object, essence and effect/fruit of each. The knowledge of God differs in its origin because it is completely indebted to Christ. All other knowledge is acquired through research and human effort, while the knowledge of God is given through Christ. Therefore, orthodox Christology is essential for knowing God because the one who knows and reveals God the Father, is at the same time true God. Thus, Christ 'alone knew the Father, was with God in the beginning, lay in His bosom. And saw Him face to face',[110] and at the same time, Christ 'is God expressed and God given. He is God revealing Himself and God sharing Himself'.[111] Importantly, Bavinck's Christology, as related to the *kennis* of God, has a covenantal dimension. The revelation of God has the 'one, great, comprehensive promise of the covenant of grace: I will be a God

[107] *TWWG*, 8.
[108] Bavinck, *Guidebook*, 13.
[109] Bavinck, "Calvin and Common Grace", 2.
[110] *TWWG*, 10-11.
[111] *TWWG*, 8.

unto thee, and ye shall be my people. And as its mid-point and its hight-point this revelation has its Immanuel, God-with-us'.[112]

The second point of difference is related to the *object* of this knowledge: God himself. While creation reveals God's power and divinity, this knowledge is 'limited and insufficient for man'.[113] However, because Christ 'as seen the Father and declared Him', we are able to know God through his mercy and grace, understanding that 'at His cross the full content of the faith of the Old Testament is unfolded'. In other words, this is knowledge based on the gospel, where we know and love God because God knew and loved us first. Significantly, we acquire this knowledge by 'seeing the glory of Christ in the mirror of His word'.[114]

Regarding the essence of this knowledge, Bavinck differentiates between *weten* and *kennen*. The first is about 'mere information,' and the second, 'real knowing'[115]; knowing through 'personal contemplation' (*eigen aanschouwing*).[116] Thus, *weten* is only head-knowledge, where in *kennen*, there is a personal involvement of the heart. Therefore, knowing God involves experiential knowledge based on the person of Christ. Again, the objective element is the ground for this subjective and experiential knowledge, where 'we have seen [God] in the person of Christ…we have encountered Him on our life's way, and that in the experience of our soul we have come to know His virtues, His righteousness and holiness, His compassion and His grace'. For Bavinck, this is why this knowledge has the name 'the knowledge of faith'.[117] Finally, the fruit or effect of this knowledge is eternal life that begins here on earth and is perfected in heaven. Therefore, knowing God 'in the face of Christ' brings 'eternal life, imperturbable joy, and heavenly blessedness'.[118]

In sum, Bavinck noted, knowing God reflects the chief end of man according to what Calvin said in the Geneva Catechism—'to know God by whom he was created'—and what is expressed in the 'brief and rich reply' of the Westminster Catechism: to glorify God and

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[112] *TWWG*, 8.
[113] Bavinck, *Guidebook*, 3 and *TWWG*, 11-12.
[114] *TWWG*, 12.
[115] *TWWG*, 12-13.
[116] Bavinck, *Guidebook*, 15. Modified translation. For Bavinck *kennen* and *weten* are different senses of knowing. The first indicates a more immediate, subjective and personal knowledge, where the seconds refers to a higher reflective order where it objectivises the thing known. Therefore, *weten* refers to an impersonal knowledge. In his *Guidebook*, Bavinck describes *weten* as the 'description by others of a person or thing' and *kennen*, 'the person or thing itself.' Therefore, a knowledge (*weten*) concerning God 'consists only in the intellectual acceptance of another's witness, never reaching the heart and therefore, granting no salvation nor peace, but rather makes judgment worse'. See Bavinck, *Guidebook,* 15-16.
[117] *TWWG*, 13.
[118] *TWWG*, 14. The English translation omits the word 'face'.

enjoy him forever.[119] So too, as part of faith in God, this description of the knowledge (*kennis*) of God reflects the relationship between faith and knowledge as *geloofskennis* here on earth as described in the previous chapter.[120]

II.2.2 **Trusting and hoping in God**.

According to this section of *RE*, the second element that faith involves is trusting in God. Bavinck defines it as a virtue generated by the Holy Spirit where we rest in God in everything and every moment.[121] Trusting occupies a key place in Bavinck's definition of faith. In *The Certainty of Faith*, he explains that for the Reformation, faith was not just an assent to the truths of historical information but rather a 'heartful trust (*vertrouwen des harten*) in the good news of salvation'.[122] Prominently, Bavinck inserted a new paragraph in the second edition (1903) where he relates together two aspects described in chapter two about his definition of religion and the relationship between the objective (revelation) and the subjective (the personal relation to God in faith) elements. In fact, Bavinck mentions that the reformers made *religie* out of both, i.e., revelation and faith.[123]

In the same book, Bavinck ties together some of the ideas that shape his understanding of piety or subjective religion, such as man's highest good, fellowship with God, faith and trusting. In his words, 'the Christian religion teaches us that the highest good for man is found in God alone, in fellowship with Him, in heavenly salvation. Faith is a thoroughly personal matter, a retying of the bonds that tie the soul to God, a renunciation of all creaturely things to place all one's trust in God, whether in life or death'.[124] Bavinck is clear about the place of certainty in his definition of faith. There is no doubt that for Bavinck, certainty is part of the very nature of faith, which itself '*is* certainty and as such excludes all doubt'.[125]

This certainty must be treated in an objective and subjective sense in the freedom experienced by the children of God. In his words, 'but the certainty of truth is not enough for a Christian. He also needs the certainty of salvation. He will only be able to rest and

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[119] *TWWG*, 15. *The Geneva Catechism*, question and answer 1. *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, question and answer 1.
[120] For the definition of knowledge as part of saving faith, see *RD* IV, 98-132.
[121] *RE* II, 147.
[122] Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, 63-4. Bavinck describes the difference between the Roman Catholic and Protestant definitions of faith regarding the absence or presence of the *fiducia* (trusting) element of faith. See *RD* IV, 108-12.
[123] Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, 63-4.
[124] Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, 63-4.
[125] Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, 85. Emphasis by Bavinck.

glory in the freedom of the children of God when his faith is certain not only of the object on which he depends but also of himself. These two kinds of certainty, easily distinguished, cannot be separated.'.[126] While faith excludes all doubts, in the Christian experience, it is often mixed with doubt; however, these doubts do not have their origin in the new man regenerated by God, but in the old man—an idea expressed in *MG* and *RE*.[127] Because its final ground is the word and promises of God, the Christian, through faith, enjoys that certainty when he rests in God's accomplished work for eternity. So too, because certainty is closely related to trusting as resting—because 'certainty is rest, peace, joy, bliss; there is rest and relaxation in truth'[128]—both are related to hope in God. In this way, the certainty of faith must first be a certainty of God's promises in the gospel, similar to Bavinck's *RE* definition of hope in God.

In *RE*, Bavinck describes hoping in God as a virtue related to the certainty of future soteriological blessings. Its object is God's promises and fulfilment. Particularly, *perseverance* is hope's fruit. The idea of 'certainty in perseverance' as remaining standing 'without doubt to anticipate the fulfilment of salvation', is also found in *RD* as something properly Reformed. According to Bavinck, and based on Calvin, Zwingli, de Moor and Vitringa, 'the Reformed alone, maintained this doctrine [i.e. the perseverance of the saints] and linked it with the assurance of faith'.[129]

In connection to this, and because perseverance is a gift of God, Bavinck ground it in a covenantal and trinitarian framework. This is described in *RD*, *MD* and *GICR*. The certainty of salvation is vital for pursuing 'sanctification, without which no one will see God'. So too, faith in the preservation of is the root of 'true godliness' (*ware godzaligheid*).[130]Significantly, perseverance's foundation lies in the unbreakable covenant of grace of the triune God. In fact, all doubts and uncertainties end when perseverance is regarded as the preservation of God before all human responsibility. Essentially, this preservation is presented in trinitarian and covenantal terms. Thus, the Scriptures gives 'a multitude of evidences' of this 'in the work of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, in connection with the covenant of grace and all its benefits'.[131]

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[126] Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, 84.
[127] *TWWG*, 492 and *RE* I, 413.
[128] *RD* I, 576.
[129] *RD* IV, 267.
[130] Bavinck, *Guidebook*, 160.
[131] *TWWG*, 486.

Even when believers fall into sin, there is no need to doubt God's grace, but Christians must strengthen themselves 'with the thought that we have an eternal covenant of grace with God. And it is in the way of the covenant that He causes us to walk through his word and Spirit'.[132] Finally, Bavinck finishes the *RD*'s chapter on sanctification and perseverance by highlighting the following ideas: the unbreakableness of the covenant of grace, the inscription of his law in the inmost being of believers, and knowing that 'faith is a firm ground, hope is an anchor…and love never ends'.[133] Having described Bavinck's understanding of faith and hope, we can turn to his comprehension of loving God.[134]

II.2.3 Loving God

The third commandment involved in the Christian's relationship with God is love for God. The idea that love follows faith is not only in *Reformed Ethics*, but also in his only published sermon. There, Bavinck states that 'love is the fruit: the ripe, glorious, precious fruit of faith'.[135] Importantly, this love for God has a rich Christological element because it is also a 'love for Christ, for Christ in both natures, in all his offices and states'.[136]

In connection with piety, and quoting from Polanus' *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae*, Bavinck mentions that this love includes '*fear* and *piety*' (*godsvrucht*),[137] something prominent in the Old and New Testaments. This notion and relationship between loving God and piety is also found in Bavinck's *Philosophy of Revelation*. There, he connects some of the aspects previously described that summarise the elements of *praxis pietatis*, such as knowledge of God, subjective religion, faith, *fiducia*, love, and piety. In his words, 'the word faith, which in Christendom expresses subjective religiosity…is at the same time *cognitio* and *fiducia* (knowledge and trust), and expresses the peculiarity of the Christian religion so well because this religion desires a knowledge (*kennis*) of God which is at the same time trust, love, piety (*vroomheid*)'.[138]

Because for Bavinck, there is one duty and one object of love, namely God, everything else must be loved in God and for God. That includes love for one's neighbour, or what is described in the following chapter under morality. However, prior to this, it is essential to

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132 *TWWG*, 488.
133 *RD* IV, 270.
134 For the relationship between knowledge (*cognitio, kennis*) and trust (*fiducia, vertrouwen*) see *RD* IV, 98-132. In sum, 'faith is knowledge (*kennis*) and trust (*vertrouwen*) both' in *TWWG*, 414. See also, *Guidebook*, 141-42.
135 Herman Bavinck, *On Preaching & Preachers*. Ed. and trans. James Eglinton. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers (2017), 80.
136 *RE II*, 153.
137 *RE II*, 153. Emphasis by Bavinck.
138 *PoR*, 179.

explain how the covenantal objective religion commands the worship of God according to the second and third commandments and thus, believers subjectively respond to them.

II. 3 The second and third commandments: true personal worship.

If the first commandment teaches about the true God, the second deals with the true religion (*ware godsdienst*), teaching how we 'must worship God, according to his will and command',[139] and the third is about private religion or worship.[140] Regarding the proper way to worship God, and if the use and veneration of images should be allowed or not, Bavinck explains that the main difference between Roman and Reformed churches lies in the question of who decides how God is to be worshipped.[141] For Roman Catholicism, 'the answer is Scripture and the church'.[142]

For Bavinck, the problem with this view is that humans decide the proper way of serving God in the narrow sense. In a broad sense, there is a service or worship to God (*dienst Gods*) when Christians obey laws created by parents and governments that do not oppose God's law. Furthermore, there is a broad sense of worship when churches stipulate regulations for the election of elders, the time of preaching, location, etc. However, religion or worship in the real or proper sense is only regulated by the word of God. In other words, what is prescribed in this commandment is that 'God must be worshipped and served in the way he himself has commanded—that is, only according to his Word'.[143] What if humans determine worship in the real sense? For Bavinck, this is impossible, because otherwise 'that would invalidate and destroy the very essence of true worship'.[144] So, what are the proper practices of true worship? This is what Bavinck discuss in the third commandment.

The commandment of not taking the Lord's name in vain is the ground for private religion. Because God does not reveal himself through images—and therefore, he does not want to be served through them—he has actually revealed himself in his name. In *RE*, Bavinck states that 'the name of God is God's revelation in a variety of relationships towards humanity'. Here, he refers to all God's names, such as El, Elohim, YHWH as God's proper name, including his 'full name of Father, Son, and Spirit'.

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[139] *RE II*, 154.
[140] *RE II*, 180.
[141] *RE II*, 173.
[142] *RE II*, 173.
[143] *RE* II, 174.
[144] *RE* II, 174.

In other words, and according to *RD*, names describe God in his relationship with creation (*Elohim*), in his transcendence (*Elyon*), in his unique relationship to Israel in making the power of nature subservient to the work of grace (*El Shaddai*), as the faithful God of grace (YHWH) and in the trinitarian name where God most abundantly revealed himself.[145] Therefore, what God forbids in this commandment is 'cursing, swearing falsely, unnecessary swearing, blasphemy, and any misuse of God's name'.[146]

But what is prescribed in this commandment? The right use of oaths, prayer/invocation and the confession of God's name. While Bavinck spends the rest of this section describing the history, the teaching of Scripture, and the essence and the use of oaths, he does not expand his ideas on prayer and confession. However, he does this in other sections of his works. Prominently, prayer is a practice of piety that can be considered a bridge that organically unites internal and external worship. This is because in *RD,* Bavinck inserts prayer (*gebed*) both in internal and external *cultus*. Thus, the analysis of Bavinck's description of prayer becomes indispensable to understanding the practice of piety.

II.3.1 Prayer

Prayer 'is the most intimate act of communion with God'. This is what Bavinck expressed in his foreword to Frans Kramer's book *Het Gebed* (Prayer).[147] While Bavinck did not publish any particular book or chapter related to prayer, the importance of this exercise can be noted in different places through his works and even in his personal life. Furthermore, in *RE*, prayer is the more extended practice described for restoring the Christian life.[148] In light of this, I will compare some of the elements described in *RE* with some published writings to describe the place of prayer in the worship of God.

In *RE*, Bavinck indicates that prayer is a duty. The same idea found is in his foreword to *Het Gebed*. In his definition, the elements present in or related to Bavinck's definition of religion—*dienst*, *plicht* and *gebod*—are also part of what prayer is. Prayer is 'in the first place a service of God, a duty imposed on us by Him, a commandment prescribed by Him to us'.[149] Interestingly, in both places, Bavinck changes the tone of his definition, that is, from

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[145] *RD* II, 137-47.
[146] *RE II*, 190.
[147] DO: 'de innigste gemeenschapsoefening met God'. Herman Bavinck, foreword in Frans Kramer, *Het gebed* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1905), 1-3.
[148] Bavinck, *RE I*, 466-82. The other means for restoration are spiritual meditation, reading the word of God, singing, solicitude, fasting, vigils and vows. Each of them covers one page approximately.
[149] DO: 'maar het is in de eerste plaats een dienst Gods, een plicht door Hem ons opgelegd, een gebod, door Hem ons voorgeschreven'. Bavinck, *Gebed*.

duty to *privilege*. In *RE*, he states that 'prayer is much more a privilege than it is a duty…is not a command but a promise, blessing, benefit'.[150] In *Het Gebed*, 'prayer is in the first place an honour and service of God, but therefore, it is also a need, an honour, a privilege of man'.[151]

This view of prayer as duty and privilege reflects Bavinck's description of objective and subjective covenantal religion. That is, on the one hand, an objective element—indicated in God's word—that teaches how to pray, an aspect closely connected with true piety by obedience: '[God] has told us how you shall serve and honour him in prayer. So, there are rules for [prayer]…and true, real piety first comes out in obedience'.[152] On the other hand, a subjective and experiential element of the Christian life is found in the Reformed tradition. When prayer is seen through the lens of gratitude, as seen in the Heidelberg Catechism, it takes on a better meaning; it is not a burden but a pleasure. In other words, for the Christian, prayer is 'the breath of his life, the pulse of his spiritual existence, the most intimate exercise of communion with God; his life becomes a prayer without ceasing'.[153]

In prayer, there is the object and subject of that exercise and privilege. On the one hand, the object is the Triune God. While we can ask each person for certain gifts, it is the Father who is addressed in prayer in the name of the Son, with the Holy Spirit praying through and in us.[154] On the other hand, humans are the subject of prayer. Indeed, this marks a difference between humans and animals. Humans pray, but animals do not. This is indicated both in *RE* and in the foreword for the book about prayer. In fact, while an animal 'does not pray…a man cannot live without prayer'.[155] The reason for this is the same both in *RE* and *Het Gebed*: man is not only dependent on God, but also aware of this dependence.[156] In sum, prayer helps Bavinck make a double distinction; between Creator and creature, and between creatures that do and do not acknowledge their dependence on God.

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150 Bavinck, *RE I*, 468.
151 DO: 'Het gebed is in de eerste plaats een eeren en dienen van God, maar daarom is het ook eene behoefte, eene eere, een voorrecht van den mensch.' Bavinck, *Gebed*.
152 DO: 'Hij heeft ons gezegd, hoe jij in het gebed Hem dienen en eeren zullen. Er bestaan dus regelen voor.... En de ware, echte vroomheid komt allereerst in gehoorzaamheid uit.' Bavinck, *Gebed*.
153 DO: 'Het gebed is de ademtocht van zijn leven, de polsslag van zijn geestelijk bestaan, de innigste gemeenschapsoefening met God; zijn leven wordt een bidden zonder ophouden'. Bavinck, *Gebed*.
154 Bavinck, *RE I*, 475-78.
155 DO: 'Een dier bidt niet, maar een mensch kan niet leven zonder gebed'. Bavinck, *Gebed*. See also *RE I*, 472.
156 *RE I*, 472.

The idea that humans can pray is closely related to religion or the service of God. Actually, from the beginning of humanity, prayer has been associated with *cultus*. In *Magnalia Dei*, Bavinck indicates that while we found descriptions of sacrifices but not of prayers in the firsts chapter of Genesis, prayers without doubt 'constituted a part of the service from the beginning, for without prayer no service of God is conceivable. Indeed, the offer of the sacrifice is itself an embodied prayer and is always and everywhere accompanied by prayer'.[157] Importantly, prayers were part of the individual life and communal life, as an expression of a 'unified group'.[158]

Historically, prayer was even crucial for the Reformation. Although for Zwingli and Calvin, the Reformation's point of departure was the experience of sin and grace, guilt and reconciliation, the movement did not stop in that experience. But from that, they saw that God was sovereign both in the works of creation and re-creation. In order to experience a holistic reformation for the glory of God, the word of God and prayer played a vital role for the Reformers. According to Bavinck, 'the whole world lay open to them, so to speak, not in order to be left to its own devices but to be penetrated and hallowed by the word of God and prayer'.[159] This holistic account of sanctification is due to Bavinck's doctrine of creation, where nothing is unclean of itself. Therefore nothing should be refused if it is received with thanksgiving, 'for it is sanctified through the word of God and through prayer'.[160]

In this sense, prayer is a means of sanctification. However, can prayer be considered a means of grace? In a broad term, yes, but in a narrow sense, prayer is not a means of grace. In *RD*, Bavinck specifies that the term 'means of grace' can be stretched to include the benefits of the covenant of grace, where prayer is one such benefits. However, it is not 'advisable' to include it in the actual meaning of means of grace because, as with the church, they do not impart grace. 'This only occurs,' he notes, 'through the Word and sacraments'. While the church administrates the Word and sacraments, prayer has to be considered a fruit rather than a means of grace itself.[161]

Importantly, prayer as a means of sanctification significantly impacts holding to and developing Christian orthodoxy. For example, the church fathers remained faithful to the

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[157] *TWWG*, 30-1.
[158] *TWWG*, 30-1.
[159] *TWWG*, 109.
[160] *TWWG*, 480. This idea is also found in *The Sacrifice of Praise*, 57.
[161] *RD IV*, 447.

teaching of the apostles through their 'piety' (*godsvrucht*) and power of thought in a struggle that required 'much prayer'. Bavinck identified old heresies in contemporaneous Dutch movements: Arianism in the Groningen Theology, and Sabellianism in the Modern (Leiden) Theology.[162] In light of this, it is vital to ask how Bavinck held to Reformed orthodoxy in his period as a student in Leiden. Part of the answer is found in faith and prayer.

In the same letter in which Bavinck refers to the narrow-mindedness and pettiness that for some people is regarded as piety (*vroomheid*), he also mentions 'faith and prayer' as means to overcome 'the secret enmity that the sinful heart feels against the Holy One'. This secret enmity of the sinful heart is expressed in an 'unspoken desire that Scripture might not be true, that the newer criticism be right'.[163] Willem J. de Wit had already rightly identified faith and prayer to overcome this sinful desire. Notably, he calls to proceed with an attitude of reverence to study the private area of Bavinck's life of prayer.[164] Having also considered this, still, there are some of de Wit's conclusions that should be nuanced.

In the analysis of some Bavinck's letters, his foreword to *Het Gebed*, and the manuscript 'De mensch, Gods evenbeeld,' de Wit concludes the following points that should be re-interpreted according to the first sources. First, 'Bavinck's piety is characterised by deep loyalty more than by confidential conversation'. Second, 'prayer as the free expression of one's doubts and needs, without worrying whether this is according to the rules, does not seem to have been very important to him'. And finally, 'intensive preparation in prayer seems to have been an exception rather than a rule for Bavinck'.[165]

The first two arguments are closely connected in de Wit's argument according to his reading of Bavinck's foreword to *Het Gebed*. Even when Bavinck expresses the view that prayer is the 'breath of the Christian life', the phrase 'the Christian does not seek himself but the honour of his Father' is de Wit's argument to support his view that Bavinck's piety is 'characterised by deep loyalty more than by confidential conversation'.[166]

However, this should not be the case when interpreting Bavinck's view of prayer. Instead, Bavinck's subjective experiential expressions of prayer as 'breath of life, the pulse of spiritual existence, the most intimate exercise in communion with God' are also connected

162 *TWWG*, 30-1.
163 de Wit, *On the way to the living God*, 16.
164 de Wit, *On the way to the living God*, 31.
165 de Wit, *On the way to the living God*, 33.
166 de Wit, *On the way to the living God*, 33.

to the objective principle of Reformed piety indicated in chapter two: the honour or glory of God. In other words, both the objective ground and the subjective practice of prayer are part of Bavinck's definition of prayer. Thus, prayer *is* an expression of a living fellowship with God that *also*—because of its objective principle—*seeks* not man's honour but God's glory. Therefore, prayers recorded in his diary during his period in Leiden—such as 'O God, protect me in Leiden!' or 'O God, let the wish to serve you be in my case a true one', and 'O God! Let me fight for your honor!'[167]—express loyalty to God (as de Wit argues) *by* a confidential tone or conversation.

The other conclusion that must be re-interpreted, in de Wit's view, is the importance of the free expressions of 'doubts and needs without worrying whether this is according to the rules'. First, we must distinguish between doubts and needs. When we pray for spiritual needs (forgiveness, faith, sanctification), it must be done unconditionally, that is, not adding qualifications such as 'if it is your will and according to your counsel'. Actually, this reflects doubts for Bavinck because it was a prayer not made in faith. In other words, praying for those benefits without which there is no salvation may and 'must be asked of God for ourselves absolutely, without conditions'.[168] Conversely, because physical needs are not absolutely necessary for us, 'they should always be accompanied with conditions'.[169] In this way, we can unconditionally and freely pray for spiritual needs required for salvation, while praying for physical needs such as prolonging life should be done under conditions that Bavinck did not describe in great detail. However, this can be further developed in some letters.

