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BAVINCK'S USE OF AUGUSTINE AS AN ANTIDOTE TO RITSCHL

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The main source for this paper will be Bavinck's *Gereformeerde dogmatiek* in the splendid recent English translation.¹ In the case of Ritschl, his main work *Die christliche Lehre von der Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung* will be quoted either in English translation², or in German in the case of the untranslated Volume 2 (*Der biblische Stoff der Lehre*) and occasionally in the case of Volumes 1 and 3 where it seemed important to look at the original.

Although conclusions might possibly be speculative at best, it could be worth attempting to posit a logical connection between Bavinck's identity as a systematic rather than a biblical theologian, and his self-distancing from covenant theology. In the latter respect he was in good Reformed company, given that Calvin and the mature Bullinger hardly were.³ True, in Bavinck's *RD* Vol. 3 there is a concern to keep the covenant of salvation (*pactum salutis*) and the covenant of grace as such mutually distinct, and there is an insistence against Cocceius that the covenant of grace runs through both dispensations. However in both cases he is trying to correct

¹ H. Bavinck, *RD*, ed. by J. Bolt, trans. by J. Vriend, 4 vols (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003-2008), cited hereafter as *RD*. Where references appear in the text (e.g. 2, p. 143) these are to the respective volumes of this work.

² 3 vols (Bonn: A. Marcus, 1870-74). Translations: Volume 1—A. Ritschl, *A Critical History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, trans. by J. Black (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1872); Volume 3—A. Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation. The Positive Development of the Doctrine*, ed. by H. Mackintosh and A. Macaulay (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1900).

³ Cf. P. Opitz, *Heinrich Bullinger als Theologe. Eine Studie zu den Dekaden* (Zürich: TVZ, 2004). On Calvin, while there are covenantal themes throughout Calvin, such that it does no harm to call him a 'theologian of the covenant', as Lillback does, he is not in the formal sense of those whose titles testify to the centrality of the concept (e.g. Cocceius [*Summa doctrinae de foedere et testament Dei*,] Witsius [*De oeconomia foederum*]). See further C. Venema, 'Covenant and Election in the Theology of Herman Bavinck', *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 19 (2008), 69-115.

a perversion of covenant theology rather than build on it. There is no consistent treatment of a scheme of covenant of works or nature: the covenant is mentioned but it is not a controlling theme that gives structure to the theology.⁴ Indeed the dissertation by Hoekema laments how in comparison with the treatments by Aalders and Vos, Bavinck's covenant theology is meagre.⁵ If there is a title that suits Bavinck's theology it would be 'organic', not in the sense of a Schelling or Hegel, but as that which allows a mutuality and a correspondence, and eschews mechanism.⁶ Organic too in his view, expressed in the first hundred pages or so of Volume 2, that sin is something that is 'an ethical phenomenon; it is lawlessness'. Therefore he opposes (2, p. 141) the notion that 'not the law but the gospel is the source of our knowledge of sin', for it is the created moral law that is the constant thing against which each and every individual transgression offends.⁷ Hence whenever we disobey in one thing, we participate in Adam's sin of bring a law unto ourselves (3, p. 33).⁸ The story of the Fall might be sketchy but the fact is sure (3, p. 37).

If covenant theology at this point is merely in the background, was that because biblical theology was troubled waters, muddied even poisoned by the developments in modern biblical criticism? More positively, could it be the influence of Augustine at work, or at least his realist, hence organic model of creation, fall and salvation? The answer to this second question soon appears to be: 'not at all'. Having stated clearly that those who sin are without excuse, quite apart from the revelation of Christ, he continues:

Adam's disobedience is the originating sin; that is the clear teaching of Scripture. How can that not be seen as arbitrary? Only by recognising the organic unity and solidarity of the human race. This unity is first of all physical and organic, but, more importantly, also representative. Here too we must begin with Christ, who is our representative mediator in redemption. Physical unity and a realistic understanding of the transmission of sin is inad-

⁴ Bavinck, *RD* 3, p. 226.

⁵ A. Hoekema, 'Herman Bavinck's Doctrine of the Covenant' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1953).

⁶ I owe this judgement to the work of James Eglinton in his 'Trinity and Organism: Towards a New Reading of Herman Bavinck's Organic Motif' (unpublished doctoral thesis, The University of Edinburgh, 2010).

⁷ J. Veenhof, *Nature and Grace in Bavinck*, trans. by A. Wolters (Sioux Center: Dordt College Press, 2006), pp. 14, 22. For Bavinck, grace counters non-substantial sin, resulting in a once-again intact nature.

⁸ Cf. O. Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards and the Metaphysics of Sin* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005).

equate...Among human beings there is a moral solidarity that is greater than the physical. Reformed theology tries to explain this through the doctrine of the covenant—the covenant of works with Adam and the covenant of grace in Christ. The covenant of works and the covenant of grace are the forms by which the organism of humanity is maintained, also in a religious sense.Physical heredity cannot explain original sin (3, p. 77).