The 'Letters to a Dying Student,' show us a Bavinck who actually expresses his concerns, needs and comfort in the physical recovery of his student. He wrote, 'I pray and beg that [God] would once more grant this'. What is Bavinck praying for? 'I also sincerely hope that the Lord would still lengthen your days and give back your strength and once again use you as a worker in his vineyard'.[170] In the same letter, Bavinck manifests his concerns, 'sometimes I fear that the Lord's path can be very different from that for which we would wish'. Strikingly, Bavinck finishes this letter by saying that he hopes to pray for him

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[167] *BCB*, 82-3, 90.
[168] *RE I*, 478.
[169] *RE I*, 478.
[170] Translated by James Eglinton, "Letters to a Dying Student: Bavinck's Letters to Johan van Haselen" in *TBR 4* (2013), 94-102.

together with the congregation, asserting that 'how glorious is it that our prayers are united in heaven above'.

In a second letter, Bavinck expresses both his desires for his student's recovery and gladness in the harmony that exists between the student's will and God's will: 'Sometimes I still have a quiet hope that you shall become better. I pray to God for this, that He would restore you fully to your parents and family and would give you back to us all. But I was nonetheless made glad that you are at one with God's will, whatever that may be'. In a third letter, Bavinck continues praying for the student's recovery: 'And I pray to Him that He will lead you through it, strengthen and restore you'. In a final letter, and knowing that his student was not improving, Bavinck manifests his own internal and spiritual conflicts, the consideration of heaven, to then rest finally in God's will:

> When I hear how you are, I sometimes receive courage, but then again all hope fails me… Often I feel sorry for you: life is so attractive, death seems so burdensome. But sometimes, momentarily, if I consider the glory of being with Jesus and understand this life in its futility and idleness, on these occasions I envy you and others called out of the fight early by the Lord… Then dying is no longer dying, and to die young even becomes a privilege. Yes, I ask it of the Lord that He might still restore you and renew your strength and health. But a Christian learns to pray after his Savior: Your will, O Father, be done.[171]

In these letters, it is possible to see how Bavinck freely expresses his desires. But what about the intensive preparation in prayer as an exception for Bavinck? This conclusion is made upon the veracity of a 'hagiographic story' of a chairman of the school board that comes to Bavinck's house and hears him praying. The story tells:

> The housekeeper of the pastor took me into the front room. The pastor would be ready in a minute, I just had to wait. I sat down, but immediately heard somebody speaking in the next room. . . . I heard Bavinck praying. Praying, begging, wrestling for wisdom, for a blessing on the work that he was about to do. I stood as if pinned to the ground and was surprised . . . that he felt so little and incapable to fulfill this work that he had to put pressure on the throne of grace. But that

[171] Bavinck, "Letters to a Dying Student".

> evening I was surprised for a second time: now about the mighty, awesome word that the pastor laid on the consciences of the hearers. It was the witness of all: we have never heard Bavinck like this![172]

From here, de Wit concludes that 'such intensive preparation in prayer seems to have been an exception rather than a rule for Bavinck'.[173] However, de Wit does not explain what 'intensive preparation in prayer' means. If the words 'praying, begging, wrestling for wisdom, for a blessing on the work that he was about to do' means *fervency* in prayer, then de Wit's interpretation must be revised.

As we saw before, Bavinck's doctrine of certainty occupies a prominent place in his thought. And regarding piety and prayer, this is closely connected to fervent prayers. In his words, 'this certainty of perseverance…is so far from exciting believers a spirit of pride…that on the contrary it is the real source of humility…true piety…*fervent prayers*…and of solid rejoicing in God'.[174] The same idea is expressed in Bavinck's *Guidebook*: 'faith in the preservation of God…is a root of true humility…true godliness…ardent prayers'.[175] If 'intensive preparation in prayer' is taken literally, then de Wit's interpretation is also inaccurate. In fact, in *RE*, Bavinck argues for a general preparation that considers the majesty of God to promote reverence and trust in prayer. Leaning on Voetius's book on the practice of piety, Bavinck indicates that sometimes a more specific preparation is required. This preparation includes 'awakening a feeling of our smallness…thinking through the content and form of the prayer, quickening the impression of God's presence by asking for the Spirit of prayer in advance'.[176]

In sum, Bavinck's understanding of prayer reflects an agreement between *Reformed Ethics* and some of his unpublished material, including personal letters. The relationship between prayer and spiritual life is not only mentioned in the foreword to *Het Gebed* but also in *Reformed Ethics*. In the first, he refers to prayer as 'the pulse of his spiritual existence'. In *RE*, prayer is 'the test and thermometer of our spiritual life, its pulse, and the best medication for it'.[177]

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[172] Quoted in de Wit, *On the way to the living God*, 32.
[173] de Wit, *On the way to the living God*, 32.
[174] *TWWG*, 488. Emphasis mine.
[175] Bavinck, *Guidebook*, 160.
[176] *RE* I, 479.
[177] *RE* I, 482. Remarkably, this idea is also reflected in Jan Bavinck and Herman's nephew, the reverend C.B. Bavinck (brother of Johan H. Bavinck (1895-1964). The first expresses that 'prayer is the pulse of the spiritual life' (DO: 'het gebed is de polsslag van het geestelijk leven), see Bavinck, *De Heidelbergsche Catechismus*. Deel II, 844. Coenraad Bernardus Bavinck (1907-1989) says, 'prayer has been called the indicator of our spiritual life.'

If the word of God regulates both religion and prayer, and through the word and prayer, the Reformers developed their holistic Reformation, what was the place of preaching the word in Bavinck's description of *cultus*? To answer this, it is necessary to describe the importance of the preaching sermon according to what is indicated in the fourth commandment as communal worship.

II. 4 Fourth Commandment: proper communal worship

At this point, Bavinck develops a logical sequence of the first four commandments pointing to the true God, true religion and private religion. Consequently, the fourth commandment deals with the communal exercise of true religion through the sanctification of the Sabbath. After discussing the scriptural teaching of the Sabbath, the Sunday observance in Church history, Reformed debates about the keeping of the Sunday and the feasts days in different Christian traditions, Bavinck's conclusions about the Sunday observance lean primarily on Francis Turretin.[178] In this way, the Sabbath was instituted at creation and at the time of the law, the seventh day was a mark of the covenant between YHWH and Israel forever, becoming the foundation of all worship.

Significantly, and against the Anabaptists and Cocceius, who stated that the fourth commandment is entirely ceremonial, Bavinck argues that it is partly ceremonial and mainly moral.[179] On the one hand, ceremonial elements have passed, such as the specific day, moving from the seventh to the first day according to the New Testament, and also have passed the strict observance of that day. On the other hand, there are moral and permanent elements in this commandment, such as worshipping God at set times in the community. The permanent element involves a negative and positive aspects; abstention from ordinary works and 'attending church services, studying God's word, using the sacraments, and so forth'.[180] While this communal worship consists of consecration and dedication to God in 'congregational assemblies, the reading of God's Word, using the sacraments, singing, and gathering and presenting alms',[181] there is a foundational element both for piety and the practice of piety in communal worship: the Word of God.

In chapter two, I argued that Christian piety is a regenerated *habitus* or disposition that passes into practices under the impact of objective religion. However, it is critical to ask

(DO: 'Het gebed is wel eens genoemd de graadmeter van ons geestelijk leven'), see C.B. Bavinck, *Kwijnend en bloeiend geloofsleven* (Amsterdam: S.J.P. Bakker, n.d.), 100.
[178] *RE II*, 218-74. Regarding Bavinck's leaning on Turretin, see *RE II*, 269-72.
[179] *RE II*, 271.
[180] *RE II*, 272.
[181] *RE II*, 274.

how this piety is regenerated and under which ordinary circumstances this occurs. The answer is found in what Reformed churches highlight as an essential element of public worship: the preaching of the word of God.

Thus, in ordinary contexts, piety is regenerated and nurtured by the Holy Spirit by using the preached word in a covenantal exercise of communal worship. Therefore, and because 'all the ministrations and offices which Christ instituted into His church are centered in the Word',[182] I will focus on the main means of grace that brings regeneration and development of *praxis pietatis* in the context of public worship: the word of God. This will be done by describing the word itself, the work of the Holy Spirit together with the word and finally, the anointed preaching of the word in public worship.

II.4.1 The word of God in public worship

While some studies have focused on some areas of Bavinck's understanding of Scripture,[183] Eglinton's description of the organic motif and Scripture is helpful in uniting and further developing the proper understanding of the word of God in public worship. As Eglinton has identified, Christ is 'the organic centre of all revelation', and related to the written word—who points out to the incarnate word—who is not only 'God-breathed' when it was written, but also by the work of the Holy Spirit is 'God-breathing'.[184] This does not mean adding new material to the Scripture but actually applying and assimilating the word into the consciousness and heart of the believer.

Therefore, Christological and pneumatological elements are essential when considering the word of God in the context of public worship and the harmony between God's will and the believer's will. In other words, in the context of public worship, it is essential to consider Christ as the one who objectively acquires and distributes the benefits of salvation and the Holy Spirit as the one who subjectively applies them.

Because Christ is the organic centre of all God's revelation, and the Scripture is 'an organic principle, the seed, the root, out of which the plant of dogmatics grows',[185] the relevance of God's word is also highlighted in understanding the marks of the Church. While some theologians refer to two or three marks of the Church, Bavinck agrees with Turretin and

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[182] *TWWG*, 521.
[183] See for example van den Belt, *The Authority of Scripture in Reformed Theology*. See also Bruce Pass, "Upholding Sola Scriptura Today: Some Unturned Stones in Herman Bavinck's Doctrine of Inspiration" in *IJST* 20:4 (2018), 517-36.
[184] Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 181.
[185] Bavinck, 'Confessie en Dogmatiek', cited in Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 159.

van Mastricht that actually, in substance, there is only one mark, 'the one and the same Word, which is administered and confessed in preaching, confession, sacraments, etc.' In this way, 'the Word is truly the soul of the church. All ministry in the church is a ministry of the Word'.[186] Thus, the church accepts, preserves, confess it, and when it is rightly preached, the sacraments are purely administrated.

The church's power to teach this word has Christological roots. It is Christ, through his prophetic office, who teaches by his word and Spirit. For this, he uses human beings. In general terms, Christ is actively teaching through parents at home, teachers at school, elders in visiting people and through all believers. However, Christ teaches particularly and officially in the context of public worship by the administration of the word by the minister of the word. This power to teach (*potestas docendi*) is understood differently from Roman Catholicism, which has made 'the Word subordinate to the sacrament, the homilete to the liturgist, preaching (*prediking*) to worship (*cultus*)'.[187] The difference is better understood in the extremes taken by certain groups in how the benefits of Christ are communicated to believers. While mysticisms reject the means for this, Roman Catholicism binds grace to the means; in this way, the church is the perfect means of grace. However, the relationship between the means of grace—specifically the Scripture—and the church is different in Protestantism. The Reformation put the Scripture as the foundation of the church and sacraments, and 'elevated Scripture high above the church. Not the church but Scripture, the Word of God, became the means of grace par excellence'.[188]

It is essential to distinguish between the different meanings attributed to the word of God. For example, the word of God could mean the power of God by which he created and sustains creation, or also the second person of the Trinity.[189] However, in this case, it is referred to as the written covenantal revelation. Thus, the word of God is 'the promulgation of the covenant of works and the covenant of grace', having universal implications. In the context of believers, this word comes to people in many ways. Nevertheless, in its strict use as 'the first and most important means of grace…the word of God comes up for discussion insofar as it is publicly preached by the minister. The emphasis then falls on the Word as *proclaimed* in God's name'.[190]

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[186] *RD* IV, 312.
[187] *RD* IV, 418.
[188] *RD* IV, 444.
[189] RD I, 401-2 and RD IV, 448-49.
[190] *RD* IV, 448-9. Emphasis by Bavinck.

Significantly, when the word of God is seen in its covenantal unity, both the law and the gospel, the whole counsel of God is the content of preaching. Therefore, 'the law must always be proclaimed in the church in the context of the gospel'.[191] Consequently, even when the gospel objectively describes the covenantal benefits acquired by Christ,[192] they must be subjectively applied. In other words, 'this objective union with Christ is not enough; it must also be brought about subjectively…how does this subjective application of the benefits of the covenant begin?'.[193] For this application, the word itself is not enough. According to Bavinck and the Reformed tradition, the pneumatological element is indispensable to the proper understanding of the application of the benefits of the covenant.

II.4.2 The Spirit of God and the word of God in public worship

Against the nomistic (Pelagianism, and modern rationalism) and antinomian (Anabaptism) schools, which do not depend on the Holy Spirit or the word of God, respectively, Bavinck wrote that,

> The Reformers jointly maintained that the Word alone is insufficient to bring people to faith and repentance, that the Holy Spirit can but usually does not work without the Word, and that Word and Spirit, therefore, work in conjunction to apply the salvation of Christ to human beings.[194]

At the same time, the Reformed tradition held a different view from the Lutherans about the relationship between the word and the Spirit. For the latter, the Holy Spirit works *through* the word (*per verbum*), whereas the Reformed tradition described it as *with* the word (*cum verbo*). The difference lies in the ordinary and extraordinary way of human conversion by God. Lutherans mainly acknowledge the ordinary way, while the Reformed both. In Reformed theology, God's freedom and omnipotence cannot be restricted. Thus, God 'could also glorify his grace in the hearts of sinners apart from external means'.[195] But ordinarily, the word alone is insufficient for regeneration.; it must be accompanied by an internal grace operated by the Holy Spirit. In this way, the regeneration of the heart is an *immediate* work of the Holy Spirit. That means that 'the grace of the Holy Spirit was not confined to the Word, nor did it operate merely through the Word, but with and alongside

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191 *RD* IV, 453-55.
192 *RD* IV, 443.
193 Bavinck, *Calling and Regeneration*, 16.
194 *RD* IV, 457.
195 *RD* IV, 445.

the Word'. However, it is important to keep in mind this immediate grace does not imply the exclusion of the word of God in connection with regeneration.[196]

The primacy of the Holy Spirit in connection to the word leads to the supremacy of Christ and his benefits. So, 'the Spirit occupies the first place here because He is the person acting as He makes use of the Word as His instrument and with that Word stands in service to the Son of God'.[197] In this manner, the Spirit sustains and makes the word of God active to be applied in the heart in a particular context. Therefore, apart from exceptional cases where the Holy Spirit works in pagans, he regenerates those who live in a covenantal context, where parents and children are considered in public worship. Bavinck is emphatic on this, 'as a rule he effects regeneration only in those who live under the administration of the covenant…the Holy Spirit only works in places where the covenant of grace, with the administration of the Word and sacraments, has expended itself'.[198]

The Christological, pneumatological and covenantal elements involved in regeneration by the word of God are described in detail in his book *Calling and Regeneration*. Not only the necessity of the Holy Spirit (*contra* the isolation of Scripture in regeneration) is repeated here and there, but the idea of subjective covenantal application of the benefits of Christ—and communion with his person—is highlighted in different places. For Bavinck, the Reformed 'held firmly to the connection between Word and Spirit, between calling and regeneration. They were able to do that by means of their doctrine of the covenant of grace'.[199] In other words, the work of the Spirit with the word to apply the objective benefits of Christ subjectively is better assumed through covenant theology.

Not only the beginning of the spiritual life is considered here through the regeneration of man's *habitus*, but also the maturation of this life through God's word in communion with God. Again, the idea of religion as a deep, inward and tender fellowship with God in the context of the covenant of grace takes place. By echoing Augustine, Bavinck indicates that 'the human heart has been created for God and does not rest until finds rest in His Father-heart'. In this sense, a deist god will never satisfy the human heart. As such, the Augustinian thought finds its realisation and security in pneumatological and covenantal expressions. Thus, in the doctrine of God's internal and invincible grace, 'we confess that

[196] Bavinck, *Calling and Regeneration*, 34.
[197] Bavinck, *Calling and Regeneration*, 40.
[198] *RD* IV, 460.
[199] Bavinck, *Calling and Regeneration*, 74.

God Himself with His Spirit comes to make His dwelling in us, and places us within a covenant fellowship which knows no abandonment or alteration'.[200]

Why the emphasis on covenant? Because through this Reformed teaching, Bavinck can organically systematise the objective and subjective elements that shape the relationship between God and his people. With this framework, the objective principle of *Gereformeerde vroomheid*—the glory of God—is always put in the front. Thus, 'in that covenant, God is the first and the last, the beginning and the end'.[201]

In the same way, the continuity of God's relationship with parents and their children is maintained in a covenant that continues from generation to generation. At the same time, the covenant precedes the church as an institution, as an organism, and even precedes faith. With this, faith is not seen as a condition *unto* the covenant, but a condition *within* the covenant. Even more, the covenant precedes the operation of the Holy Spirit, Christ's incarnation and atonement in time to be rooted in eternity as a covenant between the Father and the Son. Therefore, 'the covenant of grace, existing from eternity to eternity, functions within history as the instrumentality of all redemption, the route along which God communicates all of His gracious benefits to man'.[202]

In summary, where the word of God is, God and his Spirit are at work.[203] Consequently, what is an indispensable element of the administration of the word in the congregation? For Bavinck the answer is 'the preaching unto faith and conversion'.[204] Therefore, it is necessary to analyse Bavinck's understanding of the preaching of the word in order to have a further picture of the practice of piety in communal worship.

II.4.3 Spirit-filled preaching of the word in public worship

As we have seen, the word and the Spirit are vital in the regeneration and the nurture of spiritual life. The path where this ordinary occurs is in the covenant of grace. Thus, the covenant is both objectively present in eternity by the *pactum salutis* and in time by the person and work of Christ, and subjectively through the Holy Spirit's impartation of the covenantal benefits. In fact, this is how Bavinck finishes his book *Calling and Regeneration*: 'God imparts all these benefits along the pathway of the covenant, in the context of the

[200] Bavinck, *Calling and Regeneration*, 26.
[201] Bavinck, *Calling and Regeneration*, 76.
[202] Bavinck, *Calling and Regeneration*, 77.
[203] Bavinck, *Calling and Regeneration*, 78.
[204] Bavinck, *Calling and Regeneration*, 92.

administration of the means of grace, which He has ordained…along the path of the covenant God executes the decree of His eternal election'.[205]

But to understand this conclusion, we should consider one of the reasons for writing this book. It was not only concerning theological differences between two groups, such as supra- or infralapsarianism, justification in eternity and presumptive regeneration as the ground for infant baptism (instead of the covenant), but how these theological perspectives also affected the preaching of the word.

At the beginning of the book, Bavinck detects some reservations of 'very serious nature' among believers with a 'pious mind' (*godvruchtig gemoed*). This complaining refers to preaching that suggests no unregenerate people in the church. In this case, 'ministers are no longer preaching discriminatingly'. Therefore, preachers are not emphasising the necessity of being born again or preaching to the conscience in order to expose, for example, false security. In Bavinck's words:

> sermons are no longer being preached with an urgency that communicates the message that anyone who is not regenerated by water and Spirit will not see the kingdom of God. Preaching no longer lays it upon the listener's heart that it will profit nothing though we have the name of Christian and are physically alive, if we are still dead in sins and trespasses.[206]

Bavinck detects a similar diagnosis in some American preaching with its consequences for the Christian life: the contrast of sin and grace is weakened, and the Holy Spirit's work—which includes regeneration—did not have a primary position because the preaching was primarily moralistic.[207]

The priority of the preached word on the Lord's Day is critical for a holistic comprehension of the Christian life. Considering that the church's gatherings must remain 'the center point of the religious life, the source of spiritual power, the inspiration for the work everyone is called to do…each day', the preaching of the word acquires a significant meaning for all areas of life. Therefore, neither a printed nor spoken word from elsewhere can be compared to the spoken word in the gatherings of the congregation. Why is this? Because for Bavinck, it is in Sunday's communal worship that we find some of the

[205] Bavinck, *Calling and Regeneration*, 166-67.
[206] Bavinck, *Calling and Regeneration*, 5.
[207] Bavinck, *Preaching and Preachers*, 85.

elements related to subjective religion discussed up to this point, i.e., Christological-pneumatological and covenantal piety. In the word spoken, 'here alone do we find the ministry of God's word and the sealing of his covenant. Here, Christ himself lives in our midst and works by his Spirit. Here we taste the communion of saints, the forgiving of sins, and the principle of eternal life'. In this way, the keeping of the Sabbath leads Bavinck to say that 'the Sabbath is the best of days; no other day is like it'.[208] Therefore, Bavinck calls ministers not to neglect their gifts entrusted by God as preachers of the word. This is expressed in the foreword to *Eloquence* (1901), a treatise that, in some places, exposes the affective heart of the preacher in his experiential preaching.

Because ministers have been entrusted with greater power than world leaders—by being servants of the word—they must develop the gift and art of speaking well, that is, eloquence. Because of this, eloquence is closely connected with experiential preaching, that is, soul-holistic preaching of the word. This is seen in his definition of eloquence as the 'gift developed by the art, by the power of the word to convince the mind, touching the conscience and persuasively affecting the will of the people'.[209] Three elements are involved here: argument, description and persuasion. Notably, the soul-holistic aspect flows from the *totus* preacher to the *totus* hearer. In Bavinck's words, 'the word that must go out in order to be eloquent must come from the whole person…it must also be directed to the whole person, to understanding, heart and will'.[210]

This sense of eloquence enables preachers to develop their gifts in the aforementioned three areas: intellect, affections and will. Regarding the first, Bavinck regards empty sentences, pompous voices and flattering terms as signs of a lack of sound content and real study. The medicine for the sense of fantasy of some allegorical meanings of Scripture is 'hard study, solid knowledge and real science'. So, the study must lead preachers to declare in God's name according to his word. The result is the conviction regarding the divinity of the word that without it, the preaching 'loses influence and power'.[211] This also gives the freedom to pronounce things related to the soul, declaring the eternal 'amen' or the eternal 'woe'. Furthermore, only those who 'feel' themselves called by the Lord can only be eloquent preachers, knowing that declaring God's word – and not theirs – leads them to understand that man-pleasant preaching could be a sign of irresponsibility and unbelief. As

[208] Bavinck, *Preaching and Preachers*, 19.
[209] Bavinck, *Preaching and Preachers*, 32.
[210] Bavinck, *Preaching and Preachers*, 32.
[211] Bavinck, *Preaching and Preachers*, 35.

Bavinck states: 'therefore, it is also irresponsible and fundamentally unbelief to use the word of God in order simply to declare opinions which please the people'.[212]

However, possessing solid knowledge is insufficient. The sermon must reach the conscience. For this, if an orator makes people perceive what he is saying, the preacher should be able to do this in a better way—that is, describing things both in theoretical and experiential terms. In this way, when the preacher describes, for example, what sin is, he does so 'not only in dogmatic terms, [he] also let us see it in its awful guilt, in its devastating power'.[213] Again, for Bavinck, the study of the Scripture is the best way to fulfil the demands of eloquence in a way that opposes rationalism.

Still, eloquence is not satisfied with reaching the mind and affections. In fact, and by quoting Herman Witsius, Bavinck indicates that the 'soul-stirring and tear-jerking preachers are not always the best.'[214] In going a step further, an eloquent preacher goes through the intellect and heart to 'move the will of the person'. Again, this holistic approach is not only for the hearers but also for the preacher: 'the orator may not be satisfied until his hearers think, feel and act as he does'.[215] However, the preacher's task of persuasion is sustained in the work of the Holy Spirit. The dominion over the will belongs to the Spirit of God, not to the preacher. Therefore, the sermon must be anointed with the presence of the Holy Spirit. In other words, 'the preaching of the word is accompanied by the work of the Spirit, and the word of the minister is simply the means in His almighty hand'.[216]

But how can the preacher get eloquence? Again, Bavinck's holistic approach answers this question by considering an engagement in God's special revelation and the area of common grace. First, it requires an intimate and daily engagement with the Holy Scripture. Next to this, it entails engagement with a diversity of people, i.e., 'classical peoples of antiquity', with 'the most beautiful and nobles spirits from our own people and nations arounds us', with the 'civilized within our own circles,' and above all, with women, 'the gender to whom the jewel of beauty and secret of grace has been entrusted.'[217]

The holistic approach is also viewed in the harmony of body and soul, between what preachers say and how they say it. Consequently, and because eloquence is produced by the whole person, the whole of the preacher is involved in preaching. Even when the voice

[212] Bavinck, *Preaching and Preachers*, 35.
[213] Bavinck, *Preaching and Preachers*, 37.
[214] Bavinck, *Preaching and Preachers*, 41.
[215] Bavinck, *Preaching and Preachers*, 42.
[216] Bavinck, *Preaching and Preachers*, 43.
[217] Bavinck, *Preaching and Preachers*, 49.

takes first, there is also bodily eloquence. For Bavinck, everything matters here because everything in the preacher communicates something. Therefore, this bodily eloquence illustrates, supports and confirms the heart's thoughts. This is why according to the harmony of the inner and outer person, the head and body, and even clothing, must express what is taking place in the soul in order to be declared by the mouth. Because of the connection between affections and the look, even the language of the preacher's eyes matter: 'each of the soul's affections is reflected in the eye as in a mirror'.[218] Therefore, harmony is essential for preachers. Otherwise, the preacher could be reflecting something that is in conflict with Christianity: disharmony.[219]

Eloquence is crucial in order to develop an essential task in ministers: to hold the meaning of corporate *cultus* in the Lord's Day as an expression of the practice of piety towards God. According to the New Covenant, the priestly nature of believers is manifested in spiritual sacrifices. That includes the 'confession of Christ's name, in the worship of God, in the community of Christ's intercession, and in offering up gifts in service of God's work and of Christ's poor brothers'.[220] This is expressed in Bavinck's booklet *De Predikdienst* or 'the preaching service'. There, Bavinck argues for the importance of Sunday sermons in a context where people increasingly fail to attend church twice on Sundays, and where there is no time to distinguish between true and false faith or for spiritual examination. Thus, in days where 'the true attitude [toward worship] is being lost', the preacher's call is to teach people the meaning of congregational worship.

The sermon is the high point of the *cultus*. Bavinck enumerates many reasons for this. Through preaching, the congregation remains strong, and in connection with the signs and seals of the covenant, it is strengthened and built up in the faith. At the same time, through preaching, the congregation is protected in its holiness.[221] Because of this, preachers must make better use of their gifts. Otherwise, they are going to misuse them not by false accents, unnatural posturing and gesticulation, but by a 'lack of earnest preparation, simplicity and truth, pace and thought, faith and inspiration, and above all, solemnity and unction'.[222] The last element—unction—opens up a main problem perceived by Bavinck

[218] Bavinck, *Preaching and Preachers*, 53.
[219] Bavinck, *Preaching and Preachers*, 55.
[220] Bavinck, *Preaching and Preachers*, 60.
[221] Bavinck, *Preaching and Preachers*, 61-2,
[222] Bavinck, *Preaching and Preachers*, 62-3.

regarding preaching in his days. This is related at the same time to two principal elements for regeneration and the development of spiritual life: the word and the Spirit.

> That is the primary lack of contemporary preaching; it is not drawn out of the Scripture; it is not baptized in their spirit. At the present there is research in Scripture; in the academies…but that is not real research [because] it does not teach us Scripture itself in its richness and depth, in its unity and diversity.[223]

The result of this lacking element directly affects preaching. Power and authority are lost. The solution for this lies, on the one hand, in organized, persistent and continual study of the Scripture, and on the other hand, in good practices of piety, such as a praying heart, a sanctified conscience and a 'pious and receptive soul'.[224] When these things are considered, a new harmony is described between the preacher's speech with the Preacher's speech or the Holy Spirit. In other words, the preacher's preaching must be shaped by, and become one with the objective word—the Holy Scripture—which at the same time is the word of the one that subjectively applies the objective word: the Holy Spirit. According to Bavinck, 'our speech will be formed by, and indeed will become one with the speech of the Holy Scriptures, which is the speech of the best Preacher, the only Teacher, the *Doctor et Consolator Ecclesiae* [Doctor and Counsellor of the Church]'.[225] The fruit will be an anointed and experiential preaching that, from the whole counsel of God, reaches the whole heart of both the preacher and the hearers:

> Our preaching will no longer be boring, monotone, and irritating. Rather, we will speak full of the Holy Spirit, in a demonstration of power; then we will speak no words of human wisdom, but rather the eternal, lasting word of our God.[226]

III Conclusion

The practice of piety or the expression of subjective religion towards God is fundamental in understanding Bavinck's comprehension of the Christian life in holistic terms. The ground for this is the objective principle of the exercise of piety, namely, God and his knowledge. In other words, there is no religion (piety) and worship (the practice of piety

[223] Bavinck, *Preaching and Preachers*, 63.
[224] Bavinck, *Preaching and Preachers*, 63.
[225] Bavinck, *Preaching and Preachers*, 65
[226] Bavinck, *Preaching and Preachers*, 65

towards God) without the proper knowledge of the true God, and the proper relationship with the triune God in faith, love and hope.

The objective foundation in Reformed piety plays a vital role in considering the difference in Bavinck's conception of Pietism. The pietistic elements presented at the beginning of this chapter are also sketched in a manuscript titled 'De voornaamste problemen der tegenwoordige dogmatiek' ('The main problems of contemporary dogmatics'), particularly in its section III titled 'Rationalisme en piëtisme' ('Rationalism and Pietism'), which serves to illustrate a summary of Bavinck's points of critique towards Pietism: opposition to Rationalism, and the detachment of *pius affectus* from knowledge (*het kennen*) and the known object (*het gekende voorwerp*). In other words, Pietism's attention moves from the object to the subject.[227] Thus, this particular section of 'De voornaamste problemen der tegenwoordige dogmatiek' confirms the tendency and emphasis that Pietism gives to the subject and which I have described throughout this chapter.

Across these texts, it is clear that for Bavinck, if pietistic tendencies are to be avoided, covenant theology must play a substantial role. Thus, the absence of the covenant of grace can turn Reformed piety into one-sided Pietism. Therefore, the nature of Reformed piety (subjective religion) and the practice of piety (worship) through fellowship with the triune God is better understood in a covenantal context:

> For according to its essence, religion is nothing less than fellowship with God, the most deep, inward, and tender fellowship that can be imagined and understood second only to the fellowship between the three persons of the Godhead and the fellowship between the two natures of Christ. That is what Scripture expresses in its beautiful doctrine of the covenant… That fellowship is more intimate and tender than the fellowship between husband and wife.[228]

Thus, in his view, the objective trinitarian and covenantal features of Reformed piety promote sound experiential-subjective religion that does not turn into the subjectivism of Pietism.

At the same time, the experiential aspect of fellowship with God highlights Bavinck's significance of eternity to understand his holistic worldview. Bavinck's neo-Calvinistic

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[227] See Herman Bavinck, *De voornaamste problemen der tegenwoordige dogmatiek. College aan de Vrije Univ[ersiteit] 3 februari 1902*.
[228] Bavinck, *Calling and Regeneration*, 25

project is rooted in fellowship with God, expressed in knowing God 'in the face of Christ' where this knowledge brings 'eternal life, imperturbable joy, and heavenly blessedness'.[229] This is why Bavinck highlights in his neo-Calvinist context the retrieval of experiential covenantal Reformed theology by calling people to read, for example, the works of the Erskine brothers. In this sense, Bavinck's theology avoided any attempt to overshadow this lively fellowship with God in the daily Christian life. As he expresses in 'Calvin and Common Grace',

> Whatever material or ideal possessions the world may offer, all these taken together cannot outweigh or even be compared with this greatest of all treasures, communion with God; and hence, in case of conflict with this, they are to be unconditionally sacrificed. "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee"[230]

On this basis, the holistic view of Bavinck's neo-Calvinism is adequately understood when communion with God—on earth and in heaven—is pushed to the front as a knowledge that begins and ends with God. Thus, the *kennis* of God 'makes us *blessed* and gives *eternal* life, hereafter indeed, but here and now also…the knowledge of God gave us life, but the life that was given leads us back to the knowledge of Him'.[231] Therefore, descriptions that categorize Bavinck's neo-Calvinism as a movement that eclipses the importance of communion with God both on earth and in heaven, should be corrected in light of the primary sources.

In summary, the trinitarian, covenantal, and experiential relationship with God laid the foundation for the duties towards our neighbour. Thus, piety also shapes our view of our holistic relationship with human beings. This aspect of the *praxis pietiatis* related to morality and culture will be described in the following chapter. However, before that, it is critical to identify one of the contexts where future theologians and ministers of the word can learn about the practice of piety towards God and their neighbours. In other words, it is vital to describe theological training as a means to promote the practice of piety towards God, ourselves, and others.

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[229] *TWWG*, 14. The English translation omits the word 'face'.
[230] Bavinck, "Calvin and Common Grace", 2.
[231] *TWWG*, 113. Emphasis by Bavinck.

Chapter V

Reformed orthodoxy and theological training as a means to promote the practice of piety

> *Finis [Sancta Theologia] est pietas, salus, Dei gloria*. – Herman Bavinck.[1]

> *Religious life does have its own content and independent value. It remains the center, the heart from which all the Christian's thoughts and acts proceed, by which they are animated and given the warmth of life. There, in fellowship with God, he is strengthened for his labors and girds himself for the battle. But that mysterious life of fellowship with God is not the whole of life. The prayer chamber is the inner room, although it is not the whole house in which he lives and functions. Spiritual life does not exclude family and social life, business and politics, art and science. It is distinct from these; it is also of much greater value, but it does not stand irreconcilably opposed to it.*[2] – Herman Bavinck.

The previous chapters have shown the nature of piety or subjective religion in Bavinck's thought. Although every human being has a *sensus divinitatis* or feeling of absolute dependence on God, regeneration must take place in the core of the person's being in order to have a right fellowship with God. In other words, it is necessary to highlight the indispensability of the new birth to understand the movement from general or common piety to Christian piety. Therefore, fallen humans need to be regenerated by God in order to have a *recta communio* with the God who reveals himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Therefore, Christian piety – as the regenerated disposition of the human heart – is grounded in the knowledge of the triune God. In this way, the triune God is the same God who creates and recreates in order to be glorified in the fellowship that believers have with each person of the Trinity.

At the same time, Bavinck acknowledges not only the feeling of divinity and the necessity of regeneration, but also the type of relationship believers have with God. Knowing that under the covenantal objective religion – in the power of the Holy Spirit – the regenerated

[1] Herman Bavinck, Manuscript van een [collegedictaat] *Medulla Theologiae. Dogmaticae*. 1884/5.', inv.nr. 46 // Collegedictaten. Archief van Herman Bavinck, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2.
[2] Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, 95-6.

habitus passes into action, where a primary *actus* in the Christian life is the experiential knowledge of God that is structured and nurtured in a particular manner. For Bavinck, pious Christian people's fellowship with God is covenantal in its essence.

Covenant theology plays a key role in Bavinck's description of biblical religion. This involves both objective and subjective religion. As he indicated in *Philosophy of Revelation*, the content of the Old and New Testament – objective revelation – consists principally in 'the covenant of grace, and in the gospel.'[3] So too, if God reveals his gospel in a covenantal way, the response to, and new way of living in the light of the gospel, are structured in a covenantal subjective religion. In other words, God objectively reveals himself and comes to human beings in the way of the *foedus gratiae* while people, in freedom and love, subjectively respond to God's call in the same covenantal way. In summary, for Bavinck the very nature of religion, objectively and subjectively,

> takes the shape of a covenant in which God acts, not coercively, but with counsel, admonition, warning, invitation…and in which humans serve God, not under duress or violence, but willingly, by their own free consent, moved by love to love in return…for that reason religion is conceivable only in the form of a covenant and comes to its full realisation only in that form.[4]

In short, Christian Reformed piety is trinitarian and covenantal. Furthermore, at the same time, *vroomheid* is also holistic and organic. As he describes in his *Principles of Pedagogy*, 'true piety, organically bound to substantial knowledge and true refinement'.[5] Significantly, and as was described in chapter two, this idea was defended by Bavinck in *De School met den Bijbel*, arguing, for example, about the organic connection between piety and science. So too, the organic value of piety is not only considered towards external life spheres, such as education or science, but also in the inner shape of personality. In a neo-Calvinistic fashion, Reformed piety is trinitarian, covenantal and holistic.

As the previous chapter described, subjective religion is manifested in the practice of piety towards God—that is, *cultus*. The experiential character of the service or worship of God is done in communion with God. In this sense, the priority of fellowship with God or internal *cultus* is essential for Bavinck's theological and holistic project neo-Calvinism. As he

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[3] *PoR,* 158.
[4] *RD* II, 570-71.
[5] Bavinck, *Paedagogische beginselen*, 53.

states in *The Certainty of Faith*, in describing the powerful convictions of faith, 'no devotion, no commitment, no self-denial, no love, no faithfulness, no patience, no virtues in general are as marvellously rich and sublime as those that blossom forth from a life of fellowship with God'.[6] At the same time, the idea of God as the *summum bonum* is understood and experienced in light of communion with God. In the same book, he wrote that, 'the Christian religion teaches us that the highest good for man is found in God alone, in fellowship with Him, in heavenly salvation'.[7]

Importantly, this *gemeenschap* with God is related to knowing God in the face of Jesus Christ. This knowledge is not impersonal (*weten*) but personal (*kennis*). For Bavinck, 'one may know (*weten*) much about creatures, countries…but this is much different from knowing (*kennen*) from contemplation (*aanschouwing*)'.[8] Thus, the experiential knowledge of God (*kennis Gods*) is a faith-knowledge on earth, while in heaven will switch into a contemplation-knowledge. In this sense, and as was demonstrated in chapter three, Bavinck considered the doctrine of the beatific vision as the climax of salvation. Therefore, Bavinck's neo-Calvinism project should not be considered contrary to the classic and diverse Reformed understanding of the *visio Dei*. In fact, it is from the theocentric view of his theology that it is possible to understand his theocentric view of life, the world, and eschatology. In this way, Bavinck's Reformed piety can help to understand the proper relationship of man with God (*cultus*) and with other creatures (morality and culture).

But how can people learn (especially candidates for the ministry) about the relationship that humans have, on the one hand, with the Creator and, on the other hand, with creatures? Which science can help believers to remain faithful to the heavenly destination in the earthly vocations for the understanding of *cultus* and *culture*? For Herman Bavinck, there is a particular science that helps humans in religion and morality. That science is theology.

The relevance of researching the relationship between piety and theological science comes to the front considering the latest Bavinckian scholarship. Ximian Xu has demonstrated the essential place of science (*wetenschap*) in Bavinck's theology. In fact, the interpretative trinitarian and organic motif described by Eglinton can now be enriched by the scientific meta-paradigm proposed by Xu. The *wetenschappelijke* dogmatic account proposed by Bavinck considers the relationship between the object (God) and the subject (the theologian) through the three elements that conform to science. Thus, scientific theology

[6] Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, 29.
[7] Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, 79.
[8] Bavinck, *Guidebook*, 15.

has i) God as the real object, ii) takes assumptions of God's existence and self-revelation in faith, and iii) is bound up with God.[9]

Significatively, the trinitarian and *exitus-reditus* scheme described by Xu confirms the theocentric nature of the Bavinckian theology ('from God, by God, and for God') and, in this case, Reformed piety.[10] For this research, this idea has implications for the life of the theologian: he must be humble (according to the catholic nature of theology), and he must worship God (according to the doxological nature of theology). In other words, the theologian must be a believer. Therefore, it is crucial to describe the symbiotic relationship between the practice of piety in the Christian life (in its relation to God and creation) and theological training.

For Bavinck, as he described in his *Marrow of Theology* lecture notes, the end of sacred theology is 'piety, salvation, [and] the glory of God'.[11] On account of this, this chapter presents Reformed orthodoxy and theological education as a promoter of *praxis pietatis* towards God in religion, and to creatures in morality and culture. For this, four things will be described in order to understand the relationship between piety and theological science: first, Bavinck's reading of John Calvin and Gisbertus Voetius as promoters of the unity between *pietas* and *scientia*; second, the principles of godly theological education; third, the testimony of some of Bavinck's students about the place of piety in theology; and finally, a brief description of subjective religion as the foundation for morality and culture.

I. Bavinck's sketch of Calvin and Voetius on theological *praxis pietatis*

Neo-Calvinism was primarily a theological movement. In this sense, neo-Calvinist theologians such as Kuyper and Bavinck retrieved the essence of old Reformed confessionalism and theology in a new form that answered the challenges of late modern Dutch society. As Brock and Sutanto describe,

> Neo-Calvinism was a revival of Reformed confessionalist theology in the Netherlands…its most mature distinctive was not first in political theology, Reformational philosophy, or public-theological models for the relation between the church and social order, but in its careful, nuanced,

[9] Ximiam Xu, *Theology as the Science of God*, 244.
[10] The *exitus-reditus* scheme can be identified in revelation and creation (*RD* I, 341-42 and RD II, 425-26). For the understanding of Bavinck's dogmatic methodology in the *exitus-reditus* scheme, see Xu, *Theology as the Science of God*, 104, 139, 163-65, 246. For participatory elements identified in Bavinck's theology see Huttinga, "Participation and Communicability".
[11] *Medulla* were the study notes prepared by Bavinck to teach in his first years in Kampen (1884-85). Interestingly, this manuscript reveals the acquisition of Reformed scholastic vocabulary.

> and unique marriage between classical, Reformed confessionalist dogmatics and modern philosophy and theology that allowed it to speak Reformed dogmatics to a particular European, modern world.[12]

According to the previous paragraph, neo-Calvinism can only be appropriately comprehended when it is understood in the context of its Reformed theological foundations. As chapter one presented, *praxis pietatis* was an essential theme within the diversity of the Reformed tradition, especially in the theology of John Calvin and the *Nadere Reformatie*. Therefore, studies describing the Reformed sources explaining the relationship between piety and theology and how neo-Calvinist theologians used these sources should be expected. Yet, strikingly, the retrieval of reformation and post-reformation Reformed sources in *praxis pietatis* has not been further explored in neo-Calvinism studies.

At the same time, the organic connection between *vroomheid* and *wetenschap* is worth analysing in light of Xu's identification of Bavinck's use of the *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae* as a vital source of Bavinck's scientific and theological system formulation. Nevertheless, Xu does not describe other Reformed sources, or explore in detail the *pietas/scientia* paradigm in Bavinck's scientific theology (apart from the humble and doxological disposition of the theologian). Thus, Xu's observation, and Bolt's mention of the numerous citations of post-Reformation Reformed theologians in the introduction Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatics, open the question about Bavinck's reading of Reformed theologians regarding their description of the place of piety in theological education. This chapter will briefly analyse two influential Reformed theologians in Bavinck's theology, John Calvin and Gisbertus Voetius.

I.1 John Calvin on theology and piety

In 1909, Bavinck gave a lecture on the occasion of Calvin's 400th birthday.[13] His address begins by acknowledging the contributions of Martin Luther (1483-1546) and Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) to the Reformation, arguing that the doctrine of 'justification by faith' – highlighted by Luther – was subordinated to the idea of 'glorifying God' by Zwingli's reformation in Switzerland.[14] In this lecture, Bavinck's first observation of Calvin described his attempt to forge a synthesis between Luther and Zwingli, an effort for which Bavinck called Calvin the 'saviour' of Protestantism because he 'brought the two together [Luther

[12] Brock and Sutanto, *Neo-Calvinism*, 4.
[13] Herman Bavinck, "John Calvin: A Lecture on the Occasion of his 400th Birthday, July, 1509-1909", translated by John Bolt, *TBR* 1 (2010): 57-85.
[14] Bavinck, "John Calvin", 57-58.

and Zwingli] into a higher unity, systematised the ideas of the Reformation, and organised its labors.'[15]

Following a general and historical exposition of the first thirty years of Calvin's life and theology, Bavinck stopped to emphasise a crucial detail of Calvin's conversion. Recognising that Calvin did not like to talk about himself, for which reason his autobiographical writings are few,[16] Bavinck compared the respective conversion experiences of Luther, Zwingli and Calvin. Despite the similarities between the three Reformers, one of the main elements of Calvin's conversion can be presented in one word: certainty. In Bavinck's words, 'Calvin experienced a deliverance from error to truth, from doubt to certainty (*zekerheid*).'[17]

The certainty of faith that Calvin experienced is one of the main features of Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. It is this complete certainty that Bavinck thought 'stands out above everything else' in the *Institutes*. It is 'the rock-hard conviction that shines through on every page.'[18] In this way, Bavinck considered the theology reflected in Calvin's *Institutes* was not a simple repetition or a mere repristination of what Luther and Zwingli had already said. Still, it was a 'synthesis in the confession of truth. Thus, thanks to [Calvin's] labors, a new type of *Christian piety* and *theology* come into being.'[19]

From the previous sentence, two things are relevant for this research. The first is an observation on the translation from Dutch into English. For Bavinck, Calvin did not simply elaborate a 'theology', but a *godgeleerde wetenshap*,[20] that is, a 'theological science'. The close of this quotation highlights a twin claim on Calvin's contribution: he introduced a close union of Christian theological scholarship and piety. 'Theological science' (*godgeleerde*

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15 Bavinck, "John Calvin", 58.

16 Bavinck mentions that Calvin referred to his conversion 'once in his later writings, in the Preface to his *Commentary on the Psalms* in 1537' and in 'his fine 1539 letter to Cardinal Sadoleto.' Bavinck, "John Calvin", 62. At the beginning of Calvin's biography, Bruce Gordon mentions that 'despite his dominant personality, Calvin rarely and reluctantly drew attention to himself in his writing.' Gordon, *Calvin*, viii, 33-35.

17 Ibid., 62. For the Dutch version see Herman Bavinck, *Johannes Calvijn: Eene lezing ter geletogenheid van den vierhonderdsten gedenkdag zijner geboorte, 10 Juli 1509–1909* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1909), 11. This idea is also supported by Gordon: 'Calvin's journey was way from the uncertainty of his youth, and in this was perhaps his greatest legacy: he though a generation that to know salvation was to be certain that it was freely offered. If there was one thing a person could be certain of, it was God's promises.' Gordon, *Calvin*, 98.

18 Bavinck, "John Calvin", 65.

19 Bavinck, "John Calvin", 66. Emphasis mine. Interestingly, and as Bavinck also did, Gordon has shed some light in the importance of assurance of salvation and piety: 'The Institutes was intended as a guide to scripture for those who felt God's grace, to strengthen them in that sure knowledge of salvation promised by God. In short, it was to encourage true piety and devotion.' See Gordon, *Calvin*, 62.

20 Bavinck, *Johannes Calvijn*, 14.

wetenshap) and 'piety' were not opposed to each other.[21] Instead, in Calvin's theology, Bavinck saw a 'new type of Christian piety' (*Christelijke vroomheid*) developed not only in his inward conversion experience but also in 'art, science, and philosophy as rich gifts of God.'[22] In considering all of this, Bavinck finished his lecture emphasising that the more excellent tribute to Calvin's theology was to confess with heart and mouth, word and deed that, 'from him and through him and unto him are all things; to him be the glory forever!'[23] In sum, Bavinck's reading of Calvin helped him to continue developing an all-encompassing understanding of piety connected to theological science.