It is a moral solidarity. Yet what does it here mean to ‘begin with Christ’? Namely that as we relate to him (morally, not ontologically) so too we relate to Adam. Bavinck wants to avoid the idea of sinning in some Platonic Adam. The rendering *in quo* by Augustine and other was a mistake. People commit their own sins but they do this because of what Adam did since all are somehow included in Adam, without any idea that we all sinned his sin. ‘God apprehends and regards, judges and condemns all humans in one [representative man], and so also they all descend from him as sinners and are all subject to death.’ (3, p. 85) The unity is an ethical, federal one. There is no place for realism, that sin is like a plague which we contract, for then in theory we could atone, and would also have the sin of all others, not just Adam. God chose Adam to represent us and we are guilty because of his sin. ‘[W.T.] Shedd’ admittedly asserts that Augustine, the scholastics, as well as the earliest Reformed theologians were all realists. But that is incorrect. Whereas the doctrine of the covenant had not yet been developed, the idea already occurs in the church fathers and the medieval theologians.’ (3, p. 103) Bavinck does not say which. ‘In the human race, we encounter a variety of forms of community that are absolutely not based only, nor even principally, on physical descent but on another, moral unity.’ (3, p. 104) In short, we have to bear the debts of the estate when we claim the inheritance.

What strikes one from this discussion is how, again, Bavinck uses the federal concept to say what is not the case (ontological unity), and cannot even be bothered to tell us who remedied Augustine’s ‘mistake’ in the Middle Ages.

It is being born as those imputed to have sin that makes us sinners: ‘On the ground that they were comprehended in Adam, either as the natural or the federal head, they were declared guilty by God.’ (3, p. 110) The way in which this “originated sin” becomes the experience of all of us is not through imitation but through generation based on imputation. There is an antecedent judgement (*krima*) of God, and in virtue of that judgement all people are born of Adam guilty, impure, and in the process of dying’ (3, p. 110).

⁹ W. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (New York: C. Scribner, 1888).

This is all a little impressionistic, short and reluctant to engage with details of federal theology. Although in his heart he might well have been a covenantal theologian, in his *Dogmatics ad extra* this is not so apparent. This is, I think because his work was intended as an ecumenical work that would speak to Lutherans, Catholics and others. Or a more substantive reason is an insistence that ultimate reality is moral that is at stake in this section. Throughout the four volumes there is much readiness to make common cause with Augustine, even on Augustine's terms, as one who located sin in the will and combined a doctrine of Divine Sovereignty with a high doctrine of Creation.¹⁰ There is some attempt in Volume 1 (ch. 13: 'Human Destiny') to invoke Augustine in a treatment the covenant of works according to which moral image was natural—a *posse non peccare*, yet still some way off from the blessedness of *non posse peccare*. 'Paradise was not heaven' (1, p. 573). 'The Lutheran believer enjoys the new life in the present and feels no need for more. For the Reformed, who walked in the footsteps of Augustine, things were different. According to them, Adam did not possess the highest kind of life.'¹¹ Hence the need for 'Augustinian' perseverance, yes, (although for Augustine it is perseverance of *faith*), and Bavinck is right to see Augustine's account of the pre-lapsarian Adam as chiming with the Reformed tradition as Bavinck saw it. This alliance with the bishop of Hippo is for the sake of showing how the wisdom of that church father could be used by orthodoxy to withstand the onslaught of moderns, including Ritschl. Augustine was as a moral theologian in the fullest sense of that term, who would bypass creation in an account of the moral law.

For all that, the covenant of works is hardly corresponded to by a real interest in the covenant of grace, as we have seen above.

¹⁰ M. Wisse ('The First Modern Man? Twentieth-Century Theological Reception of Augustine', in *Oxford Guide to the History of the Reception of Augustine*, ed. by K. Pollmann [Oxford: OUP, 2011], *forthcoming*) suspects that Bavinck knew most of his Augustine through Harnack or other 'handbooks. More research would need to be done to see whether Bavinck read Augustine's work without any such mediation.' Cf. the online resource: W. van der Schee, 'Augustinus, Aurelius (354-430)', in *Register Project Neocalvinisme* (2001) <<http://www.neocalvinisme.nl/rg/a/augustinus.html>> [accessed 26 April 2011].

¹¹ A few pages earlier (1, p. 567) Bavinck has called on Augustine for help. The City of God passage however (XVI, 27) describes the 'covenant from the beginning' (*testamentum autem primum*) as 'You will surely die'.

ALBRECHT RITSCHL'S BIBLICAL MATTER

It would be inaccurate to say that Bavinck misrepresented Ritschl—yet he hardly gives him respect or the benefit of the doubt. There is little attempt to stand where Ritschl stood, just as when describing Lutheran positions in general there can often be a use of trusted secondary sources at the expense of primary texts. Perhaps Bavinck was simply aware how damaging Dutch versions of liberal (and Lutheran) theology could be in conspiring to drive confessional Christianity into the side-streets if not the fields. Or it might simply be because Bavinck was not a historical theologian as such, whose task is to present and account for, before evaluating. Nor was he a Christian apologist who would pay his opponent the honour of a brick by brick demolition. It is the boldness of the Systematic Theologian, to call it as he sees it and to use the quarry as suits the edifice he is constructing. Added to this is the genre of Dogmatics: thematic treatment based on answers to questions from difficult students ever since the High Middle Ages. A fair amount of scriptural proof-texting takes place in the *Reformed Dogmatics*, although Bavinck's knowledge of contemporary biblical studies is impressive.