Despite not being directly associated with the broader celebrations that took place in Europe around the figure of John Calvin in 1909,[24] Herman Bavinck continued honouring him with a publication about the doctrine of common grace in Calvin's thought.

In his article *Calvin and Common Grace* (translated by Geerhardus Vos), Bavinck engages his readers by asking questions about the relationship between nature and grace, creation and recreation, and culture and Christianity. As a sort of prolegomena, Bavinck highlights that God is the highest good for the human being.[25] Nothing can be compared to having communion with God.[26] However, earthly vocations are not sinful in themselves and 'so long as they do not interfere with man's pursuit of the kingdom of heaven, they are to be enjoyed with thanksgiving.'[27] Here it is possible to notice the priority of some elements that constitute Bavinck's holistic view of life, such as, communion with God and the kingdom of God.

For Bavinck, these ideas were developed during the Reformation. Through the Reformers, a new understanding of *veritas*, *gratia* and *bona opera* shed light on the salvation of souls and the glory of God. Faith was not a mere intellectual assent in a Roman Catholic sense, but a surrender of the whole of human life to God's grace and 'admission into communion with him and absolute assurance of salvation.'[28] Bavinck highlights the idea of assurance

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[21] It is important to mention that the English version of this lecture translates the Dutch phrase '*godgeleerde wetenshap*' as 'theology' and not rightly as 'theological science'. This correction is fundamental for this thesis. See Bavinck, *Johannes Calvijn*, 14

[22] Bavinck, "John Calvin", 84.

[23] Bavinck, "John Calvin", 85.

[24] Herman Paul and Johan de Niet, "Issus de Calvin: Collective Memories of John Calvin in Dutch Neo-Calvinism" in *Sober, Strict, and Scriptural: Collective Memories of John Calvin, 1800-2000*. Ed. Johan de Niet, Herman Paul and Bart Wallet. (Leiden: BRILL, 2009), 67-95.

[25] In the same year Bavinck published *Magnalia Dei*, where the first chapter begins with the affirmation that 'God, and God alone, is man's highest good.' See *TWWG*, 1.

[26] *TWWG*, 100.

[27] *TWWG*, 100.

[28] Bavinck, "Calvin and Common Grace", 446.

(*certidudo*) in Calvin's definition of faith. This certainty of *fides salvifica* is the principle of 'the true fear of God, for *primus ad pietatem gradus* [*est*] *agnoscere Deum esse nobis Patrem*.'[29] This direct Latin quotation from the *Institutes* shows Bavinck's interest in putting concepts such as faith, assurance, fellowship with God and piety in a close relationship. As a result, Calvin's widened understanding of faith provides a new meaning to the relationship between Christianity and culture. In this sense, *fides salvificans* is a faith 'which renews the entire man…in soul and body, in all his relations and activities, and hence a faith which exercises its sanctifying influence in the entire range of life, upon Church and school, upon society and state, upon science and art.'[30] As a result, Bavinck finishes his article by pointing out that for Calvin, life and doctrine were one.[31]

In summary, Herman Bavinck – as a neo-Calvinist theologian – identified in Calvin's theology a vital union between theology as a science and Christian piety.[32] Importantly, Bavinck highlights several times the significance of *fides* and *certitudo* in Calvin's understanding of *pietas*. From this faith and assurance, believers can glorify God as the highest good while at the same time, they can practice their piety in every sphere of the creational order. Furthermore, this unity between piety and theological science was also identified in Gisbertus Voetius.

I.2 Gisbertus Voetius on theology and piety

While it is true that Calvin's theology played an indispensable role in the development of neo-Calvinism, post-Reformation Reformed theologians were also part of the consciousness of first-generation neo-Calvinist theologians. Bavinck and Kuyper brought back essential works of the seventeenth-century high-orthodoxy period, such as the Leiden's *Synopsis purioris theologiae* and some of Voetius' *Selectae disputationes theologicae*, respectively.[33] At the same time, part of their theology was used in their respective

[29] Bavinck, "Calvin and Common Grace", 446. 'The first step to piety, is to acknowledge that God is Father to us.'
[30] Bavinck, "Calvin and Common Grace", 448.
[31] Bavinck, "Calvin and Common Grace", 465.
[32] Kuyper also saw in Calvin, and therefore in Calvinism, a sound relationship between religious consciousness, theology, and its holistic development. In his words, 'Calvinism is rooted in a form of religion which was peculiarly its own, and from this specific religious consciousness there was developed first a peculiar theology, then a special church-order, and then a given form for political and social life, for the interpretation of the moral world-order, for the relation between nature and grace, between Christianity and the world, between church and state, and finally for art and science'. See Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1931), 17. See also, Abraham Kuyper, *The Practice of Godliness* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), 41-42.
[33] Kuyper also republished Voetius' Catechism on the Heidelberg Catechism. See Abraham Kuyper, *Voetius' catechisatie over den Heidelbergschen Catechismus. Naar Poudroyen's editie van 1662 op nieuw uitgegeven, bij ons publiek ingeleid, en met enkele aanteekeningen voorzien door Dr. A. Kuyper* (Rotterdam: Gebroeders Huge, 1891).

theological projects as part of the Reformed awakening and contextualisation that characterised the neo-Calvinist movement. In this sense, Reformed scholastic theologians were considered in high esteem by them; while Kuyper regarded Calvin as a *pater ecclesiae*, Voetius was a *doctor eclessiae*.[34] In the same line, for Geerhardus Vos, Voetius,

> occupies a place of high honor among the Dutch theologians of the seventeenth century. He was, perhaps, the ablest, the most learned and the most influential of all Calvinistic divines belonging to that period so rich in eminent names… He was a scholastic of the first rank, who knew how to handle the weapons of his craft with great skill and subtlety; a mystic of a deeply pious vein; a writer of exceptional fertility; and a teacher of wide influence.[35]

The above paragraph is part of Vos' review of the first volume of A.C Duker's (1837-1915) biography of Gisbertus Voetius. However, Vos was not the only neo-Calvinist who reviewed that biography. Herman Bavinck wrote five reviews of Duker's biography of Voetius between 1893 and 1915, denoting the influence of Voetius on Bavinck's Kampen and Amsterdam period.[36] From there it is possible to identify, for example, the relevance for both the young and the mature Bavinck of Voetius' understanding of the relationship between piety and theological sciences.

Certainly, Voetius was a chief theologian for Herman Bavinck. In 1893, he wrote that 'Voetius was, without doubt, the most solid theologian of the Dutch Reformed Church in the seventeenth century'.[37] In the same review, Bavinck acknowledged a unity and diversity of features in Voetius' persona. 'He united in himself many characteristics and abilities, each of which would have already made his name famous. He was a dogmatician and moralist, canonist and practical writer, and in every field, upon which he moved, a master

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[34] For Kuyper's understanding of church fathers and doctors, see James Eglinton, "The reception of Aquinas in Kuyper's *Encyclopaedie der Heilige Godgeleerdheid*" in *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception of Aquinas*. Ed. Matthew Levering and Marcus Plested (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 464.

[35] Geerhardus Vos, "Review of Gisbertus Voetius, door A. C. Duker" in *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 5 (1894), 714-15.

[36] Herman Bavinck began his pastoral ministry in Franeker in 1882, the last year of Duker's pastoral ministry in the same city. Interestingly, Aart de Groot mentions, in his introduction to Duker's republication of Voetius, a longstanding friendship between Herman Bavinck and Arnoldus Cornelis Duker. See A. de Groot introduction in A.C. Duker, *Gisbertus Voetius. Met een inleiding van Dr. A. de Groot*. Eerst Deel. Reprinted (Leiden: J.J. Groen en Zoon, 1989).

[37] DO: 'Voetius was ongetwijfeld de degelijkste theoloog van de Naderlandsche Gereformeerde Kerken in de zeventiende eeuw.' Herman Bavinck, "Gisbertus Voetius." Review of Gisbertus Voetius, by A. C. Duker. *De Bazuin* 41:41 (1893), 3.

in the full sense of the word'.[38] Significantly, in 1915, and despite being grateful for the latest volume of Duker – where the author describes Voetius from different angles, that is, in his person, life and work, as a student, preacher and professor, 'in his piety' (*in zijne vroomheid*), and so on – Bavinck expressed the view that Duker's work could be better appreciated if someone were to write about Voetius in 'the unity of his personality' (*in de eenheid zijner persoonlijkheid*).[39] As chapters two and three have explained, personality is linked to Bavinck's understanding of healthy piety. In fact, some morbid expressions of piety express a disharmony in personality. But for Bavinck, as he wrote in 1907 in total agreement with A.C. Duker, 'Voetius was not a pietist' (*Voetius was geen piëtist*).[40]

The characteristics found in Voetius that Bavinck highlights in other reviews are related to the theoretical-practical aspect of 'the most important Dutch Reformed Theologian', as he indicated in 1895.[41] However, it is crucial to highlight Bavinck does not repristinate Voetius' thought, but in a neo-Calvinistic mindset, he acknowledges the significance of Voetius' kernel for his late modern context. Thus, even when 'the forms' (*de vormen*) of Voetius' struggles (i.e., contra Descartes and Cocceius) did not belong to or speak to the late modern context, Bavinck says that a 'core of issues' (*eene kern van vraagstukken*) remains, which 'also is important for our time' (*die ook voor onzen tijd van belang is*).[42] In other words, the essence of Reformed orthodoxy is retrieved and therefore, it can be contextualised for particular late modern circumstances. This is why we can see Bavinck quoting Voetius in some of his influential works, such as *The Catholicity of Christianity* (1892) and *Calling and Regeneration* (1903), *Reformed Dogmatics* and *Ethics*.

In that line – of retrieval and contextualisation – one can detect some of the Voetian elements in Bavinck's understanding of science and piety. For example, in 1907, Bavinck highlighted the Scripture as the principle of every science. In his words, 'Voetius takes the position that Holy Scripture is a light for the paths of all, and a lamp for every foot… Regarding its foundation and principle, all sciences (*wetenschappen*) must rely on Holy Scripture, which is "the book of all science", the "sea of all wisdom", "the academy of

[38] DO: 'Hij vereenigde een tal van eigenschappen en bekwaamheden in zich, die elk op zichzelve reeds zijn naam beroemd zouden hebben gemaakt. Hij was dogmaticus en moralist, kanonist en praktikaal schrijver, en op ieder terrein, waarop hij zich bewoog, een meester in den vollen zin des woords'. Bavinck, "Gisbertus Voetius." (1893), 3.
[39] Herman Bavinck, "Review of Gisbertus Voetius, by A. C. Duker." in *De Bazuin* 63:19 (1915), 4.
[40] Herman Bavinck, Review of *Gisbertus Voetius*, vol. 2, part 2, by A. C. Duker. *Hollandia* 23:942 (1907)
[41] DO: 'van den voornaamsten Nederlandschen Gereformeerden Godgeleerde'. Herman Bavinck, "Review of *Gisbertus Voetius*, vol. 1, part 2, by A. C. Duker," in *De Bazuin* 43:42 (1895), 4.
[42] Bavinck, "Review of Gisbertus Voetius" (1907).

academies'".[43] This quotation should not be overlooked in light of Bavinck's induction into the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences the year before. In this line, Bavinck held that, as Voetius, the Scripture (as the *principium externum*) was fundamental for the development of science.

As we saw before, for Bavinck, Voetius was not a pietist. This means that the Utrecht professor did not, in principle (*beginsel*) condemn opulence in different areas, such as feasts, home and clothing. In fact, Voetius never sought the 'evil' (*het kwaad*) in the 'matter' (*de stof*) and the world, but in every place, Voetius upheld the 'biblical principle' (*Bijbelsch beginsel*) of 'moderation' (*matigheid*) and 'Piety' (*Godzaligheid*, capitalised by Bavinck). Thus, through Duker's book, people can become acquainted with Voetius as a man of 'firm principles' (*vaste beginselen*), 'deep conviction' (*diepe overtuiging*) and 'pious conduct' (*vromen wandel*).[44]

The holistic and influential approach of Voetius is another aspect considered in Bavinck's review. In 1911, he mentions Voetius was highly regarded by the academic senate and the magistrate of the city of Utrecht. Voetius' opinion was highly valued. His vote was often the deciding factor when appointing professors. He was appointed rector four times during his forty-two years of professorship.[45] Such was his influence that Bavinck reminded his readers that the university in Utrecht was known as the Voetian academy. Importantly, Bavinck highlights that Voetius achieved that high position because of his diverse gifts (*veelzijdige gaven*), great devotion (*groote toewijding*) and extraordinary capacity for labour (*buitengewone arbeidskracht*). These things are reflected in the rigorous academic teaching and pastoral approach taken as professor of theology. In Bavinck's words,

> In his numerous lectures [Voetius] not only introduced his students to the knowledge of Reformed dogmatics, ethics, ascetics and church law, but he also tried to bring them up to date them on all kinds of theological trends and scholastic distinctions, while in doing so, he did not neglect practical training and took great care in teaching preaching and catechism.[46]

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[43] DO: 'Voetius het standpunt in, dat de H. Schrift een licht is op alle pad en eene lamp voor ieders voet . . . Alle wetenschappen moeten, wat haar fundament en beginsel betreft, steunen op de Heilige Schrift, die "het boek van alle wetenscha", de "zee van alle wijsheid", de "academie der academiën" is'. Bavinck, "Review of Gisbertus Voetius" (1907).

[44] Bavinck, "Review of Gisbertus Voetius" (1907).

[45] Herman Bavinck, "Review of Gisbertus Voetius, vol. 2, part 3 and vol. 3, part 1, by A. C. Duker," in *De Bazuin* 59:10 (1911), 4.

[46] DO: 'Op zijne talrijke colleges leidde hij zijne studenten niet alleen in tot de kennis van Gereformeerde dogmatiek, ethiek, ascetiek en kerkrecht, maar hij trachtte ze ook op de hoogte te brengen van allerlei

For Voetius, unity between piety in science in theological education has its goal in communion with God, as Andreas Beck describes. Beck notes that Voetius' dogmatics, structured in *Syllabus problematum*, presents a remarkable feature. That is, the chapter 'on theology' is immediately followed by the chapter on 'the greatest good or happiness' (not on the doctrine of the Scripture).[47] In other words, Voetius immediately links theology with the highest good. This feature resembles, in a certain way, Bavinck's theology. Both in *Magnalia Dei* and *Guidebook for the Christian Religion*, Bavinck begins with the priority of man's *highest good*: knowing God in communion with him. In conclusion, the notion of fellowship with God comes to the front in Bavinck's theological project. *Ergo*, theologians should have communion with God. But what does this idea mean for Bavinck?

In Bavinck's reading of Calvin and Voetius we can notice some of the elements that must be in the heart of the theologian, such as faith and certainty. But which other elements or principles should be considered in theological training in order to cultivate a holistic *praxis* of piety towards God and others? To this, I will turn.

II. Principles for godly theological training

As we saw in chapter three, piety was vital to the theological training offered in Kampen. Since the institution's beginning in 1854, its students' nourishment with 'the doctrine of truth that is according to godliness' (*godzaligheid*) was deemed essential for the flourishment of the church. If that was not the case, 'the church shall languish and suffer damage'.[48] In the same line, in 1879 the synod of the Christian Reformed Church decided that apart from church membership, a certificate of 'piety and character' (*godsvrucht en karakter*) provided by the church consistory had to be presented by the candidates for ministry. Nevertheless, this did not secure the knowledge level for the exams. As Harinck and Berkelaar indicate, this continued to be a cause of concern for the theological school during that period.[49]

In other words, piety and science were necessary for theological training of Seceders ministers. In that spirit, the seminary trustees proposed to the synod to appoint new teachers in 1882. Which characteristics should the new *docenten* possess? 'Men with

theologische richtingen en scholastische onderscheidingen, terwijl hij daarbij ook de practische opleiding niet verwaarloosde en aan het onderwijs in prediking en catechisatie groote zorg besteedde'. Bavinck, Review of *Gisbertus Voetius* (1911), 4.

[47] Beck, *Voetius*, 195-200.

[48] DO: 'de kerk zal er door kwijnen en schade lijden'. Cited in George Harinck and Wim Berkelaar, *Domineesfabriek: Geschiedenis van de Theologische Universiteit Kampen* (Amersfoort: Prometheus, 2018), 35.

[49] Harinck and Berkelaar, *Domineesfabriek*, 63.

godliness (*godsvrucht*), with knowledge (*wetenschap*), with tact (*takt*)'.[50] In this context, a young Bavinck, as a pastor at Franeker, wanted to fulfil that purpose. During his period as a professor in Kampen, Bavinck expressed the necessity of piety in the student life through his manuscripts and lectures in ethics and dogmatics from a Reformed perspective.

As I described in chapter two, at the end of his period in Kampen, Bavinck published two reviews that expressed his view on *Christelijke vroomheid* (1900 and 1902). At the end of 1902, Bavinck started a new period in his life – until his death – as a professor at the Free University of Amsterdam. At this point it is essential to ask how a mature Bavinck understood the relationship between piety and science in his new Amsterdam period. The question is valid in light of the place of scholarship and piety in the Free University.

Since its beginning, the Christian university founded by Kuyper set high requirements for the examination of the students. Classical languages and many hours of study were required for theological students.[51] This resembles a Voetian spirit in the theology of the Free University, as van Deursen indicates. The kind of old Reformed experiential piety was experienced at Kuyper's classroom as some students describe: 'we learned from him to bow humbly before the majesty of God's Word. Learned to accept, gratefully and with piety, the treasure of our confessional standards. Learned to join our reformed (*gereformeerde*) fathers'. So too, another student describes the dogmatic teaching of Kuyper not in rationalistic terms, but as doctrine that 'came after us as a power, the power of the truth of God'.[52]

Crucially, at the end of the first twenty-five years of its existence, the Free University needed to continue consolidating and developing its scientific and cultural program. So, from the beginning of the twentieth century, the Free University was required to answer the question regarding the relationship between piety and science. In the words of van Deursen, 'for a following generation these questions would become unavoidable: the union of science with godliness, of beauty with Christian virtue'.[53] Therefore, it should come as no surprise that in 1905 Bavinck addressed a group of students there about 'piety and science'. In fact, reading this brief manuscript titled 'Vroomheid en wetenschap' and his

[50] Harinck and Berkelaar, *Domineesfabriek*, 79.
[51] Arie Theodorus van Deursen, *The Distinctive Character of the Free University in Amsterdam, 1880-2005*. Translated by Herbert Donald Morton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 26.
[52] van Deursen, *The Distinctive Character*, 27.
[53] van Deursen, *The Distinctive Character*, 67.

article 'Godsvrucht en wetenschap,' published two years later, sheds some light on the necessity of godliness among the students at the Free University.

What could society expect from the students' passivity, indolence, fractions among them and, in some cases, excesses of alcohol?[54] At the same time, scientific theology should advance. Therefore, in his period in Amsterdam, Bavinck continued to target the unity between piety and scientific theology. In other words, Bavinck had in mind 'men of mental capacity and godliness who in their scientific work too stood on the foundations of divine revelation and allowed themselves to be guided by the light of that revelation'.[55]

In light of this, it is necessary to answer the following question: What principles should be considered in both the seminary and the university classroom, in the professors and in the students, to develop a theology that promotes holistic piety, that is, directed to God in worship and service to others through a Reformed Christian view of morality and culture? The answer to this question is found in his academic orations in Kampen and Amsterdam. The analysis of his four orations can help us to see the continuity/discontinuity between the young and mature Bavinck related to his understanding of Christian piety or subjective religion.

II.1 Theocentric *principia*

Christian piety is about the relationship between the believer and God *per* knowing God. Thus, in knowing, there is a *relatie* between the subject and the object, as Bavinck expressed in both editions of *Christian Worldview* (1904, 1913), where in the relationship between the subject and the object, there is a knowing or conformity of the subject's consciousness to the objective reality.[56] In this case, in the Christian religion, there is a God-consciousness, therefore, without God, there is no religion at all, as Bavinck expressed in his *Christianity and Science* (1904), specifically in his section about theological science:

> [We] understand that faith in God, in his personal existence, is also contained in faith in the objective truth of religion. This is undeniable: if there is no God, then religion (*godsdienst*) – the serving of God (*dienen van God*) – is foolishness; and *vice versa*, of religion is truth, the existence of

[54] For a description of the student life of the first two decades of the Free University see van Deursen, *The Distinctive Character*, 79-87.
[55] Cited in van Deursen, *The Distinctive Character*, 88.
[56] See Bavinck, *Christian Worldview*, 35, 38.

> God is established at the same time. Theology, in the sense of the knowledge of God is the heart of religion.[57]

In the previous paragraph, it is possible to observe the connection between religion and theological science through their objective reality, God. The theocentric emphasis as the object of theology – opposing religious studies as the object of theology– can be observed in his four theological orations in relationship with subjective religion. These principles, or *principia*, are 1) God himself objectively revealed in 2) his word (*principium externum*) that is 3) subjectively applied to the person's consciousness by the Holy Spirit (*principium internum*). In other words, the saving knowledge of God is experienced in a scriptural and pneumatological dimension.

At the beginning of his professorship in Kampen, Bavinck claimed that the ontological foundation of theology is God himself (*principium essendi*). This is specifically regarding Reformed theology, where there is an impression of God's knowledge in the believer's consciousness.[58] In fact, the very name of the sacred science, 'theology', expresses its theocentric nature, 'it is called theology not only because it has God as its origin, but also because it has Him for its object'.[59]

Significantly, at the beginning of his professorship in Amsterdam, Bavinck continued holding the principle of God as the object of theology. In his *Religion and Theology* speech (1902), he distinguishes between philosophy and theology, where the latter is about 'the knowledge of God in the face of Christ, the one sent of the Father'.[60] Thus, theology is theological from the beginning to the end. It proceeds from God to God returns and finds its rest in God's rest.[61] Notably, God as the object of theological science is assumed in the classic understanding of ectypal theology. This assumption is held both in his oration of 1883, his *Medulla* notes (1884/5) and *Modernism and Orthodoxy* (1911).[62] Thus, in a dogmatic perspective, the knowledge of God is considered in an ectypal or analogical sense by using classic Reformed orthodox scholastic language. This knowledge is found objectively in the Scripture and subjectively applied by the Holy Spirt, as the following *principia*.

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[57] Herman Bavinck, *Christianity and Science*. Edited and translated by N. Gray Sutanto, James Eglinton, Cory C. Brock (Wheaton: Crossway, 2023), 88.
[58] *OT*, 34.
[59] *OT*, 41.
[60] *OT*, 108.
[61] *OT*, 137.
[62] *OT*, 46 and 173. In his *Medulla theologiae* (page 1), Bavinck also mentions the classical Reformed subdivision of *Theologia ecytypa* in *theologia unionis*, *visionis* and *viatorum*.

The relationship between the word of God and the Spirit of God in theology and religion is a principle identified in the Kampen and Amsterdam period. Notably, the pneumatological aspect is critical to understanding the application of scriptural reality to the church. In the *Science of Holy Theology* (1883), Bavinck claims – *contra* the secularisation of theology and *pro* its sanctification – the Holy Spirit 'brings and applies the treasures of the Word to the heart and the consciousness of the church…The character of all the Spirit's works in this dispensation is thus applicatory. He takes everything from Christ, from the Word, adds nothing new to it, for he rests completely in the work of the Son and, therefore, so do our souls'.[63]

In this line, the word-Spirit relationship is critical for understanding theology as a science given by God to the church. In his lecture about *The Teaching Office* (1899), he refers to scholarly theology as the development of a gift of the Holy Spirit that is distributed as he wills.[64] Explicitly, at the beginning of his Amsterdam period, Bavinck points out that God gave both his word and Spirit for a correct understanding of theology, religion, and the relationship between the two. From these two principles (*principia*), that is, 'from the instruction of the word and the illumination of the Spirit', Bavinck claims that 'all genuine theology' arises and 'true theology' is born'.[65] In this line, the Holy Spirit – conjoined with the word – regenerates sinners and because he is the *Doctor ecclesiae*, also imparts gifts of wisdom and knowledge to God's people.[66]

The scriptural and pneumatological aspect is also linked to the Christological one in terms of pastoral ministry, as the previous chapter described. This idea continues in *The Teaching Office*, 'it is Christ who deems people worthy of serving the truth and qualifies them for this ministry by his word and Spirit'.[67] In this sense, the object and *principia* of both religion and theology are the same. On the one hand, God in the face of Christ; on the other hand, the Scripture and the presence and illuminating work of the Holy Spirit.

The relevance of these theocentric *principia* are vital for godly theological training. Their absence or replacement changes the essence of theology and Christian religion. In *The Science of Holy Theology* and *Religion and Theology* (representing the beginning of the Kampen and Amsterdam periods, respectively), Bavinck mentions the catastrophic results of the

[63] *OT*, 33.
[64] *OT*, 96.
[65] *OT*, 133.
[66] *OT*, 136.
[67] *OT*, 86.

Higher Education Act of 1876 and Schleiermacher's thought for modern theology and religion. The change of the faculties of theology into departments of religious studies (required by the Higher Education Act) switched the object of theology from God to religious consciousness. This is what Bavinck means as the 'secularisation of theology', expressed in 1883. In modern theology, 'God is no longer the object of theology. Rather, it is religion, 'which is being researched as a fascinating historic phenomenon so that its origin, development, and laws can be discerned'.[68] In fact, not only the object of theology is replaced, but the Scripture as the *principium externum* of theology is detached from theological science.

In other words, modern theology lacks a specific principle and specific object.[69] This is further explained in *Religion and Theology*. According to Bavinck, in early times, religion was described as knowing and serving God; therefore, 'one viewed religion first from its objective, theological side'.[70] But since Kant's and Schleiermacher's influence, theology has moved from objectivity to subjectivity. Schleiermacher's new understanding of piety brought a change in religion. Significantly, 'this change in the *conception of religion* is necessarily accompanied by a modification in the *concept of theology*'.[71] This shift affects not only the theoretical aspect of theology and religion, but also the daily life experience of theologians and ministers. In other words, Bavinck identifies that alterations in the view of piety or theology, affect the other and vice-versa.

The replacement of theological principles directly influences the inner life of candidates for the ministry. This is especially highlighted in his two orations in the Amsterdam period. In fact, the secularised development of modern science produces a conflict in life, such as between theology and religion or culture and Christianity. But the conflict is 'painfully experienced' in the students from a Christian family background that encounters secularised modern science at the *gymnasium* and academy as he expresses in *Religion and Theology*. The result? 'Many have succumbed in this dangerous crisis'.[72] In the same lecture, Bavinck again identifies this crisis as one of the effects of a Christian religion moulded by

[68] *OT*, 42.
[69] *OT*, 42-43.
[70] *OT*, 112.
[71] *OT*, 115. Emphasis mine.
[72] *OT*, 111. In his book, *The Upbringing of the Mature Youth*, Bavinck also identifies some internal and religious conflicts that young Christians face in the puberty stage. For example, when they are aware of a society that rejects biblical affirmations, as well as the contradictions that occur between the profession and practice of some Christians. This leads some young people to start looking for other ideals, even reaching skepticism. See Herman Bavinck, *De opvoeding der rijpere jeugd* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1916), 156-58.

the philosophy of modern science. This context has an impact on the life of the student and churches:

> At present, the outcome has certainly not lived up to these expectations. In the first place, the students and then the churches have become the pitiable victims of this philosophical conception of religion. If students come from a believing household, they not only encounter a difficult crisis at the academy whereby their religious conviction and their love for ministry are at stake, but still greater difficulties await them when they return from the academy to the church, from scholarship to life, from theory to praxis. In many cases they can no longer speak because they do not believe.[73]

The previous paragraph shows the crisis experienced in the life of the student and churches. Bavinck expands that thought by saying that theological students lack the power to serve those on their deathbeds. The same idea of the impotence of serving others on their sickbed or deathbed is repeated in *Modernism and Orthodoxy*. The scientific theologian that forgets God's special revelation and considers God only with names as 'the absolute' or 'the primordial cause of all things' – and not God's love, for example – has lost the content and language of faith. That faith 'is impoverished for words, not just theologically, but also in preaching and prayer, on the sickbed and deathbed'.[74] Thus, God cannot be considered with 'the cold name of the Absolute' because every person longs after God, a God 'who is near him' and 'who hears his prayers'.[75] In other words, theologians need to cultivate the *praxis pietatis* towards God personally. In Bavinck's terms, God's personal existence and revelation presuppose that 'God personally approaches me in relationship and can establish fellowship with me and that I can trust him unconditionally, at all times, in distress and death, and that I may lay my lot in his hands for time and eternity. I am not claiming that this deep and rich conception of religion appears in all religions. We owe it precisely to Christ's Gospel'.[76]

In sum, because the God of science and the God of religion is one and the same God, it is critical to describe the relationship between theology and subjective religion to develop godly theological training grounded in theological *principia*.

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[73] *OT*, 116-17.
[74] *OT*, 172.
[75] *OT*, 167.
[76] *OT*, 165. I modified the English translation 'dire and death' for 'distress and death'. DO: 'nood en dood'.

II.2 Two sisters: Religion and theology

At the end of his 1902 lecture, Bavinck describes the relationship between religion and theology not as mother and daughter, but as two sisters, specifically as the biblical figures of Mary and Martha. Bavinck's four academic orations describe the link between theology and subjective religion as fellowship with God.

At the beginning of his career, and after retaining God as the object of theology, and the church and Christianity as the subject of theology, Bavinck relates theology and religion as similar to the point of claiming that the first 'is itself religion', and the church itself is a theologian.[77] This is because the theologian's task is described in his explanation of believers' communion with God. Both in theological and devotional exercises, there is a 'God-consciousness' and 'self-consciousness' or knowledge of God and the self-knowledge of the church.[78] This double knowledge resembles Calvin's idea of true wisdom and Calvin's definitions of faith and piety in his *Institutes,* as described in chapter one. In effect, through theology, the church can experience the reality of piety in knowing and serving God in connection with the idea of the certainty of faith. According to Bavinck, by theology, the church becomes,

> more closely acquainted with the God, whom it already possesses through faith... It wants to serve God also with its mind, and this because it is convinced that it is only the [church] which is wholly [pious]—with mind and soul and strength—that is truly pious. Theology is born not of skepticism, nor of the need for certainty, but of the assurance of faith.[79]

Notably, the subjective experience of piety is rooted in the same object of theology and religion: God himself in the face of Christ. The firmness of this object leads to the contemplation and meditation of God in the triunity of his being, God's attributes and works and God's revelation and relationship with his creatures.[80] In *The Teaching Office*, Bavinck begins his oration by acknowledging God, his revelation and the 'mystical fellowship' between the church and God. Significantly, God's thoughts deposited in his revelation invites believers to research and reflection from a gospel perspective. From there, the church must 'raise the standard of the cross on the field of scholarship

[77] *OT*, 45.
[78] *OT*, 45.
[79] *OT*, 46.
[80] *OT*, 46.

(*wetenschap*)'. Therefore, in order to possess a 'healthy and vigorous life' and 'answer its calling', the church needs theology.[81]

To fulfil this theological task, what kind of men does Bavinck wish to be appointed professors? The answer: 'good and pious (*vroome*) men'.[82] There is a need, according to Bavinck, for men 'full of the Holy Spirit and full of wisdom'. In other words, scientists must be believers in which 'the most profound theologian continues to walk by faith here on here until the end of their life'.[83] This is in accordance with the imperative found in the second edition of *Reformed Dogmatics*, the dogmatician must be an active believer from the beginning to the end of his work.[84]

Two years before the release of the second edition of *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*, Bavinck described the importance of growing in piety for scientists in his book *Christianity and Science*. This is because the scientist is a human being like any other person in a moral and religious sense. Thus, 'the man of science can only remain living religiously and morally, when he takes unto himself the same food that quiets the spiritual hunger of the poorest day labourer'.[85] The same spiritual necessity should lead theologians to consider the 'religious ideas (*religieuze voorstellingen*) and 'conditions' (*aandoeningen*) of the pious (*vromen*); if that is not the case, theologians 'undermine the foundation of [their] own science'.[86]

In the same book, Bavinck claims that theology, in the sense of the knowledge of God, is the heart of religion.[87] This is not something new. Two years before, in *Theology and Religion*, Bavinck explicitly stated that 'theology in the proper sense of the word is the heart of religion; it stands or falls with it'.[88] The reason for this statement lies again in the place of faith in relation to theology. As chapter three described, faith is also regarded as faith-knowledge (*geloofskennis*). Therefore, 'theology, in a certain sense, is the heart of religion. To know God is life'.[89]

Because of the relationship between religion and theology, scientists should experience the regeneration of the whole person to exercise essential duties of the Christian life, such as 'deny themselves and take up their cross'. Again, sanctification is vital for theologians

[81] *OT*, 62.
[82] Ibid., 97.
[83] Ibid., 104.
[84] *RD* I, 42.
[85] Bavinck, *Christianity and Science*, 63.
[86] Bavinck, *Christianity and Science*, 64.
[87] Bavinck, *Christianity and Science*, 88.
[88] *OT*, 127.
[89] *OT*, 139.

because 'in order to see God, there must be purity of heart'.[90] In this oration, *Religion and Theology*, Bavinck summarises some of the elements that conform to his definition of piety described in the previous chapters. The experiential language used to describe the new godly life (*nieuw godzalig leven*) of Christians (and theologians in this case) in terms of 'ardent love' or 'the mortification of the old nature' points out the objective demand of God to live according to his will, and the subjective response of believers that is found in Bavinck's definition of piety.

Because Christian religion is not a relationship determined by people, but a 'service required of us by God', true religion is a '*sacrifice'* of the entire being.[91] However, religion is not considered only in its objective obligation. Here is where Bavinck's definition of piety or subjective religion comes to the fore. Religion is 'also a disposition and desire' where there is harmony between the different faculties of the person. In other words, theologians must understand that religion is a matter of 'the head and the heart, faith and love, idea and affection, theory and praxis, doctrine and life together—a service certainly, but a service of love which never fails'.[92]

The previous quotation led us to another principle of godly theological training, the *praxis*. Practice can be adequately understood when the unity and the distinction between religion and theology are maintained. As I mentioned at the beginning of this section, Bavinck regarded both as sisters, Mary and Martha, respectively. It is possible even to infer that there is an older and a younger sister because theology is 'most certainly the fruit of faith'.[93] Bavinck states that centuries ago, the church existed without scholarship, and also that 'thousands of pious [people] still live who have no concept of theology'.[94] Despite the distinction between religion and theology, they are closely related because 'they share the same blood'. In other words, the close relationship between them must be maintained because both arise from the same word-Spirit *principia*. Thus, the content of faith becomes the object of scientific reflection in theology. In fact, both have the same material and the God-glorifying end: 'the knowledge of God in the face of Christ' and 'the glory of God's name'.[95]

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[90] *OT*, 131.
[91] *OT*, 132-133. Italics by Bavinck.
[92] *OT*, 133.
[93] *OT*, 137.
[94] *OT*, 136.
[95] *OT*, 138.

From the theocentric *principia* there is a subjective response reflected in the desire and disposition to serve God according to his will. Consequently, the unity/distinction between religion and theology helps Bavinck to prepare the soil to cultivate the practical aspect of piety and theology. Actually, theology serves as a bridge between religion and culture. In sum, the *principia* of godly theological training connects piety with culture:

> Through theology, religious life firmly preserves its connection with the culture of its people, its position at the pinnacle of its time, its connection with its country and people, with science and art, with state and society, with all national and international movements. Through scholarly theology, servants of the Word are raised up for the church of the Lord, who, as genuine theologians are children both of their generation and their century.[96]

II.3 Theological *praxis*

From the aforementioned objective theocentric principles, and by the subjective work of the Holy Spirit in the human's heart, the believer responds by faith in order to cultivate fellowship with God. The objective-subjective movement in a trinitarian and *exitus-reditus* scheme is key to preserving the essence of Christian religion. As Bavinck indicates in *Modernism and Orthodoxy*,

> faith immediately finds solid ground under its feet when it stands upon God's *special* revelation, which comes to the human heart objectively in the person of Christ and subjectively in the testimony of the Holy Spirit...Now, if religion (not as religiosity but as genuine worship, as fellowship with the living God) presupposes such a special revelation both objectively and subjectively, then the present controversy takes on a very serious character, for it is not about a few orthodox hymn tunes or dogmatic formulas, but about the preservation of the Christian religion itself.[97]

The theocentric principles and the close relationship between religion and theology lead theology to its practical dimension. While Bavinck's description of theology as *regina scientiarum*, and the issue about what was the fittest place for theological science – i.e., the

[96] *OT*, 139.
[97] *OT*, 172.

university or the church through the seminary – has been described by Xu and Pass,[98] it is crucial to describe the practical role of theology in the formation of those who will become ministers in Reformed churches.

The practical aspect of theology has been part of the Reformed mindset of Dutch Reformed scholasticism. For Voetius, theology was mainly practical (*scientia practica*), while for van Mastricht it was both theoretical and practical (*theoretico-practica*).[99] By considering Thomists' theoretical and the Scotists' practical views of theology, Bavinck acknowledges that the Reformed put both the theoretical and practical views together.[100] In this line, Bavinck also defines the nature of theology as 'a theoretical science, but it is also a practical science'.[101] So too, this is the genus of theology that Bavinck taught during his first years in Kampen. In his *Medulla* manuscript, Bavinck holds a *theoretico-practica* view of theology: '[*Theologia est*] *non solum theoretica sed etiam practica*'.[102] Therefore, for the young Bavinck, it is impossible to conceive theology as knowledge for the sake of intellectual knowledge. In fact, that is 'foolishness', which cannot be the case with theological science; theology has to be practical according to his purpose.[103] The reason lies in its relationship with life.

Theology is rooted in life and has life as its end. This concept of life that Bavinck refers to is the one given posteriorly in *Kennis en Leven*, that is, the experiential knowledge (*kennis*) of God. In *The Science of Holy Theology*, Bavinck addresses his audience by saying that 'if God gives us theology, then he intends therewith that we might come to know Him in the face of Christ and in this way *have eternal life*'.[104] Thus, this science comprehends the theologian's intellectual, affectional and volitional aspects. Bavinck is definite about the holistic and practical aspects of theology. If this science does not have this life as its end, 'theology is nothing' or 'does not deserve its name' because practice is the crown of theology.[105]

This *theoretico-practica* aspect points out the close relationship between dogmatics and ethics from a Reformed perspective, that is, from beholding God's being and his creational and saving works, humans respond by living according to God's will. Therefore, Bavinck understands this practical aspect as 'the art that follows science' or the conversion of

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98 Xu, *Theology as the Science of God*, 192-213 and Pass' introduction in *On Theology*.
99 For the practical nature of theology in Voetius see Beck, *Voetius*, 186 -94. For the *theoretico-practica* paradigm in van Mastricht see Adriaan Neele, *The Art of Living to God* (Pretoria: Pretoria University Press, 2005) and *Petrus van Mastricht (1630-1706): Text, Context, and Interpretation* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020).
100 *OT*, 52.
101 *OT*, 53.
102 Bavinck, *Medulla*, 4.
103 *OT*, 52.
104 *OT*, Emphasis by Bavinck.
105 *OT*, 54.

knowledge into skill where 'the truths drawn from exegetical, historical and systematic theology' pass into life.[106]

This dogmatic-ethic union as part of the genus of theology could also be understood in the faith-love or the knowing-serving relationship. Bavinck argues that 'faith without love is impossible. To know God and not serve Him is unthinkable. The *credenda* (articles of faith) are simultaneously the *agenda* (things that are to be done)'.[107] At the same time, the theoretical-practical nature of theology led Bavinck to embrace all the categories of *intellegentia*, *scientia*, *sapientia*, *prudentia* and *ars* under the name of 'science', also recognising that theology is also called *doctrina* or *sapientia* by Dutch orthodox theologians. Again, this is the paradigm that Bavinck will use for his dogmatic class. In describing the genus of theology, the young professor says that it '*est scientia*', '*sapientia*' and '*doctrina*'.[108]

Significatively, a young Bavinck highlights a crucial point in the first oration: the theoretical aspect precedes the practical nature of theology. This observation must be considered for a correct reading of what a mature Bavinck states in his second edition of *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*. In *Reformed Dogmatics*, he states that the final purpose of theology does not lie in any creature, 'not in practice, or in piety (*vroomheid*)' because in comparison with other sciences, theology maintains its own 'nature'.[109] One could possibly conclude that the theocentric emphasis erases ethical implications, but that is not possible in light of the whole argument of that section of *Reformed Dogmatics*.

With the previous statement, Bavinck highlights the theocentric nature of theology. In fact, in the same paragraph, Bavinck emphasises the God-glorifying and theological nature of this particular science: theology is from God and by God, and hence for God as well, having its final goal in God's glory. Furthermore, Bavinck links the nature of theology with truth and knowledge in an experiential way that reflects the nature and end of theology and piety, to know God. Theology is the knowledge of God. Essentially, this knowledge is blessedness and eternal life both here on earth and in heaven. Again, the doctrine of the beatific vision is significant for a mature Bavinck: 'to know God in the face of Christ – by faith here on earth, by sight (*aanschouwen*) in the hereafter- not only results in blessedness but is as such blessedness and eternal life'.[110] When this is understood, one can closely

[106] *OT*, 54.
[107] *OT*, 54.
[108] Bavinck, *Medulla*, 4.
[109] *RD* I, 53.
[110] *RD* I, 53.

relate dogmatics to ethics and, thus, comprehend the theoretical-practical description of the young Bavinck and Reformed orthodoxy. The theocentric conceptualisation of dogmatics and ethics reinforces this *theoretico-practica* aspect as two 'sciences' (*wetenschappen*) that together form a single system; dogmatics and ethics 'are related members of one (*één*) organism'.[111] This last idea appears identically in both editions of *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*, showing the continuity of the theoretical-practical aspect of scientific theology. This idea is essential for the training of future ministers.

III. Training of pastors-theologians

As we approach the end of Bavinck's period at Kampen, we can see the consolidation of his theological thought in relation to theological teaching. *The Teaching Office* oration shows the theoretical movement into the practical in the task of theologians and ministers. As we have seen in the previous chapters, the objective reality of the gospel must penetrate the subject's consciousness to grow in piety. For this, God uses the academy and science (*wetenschap*) with a double purpose: to 'destroy the work of the devil' and to transplant God's truth 'completely into the consciousness of errant humanity through research and reflection'.[112] Thus, Christ prepares people for this task through his word and Spirit. So too, drawing from church history, and directly from Voetius, Bavinck points out that church doctors had an obligation to teach, resist the enemies and serve the church with scholarship or science (*wetenschap*).[113]

For Bavinck, even when the teaching office is not a church office in the sense of the elders or deacons, the church (*kerk*) needs teachers to fulfil its calling because they are a gift of the Holy Spirit. One of the primary tasks of the church, done by its doctors/teachers, is related to the practice of theology and education for the ministry of the Word. Both the pneumatological aspect and human responsibility are essential here in how the Holy Spirit gives, and the church responds to, God's gifts. In Bavinck's words:

> The Holy Spirit, nevertheless, makes sure that the church is not lacking in the gifts of *didaskalia* of which it has need and the church is called not to neglect to such gifts, but to seek out and identify the persons that have received them in order that they may be set apart for the interpretation and defense of the truth and for the education of ministers

[111] *RD* I, 58. The English version translates *wetenshappen* as 'disciplines'.
[112] *OT*, 85-86.
[113] *OT*, 87.

> of the Word and to give them the opportunity of dedicating their lives to this weighty task without hindrance.[114]

By directly mentioning Kuyper in his speech, Bavinck aligns with him by claiming that the teaching office has at least a triple purpose: to serve to the education of future ministers of the word of God, the explanation of truth in a scholarly manner, and to the defense of the truth that the church confesses against heresy. In other words, through the teaching office of theologians, 'the church fulfils its calling to proclaim the gospel' to everyone in the domain of science, grows in grace 'and attains the unity of faith' in the knowledge of Christ.[115]

In sum, at the end of his oration, Bavinck reminds the double task that the church has when commissioning its doctors, who are at the same time professors of theology: 'practice of theology and education for the ministry of the Word'.[116] In fact, Bavinck is confident the church will take that direction: 'We trust that Reformed churches will make education and theology an object of its ongoing concern'.[117]

For the realisation of the task given by the church, the character and spirituality of the theologian is also considered by Bavinck at the beginning of his periods in Kampen and Amsterdam. In 1883, the young professor directly quoted in his speech the words of Herman Witsius by expressing that a theologian is 'whoever is instructed with true knowledge of God and divine matters—God himself being the Teacher—not just in words alone but in the entire institution of his life, who puts into practice God's praiseworthy virtues, and who is complete for His glory'. Because of the unity between religion and theology, a theologian is a priest who serves God, a prophet who speaks for God's honour, and a man of God equipped for every good work. [118]

Notably, the theologian is a Christian person. At the end of his first Amsterdam oration, Bavinck highlights the harmony in the convictions of the theologian as an ordinary person who is also a member of a congregation. This means theologians are not people removed from reality; they are citizens of their country and members of a particular church with a defined confession. In terms of their piety, theologians have the same spiritual need as every other person. Thus, theologians live by faith just as other Christian believers. In this

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[114] *OT*, 98.
[115] *OT*, 99.
[116] *OT*, 104.
[117] *OT*, 105.
[118] *OT*, 55.

way, there is no conflict between being a person, a Christian, and a theologian.[119] In other words, there is harmony in the heart of the theologian.

Another concluding harmony is observed at the end of Bavinck's first speech in Amsterdam. This harmony is about the elements that shape the godly theological training, that is, the theocentric principles, the intimate relationship between religion/theology and the practical nature of theology for the training of candidates for the ministry. Notably, piety in the theology classroom has its end in fixing the eyes of students on eternal things. For Bavinck, godly and scientific Reformed theological education is rooted in heaven because it is a gift from God in order to know God and serve others. Furthermore, the childlike analogy comes to the front as well:

> Consequently, a childlike humility is required of the practitioner of theology. Certainly, theology is a science… The object theology has to research is truth, divine truth, for it is also a truth which serves life and which accords with godliness (*godzaligheid*)… Religion—the fear of God—must, therefore, be the element that inspires all theological research. It must be the heartbeat one hears softer or louder in every dogma. A theologian is someone who dedicates themselves to speaking about God because they speak from and through Him. To practice theology— it is a holy work. It is a priestly service in the house of the Lord. It is itself religion, a serving of God in His temple, a devotion of heart and mind to the glory of His Name.[120]

After that paragraph, Bavinck addresses the Free University of Amsterdam directors to indicate that he has joined the faculty to collaborate in realising a high ideal. What is the ideal that Bavinck has in mind? To apply his powers for the development – 'both theoretically and practically' – of the connection between confession and science.[121] Finally, he directs his students to emphasise the relationship between subjective religion and sacred science:

> Esteemed students…theology is the most beautiful and most glorious of all sciences. It brings you into contact not with material but with spiritual, not with visible but with invisible, not with temporal but with

[119] *OT*, 140.
[120] *OT*, 141.
[121] *OT*, 142.