Now for Ritschl too, the notion of covenant *was* important (though perhaps not quite central in his theology) as was a concomitant personalism in his doctrine of God along with a sensitivity to the biblical witness to Israel's struggle to obey.¹² His theology was 'eschatological' in the sense of forward-looking: he found it unfortunate that the traditional doctrine of original sin had such nostalgia for or horrid fascination with the past. This obscured the gospel's character as an anticipation of the future goal for humanity in response to the revelation of God in Christ. He disagreed with Schleiermacher's devaluing of the guilt aspect of sin, for guilt can be viewed as sin's own punishment in the conscience and as a feeling which leads to reconciliation, just as physical pain drives one to the doctor.¹³ The kind of sin that is forgivable may and should be viewed as part of God's plan.¹⁴

Like Bavinck, Ritschl was keen to throw off the burden of philosophical Idealism. In 1864 Ritschl, who had been mentored in philosophy by R. H. Lotze, followed I. A. Dorner at Göttingen, a university then enjoying its reputation for excellence in the natural sciences and philosophy. Ritschl had taken leave of F. C. Baur's Hegelian optimism as early as 1857. For all that his theology continued to be 'eschatologically' informed by

¹² R. Schäfer, *Ritschl, Grundlinien eines fast verschollenen dogmatischen Systems* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1968), pp. 85, 97.

¹³ *Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung*, 1, p. 83.

¹⁴ *Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung*, 3, pp. 358-60.

consideration of 'God's purposes', his account of church history was less about 'steady progress' and more about interruption and renewal in light of the goal. It was not the case that Christianity had become more mature as it became more rational. As James Redmond puts it:

No longer is the emergence of the second-century Catholic Church regarded as the quasi-Hegelian *Aufhebung* of apparently contradictory and mutually incompatible movements and beliefs—rather, the second edition [of *Die Entstehung der altkatholischen Kirche*] strongly hints at Ritschl's later and very complex theory that the contradictions in second-century Christianity are more real than apparent, that early in its history Christianity "fell from grace" because of its adulteration by alien, nonreligious, speculative elements, an adulteration which was in later centuries to become encapsulated in the Catholic Church of the late middle ages.¹⁵

Christianity had declined after the glorious age of Revelation through Jesus to the apostles, and so the Reformers had been right to try to retrieve this.¹⁶ However, Hegelian theology could and had become just as much a rationalist scholasticism and any advance of theology always had to be tested by the message of the man from Galilee.

At the same time, one can trace in Ritschl that which R. Schäfer named 'revelatory positivism', which might sound counterintuitive as an epithet for this paragon of nineteenth-century liberal theology. Yet, as Julius Kaftan observed in the first decade of the twentieth, the development from 'kingdom of God' emphasis to this *Offenbarungspositivismus* was a natural and consistent one. Schäfer sees Ritschl's contribution as adding historically based knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) to the experience or *Erfahrungstheologie* of Schleiermacher, basing knowledge of God, hence theology, on secure understanding of the revealing man Jesus and his mission. Over against Schleiermacher, Dogmatics was to be founded on history, not on the experience of present-day believers today. As for Ethics, Ritschl had a strong ecclesiology whose content was communal morality, such that the will replaced any over-reliance on 'feeling'.¹⁷ Wilhelm Hermann would continue in this direction.¹⁸ Again, this is not miles apart from Reformed Orthodoxy as developed by Bavinck, with his move from dogmatic to ethical themes in his later career.

¹⁵ J. Richmond, *Ritschl, A Reappraisal: A Study in Systematic Theology* (London: William Collins, 1978), p. 15.

¹⁶ This 'Romantic' outlook was furthered by Wellhausen, against the idealism of Vatke.

¹⁷ R. Schäfer, 'Ritschl', *Theologisch Realencyclopädie*, pp. 29, 220-38, 224.

¹⁸ Schäfer, *Ritschl, Grundlinien*, pp. 177f.

Ritschl consequently insisted that his *Dogmatics* was based on biblical theology. In this, as Wolfhart Pannenberg noted, he was echoing J. P. Gabler's insistence that Justification could not be *the* formal principle of Christian theology. Formal and material principles are one and the same, and that principle is Scripture.¹⁹ Schleiermacher had first defined dogmatic theology as having ecclesial doctrine as substance, but this was to give too far too much to *a priori* reasoning, and it only got worse when Schleiermacher then wanted to put 'pious consciousness' in the place of ecclesial doctrine, which in turn encouraged his follower Rothe to be even more speculative. When the early church lost sight of its Old Testament heritage of the covenant people it ended up with moralism, and this was happening in the nineteenth century too. As Schäfer notes, the Old Testament with its content of theology through history was invaluable for theological reasons in Ritschl's view, against Schleiermacher.²⁰ Biblical theology was the antidote to Baur's history of early Christianity.