> eternal things. Through the forecourt and holy place it guides you into the holy of holies… Out of all that is finite it causes you to ascend to the infinite and eternal being of God so that you shall also find rest for your thinking with Him and by His light shall behold the being of all things.[122]

Throughout Bavinck's writings it is possible to identify the previously mentioned elements that shape godly theological training. But in which way do these ideas impact the spiritual life of his students? Did Bavinck's students see coherence between the theory and the experience in the classroom? To this, we will briefly turn.

III.1 Reformed piety in the classroom: spirituality, personality, and struggle

For Bavinck, a theologian must be a Christian and a human being. There must be no conflict between being a person and a theologian. In his words, 'God forbid, that in becoming theologians we should to the same degree cease to be people!'[123]

At the centenary of Bavinck's birth (1954), one of his students – Rev. Gerrit Brillenburg Wurth – wrote a memorial about his professor during his period at the Free University of Amsterdam. To dedicate a word of gratitude, a 'remembrance replete with piety' (*piëteitsvol herdenken*), Wurth begins to speak of Bavinck as a 'Christian person' (*als mens christen*).[124] This idea could be obvious, but it is not because Wurth will later describe Bavinck as a person and as a Christian, echoing the idea previously mentioned in Bavinck's oration in Amsterdam in 1902.[125] The way Wurth describes Bavinck not only reflects the impression that Bavinck left on the students theoretically, but also to understand the practical aspect of the Christian-person harmony, to describe two aspects observed in his teacher: his spirituality and the harmony/struggle of his personality.

III.1.1 Bavinck's spirituality

As chapter two described, there is a close relationship between piety and spirituality because both concepts have fellowship with God as part of their definitions. Thus, when we talk about Bavinck's spirituality, we refer to the disposition and practice of having communion with God (by practising, for example, some spiritual exercises related to the

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[122] *OT*, 144.
[123] *OT*, 140.
[124] Gerrit Brillenburg Wurth, "Ter gedachtenis van dr Herman Bavinck (1854–1921)" in *Gereformeerd Weekblad* 10:185–86 (1954).
[125] In the same line, the idea of 'being human and being a Christian' could be summarized in the concept of *kinderleven* that is, being a child of God in all things (see chapter three). This echoes Bavinck's letter to Snouck Hurgronje, 'to be a human in the fullest natural sense of that word, and then as a human, a child of God in all things – that seems to be the most beautiful of all. That is what I strive for.' Quoted in *BCB*, 161.

first table of the law) that is distinguished – but not opposed to – from other activities of others life's sphere. As Bavinck put it at the end of *The Certainty of Faith*:

> Religious life does have its own content and independent value. It remains the center, the heart from which all the Christian's thoughts and acts proceed, by which they are animated and given the warmth of life. There, in fellowship with God, he is strengthened for his labors and girds himself for the battle. But that mysterious life of fellowship with God is not the whole of life. The prayer chamber is the inner room, although it is not the whole house in which he lives and functions. Spiritual life does not exclude family and social life, business and politics, art and science. It is distinct from these; it is also of much greater value, but it does not stand irreconcilably opposed to it.[126]

Specifically, Bavinck's spirituality in the classroom is reflected in how he pointed out the *principium essendi* of theology in an experiential way. For example, G.B. Wurth describes the contemplative aspect of Bavinck's last years, especially the 'peace of mind' or 'spiritual peace' (*geestelijke rust*) when he was lecturing. The contemplative aspect is related to the idea that Bavinck's eyes could look straight ahead in a calm (*rustig*) way, 'as it were, gazing at something in the distance' when teaching.[127] Another student, J. J. Buskes, made a similar observation. Buskes expressed the reflective aspect of Bavinck, where his description points to the experiential spirituality, grounded in the objective foundation of theology, of some of Bavinck's lectures. For Buskes,

> When Bavinck lectured in the dull and paintless hall on the Keizersgracht, it could happen that he became so filled with the glory of God that he forgot about us, and while speaking, he stared out through the window into endless distances, because God's glory is endless, and we sat there speechless, and we listened and were introduced – for the whole of our live – into the saving mystery of the Eternal and Almighty One, who in Jesus Christ is our gracious Father. As a student, then I felt the same emotion that I sometimes felt as a child when dad prayed with us at the table.[128]

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[126] Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, 95-6.
[127] Wurth, *Bavinck*, 185.
[128] DO: 'Als Bavinck in het smakeloze en verveloze zaaltje aan de Keizersgracht college gaf, kon het gebeuren, dat hij zo vervuld werd van de heerlijkheid Gods, dat hij ons vergat en al sprekende door het raam

The above quotation shows that Bavinck's lecture stirred up Buskes' affections to ponder the experiential dimension of piety. In fact, Buskes has one descriptor that summarises this experience in the lecture hall. In his description, 'I know only one word to describe all this: piety, Reformed piety, which I regard as a very precious good.'[129] In sum, some of Bavinck's experiential teaching was described as a synonym for Reformed piety.

The kind of piety that belongs to Bavinck's tradition is something that emphasises both the object of theology, God himself, and the subjective experience of those who were filled with the glory of God, that is, the professor and the students. For Buskes, this 'Reformed piety' is something that he regards as a very precious good. Notably, Buskes begins his description of Bavinck very similarly to Wurth, that is, by using two adjectives. Wurth uses 'human' and 'Christian'. Buskes refers to Bavinck as a 'great scholar' (*grote geleerde*) and a 'pious man' (*vrome man*).[130]

The experiential aspect of Reformed piety is also highlighted in two memories that Wurth describes in his article. The two memories are related to two students' congress held at the end of and after the first world war. At the first congress of Reformed students in 1918 (*Gereformeerde Studentencongres*), Wurth indicates that Bavinck would have preferred not to take on an official lecture. However, after the other speeches, an old Bavinck started to draw a comparison between the present time and his time in the Seceder manse in Kampen. Despite the 'scientific' and 'cultural' advantage that they have in comparison with the older generation of Seceders, the *afgescheidenen* 'still knew what sin and grace were'. In a pastoral way, Bavinck asked themselves, 'do we not sometimes run the danger that we, by all our increased knowledge and cultural insight, will forget that one thing?'[131] In other words, Bavinck is not satisfied with a theoretical knowledge of doctrines, but as in his foreword to the Erskine brother's works, the experiential aspect of some doctrine is vital for the Christian life.

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naar buiten staarde in eindeloze verten, want Gods heerlijkheid is eindeloos, en we zaten sprakeloos te luisteren en werden ingeleid - voor ons gehele leven - in het heilgeheim van de Eeuwige en Almachtige, die in Jezus Christus onze genadige Vader is. Ik voelde als student dan dezelfde ontroering, die ik als kind soms voelde, wanneer Vader aan tafel met ons bad'. J.J. Buskes, "Prof. dr. Herman Bavinck (1854-1921)", in *Woord en Dienst: Veertiendaags orgaan voor het hervormde kerkewerk*, jaargang 12, nummer 11, 25 mei 1963. Cf. J. J. Buskes, *Hoera voor het leven* (Amsterdam: De Brug, 1959), 33-38.

[129] DO: 'Ik weet ook maar één woord, waarmee ik dit alles kan aanduiden: vroomheid, gereformeerde vroomheid, die ik beschouw als een zeer kostbaar goed.' See Buskes, *Hoera voor het Leven*, 33.

[130] Buskes, *Hoera voor het Leven*, 33.

[131] DO: 'die wisten nog wat zonde en genade was. En lopen wij wel eens niet het gevaar, dat wij, bij al onze toegenomen kennis en cultureel inzicht, dat ene gaan vergeten?' Wurth, "Bavinck", 185.

The second memory was at another meeting of the Student Corps (*Studentencorps*), where the theme was about the future of Christianity in connection to the task of the League of the Nations. Wurth recalls when Bavinck turns to the students 'so urgently' (*zo dringend*) to indicate a double desire. The first reflects his eschatological desire to depart (*heengaan*) and to be with Christ not 'tomorrow' but 'today!' (*nog vandaag!*) because to be with Christ 'is by far the best for me' (*voor mij verreweg het beste*). Nevertheless, at the same time, he wished to be a young man again – as the present students – to see the coming future of the 'formidably turbulent world' (*geweldig bewogen wereld*) where they currently live. This Pauline echo reflects the personality of Bavinck as the expression of his holistic, experiential and heavenly-rooted view of piety as a man of his times. In Wurth's words, 'that was Bavinck: a modern man, a scholar of stature; but in his heart still central that one [thing]: deep knowledge of sin and joyful experience of God's grace'.[132]

III.1.2 Bavinck's personality: pious yet modern

The theoretical-practical aspect of Bavinck's theology led Wurth to acknowledge the value of Bavinck's works and personality. Although, church history shows that the significance of some people lies almost entirely in the treatises they produced, while their personalities are forgotten or sometimes contrasted with their works, that is not the case with Bavinck, according to the student. Wurth considers Bavinck's oeuvre as 'highly valuable' (*hoogst waardevol*), but his personality was 'of such nature' (*van die aard*) that Wurth regarded it as a blessing to have known his professor closely.[133] In the cases of both students, Wurth and Buskes, it is possible to identify a *harmony-struggle-solution* rhythm in Bavinck's personality.

Under the 'Christian-and-person' paradigm taught by Bavinck, Wurth describes his personality. The 'double conversion' idea reflected in *Philosophy of Revelation* – that 'man must be twice converted, first from the natural to the spiritual life, and then from the spiritual to the natural'[134] – is also observed in Bavinck's persona. For Wurth, Bavinck was a human in the full sense that he was not 'alien' (*vreemd*) to anything 'human' (*menselijks*). But at the same time, and 'more than a human' (*méér nog dan mens*), 'he was a Christian' (*was hij Christien*).

Immediately Wurth seems to nuance his idea by saying that actually, to be a human and to be a Christian was one (*één*) with him. In sum, and by using Paul's words, Bavinck was 'a

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[132] DO: 'Dàt was Bavinck: een modern mens, een geleerde van formaat; maar in zijn hart nog steeds centraal dat éne: diepe kennis van zonde en blijde ervaring van Gods genade.' Wurth, "Bavinck", 185.
[133] Wurth, "Bavinck", 185.
[134] *PoR*, 192.

human in Christ' (*een mens in Christus*). From this harmony, students 'felt' (*voelden*) that there was 'no gap' (*geen kloof*) between his dogmatics and his personal faith. In fact, here lies one of the reasons of Bavinck's theological-experiential teaching: 'therefore, his dogmatics were so alive, because his faith was so alive'.[135] Importantly, Wurth acknowledges that Bavinck did not talk much about his personal faith; the experiential aspect was something that students perceived behind Bavinck's words. In other words, if there was something that adorned Bavinck as 'human' and as 'scholar' (*geleerde*) was his 'great degree of modesty' (*grote mate van bescheidenheid*).[136]

Bavinck's modesty can be mainly observed in his Reformed and catholic spirit.[137] For Wurth, his professor thought biblically and ecclesiastically (*kerkelijk*). This attitude led Bavinck to listen to the voices of the past regarding the 'big questions' (*grote vragen*). The 'sacred art of listening' (*heilige kunst van het luisteren*) conducted such an attitude in him that seldom can someone accuse Bavinck of misrepresenting the opinion of those who thought in a different way.

Buskes also detected this catholicity regarding Bavinck's appreciation for dogmatic development and formulation in church history. In 1959, Buskes wrote that 'Bavinck wants to value everything, everything that is before and after, in the East and the West, in the old church, in that of Rome and in that of the Reformation, that has been formulated as interpretation of the consciousness of the Christian faith'.[138] In this way, Bavinck's interest in Reformed theology during his Kampen period, and his emphasis on Christian theology in general during his Amsterdam period can be reflected in Buskes' observation of the relationship between what is specific and general. In Buskes' words, 'Bavinck always sought the connection between the specifically Reformed and the generally Christian, between the specifically Christian and the generally human'.[139] In this relationship, Buskes detected Bavinck's 'strength' (*kracht*) and 'weakness' (*zwakheid*). For Wurth, this was Bavinck's struggle.

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135 'Zijn dogmatiek was daarom zo levend, omdat zijn geloof zo levend was'. Wurth, "Bavinck", 185.
136 Wurth, "Bavinck", 186.
137 Wurth also described the modest spirit in Bavinck in mentioning that he was an enemy of every kind of speculation. In this way, with Calvin, Bavinck went as far as Scripture went in terms of theological development.
138 DO: 'Bavinck wil alles waarderen, alles wat voor en na, in het Oosten en het Westen, in de oude kerk, in die van Rome en in die van de Hervorming, als bewustzijnsvertolking van het christelijk geloof is geformuleerd'. Buskes, *Hoera voor het Leven*, 35.
139 DO: 'Bavinck steeds het verband tussen het specifiek gereformeerde en het algemeen christelijke, tussen het specifiek christelijke en het algemeen menselijke zocht'. Buskes, *Hoera voor het Leven*, 34.

In 1954, Wurth wrote two more articles, 'Bavincks levenstrijd' ('Bavinck's struggle of life') and 'Bavinck en de cultuur' ('Bavinck and culture'). Both writings present the tension and the solution that Bavinck's students discerned in him from a theoretical and practical aspect. In fact, Wurth projects and presents Bavinck's tension as the actual church's tension. In his words, 'in Bavinck's figure and in his life, the actual crisis is revealed, which has been working in the life of our Reformed churches for a long time and is still working now'.[140] What is this tension or crisis about? It can be summarised as the daily life application of the 'separation-to-integration' path that some Seceders, like Bavinck, chose.[141]

The tension indicates the following question. How can a holistic and experiential concept of piety be practised in a modern context without falling into pietistic-isolated forms of pietism or modern theological tendencies? Wurth points out that Bavinck remained spiritually as a son of the Secession. He remarks that his professor was never 'ashamed' (*geschaamd*) about his 'spiritual origin' (*geestelijke afkomst*) and his 'relatedness' (*verwantschap*) with the 'circles of simple pious people' (*kringen van eenvoudige vromen*). In fact, the spirituality of the Secession was always perceptible in Bavinck's 'marked, deep piety' (*gemarkeerde, diepinnige vroomheid*). However, Bavinck gradually broke out of the outward 'isolation' that characterised the beginnings of the Secession of 1834. Wurth observes this change in Bavinck's *Catholicity of Christianity and the Church* (1884), describing his professor as 'in the deepest and best sense of the word, a "catholic" Christian'.[142]

Bavinck's catholicity was related to the all-encompassing significance of Christianity for all spheres of life. Wurth remarks that Bavinck's students used to listen to an essential theme from his teacher: 'the cosmic meaning of Christ' (*De kosmische betekenis van Christus*). Bavinck's view of the universality of the Christian message stimulated his activity in a modern context. Although not everyone around him understood Bavinck, he remained very attentive to the development of the society in which he lived. Wurth remarks that Bavinck was open to everything that 'fermented' (*gistte*) and 'moved' (*bewoog*) in the modern world. Bavinck's catholicity led him not to ignore modern man's questions. Importantly, Bavinck remained as a 'real seceder' (*echte afgescheidene*) who was interested in modernity

[140] DO: 'in Bavincks figuur en in zijn leven openbaart zich de eigenlijke crisis, die in het leven onzer gereformeerde kerken reeds sinds lange tijd gewerkt heeft en nu nog steeds doorwerken blijft'. G.B. Wurth, "Bavincks levensstrijd" in *Gereformeerd Weekblad* 10:196 (1954b).
[141] *BCB*, 16.
[142] DO: 'Bavinck was in de diepste en beste zin van het woord een "katholiek" christen'. Wurth, "Bavincks levensstrijd"

because he was indeed 'in every way a modern person' (*op en top modern mens*) where the modern 'feeling of life' (*levensgevoel*) was not something strange for him. In other words, Bavinck was orthodox and modern because of his experiential and holistic understanding and practice of piety.

Bavinck's catholic spirit is also described in Wurth's *Bavinck en de cultuur*. As the title indicates, the author will point out the place of culture in Bavinck's thought. Significantly, Wurth remarks that he is not suggesting that Bavinck's importance lies 'predominantly' (*overwegend*) in cultural things. First, Bavinck is 'primarily a theologian' (*primair theoloog*), where theology was the 'sacred passion' (*heilige hartstocht*) of his life. Wurth's observation confirms Brock and Sutanto's view of neo-Calvinism primarily as a theological movement.

However, this does not mean that culture was left behind—quite the contrary. Culture was not an 'incidental' (*bijkomstig*) aspect of Bavinck's 'lifework' (*levensarbeid*). Thus, cultural issues were important for Bavinck both as a 'theologian' and as a 'servant' (*dienaar*). In Wurth's words, 'the problem of the culture fascinated [Bavinck] to the highest degree for all of his life'.[143] Strikingly, the 'cultural problem' (*cultuurprobleem*) is described as the 'great cross' (*grote kruis*) in Bavinck's life. However, simultaneously, Bavinck saw the victory (*overwinning*) in the faith. Therefore, it is in this 'tension-solution' paradigm that lies Bavinck's relevance in the view of culture. In other words, Bavinck's writings show a 'theologically responsible' (*theologisch verantwoorde*) vision of culture.

The connection between theology and culture is made because, again, Wurth highlights that Bavinck did not merely know the modern mind from the outside or from 'books'; the modern spirit touched Bavinck 'inwardly' (*innerlijk*).[144] Therefore, the tension between religion and culture is somehow solved by Bavinck's *catholic faith*. For Bavinck, culture mainly matters because catholicity matters. According to Wurth, for Bavinck, catholicity is the 'essential characteristic' (*wezenskenmerk*) of Christianity.

Catholicity is essential for the Christian religion because of its Christ-centered principle. The principle (*beginsel*) of catholicity is the 'unity' (*eenheid*) of Christ's creation and recreation. Thus, for Wurth, Bavinck's view of culture can only be explained by his 'theological vision' (*theologische visie*) shaped by particular New Testament books, such as Ephesians and Colossians, where all things in heaven and on earth are reconciled with God

[143] DO: 'heeft hem zijn leven lang het probleem der cultuur in de hoogste mate geboeid', G.B. Wurth, "Bavinck en de cultuur" in *Bezinning* (1954) 9:281–87.
[144] Wurth, "Bavinck en de cultuur", 282.

(Colossians 1:20) and gathered under one head (Ephesians 1:10).[145] Significantly, the 'Christocentric' (*christocentrisch*) view of culture is 'determined theocentrically' (*theocentrisch bepaald*). In this regard, Christ-centered and theocentric views of theology and culture are united in Bavinck's thought because God shows in Christ that he does not want to 'repudiate' (*verloochenen*) his creation. That is why Wurth understood two things about Bavinck's concept of grace. First, and because God's recreation work cannot be considered without presupposing creation, God's special grace can never be 'isolated' (*isoleren*) from God's common grace. Therefore, grace can never lead to considering culture as unnatural or an enemy.[146]

Bavinck's students observed his life as a constant struggle for the harmony and synthesis between head and heart, intellect and feeling. However, the two previous students present two views regarding the tension's solution. On the one hand, even when Bavinck talked about catholicity and synthesis, J.J. Buskes indicates, at least in his article, that his professor devoted his entire life to the 'solution' (*oplossing*) of the problem between Christianity and culture, but 'he did not find the solution' (*hij heeft de oplossing niet gevonden*).[147] On the other hand, Wurth acknowledges the difficulties of imitating Christ in modern culture. However, he finished his article not only by saying that in Bavinck's figure the critical problem of Christianity and culture was 'embodied' (*belichaamde*), but at the same time, from faith in Jesus Christ, and despite everything, Bavinck 'had found a solution' (*een oplossing had gevonden*).[148] Faith is the victory for the religion-culture tension.

While it is impossible to determine if Bavinck, in his own persona, solved this tension between Christianity and culture, his *corpus* offered different answers to this tension, such as catholicity, the concept of faith, imitation of Christ, and his doctrine of common grace.

However, the place of piety or subjective religion has not been studied *in toto* as an element that can help to solve the tension. Thus, for two reasons, piety can be considered vital to solving the tension between Christianity and culture. First, piety is about the covenantal relationship between God and his people. This relationship is essential to understanding any other moral and cultural relationship. As Bavinck explained in his article *Christelijke vroomheid* (Christian piety), 'The relationship in which a human being stands to God determines his relationship to all things. Whoever disrupts the God-given connection

[145] Wurth, "Bavinck en de cultuur", 286.
[146] Wurth, "Bavinck en de cultuur", 287.
[147] Buskes, *Hoera voor het Leven*, 34.
[148] Wurth, *Bavinck en de cultuur*, 287.

between nature and grace, will sacrifice the former to the latter or the latter to the former.'[149] This is also stated in *Magnalia Dei*, 'Religion, which is the relationship of man to God, governs all other relations also, and therefore implies a view of man and the world, and of the origin, essence, and purpose of all things'. [150]

Second, subjective religion implies the *praxis pietatis* towards God (religion) and, from there, flows a practice of piety in connection with culture as 'all the labor which human power expends on nature'.[151] Importantly, even when art, science, and culture cannot satisfy the human heart,[152] culture and *cultus* go together from the beginning.[153] Both are considered as one vocation where 'religion must be the principle which animates the whole life and which sanctifies it into a service of God'.[154] In other words, a Reformed view of piety is essential to understand the harmony between creation and recreation. To this, I will turn in the last section of this chapter.

IV. Practice of piety towards creatures

What presuppositions should we consider in practising piety towards creatures in moral and cultural terms? First, the necessity of being born again. As we saw in chapter two, piety is a disposition that must be directed towards God by regeneration. The reason lies in the consequence that the Fall brought into humanity that affects three kinds of relationships: 1) with God, 2) with others and 3) with ourselves. Thus, the doctrine of the fall should be considered in the view of culture and its relationship with the salvation of the human's soul. As Bavinck put it in *Philosophy of Revelation*, 'the whole of culture…the gaining of the whole world avails a man nothing if he loses his own soul; there is nothing in creation which he can give in exchange for his soul'.[155] For Bavinck, someone who does not considers the 'awful seriousness of real life' can deny the previous declaration.

The 'awful seriousness of real life' is directly connected to the triple effect of sin in the relationship with God, with others and with oneself. As he continues in *Philosophy of Revelation*:

> Man is lost *before God*, for he does not give himself to God and does not serve him in love…He is lost for *his neighbor*, for he abandons him in his

[149] Bavinck, 'Christelijke vroomheid.'
[150] *TWWG*, 41.
[151] *PoR*, 198.
[152] *PoR*, 3-5.
[153] *PoR*, 199, 205.
[154] *TWWG*, 169.
[155] *PoR*, 204.

> need and sacrifices him to his own interest in the struggle for existence. He is also lost *for himself*, for there is a cleft between his being and his consciousness, a dissension between his duty and desire, between his conscience and his will.[156]

Therefore, culture even falls into the background when the necessity of becoming a son of God comes to the front. However, it is wrong to think that 'the gospel must be at enmity with culture'.[157] This can also be applied to morality as the second presupposition for the practice of piety towards others.

Religion is not opposed to morality. On the contrary, because of the organic element in Bavinck's understanding of religion, there is a relationship between people simultaneously. In fact, 'the love of God' – part of the *cultus* expression of piety – 'includes that of our neighbor, and the latter is reflected in the former'.[158] In other words, the regenerated disposition – piety – leads believers to love God and love others as part of both the obligation indicated God's covenantal law (objective religion) and the covenantal desire to respond to God's word (subjective religion). Thus, the words that are generally paired in Bavinck's concept of religion, i.e., obligation/desire, are also used to understand morality and culture in relation to religion: 'Christian ethics maintains that the whole person must be good in intellect and will…to do good is a duty and a desire, a task and a privilege, and thus a work of love'.[159] In this way, it is essential to describe some of the duties that can help us to understand Bavinck's view of morality and culture in relation to subjective religion. These duties can be found in his *Reformed Ethics* according to God's commandments stated in the second table of the law.