One of the consequences of this biblical theological approach, where New Testament statements are to be understood according to Old Testament categories (and not Second Temple Jewish ones) is that justification becomes a subdivision of Providence and correlative trust in the covenant God. As Eckhard Lessing observes, in Ritschl's system, forgiveness of sins corresponds to God's attributes as King and Lord, who is made present and known in Christ's life which witnesses to God's covenant loyalty.²¹ A

¹⁹ 'Das protestantische Prinzip in ökumenischen Dialog', in *Beiträge zur systematischen Theologie. Band 3: Kirche und Ökumene* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2000), p. 186. Tillich would choose to lose 'Scripture' and keep 'Justification', although Dorner had already made moves in this direction.

²⁰ Schäfer *TRE*, p. 225. In his monograph Schäfer (pp. 44, 79) notes the significance of his friendship with Ludwig Diestel, whose famous article ('Die Idee der Gerechtigkeit, vorzüglich im Alten Testament, biblisch-theologisch dargestellt', *Jahrbücher für deutsche Theologie*, 5 (1860), 173-204) contained the statement, at p. 204: 'Der Aufgabe, die Bundesidee mit der der Gerechtigkeit zu durchbringen, hatten sich die großen Propheten des achten, siebenten, sechsten Jahrhunderts mit Erfolg unterzogen, ohne dieselbe zu Ende zu führen.' It took a prophet like Jesus to complete the task over against Pharisaic notions through his piety. Diestel claims that only Ritschl has got this right. The dogmatic consequences are that righteousness and grace should not be opposed, as in some sort of Idealist game.

²¹ E. Lessing, *Geschichte der deutschsprachigen evangelischen Theologie von Albrecht Ritschl bis zur Gegenwart. Band 1, 1870 bis 1918* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), p. 41, who quotes Ritschl 'Die "Sündenvergebung (ist) nicht an sein besonderes Attribut als Gesetzgeber geknüpft..., sondern an sein allgemeines Attribut als König und Herr seines Reiches.' (*Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung*, 3, p. 89)

Christology of 'exalted royal priest and prophet' offering an umbrella of providential care reinforces the idea that God's fatherly providence is the Old Testament motor that drives the New Testament revelation.

Volume 2 of Ritschl's *Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung* is given to pouring the biblical foundations of the doctrine of *Justification and Reconciliation* (for the dogmatic treatment to follow in Volume 3). Yet in Volume 2 the apostle Paul is largely absent until page 142 where begins a thirteen-page section which then concludes with the comment that Romans 2:6 is to be explained as merely a left-over of a pharisaical point of view.²² For Christians, the idea that God feels anger is of no religious worth: instead wrath marks the area which is opposite to that of salvation, as a cultic/communal measure for holiness. Divine anger it is not a moral quality, despite what Lactantius encouraged the Christian tradition to think.²³ And the Bible knows nothing of the wrath of God against original sin ('von einem Zorn Gottes um der Erbsünde willen wisse die Bibel nichts'). On Romans 3:25, Ritschl refused the idea of reconciliation as being something that could happen by cultic means in the death of Christ; rather it took place in our working out of the fact of justification on the cross. What Christ offered was his gracious presence, not the removal of sin. The cross had to be thought of in terms of mercy, of life and protection against death, not ransom. Mark 14:24 ('This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many') was the key 'covenantal' text about life-giving blood being poured out; Mark 10:45 ('to give his life as a ransom for many') was irrelevant. The language of ransom should not confuse us into thinking that God is dealing with his own wrath.²⁴

In any case Paul (like Jesus) was much more indignant about present unbelief than pre-existent sinfulness. Any idea of being taken out of the realm of sin, as in Romans 4:15, was the expression of a *pre-Christian* viewpoint. Only with the increase of active or actual sin through the law did Adam's children come under the threat of wrath. In Paul's gospel the history of sin is no longer only a mirror of the history of grace, but even a means to the latter's success.

Otto Pfleiderer, in a famous essay later to be quoted by B. B. Warfield, contested Ritschl's claim to be taken seriously as a biblical theologian. It is wrong to see Galatians 3:13 ('Christ redeemed us from the

²² *Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung*, 2, p. 155.

²³ *Ibid.* 2, p. 137. Ritschl, in the light of Luther's theology of baptism and J. C. K. von Hofmann's formulation saw the wrath of God as irrelevant to the Christian state by definition. See W. Schütte, 'Die Ausscheidung der Lehre vom Zorn Gottes in der Theologie Schleiermachers und Ritschls', *NZStHr* 10 (1968), 387-97, 395.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 2, p. 85f.

curse of the law by becoming a curse for us') as applying only to Jewish Christians who would have understood such. Pfleiderer could not blame Ritschl for attacking the doctrine of original sin,²⁵ but why did he have to go to the opposite extreme in his attempt to allow free will and the possibility of human education/improvement? What about the Zwinglian/Kantian notion that humanity is born with an inclination ('*Hang*') to evil? Paul may not have believed in original sin *per se*, but there is sinful tendency in everyone that is unexplained.²⁶ There is plenty of scriptural 'chorus' that affirms that the idea of such an inclination is not a result of the intrusion of metaphysics into Christian theology. In fact it was Socrates, a Greek, who identified evil with ignorance, such that the Good was learnable—Ritschl seems unaware of Aristotle's objection that the will is ruled as much by the passions as by intellect. Furthermore, Romans 7 shows sin to be more than mere ignorance, and actually a power. This playing down of sin leads to antinomian tendencies in the Christian churches.²⁷ According to Pfleiderer's criticism, there was no place in Ritschl's theology for the reality of religious objects of faith, and the claim to be ethical in a churchy life of reconciliation (*Versöhnung*) was a sham. Sin is also played down when it can be dealt with by our own feelings of remorse (*Selbstpeinigungen*).

Pfleiderer is correct to conclude that, as for divine anger, it is Ritschl's strong 'love of God' doctrine that implies that anger does not suit God, rather than some classical notion of divine impassibility.²⁸ It is true that the New Testament identifies sin as *agnoia*, but it does this only in a few places, and Pfleiderer lists them: 1 Pet. 1:14; Eph. 4:18; Acts 17:30; 1 Tim. 1:13. His judgement is that Ritschl is wrong to argue that there is *no* connection between Christ's death and the sin of human beings.²⁹ The death of Christ gives sin its due so that the dead are no longer held by it. Ritschl misses the notes of identification and solidarity which are so important to Paul.

One might want to describe Ritschl's account of salvation one where God makes the positive superlative. Jesus saves, in that he brings people into a common life (as his friend and colleague L. Diestel observed, the New Testament adds love for neighbour to the Old Testament's love for God). Of course this means he saves from sin, yet sin is in two types,

²⁵ O. Pfleiderer, *Die Ritschl'sche Theologie* (Braunschweig: Schwetschke und Sohn, 1891), p. 63.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

and the serious one is conscious opposition to Jesus and his work.³⁰ One becomes free from sin through recognition of, not rejection of Jesus. For Ritschl, sin was less an inborn condition, but since Christ sin was 'now' a forgetting of Christ as the source of forgiveness and ethical instruction which if unresponsive to challenge could amount to intentional denial. There is however responsibility and an account to be given when a person makes the kingdom of sin's drive one's own when we confuse the good with the Highest Good.³¹

As a 'covenantal theologian' of both Testaments Ritschl argued, not that the traditional Christian sin and atonement doctrine was too bound to the Old Testament; its problem was that it was not bound to it enough.³² Covenantal personalism as spelled out in the Old Testament is a family, not a juridical, affair. Yet, to repeat, not all were impressed with his way with Scripture. H. R. Mackintosh concludes: 'At the end of his biblico-theological survey he leaves us less than ever clear regarding the question of authority. And his attempt to exhibit harmony where he does recognise authoritative teachings may seem to us not infrequently masterful rather than masterly.'³³

Alister McGrath puts it well in highlighting the similarities to Grotius' soteriology in that of Ritschl:

The objective dimension of justification is therefore prior to, although inseparable from, the subjective consciousness of his forgiveness...Of considerable greater importance, however, is Ritschl's critique of the axiom of the *Aufklärung*—that God enters into no real relationship with humanity, unless the individual in question is morally regenerate.... Christ is the revealer of certain significant (and not necessarily rational) insights concerning an unchangeable situation between God and man, rather than the founder of a new relationship between God and man.³⁴

Yet, out of a horror of pietism perhaps, what seems to fall out is any real relationship. To strain the metaphor, a parent setting up his teenager in a flat and leaving alone seems preferable to a household of strife. In Ritschl's own words: 'Just as the assumed conception of original sin

³⁰ Ibid., p. 38.

³¹ R. Schäfer, *Ritschl. Grundlinien*, p. 99: Jesus as the true human was able to avoid sin.

³² H. R. Mackintosh, *Albrecht Ritschl and his School* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1915), p. 105.

³³ Ibid., p. 130.

³⁴ A. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei. A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), pp. 350, 356.

obscures the particular guilt of individual men, so the penal satisfaction offered by Christ is made the equivalent of the eternal damnation due to all mankind, and *is by no means fitted to counteract the sense of guilt of each separate individual.*³⁵

BAVINCK AND AUGUSTINE VERSUS RITSCHL

In his 1888 article 'De Theologie van Albrecht Ritschl', Bavinck sees Ritschl's overreaction to Idealism as ending with dull yet dangerous empiricism. Despite his protests Ritschl had a metaphysics of his own, or a (neo-)Kantian/Lotzean epistemology. Such a dualism favours science to the exclusion of faith.³⁶ If Christ is anything significant, more than just a man, he is what he is to the intersubjective perception of faith.³⁷ Bavinck contends that by this method Mary could be as easily divine as Jesus.³⁸ Ritschlian religion begins with humans as a means of helping morality, with Christianity good at tying reconciliation and holiness together, allowing people to transcend themselves. Natural theology, contemplating ideas about God, creation, humanity—these have been a dead end. New Testament authors differed from pagans in having a Old Testament conceptuality and revelation is where they all agree with each other in developing that. It is good he uses the bible, admits Bavinck, yet his cavalier exegesis shows disrespect for the Book. Ritschl has followed his principles such that all we read in the bible gives us broad outlines of religion to follow, but no inner truth is contained therein. The heart of Bavinck's concern is summed up in a passage translated by Veenhof:

Therefore, whereas salvation in Christ, was formerly considered primarily a means to separate man from sin and the world, to prepared him for heavenly blessedness and to cause him to enjoy undisturbed fellowship with God there, Ritschl posits the very opposite relationship: the purpose of salvation in Christ is precisely to enable a person, once he is freed from the oppressive feeling of sin and lives in awareness of being a child of God, to exercise his earthly vocation and fulfil his moral purpose in this world. The antithesis, therefore, is fairly sharp: on the one side a Christian life that considers the highest goal, now and hereafter, to be the contemplation of God and fellowship with him, and for that reason (always being more or less hostile to the riches of an earthly life) is in danger of falling into asceticism, pietism, and mysticism; but on the side of Ritschl, a Christian life that considers its highest

³⁵ Ritschl, *Justification and Reconciliation* 3, p. 480; my emphasis.

³⁶ 'De Theologie van Albrecht Ritschl', *Theologische Studiën*, 6 (1888), 369-403 (p. 402).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 380.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 385.

goal to be the Kingdom of God, i.e., the moral obligation of mankind, and for that reason, (always being more or less averse to the withdrawal into solitude and quiet communion with God), is in danger of degenerating into a cold Pelagianism and an unfeeling moralism. *Personally, I do not yet see any way of combining the two points of view, but I do know that there is much that is excellent in both, and that both contain undeniable truth.*³⁹

The point is: Ritschl's overall concern is to free people from religious anxiety so as to get on with vocation and ethics, and while Bavinck elsewhere praises Ritschl's emphasis on this-worldliness of the gospel (4, p. 703), here he accuses him that this is to build the kingdom on sandy foundations, since there is insufficient attention paid to inwardness of an 'Augustinian' sort.

However, except for the odd comment, throughout this article Bavinck seems content to describe rather than take Ritschl on point-by-point. For that one must look in the *Dogmatics*, and the aid of Augustine.

As is well known, Calvin claimed 'Augustine to be wholly ours (*totus noster*)'.⁴⁰ Bavinck in turn seems to have found Augustine to be not merely an inspiration, but someone he could rely on in a battle. First, there is the insistence that the Church is the only fit setting for a Christian faith to work. Bavinck is far from embarrassed by Augustine's famous most catholic-sounding quote ('I would not believe in the Gospel myself if the authority of the Catholic Church did not move me to do so.' *Ep. Contra Mani*, pp. 5, 6), for Augustine really meant that he believed 'the gospel that is to be found in the Church as it preaches'. It is not for academics or the cultured elites to define what the gospel is. It is found in God's Church.

With Vatican I (1869-70) very much providing the context, Bavinck then quotes *Ad Faustum* 1, p. 32, 19, where Augustine tells Faustus that the Scriptures are to be his authority (1, p. 456). Yet it is less the issue of 'Scripture over against tradition' that one might expect, and more whether the object of faith is general (creation) or special revelation (Scripture). Belief, according to Augustine 'is the foundation and bond uniting the whole of human society. If people accepted the proposition "I ought not to believe what I do not see", all the ties of family, friendship and love would be ruptured', although Augustine's point in the *De fide rerum invis* 3 is to encourage faith in 'divine things'. (1, p. 567) Perhaps with Augustine the knowledge of physical nature was played down, but the kinship between ourselves as intellects and God as truth and goodness is important. There

³⁹ Ibid., p. 397, in Veenhof, *Nature and Grace*, p. 8.

⁴⁰ As in the title of J. M. J. Lange van Ravenswaay, *Augustinus totus noster: Das Augustinverständnis bei Johannes Calvin* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1990).

is order outside us, creatures are good by participation (as Bavinck confirms in 2, p. 131), such that there is a natural capacity to know God. In a move against a Ritschlian metaphysics-free theology, Bavinck finds himself here agreeing with Kleutgen, that erstwhile guardian of the faith at the German College in Rome, then at Vatican I. Faith is the starting-point. The church is then the place where grace and re-ordering within is to be found in a way that will correspond to the order of creation. Since 'faith and forgiveness are only temporal and provisional; from them Augustine immediately proceeds to love, sanctification, and good works...he replaced the aesthetic worldview with an ethical one. Thus Augustine has been and is *the* dogmatician of the Christian church' (1, p. 139). What one sees here is an approximation to Catholic establishment of something akin to a *sensus divinitatis* in the rational creature which is informed by a high view of creation, once faith in objective revelation has been kindled.