IV.1 Morality and culture rooted in piety.

Before describing these duties, we should consider that imitation of Christ plays a significant part in Bavinck's ethical and moral model for the Christian life. Even when Bolt described this theme as partial, Joustra has advanced this theme by rightly situating the imitation of Christ as a consistent theme that plays a key role together with others Bavinck's central themes such as 'grace restoring nature', the gospel as a 'pearl and leaven'

156 *PoR*, 204. Emphasis mine.
157 *PoR*, 210.
158 *PoR*, 206.
159 *PoR*, 207.

and the 'organic motif'.[160] So too, Joustra connects the imitation with practical aspects of Bavinck's thought, such as social relationships and the Christian family.

In association with this research, Bolt and Joustra's understanding of Bavinck's imitation of Christ for ethics and morality can be further developed in light of Bavinck's idea of piety. The use of piety for morality lies in the heart of Bavinck's idea of imitation, that is, communion with Christ, as he stated in his *RE* and his *The Imitation of Christ* (1885/86). In his words, 'this mystical union, this spiritual, living, communion with Christ is the primary element of the imitation of Christ'.[161] So, if 'morality is grounded in religion' as he indicated in his second article on the imitation of Christ (1918), then we should infer that some of the elements that regulate subjective religion are also present in Bavinck's view of morality and culture. In fact, these elements are present in his *RE* and some of his published writings.

Importantly, this last section of this chapter does not seek to describe *in toto* the relationship between subjective religion and Christians' duties concerning morality/culture; instead presents some elements described in the *praxis pietatis* towards God that permeates the *praxis pietatis* towards others, including ourselves and our neighbour. These two fundamental elements are God's honour and God's love.

When discussing the commandments related to others in *RE*, Bavinck begins with believers' duties to themselves. While some theologians such as A.F.C Vilmar (1800-1868) denied this idea, Bavinck highlights the objective principle of piety – God's honour, described in chapter three – as the reason for moral theology and culture, knowing that the individual is the closest direct object of his moral actions. As Bavinck' indicates, 'God's honor (*Gods eer*) is certainly the ultimate objective and basic reason of our moral behavior toward ourselves, as well as of all moral behavior toward nature and the neighbor'.[162] So too, the *imago Dei* concept clarifies these self-duties because every human being has 'inestimable worth', where the immortal soul, created for eternity, has more value than the entire world.[163]

These previous ideas are also reflected in Bavinck's article about 'God's honour' (1883), where he highlights that true theology seeks to maintain God's honour in all things.[164] In

[160] Jessica Joustra, "Following the Way of Jesus: Herman Bavinck and John Howard Yoder in Dialogue on the Imitation of Christ" (PhD dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2018), 119.
[161] Bavinck, *Imitation* I, 397.
[162] *RE* II, 279.
[163] *RE* II, 280.
[164] Bavinck, *De eere Gods*, 106.

practical terms, and concerning this section, God's honour involves at least two things practically: the neighbour's honour and the holistic life-and-worldview of the Reformed tradition.

On the one hand, to attack the person's honour is the 'greatest harm' (*grootste nadeel*) that we can do. That is why to blaspheme or 'to slander' (*lasteren*) is a terrible sin.[165] On the other hand, Bavinck comments that God's honour is the principle (*beginsel*) that 'governs' (*beheerschen*) the life, thinking and strength of the Reformed church. From that principle, the church claimed for God's honour the Church, family, state, society, art and science (*wetenschap*). In this way, the Reformed church understood that religion (*godsdienst*) is not just a part of life which has its place only on Sundays, but religion 'was the life, that all life must be one service, one praising, one glorifying for God'.[166] In sum, when God's honour and piety – as the subjective covenantal relationship with God – are maintained in their proper place, we must love ourselves and others. As he indicated in his *RE*, 'love for God sanctifies self-love. Self-love then is loving oneself as a child of God, in fellowship with him, and thus also hating the sin within us'.[167]

Regarding the duties towards oneself, Bavinck classifies duties toward the life and the body and towards the life of the soul. The first regards attention to health, sustenance, clothing, life, sexual chastity, honour and property.[168] Duties toward the soul involve psychological aspects such as temperament, character, intellect, feelings and the will.[169] From here, Bavinck moves into the duties and love towards our neighbours. To define who my neighbour is, Bavinck reverses the question by indicating in the parable of the good Samaritan that it is one who 'becomes someone's neighbor' by serving love. So, the answer to the question 'receive[s] a practical answer – namely, don't ask theoretically who your neighbor is, but show that you are the neighbor of anyone who needs your serving help'.[170]

To love our neighbours presupposes at least two things, its foundation and scope. For the first, the foundation for loving others is love toward God because the second table follows the first table of God's law. Regarding the scope, Bavinck's resembles Calvin's idea described in chapter one: one should indiscriminately love others because of the *imago Dei*.

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[165] Bavinck, *De eere Gods*, 109-10.
[166] DO: 'dat godsdienst hèt leven was, dat heel het leven moest wezen één dienen, één prijzen, één verheerlijken Gods'. Bavinck, *De eere Gods*, 113.
[167] *RE* II, 288.
[168] *RE* II, 277-398.
[169] *RE* II, 398-413.
[170] *RE* II, 424.

According to Bavinck, 'our neighbors must be loved not only because they are sweet, sociable, friendly, rich, handsome, and so on, but also quite apart from all that'.[171] Notably, the good Samaritan parable gives us only one characteristic about the man who fell among the thieves, 'he was a human being', *ergo*, 'human beings, even if there is nothing attractive about them, must still be loved simply because God obliges us to do so'.[172] In sum, because we love God – in disposition and action – we should be disposed to love others 'no matter who and what they are' or even 'who needs our help', we love others because 'we are *their* neighbor'.[173]

The last point – love – redirects us to the importance of God's will expressed in his law, as was described in the previous chapter, because God's commandments presuppose love.

Because piety points out the harmony between God's will and our will, our subjective disposition must be impacted and regulated by God's word in order to produce good works born from faith. For believers, the law regulates all kinds of relationships – from God to nature. As Bavinck described in his *Guidebook*, the law is 'spiritual and governs, in principle, all the relationships in which man finds himself in relationship to God, his neighbor, himself, and the whole nature'.[174]

The previous quotation, within the sanctification section, shows how God's law regulates our desire to love God and others when faith, with the assurance of salvation, is the root of 'true humility, childlike fear, true godliness (*ware gadzaligheid*), [and] ardent prayers'. In fact, the meditation on the certainty of God's preservation for his people is the ground for the 'constant practice of gratitude and good works'.[175] Herein lies the importance of converted Christian theologians as true believers. Theologians must love themselves and their neighbours in order to promote God's honour in moral theology.

The certainty of faith should be in the theologian's heart in order to practice theology. In *The Certainty of Faith*, Bavinck states that the value of theoretical knowledge comes to the fore when it 'heals people'. So too, theology must 'provide' – and not merely prescribe – 'medicine' for the 'illness of the soul'.[176] For Bavinck, how a theologian practices love for

[171] *RE* II, 126.
[172] *RE* II, 126.
[173] *RE* II, 126. Emphasis original.
[174] Bavinck, *Guidebook*, 157.
[175] Bavinck, *Guidebook*, 160.
[176] The English version translates 'de theologie medicijn verschaffen voor de krankheid der ziel' as 'theology must prescribe medicine for the ailments of the soul'. Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, 18. I modified this translation.

his neighbour is reflected in what manner he addresses, for example, the dying neighbour with an experiential theology. In his words, 'a theologian who is acquainted with all the latest issues of his science (*wetenschap*) but who stands speechless at a sickbed and knows no answer to the questions of the lost sinner's heart isn't worthy of his title and office'.[177]

The last quotation reflects his view of the practical application of modern theology. For Bavinck, modern theology shows its impotence in practice where its representatives cannot offer comfort for either life or death from the pulpit or family visitation.[178] In summary, theologians should be converted because, in Bavinck's context, there is little of 'fervent, unfeigned faith! (*vurig, ongeveinsd geloof!*)'.[179] What group of people is diagnosed with that problem?

> Nowhere is this more true than among theologians. They are the most doubting, vacillating group of all. They have plenty of questions, doubts and criticism to offer. But what we expect from them more than from anyone else—unity of outlook, consistency of method, certainty of faith, eagerness to give an account of the hope within them—for these traits we often look in vain.

Therefore, by knowing that 'our greatest need is for certainty', what is most expected from theological sciences is the nurture of the certainty of faith.[180] From this certainty of heavenly salvation flows the godly and ethical, moral and cultural fruits needed in society. It is not a coincidence that Bavinck's two writings on the imitation of Christ finish with the idea of the *visio Dei*. Sanctification is vital in his article of 1883 because 'if this [sanctification] already begun here on earth where we only see him in a mirror, what will it be when we see him face to face?'.[181] So too, experiential piety is crucial for those who hold classical orthodox doctrines in matters of daily life and eternity. In Bavinck's words, 'the most stringent orthodoxy cannot make good the sins of smuggling, usury, dishonesty and deception in business, or of social and political unrighteousness. Whoever confesses Christ must distance himself from all unrighteousness. Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God'.[182]

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[177] Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, 18.
[178] Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, 19.
[179] Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, The English translation omits the exclamation mark.
[180] Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, 13, 19.
[181] Bavinck, *Imitation* I, 400-401.
[182] Bavinck, *Imitation* II, 440.

V. Conclusion

Bavinck's manuscript on 'Vroomheid en Wetenschap' ('Piety and Science',1905) summarises the ideas of godly and Reformed theological training, i.e., a theology that promotes the practice of piety towards God and others. For this, converted students should grow in grace and 'knowledge of Christ' (*kennis van Christus*), where there is no inactivity but progress in 'faith/love' (*geloof liefde*).

What are the means for spiritual growth? Bavinck responds in Latin: '*exercitia pietatis*'.[183] In fact, this manuscript shows some continuity in Bavinck's thoughts regarding the spiritual life. In the same way as in his period in Kampen, now in Amsterdam, a more mature Bavinck continues to speak of the spiritual life as a life that is unique, that has its own origin, growth, development, illnesses and means of recovery.[184] These are ideas that are also described in his manuscript 'Exercitia pietatis' (1896, see chapter three). This continuity can also be seen in that Bavinck detects that students in his circle tend to develop certain spiritual illnesses; an idea also present in his 1896 manuscript. At the same time, the holistic aspect is also considered in Bavinck's invitation to be interested in scientific issues, to be updated on Christian literature (and knowing books' authors) and interest in missions.[185]

In 1907, Bavinck – appointed a member of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences in the previous year – continued promoting the connection between piety and science in *Godsvrucht en wetenschap*. The organic relationship between subjective religion and science shows Bavinck's retrieval and contextualisation of the old Reformed understanding of *pietas* and *scientia* as was described in Calvin and Voetius. Bavinck, the modern scientist Reformed theologian, was also described as 'pious' by his students because of his experiential knowledge of God and the holistic application of God's honour in all spheres of life under the principle of love. In this way, love towards God is the foundation for Bavinck's moral and cultural theology. This leads us to conclude that all ethical, moral and cultural ideas find their chief end in the one who is the principle and end of piety: God. In Bavinck's words,

> The final goal of moral conduct can be found only in God, who is the origin and hence also the final goal of all things, the supreme good that

[183] Bavinck, *Vroomheid en Wetenschap*, 2-3.
[184] Bavinck, *Vroomheid en Wetenschap*, 3.
[185] Bavinck, *Vroomheid en Wetenschap*, 3-5.

> encompasses all goods, the Eternal One to whom all finite things return. Directed to that final goal, all things receive their own specific place in creation: prayer and commandment, religion and morality, an earthly and a heavenly calling, nature and culture…. Believers do not belong to themselves but to God, and they must therefore live moderately, justly, and piously (*vroom*) in the present world.[186]

In summary, piety is the *habitus* and exercise of a Christian whose life is constantly sanctified to glorify God on earth and in heaven; on earth per *cultus*, morality and culture, and in heaven by the contemplative enjoyment of the one who is the principle and end of both theology and piety: the Triune God.

[186] *RD* IV, 264-65.

Conclusion

> *So easily, we are in danger of losing sight of our destiny for eternity in the worries of earthly life. Taking care of things below, we forget to think about the things above. Devoting ourselves with all our power to our earthly calling, we neglect the care of our heavenly calling. The things of time push away the thoughts of eternity. The cares of the body push the soul's interests into the background*. – Herman Bavinck[1]

Neo-Calvinism is a Reformed theological movement. As Brock and Sutanto argue, neo-Calvinism presents a 'holistic theological project', where the doctrine of the Trinity shapes the organic terminology for unities-in-diversities.[2] This approach has led to the multiform application and contextualisation of confessional theology in every sphere of life: family, church, politics, arts, education and so on. However, it seems that one area has been largely forgotten, to different degrees, in contemporary scholarship on neo-Calvinism, which is the central theme of this dissertation: Reformed piety.

As was noted earlier in the thesis, Jessica Joustra, Al Wolters and Craig Bartholomew have observed a lack of spirituality within neo-Calvinism. Joustra even indicates a contrast between Kuyper and Kuyperians regarding piety. In her words, 'engaged in their broad vision for the Christian life, intellectual prowess, and culture-engaging call, neo-Calvinists have lacked an emphasis on piety, to their deep detriment. Kuyper's followers have done exactly what Kuyper warned them against'.[3] Joustra also cites Al Wolters to support this idea: 'generally speaking, neocalvinists are more noted for their intellectual ability and culture-transforming zeal than for their personal godliness or their living relationship with Jesus Christ'.[4] Finally, Bartholomew ends his systematic introduction to Kuyperianism by emphasising that Christian spirituality is '*the* great need of the Kuyperian tradition' that should be retrieved.[5] In sum, such figures argue that contemporary neo-Calvinism must consider the essential place of piety in its different applications.

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[1] DO: 'Zoo licht loopen wij gevaar, om in de beslommeringen van het aardsche leven onze bestemming voor de eeuwigheid uit het oog te verliezen. Zorgende voor de dingen, die beneden zijn, vergeten wij te bedenken, de dingen, die boven zijn. Met alle kracht ons wijdende aan ons aardsche beroep, laten wij de behartiging van onze hemelsche roeping na. De dingen van den tijd verdrijven de gedachten aan de eeuwigheid. De zorgen voor het lichaam dringen de belangen der ziel op den achtergrond'. Herman Bavinck, "Christelijk Leven". Review of *Meditatio futurae vitae*, by Martin Schulze in *De Bazuin* 49:11 (1901), 1-2.

[2] See the 16 theses presented by Cory Brock and Nathaniel Sutanto, *Neo-Calvinism: A Theological Introduction* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2022), 293-94.

[3] Joustra, "Following the Way of Jesus", 357.

[4] Joustra, "Following the Way of Jesus", 357.

[5] Bartholomew, *Contours of Kuyperian Tradition*, 316. Emphasis original.

However, it would be a mistake to target the lack of some expressions of spirituality only among *contemporary* neo-Calvinism. This problem can also be identified a generation after Herman Bavinck's death. His nephew, Rev. Coenraad Bernardus Bavinck (1907-1989), brother of the famed missiologist Johan Herman Bavinck (1895-1954), published a devotional book (circa 1944) titled *Kwijnend en bloeiend geloofsleven* (*Languishing and flourishing life of faith*). There, C.B. Bavinck begins by describing the spiritual situation of many people in his context. In his words, he identifies something notable: 'how sad it may be to say plainly, it is simply undeniable that the spiritual life of many in our circle languishes'.[6]

For Herman Bavinck, issues regarding spirituality were not only considered in his final years, but also at the beginning of his career as a pastor and theologian. In a short review (1882), Bavinck considers the causes of this languishing and the means for awakening in the spiritual life as an 'important subject' (*belangrijk onderwerp*).[7] A year later, he wrote another review where he welcomed the publication of a series of works regarding spiritual life. Notably, he expresses an undeniable fact that 'in the recognition of the origin, nature, character, development, health, and sickness of spiritual life, we are far behind [those in] past times'.[8] The remedy is not an easy task because if diagnosing the health or disease in the 'physical field is so difficult, how much more so in the area of spiritual life!'[9]

One of the past times that Bavinck refers to could include the seventeenth to the eighteenth century, when pious people read devotional authors. Even when Bavinck was critical of some pietistic attitudes, he expresses in *The Certainty of Faith* that 'never before or since has the hidden life of fellowship with God been studied more deeply and earnestly'.[10] The commendation and use of the covenantal and experiential theology of the Scottish Erskine brothers signal both Bavinck's view of the lack of sound spirituality among his contemporaries and part of the solution for this problem.

This dissertation has provided evidence that subjective religion – or piety – was an essential element of Bavinck's theology. Therefore, Bavinck's view of *praxis pietatis* can help to solve the issue highlighted by Joustra, Wolters and Bartholomew. Furthermore, this dissertation

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[6] DO: 'Hoe droevig het ook moge zijn om dat ronduit te zeggen, het valt eenvoudig niet te loochenen, dat het geestelijk leven bij zeer velen in onzen kring kwijnt'. C.B. Bavinck, *Kwijnend en bloeiend geloofsleven*, 7.
[7] Herman Bavinck, Review of "Eenige gedachten over de oorzaken der kwijning en middelen ter opwekking van het geestelijk leven" by W. Raman in *De Vrije Kerk* 8:3 (maart 1882): 144.
[8] DO: 'wij in de onderkenning van oorsprong, aard, karakter, ontwikkeling, gezondheid en krankte van het geestelijk leven bij vroegere tijden zeer ten achter staan'. Herman Bavinck, Review of "Schatkamer des geestelijken levens", by J.H. Donner in *De Vrije Kerk* 9:6 (juni 1883): 290.
[9] DO: 'op lichamelijk gebied is al zoo moeilijk, hoe veel te meer op het terrein des geestelijken levens!'. Bavinck, Review of "Schatkamer des geestelijken levens", 290.
[10] Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, 42.

can help contribute to the research in four areas: post-Reformation studies, scholarship on first-generation neo-Calvinism, twentieth-century Reformed theology and contemporary Bavinck scholarship. For this, a summary Bavinck's idea of Christian and Reformed subjective religion is provided.

I. *Bavinckian* piety: trinitarian, covenantal and holistic

In Bavinck's theology, Reformed piety can be understood as a regenerated disposition that, under the influence of objective religion, and through the work of the Holy Spirit, passes into actions. These actions can be generally described regarding the covenantal relationship with the triune God (in *cultus*) that is connected with morality and culture, where both the objective foundation and end of piety are the same: the glory of God. The holistic aspect should be understood considering the whole person in all kinds of relations. As Bavinck indicates in *Magnalia Dei*:

> Because religion occupies a central place in life, it saturates the whole of that life, and tries to bring it into line with itself…there are in every religion, ideas, feelings, and actions which are in part relevant to worship and in part to the moral life, and which may therefore be called both cultic and ethical.[11]

Essentially, because objective religion comes in a covenantal way, subjective religion should respond in a covenantal way as well. The objective theocentric and covenantal emphasis of Christian subjective religion prevent piety from turning into Pietism. As a result, this Reformed understanding of piety provides the foundation for Bavinck's neo-Calvinism.

Accordingly, Reformed piety aims for harmony between God's will and the human's will, between God's objective and covenantal commandments, and the human's subjective desires and responses in childlike disposition. Notably, piety influences personality and is organically connected to other spheres of life. In this line, because regenerated piety consists of a disposition and action, the covenantal subjective response involves *pistis* and *agape* in its core towards its object: God. In this way, while general or common piety points out the *feeling* of absolute dependence on God, Christian piety highlights the trusting (*pistis*) and loving (*agape*) towards the triune God. From this relationship with God it is possible to

[11] *TWWG*, 245.

articulate the holistic moral and cultural project of Bavinck. As a result, Reformed piety helps to better understand the nature-and-grace relationship that Pietism tends to separate.

In sum, Bavinck's understanding of Reformed piety occupies an essential place in his theology because it expresses a way of living that connects different areas of life in a *coram Deo* disposition by a covenantal *exitus-reditus* movement. In this way, Bavinck's trinitarian, covenantal and holistic understanding of Christian and Reformed piety provides a new paradigm that enriches the organic and scientific way of interpreting Bavinck's theology and neo-Calvinist project. So too, Bavinckian piety can provide some principles for retrieving and developing *praxis pietatis* within contemporary neo-Calvinism.

II. *Bavinckian* experiential piety for contemporary neo-Calvinism

Some of these elements that express Bavinck's concept of piety can be found in his book *The Sacrifice of Praise*. Importantly, these meditations can offer directions for retrieving and developing piety for contemporary neo-Calvinism.

The usefulness of *The Sacrifice of Praise* lies in the different approaches of two authors who recommended Bavinck's book in different years: W.H. Gispen (1903) and Scott R. Swain (2019). On the one hand, Gispen wrote a review that drew attention to the covenantal aspect of Bavinck's meditations. In his words, 'starting with the Covenant of Grace and the benefits that it both contains and bestows, Bavinck shows that it is the grounds or foundation of the confession'.[12] On the other hand, while Swain more recently acknowledges 'the renewal of Reformed theology in North America and the United Kingdom', he also observes that, 'unfortunately', this renewal in recent days 'has not, in every instance, resulted in a corresponding renewal of Reformed practice and piety'. So, for Swain, the republication of this kind of book 'can aid the renewal of Reformed practice and piety'.[13]

Because God, in the triunity of his essence, is the foundation of theology and religion, the unity-in-diversity archetype of God shapes the unity-in-diversity ectype and comprehension of piety. In this sense, a foundational unity of piety should be acknowledged within contemporary neo-Calvinism. That unity is related to the essence of Reformed piety throughout its history according to its objective foundation. This unity is understood through the general and shared understanding of pietas described by Calvin, the *Nadere*

[12] Bavinck, *Sacrifice of Praise*, 89.
[13] Bavinck, *Sacrifice of Praise*, xi.

Reformatie, and the Secession of 1834 and Bavinck's theology. The unity of Reformed piety expresses a theocentric principle and *telos* in knowing God by emphasising God's honour as the objective foundation. Because God is the central dogma of theology,[14] God himself also is the central dogma of the covenantal and regenerated subjective religion. As Bavinck described in *The Sacrifice of Praise*:

> All of these benefits of the covenant are summoned up in the one great promise: that God will be our God and the God of our seed…what gift is greater than that of God himself? What more can he give than himself–himself with all his virtues and perfections, with his grace and wisdom, with his righteousness and omnipotence, with his immutability and faithfulness?[15]

From this God-centred theology and religion comes a trinitarian life-and-worldview. As Bavinck indicates in the same book, 'the essence of Christian religion consists in this – that the creation of the Father, ruined by sin, is again restored in the death of the Son of God and through the grace of the Holy Spirit is re-created into the kingdom of God'.[16]

In this manner, Bavinck's definition of piety invites us to retrieve and develop a theology that constantly deepens both in the knowledge of God (i.e., essence, attributes, names and trinity of persons) and covenant theology. In fact, the covenantal understanding of piety leads us to consider the priority of some aspects regarding the holistic approach of *praxis pietatis*.

In this case, a Bavinckian approach to covenantal Reformed piety, acknowledges the priority of spiritual and God-centred realities over creational goods and developments. To be sure, the blessings of the covenant of grace 'form a fullness of spiritual and material, of heavenly and earthly, or eternal and temporal blessings'.[17] That is, Bavinck's neo-Calvinist understanding of *foedus gratiae* values the diversity of spiritual and material blessings within the unity of the covenant. Nevertheless, in this diversity, there is a precedence that points out to the unity of piety's essence: the spiritual priority of knowing God in the face of Christ. In *The Sacrifice of Praise*, Bavinck wrote, 'the benefits that are gifted to the person in this covenant are principally spiritual. Before all else, Christ came to earth to seek and to

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[14] 'God Himself as such in the unity of all His attributes and perfection of His entire Being is the point of departure for the thinking and acting of the Calvinist. From this root principle everything that is specifically Reformed may be derived and explained', see Bavinck, "The Future of Calvinism", 3-4.
[15] Bavinck, *Sacrifice of Praise*, 10-11.
[16] Bavinck, *Sacrifice of Praise*, 48.
[17] Bavinck, *Sacrifice of Praise*, 8.

save the lost. He did not act as a social reformer, as a political leader of the people, as an artist or a philosopher. But Savior was his name and office'.[18]

As a result, acknowledging the God-centered priority — in the unity-and-diversity scheme — helps us get a better understanding, appreciation and restoration of culture that comes, not only from God's common grace, but in this case, as a fruit of understanding and appreciating the gospel as God's work on restoring the broken relationship between God and man. As Bavinck expressed in 1891,

> It is indisputable that the salvation of human souls stands in the foreground of the New Testament. Sin, in the first place, breaks off fellowship with God, and then, in consequence, all genuine relationships that humans have with all other creatures. Thus, the first order of the day is restoring our proper relationship with God. The cross of Christ, therefore, is the heart and mid-point of the Christian religion. Jesus did not come, first of all, to renew families and reform society but to save sinners and to redeem the world from the coming wrath of God. This salvation of our souls must be our ultimate concern for which we are willing to sacrifice everything.[19]

Just as it is essential to emphasise this point, we must also point out that Bavinck does not stop there, because although 'the significance of the gospel does not depend on its influence on culture',[20] in *The Catholicity of Christianity*, he expresses the holistic reach of the evangel by saying that 'the Gospel is a joyful tiding, not only for the individual person but also for humanity, for the family, for society, for the state, for art and science, for the entire cosmos, for the whole groaning creation'.[21]

Along the same line, while Reformed piety aims for a holistic approach to worshipping God in everyday life, a distinction must be made between serving God in daily vocations and serving God on Sunday communal and liturgical worship. This distinction can help contemporary neo-Calvinism to avoid the tendency, as rightly indicated John Bolt, 'to blur

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[18] Bavinck, *Sacrifice of Praise*, 9.
[19] Herman Bavinck, "General Biblical Principles of the Relevance of Concrete Mosaic Law for the Social Questions of the Day." Translated by John Bolt. *Journal of Markets and Morality* Vol. 13, no. 2 (Fall 2010), 437-46. Here, 443.
[20] Herman Bavinck, "Christian Principles and Social Relationships." In *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, Ed. John Bolt, trans. Harry Boonstra and Gerrit Sheeres (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 119-144. Here, 141.
[21] Bavinck, *CCC*, 224

the distinction between Christian vocation and the corporate liturgical activity of God's people by way of a promiscuous use of the word "worship"".[22]

In this way, retrieving a God-centred theology — in the unity-in-diversity approach — helps to acknowledge the diversity of expressions of Reformed piety that, at the same time, distinguishes and gives significance to a God-centred spirituality in order to cultivate the diversity of earthly vocations in an *exitus et reditus* approach.[23]

Finally, the concept of 'organism' should be considered alongside piety. An organism has a principle of life (*levensbeginsel*) and a specific end.[24] Because Reformed piety's objective foundation is God's honour, its subjective life-principle lies in glorifying God. To glorify God, by knowing God, is the common idea of piety. In this sense, Reformed piety should promote practices of piety that help believers intentionally know God by faith here on earth to prepare them to know God by vision in heaven. For this, the retrieval of reading and writing devotional literature that helps believers to have affections centred on God – as Bavinck did in different ways – would be beneficial for developing neo-Calvinist projects shaped by the *levensbeginsel* of Reformed theology and piety.

Therefore, neo-Calvinism should retrieve theology and piety in order to cultivate a heavenly-mindedness that shapes the way of developing public theology for everyday life. As Michael Allen rightly indicates, 'we do well to retrieve the heavenly imagination for our contemporary Christian vocations'.[25]

Even when some points of Allen's critiques against Bavinck's understanding of *visio Dei* are not well sustained (see chapter three), his calling to retrieve the ascetic theology of Calvin, the *Nadere Reformatie,* and some puritan theologians, should not be ignored by contemporary neo-Calvinism. As we have seen, Bavinck called his students to consider seventeenth-century Reformed spirituality. One of the reasons for Bavinck's calling can be

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[22] John Bolt, "All of Life is Worship? Abraham Kuyper and Neo-Kuyperians" in Abraham Kuyper, *Our Worship*, ed. and trans. Harry Boonstra (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 322.
[23] 'Labor is a means, not a goal. The ultimate goal is that man with his labor may enter into rest and serve God on the seventh day in God's temple. The origin of man determines his destination: [being] from God, he has to return to God; God is the highest good for man and humanity', see Bavinck, "Christian Principles and Social Relationships," 122. So too, in *General Biblical Principles*, Bavinck expresses that '[God] also added a seventh day, blessed it and hallowed it, so that humans could rest from their labors and make heaven rather than earth the final goal of their work. Together with all creatures, humans are called to find their rest in fellowship with God', see Bavinck, "General Biblical Principles", 438.
[24] For Bavinck's *levensbeginsel* in theological encyclopaedia see Greg Parker, 'Theological Thinking and Loving' (PhD dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 2022), 149-150.
[25] Allen, *Grounded in Heaven*, 91. In *Reformed Ethics* Bavinck made a similar comment. 'The spiritual life should animate the moral life, control it, subject it…the purpose and task of ethics…is therefore to describe how regenerate people are to manifest their eternal heavenly life in the form of the temporal earthly life' See, *RE* I, 235.

discerned in the attitude of some of his contemporaries that reflected, in some sense, Allen's concerns about today's Kuyperianism. As Bavinck put it in 'Christelijk leven,'

> So easily, we are in danger of losing sight of our destiny for eternity in the worries of earthly life. Taking care of things below, we forget to think about the things above. Devoting ourselves with all our power to our earthly calling, we neglect the care of our heavenly calling.[26]

His article 'Christelijk leven' (The Christian Life) is a review of *Meditatio futurae vitae*, by Martin Schulze (1866-1943). In his book, Schulze presents a study of the meditation of the life to come by examining Calvin's book III about the Christian life. In his article, Bavinck indicates that Schulze's view of Calvin communicates one-sidedness. This is because Schulze emphasises aspects of negations of the Christian life (i.e., forsaking the world, self-denial, drawing the heart from the earth to sets all the affections in heavenly beatitude (*hemelsche zaligheid*)) above the positive elements (i.e., enjoying natural gifts, earthly calling). This was done because, for Bavinck, Schulze overlooked that Calvin was writing against Rome, as well as the libertines' and anabaptists' views. Despite this, Bavinck appreciates Schulze's study. This is because even with some external similarities between Roman Catholicism, Anabaptism and Calvin, there is a deep difference regarding the 'meticulous, serious life' (*nauwgezette*, *ernstige leven*) in Calvin's view. In fact, there is a 'Puritan trait' (*puriteinsche trek*) in Calvinism which should not be ignored. What is this trait that cannot be misunderstood? A heavenly-mindedness.

In other words, Christians could suffer from one-sidedness when, in Bavinck's words, 'devoting ourselves with all our power to our earthly calling, we neglect the care of our heavenly calling'. Strikingly, this danger of some kind of earthly-mindedness was also identified among Reformed Christians:

> Nobody will deny that this danger exists to an increased degree in the present age, also for confessors of the Reformed religion. The bond of this life with eternity is already being loosened. All attention is set on time, on the earth, on the physical well-being. Heaven vanishes from the heart and the eye, and many strive as much as possible to build a happy shelter here on earth for themselves and their own.[27]

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[26] See footnote 1.

[27] DO: 'Niemand zal ontkennen, dat dit gevaar in den tegenwoordigen tijd in verhoogde mate, ook voor de belijders van de Gereformeerde religie, bestaat. De band van dit leven met de eeuwigheid wordt al losser

Therefore, Bavinck's theological and practical neo-Calvinism invites us to consider the covenantal *kennis per visio* of God as the 'climax of all salvation' (*het toppunt van alle zaligheid*) and not to eclipse heaven through theology and earthly vocations. The reason for this is that, for Bavinck, the glory of God is the objective foundation and end of our theology and piety. In this line, the glory of God must be the guideline and *telos* of all things, including piety, morality and cultural development. As a young Bavinck expressed:

> All theology, which truly deserves this name…seeks to maintain His glory for all things. A true theologian is the one who – if he needs to be against everything, science and public opinion, State and church, and all things on the earth – holds fast to God and His Word and intends His glory among everything. This glory is the guideline and goal of all things.[28]

III. Contribution to post-Reformation studies, first-generation neo-Calvinism and twentieth-century Reformed scholarship

Herman Bavinck's books, articles and manuscripts give a prominent place to piety as subjective religion. This cannot be ignored in studies on Reformed orthodoxy, first-generation neo-Calvinism, and twentieth-century Reformed scholarship. To these studies, Bavinck adds a distinctive, orthodox and modern approach to *general* piety as *sensus divinitatis*/feeling of absolute dependence on God (as described by Cory Brock). In the case of this thesis, we also see that Bavinck contributes a *particular* understanding of Christian and Reformed subjective religion/piety. In other words, Bavinck's notion of Reformed *praxis pietatis* should also be considered in future studies to deepen the notion of neo-Calvinism as a theological movement. Consequently, Bavinckian piety helps us understand the development of this movement critically when piety is absent (to different degrees) from its projects. In this sense, Bavinck provides Reformed principles to address the lack of piety in neo-Calvinism.

Because of this research, post-Reformation scholarship should consider Bavinck's theology as part of the reception of the essence of *praxis pietatis* found in crucial figures of the *Nadere Reformatie*, such as the case of Voetius. Furthermore, the theological piety of Bavinck

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gemaakt. Aller aandacht is op den tijd, op de aarde, op het lichamelijk welzijn gericht. De hemel verdwijnt uit het hart en het oog, en zoveel mogelijk spant ieder zich in, om een gelukkig tehuis hier op aarde voor zich en de zijnen te bouwen'. Bavinck, *Christelijk leven*.

[28] Bavinck, "De Eere God" in De Vrije Kerk 9 (1883), cited in Ximian Xu, "Gloriously Intertwined: A Bavinckian Account of the Single Organism of Dogmatics and Ethics" in *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 24:1 (January 2022), 80-99. Here 83.

provides an example of positive appropriation done by an orthodox and late modern theologian. Not least is the fact that Bavinck describes Voetius as one of the most important Reformed theologians of the seventeenth century. Therefore, Bavinck's appropriation of Reformed orthodox theology and piety should be considered in the scholarship of post-Reformation reception within the Reformed tradition in general.

Bavinck's reception of Voetius and other Reformed orthodox theologians should also be regarded as part of the first generation of neo-Calvinism's positive and critical appropriation of Reformed orthodoxy.[29] Bavinck's neo-Calvinism gives an essential place to piety within his holistic worldview. Christian and Reformed piety provides an account of the relations between the self and God, the self and the world, and even psychological harmony between the faculties of the soul.

In the same line, Bavinck's conception of subjective religion (with the glory of God as its objective foundation) is central to his holistic application of theology that echoes the holistic program in the early and high period of the *Nadere Reformatie*. Thus, when neo-Calvinism is primarily considered as a theological movement, piety should not be overlooked in studying Bavinck's theology and persona. In other words, the all-encompassing applications of the neo-Calvinistic program should also be counted as part of the understanding of trinitarian, holistic and experiential piety.

In sum, Reformed piety's essence can be considered a significant element of continuity between Reformed orthodoxy and first-generation neo-Calvinism. This fact should not be avoided in future Reformed orthodoxy and neo-Calvinist scholarship.

Another aspect this dissertation can contribute is the Reformed understanding of religion after Bavinck's death, especially regarding both the concept of religion as such, and the understanding of the covenant idea.

In general terms, Reformed scholarship in the twentieth century was influenced by Karl Barth. On the one hand, Barth argued religion itself (including Christianity in its 'justified-sinner' conception as the true religion) was 'really unbelief [faithlessness]. It is a concern, indeed, we must say that it is the one great concern, of a godless man'.[30] As Joshua Ralston indicates, 'religion comes under the same searing "Nein" of natural theology', so too,

[29] See the first thesis that Brock and Cory provide in *Neo-Calvinism*, 293.
[30] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I/2. The Doctrine of the Word of God*. Translated by G.T. Thomson and H. Knight (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), 299-300.

religion 'is not a "point of contact" rooted in general revelation as it is for Bavinck'.[31] At this point, there is a divergence between Barth's and Bavinck's approaches to *religio*.

On the other hand, the idea of the covenant played a relevant role in Barth's dogmatics. Barth's Christological understanding of salvation – in the 'God with us' concept – is understood in covenantal terms. He asserts in *Church Dogmatics*, 'reconciliation is the fulfilment of the covenant between God and man'.[32] However, Barth's reading and reception of what he called the Federal theology of the older Reformed Church contrasts Bavinck's appropriation of Reformed orthodox covenant theology. The contrast between Bavinck and Barth can be noticed in their respective evaluations of *pactum salutis*, *foedus operum* and *foedus gratiae*.[33]

In this way, this dissertation helps to pave the way for further scholarship on twentieth-century Reformed theology, particularly considering Eglinton's recent arguments that histories of twentieth-century Reformed theology in Europe have tended towards overemphasis of Barth's wide influence, and neglect of the Europe-wide influence of neo-Calvinism. In line with this more balanced account of Barthian and neo-Calvinistic influences across Europe in that century, this dissertation provides a helpful meeting point for engagement between the receptions of Bavinck and Barth on an area in which their thoughts came close, whilst sharply disagreeing.[34] In other words, further research must be done regarding the continuity of Bavinck's understanding of Reformed piety and covenant theology.

Regarding continuity, this should not only be researched within Dutch American Reformed circles (like in Geerhardus Vos' understanding of piety), but also in the international development of Reformed theology, e.g., in the theological thought of Auguste Lecerf (1872-1943, French Reformed minister) and Jenő Sebestyén (1884-1950, minister and teacher at the Budapest Reformed Theological Academy).

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[31] Joshua Ralston "Barth, Religion, and the Religions" in The *Oxford Handbook of Karl Barth*. Ed. by Paul Dafydd Jones and Paul T. Nimmo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 637-653. Here 642.
[32] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV/1. The Doctrine of Reconciliation*. Translated by G.W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), 22
[33] While Barth's reading of federal theology led him to state 'it is clear that we cannot follow this theology even in its first and formal statement', or that the intratrinitarian covenant 'is mythology', Bavinck considered that 'for dogmatics as well as for the practice of the Christian life, the doctrine of the covenant is of the greatest importance' (*RD* III, 212). For Barth's view of historic Reformed federal theology, see *CD IV/1*, 54-66. For an analysis of Barth's covenant theology see Mark I. McDowell "Covenant Theology in Barth and the Torrances" in *Covenant Theology. Biblical, Theological and Historical Perspectives*, 401-25.
[34] See James Eglinton, "Reformed Theology in Modern Europe (Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries)" in *The Oxford Handbook of Reformed Theology*. Ed. Michael Allen and Scott Swain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 134-53.

Lecerf's theology, in general terms, positively appropriated Bavinck's ideas regarding religion and Reformed orthodox covenant theology. For example, for formulating his understanding of religion, Lecerf supports his ideas about religion's intellectual, affective elements by considering Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* and Hoornbeek's *Theologia practica*.[35] Importantly, Lecerf considers that 'to be religious is, above all, to have a thirst for God', especially for 'the living and true God'. Thus, the sensible intuition of God 'is not piety itself' but the 'germ of religion'.[36] In this way, for a deeper understanding of *praxis pietatis* in twentieth-century Reformed theology, it is crucial to consider the *general* understanding of piety (feeling of the absolute dependence on God), and the *Christian* and *Reformed* conception of piety (as a covenantal relationship with the triune God).

Continuity on holistic and experiential Bavinckian ideas of Reformed piety can also be observed, for example, in J. Sebestyén's (1884-1950) paper regarding the practical implications of Reformed theology. In 1938, he expressed that Calvinism has the 'highest ethical ideas and the best ethical programme for life as a whole',[37] being directly dependent on its theology. Connected to this, the Bible reveals how 'the sovereign God wishes Himself to be served'.[38] At this point, Bavinck's subjective religion concept comes to Sebestyén. In the paper, he indicates that 'religion is the service of God, *cultus Dei*, with all our mind, with all our soul, with all our strength (Bavinck)'.[39]

The pneumatological element is also significant for Sebestyén, indicating that '"sound doctrine applied by the Spirit of God must be the foundation of a sound life"'.[40] Interestingly, the author retrieves the interrelationship of faith and practice by referring to two Reformed theologians: Calvin and Voetius. Explicitly, Sebestyén says that 'Calvin himself laid particular stress on the thought that the knowledge of the right doctrine and the practice of piety are inseparably bound together. Voetius, the greatest theologian of the seventeenth century, was another champion of this thought'.[41] This statement echoes

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35 August Lecerf, *An introduction to Reformed Dogmatics*. Translated by André Schlemmer (London: Lutterworth Press, 1949), 135.
36 Ibid., 109.
37 J. Sebestyén, "The Reformed Faith and its Ethical Consequences to the Individual" in *Proceedings of the Fourth Calvinistic Congress held in Edinburgh* 6th to 11th July 1938 (Edinburgh: The Congress, 1938), 27-49. Here 28. The congress, in words of the president Rev. Dr. Donald Maclean (1869-1943, Free Church of Scotland), was intended to facilitate 'discussions towards pooling concepts of the Reformed Faith as applicable to the present-day life'.
38 Sebestyén, "The Reformed Faith", 29.
39 Sebestyén, "The Reformed Faith", 29.
40 Sebestyén, "The Reformed Faith", 30.
41 Sebestyén, "The Reformed Faith", 30.

Bavinck's understanding of theology as theoretical-practical in Calvin and Voetius (see chapter five).

So too, Sebestyén also identified a sound mysticism in Calvinism by saying that 'man was created by God for *praxis pietatis*, that is to the practice of piety. This is the reason that Calvinistic mysticism is so sound'.[42] Also, Sebestyén mentions the restoration of man's covenant with God and the impact of a Reformed understanding of faith in the formation of 'Christian character and personality' where the right knowledge of God 'leads man to *cultus* and *obœdientia*'.[43] In this way, there is a healthy balance between devotional practices and vocational activities by the person who lives '*coram Deo*, *pro Deo* and *cum Deo*'.[44]

In sum, figures such as Lecerf and Sebestyén present an example of continuity regarding the principles of the classic Reformed understanding of theology and piety, together with the neo-Calvinist approach exemplified in Bavinck, and in predecessors such as Calvin and Voetius.[45]

IV. How then shall we continue Bavinck studies?

Bavinck's concept of Reformed piety as trinitarian, covenantal and organic could lead to answering the following questions when his *praxis pietatis* is also considered in Brock's orthodox-yet-modern conception of Bavinck's theology.

If Bavinckian Reformed piety is principally related to covenantal fellowship with the triune God, in which sense should the doctrine of participation be understood in Bavinck's orthodox and yet modern theology? For this, more attention should be drawn to Bavinck's understanding of patristic and medieval theology and covenant theology itself, especially regarding Bavinck's early understanding of the doctrine of the covenant by exploring Bavinck's manuscript 'De leer der verbonden' (The doctrine of the covenant, 1884).

So too, if the role of the Holy Spirit is vital in Bavinck's experiential piety, research on Bavinck's understanding of the person and work of the Holy Spirit should be made,

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[42] Sebestyén, "The Reformed Faith", 31.
[43] Sebestyén, "The Reformed Faith", 33.
[44] Sebestyén, "The Reformed Faith", 33.
[45] In the same congress, the reverend Dr. P.J. Kromsigt reported the ongoing influence of Bavinck in the Netherlands. In his words, 'at the Calvinistic Congress of 1934 at Amsterdam I gave a survey of the growth of orthodoxy, especially of Calvinism in the Dutch Reformed Church owing to the influence of Professors Kuyper and Bavinck. In these later years we may observe a continuing growth'. *Proceedings of the Fourth Calvinistic Congress held in Edinburgh*, 185.

especially because of the worldwide impact of neo-Calvinism outside of Reformed circles, such in the Pentecostal tradition.

At the same time, Herman Bavinck's piety, covenant theology and pneumatology can be used to see the development of neo-Calvinist theology – in continuity or discontinuity with the Reformed tradition in general – through the following generations of Bavincks (C.B Bavinck and his two sons, J.H. Bavinck and his brother C.B. Bavinck), Geerhardus Vos, to contemporary neo-Calvinism. Because Herman connects piety and personality, special attention should be given to the development and elements of theological anthropology and psychology in Herman and Johan H. Bavinck.

Another area of research that ought to be explored as a consequence of this thesis is Bavinck's understanding of theological retrieval as a Reformed orthodox and modern man. Clearly, Bavinck made use of post-Reformation theologians in his neo-Calvinist understanding of theology and experiential piety. However, further investigation should be done regarding the specific use of Bavinck's first and second sources in order to understand more the relationship between Reformed orthodoxy and neo-Calvinism (as a theological movement).

The holistic aspect of Bavinck's *praxis pietatis* deserves more attention regarding ecclesiastical and public theology. Bavinck organically connected piety, on the one hand, with the covenantal understanding of the church and, on the other hand, with other spheres of life, such as science and education. Therefore, Bavinck's ecclesiology should be investigated by making use of the archive material related to the church as *kerk* and *gemeente*. Seeing piety as an organic bridge between different spheres of life should lead to further investigation of Bavinck's development of public theology under the Reformed principles of objective and subjective religion.

Finally, this thesis can help us better understand Bavinck's persona and continue with James Eglinton's presentation of Herman as *one* Bavinck (in this case, to avoid a dichotomy between a 'neo-Calvinist Bavinck' and a 'pietist Bavinck'). Furthermore, this research can help to expand the knowledge of the experiential side of Reformed theology in Bavinck's neo-Calvinism that, in some sense, was not broadly described in Eglinton's biography.[46] In

[46] This point is highlighted in Aart Goedvree in his review of Eglinton's *Bavinck: A Critical Biography*. See *Theologia Reformata* 64:1 (2021).

this line, Herman Bavinck was a theologian who brought the Reformed experiential principles of piety into his modern life and classroom, as J.J Buskes affirms,

> When Bavinck lectured in the dull and paintless hall on the Keizersgracht, it could happen that he became so filled with the glory of God that he forgot about us, and while speaking, he stared out through the window into endless distances, because God's glory is endless, and we sat there speechless...[47]

As we saw in the previous chapter, Buskes described this experience as '*gereformeerde vromheid*' or 'Reformed piety'. In conclusion, Reformed piety – in its trinitarian, covenantal and holistic aspect – is essential for understanding Bavinck's conception of theology and world-and-lifeview. In fact, the adjective used by Snouck Hurgronje to describe his friend Herman Bavinck helps us to summarise the importance of Christian piety that is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come:

> I have never known my good friend to be anything other than *pious*.

[47] Buskes, *Hoera voor het leven*, 33.

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