Second, Augustine's doctrine of divine immutability is important (*De ordine* II, 7): 'to claim that God has a new plan is absurd, not to say wicked' since God's ideas are in no way distinguishable from himself, and as *rationes* they act but are not acted upon (QQ. 83, 46; 2, p. 204ff.). Again a neo-Thomist could not fault this. God wills the agents of change to be inherent in creation. As for his own ideas, of which these are but reflections 'God's ideas are absolutely original; they arise from his own being; they are eternal and immutable. Indeed, they are one with his own being' (2, p. 206). Bavinck has said that for Ritschl however, 'the theologian's task is to proceed from the concept of love and to try to infer everything (creation, providence, reconciliation, justification) from that concept'. Ritschl would simply avoid discussion as to God's incommunicable attributes. Bavinck agrees with Ritschl that holiness is not an attribute in God any more than it is anything inherent in us, but rather is a relation between God and his people (2, p. 217). God is 'called holy...in connection with every revelation that impresses humans with his deity.' Yet the emphasis is on God's pure act leading to God's sole glory by the means of his power. That holiness means that God is consistent and is not merely reactive, as too much of an emphasis on grace as forgiving love might connote. 'Righteousness is not the same as favor, mercy or grace; neither is it something like "covenant faithfulness"' (2, p. 225).

Third, and in the third volume of Bavinck's *Dogmatics*, in which there are almost twice as many references to Augustine as to Calvin, he diagnoses Ritschl as siding with Pelagius on sinful *acts* preceding sinful states (3, pp. 44ff.), although Ritschl admittedly shares with Augustine the belief that there is some kind of common collective sinfulness.

From this position Ritschl drew the false conclusion that sin has become known to us, not from the story of Adam and his Fall, nor from the law and the Old Testament, but solely from the gospel, which in Ritschl means from the person and teaching of Jesus. (3, p. 44)

Joel Geflin paraphrases this section of Bavinck.⁴¹

The pantheism of Ritschl, for instance, devalues revelation prior to Christ to the point that only in Christ is the knowledge of sin made known. His view of humankind's original integrity and fall rejects the federalism of the Reformed in favor of the process of primitive man from the animal to the moral state. Sin is not objective guilt deserving punishment, Ritschl says, it is only an ignorance of God's love which has since been proclaimed by Christ.

There are two problems here. Bavinck never accused Ritschl of 'pantheism', and Ritschl was himself quite set against it, as he detects and detests it in the monism of the German mystical tradition passing through Jacob Böhme. Second, Ritschl is quite clear that to ignore Christ on the way to deliberate resistance to Him is sin, and he distinguished this from original ignorance. However, we are nevertheless responsible for that original ignorance, and have to deal with it when Christ shows it up. In other words, for Ritschl, the reality of sin affects our nature, and we become conscious of it when Christ is preached.

Bavinck is not quite finished with Ritschl yet and returns to the chase later in the same volume. Ritschl's point was that just as righteousness is communal, so too sin is communal, or even that one might speak of a sinful environment in the place of 'original sin'.⁴² Ritschl preferred to say 'Christ died for the Church' so as to exclude any idea of a mystical one-to-One arrangement (3, p. 465).

He had spelled out Ritschl's position on sin more fully earlier in the volume:⁴³

⁴¹ J. Heflin, 'Sin, the Menace to Certainty', ETS National Meeting, New Orleans, November 2009 <http://richardsibbes.com/_hermanbavinck/Heflin.pdf> [accessed 26 April 2011].

⁴² Bavinck, *RD* 3, p. 45f., n 41 seems to group along with Ritschl Julius Kaftan's *The Truth of Christian religion* (ET; Edinburgh 1894), pp. 246ff., Kaftan's *Dogmatik* (Tübingen, 1901) pp. 34, 38-40; F. Nietzsche, *Lehrbuch* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1902) and works by H. Siebeck and T. Häring.

⁴³ *RD*, 3, p. 48. The unattributed citation comes from F. R. Tennant, *The Origin and Propagation of Sin*, Hulsean Lectures for 1901-2, 2nd edn (Cambridge: University Press, 1906), p. 95 and cf. his summary of Ritschl on p. 75. [Ed.]

It was only oneness that arises as a result of their mutual connectedness and cooperation. There is still another and deeper kind of oneness, however, that underlies sins as a substratum. And it consists in a self-seeking animal nature that belongs to humanity in virtue of its origin and extends to all humans individually. Though this is not inherently sinful, it is nevertheless 'the raw material for the production of sins, as soon as these native propensities are brought into relation with any restraining or condemning influences.'

Ritschl seems here to morph into F. R. Tennant, or rather the popular Tennant is but a more articulate, consistent and perhaps noxious form of Ritschl, based on Kant and Schelling's view that sin was 'necessary' for human moral perfection, as moral consciousness was something humanity learned: Augustine is quickly summoned to correct any tendency to think that God willed sinning for our benefit. God willed the circumstances and especially the ordinances that pertain to the moral life (3, p. 60). 'He *willed* to permit it; and this willing can only be constituted to mean that sin now also occurs not by divine but by creaturely agency.' (3, p. 62)

Yet Ritschl never argued that sin was 'necessary' and was by no means an optimistic believer in 'progress'. He was clear that sin that counts as sin is something that arises from human will. If anyone's position is in danger of viewing sin as necessary, it is Bavinck, albeit on different grounds from those of Tennant, for Bavinck goes on to place 'sin' under the umbrella of a strong Providence, as part of his Doctrine of God. A few pages later Bavinck returns to Augustine (*Enchiridion*, 96); 'it is well that not only good but evil should exist', and he draws from the *City of God* XI, 18, 23 the famous 'shadows in painting' idea, closing with Thomas Aquinas (SCG III, 71 'if there is evil there is a God'). He then voices his own synthesis of this tradition: 'But it is true that also and even especially in God's government over sin his attributes are splendidly displayed.' (3, p. 65)

Augustine makes it clear that the good news shines out from the bad: God has made satisfaction for all people 'except those who of their free will are not saved' (*Ep.* 107; *Civ Dei* XIII, 23) and 'all people' of 1 Timothy 2:4 means 'chosen from all' (3, p. 456). As for Ritschl, he was a victim of 'cultural optimism' that allowed life and the sciences to be independent of the policing of theology. By helping to destroy the true nature of uniqueness of Jesus through emphasising his personality and the church as a religious special space of reconciliation as Bavinck diagnosed it (3, p. 464), Ritschl provoked a reaction in a return to metaphysics and personal mys-

ticism, in the theologies of Theodor Häring⁴⁴ and Wilhelm Herrmann.⁴⁵ In Bavinck's judgement Ritschl believed too much in justification without holiness on the basis of divine love, and ethics merely as sensible, communal life (3, p. 454).

CONCLUSION: CHRISTOLOGY AND THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Bavinck (3, p. 279) considered the view that the incarnation was determined before the fall, and only adapted to human sinfulness, only to resist it:

On the basis of Augustine's standpoint, and more specifically on that of Reformed theology, however, there is no need for this entire hypothesis. There is but one plan and decree of God; with a view to the counsel of God, there is no room for any reality other than the existing one. Accordingly, however much sin entered the world by the will of the creature, it was nevertheless included in God's will from eternity and to him was not contingent or unforeseen.⁴⁶

He was aware of those who had spotted that Ritschl's Jesus was not unique enough (3, p. 275), according to a personalism by which Jesus could have the value of God. Here indeed the Ritschlian love of 'value', which Orr also criticised, is apparent.⁴⁷ Bavinck likens Ritschl's Christology to Roman Catholic deification or the belief in the apotheosis of Mary (3, p. 281), a connection he had already made in the 1888 essay.

Yet the point for Ritschl is that God is not one who changes according to the only evidence we have of him is in his revelation as Love in Jesus. Bavinck holds to a covenantal continuity through the testaments only for the sake of insisting that God the Creator and God the Redeemer

⁴⁴ RD 3, p. 555, with reference to Theodor Häring: 'In welchem Sinn dürften wir uns immer noch 'Göttinger' heissen? Albrecht Ritschls Bedeutung für die Gegenwart', *ZThK* 20 (1910), 165-96.

⁴⁵ *Der Verkehr des Christen mit Gott: im Anschluss an Luther dargestellt* (Stuttgart: J. G. Cotta, 1892).

⁴⁶ He adds in the same paragraph: 'Only Comrie— as a result of his rigorous supralapsarianism—arrived at the theory that the predestination of the human Christ was antecedent to that of the fall.' (cf. RD 2, pp. 361-8; 382-8.)

⁴⁷ James Orr noticed that it was all about Christ's value for us that mattered. 'In Ritschl's Theology we conclude to the reality of the object from the fact of its value for us' (James Orr, *The Ritschlian Theology and the Evangelical Faith* [London: Hodder, 1897], p. 247), which Troeltsch had rightly criticised as 'fantasist'. See *Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung* 3, p. 343.

are one and the same. Just like Augustine, Ritschl maintained that the Incarnation did not mean a change in God, nor did 'humanity' undergo change except in having a capacity added—that human beings now might receive revelation from God. Accordingly, although Ritschl did not use these terms, the *pactum salutis* allows a distinction between what operates between the Father and the Son and between God and souls: these two moments are not to be fused into one idealist *Begriff*. The power of sin and the power of grace mean that the origin of the problem and its solution are conceived of in ethical categories for individuals to take hold of for themselves and in so doing influence others. The difference is not that only Bavinck thinks that sin at all levels is something humans choose, the difference is for Bavinck that, with Augustine, the exercise of divine sovereign power elevates and secures the precious order of creation, and gets it back to fitting the pattern of the original order. For humans this means sanctification to the fullness of the image of God and hence to some form of prayerful intimacy with him. Bavinck was guided by the first principles of his theology (God and creation, as helped by Augustine), while for Ritschl humans remain free in a 'covenantal' way analogous to God's freedom, as modelled in the God-Man, to go out and live for His kingdom, informed by revelation.