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Autopistia : the self-convincing authority of scripture in reformed theology

Belt, H. van der

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6 Herman Bavinck (1854-1921)

Herman Bavinck was a son of one of the ministers of the Dutch Secession, Jan Bavinck (1826-1909). The spiritual climate of the Secession – characterized by an experimental knowledge of sin and grace – placed a lasting stamp on Herman Bavinck.¹ He studied theology at the liberal university of Leiden instead of the theological school at Kampen and this decision evoked criticism in his church.² His professor in systematic theology was J.H. Scholten (1811-1885), a liberal systematic theologian who incorporated the Reformed doctrine of predestination into his philosophical idealism.³ Another professor was the Old Testament scholar A. Kuenen (1828-1891), one of the fathers of historical-criticism. Bavinck ascribed his critical attitude and his desire to understand his opponents to his theological training in Leiden.⁴

After a short pastorate Bavinck became professor of the Theological School in Kampen at the age of 28. He taught systematic theology, the encyclopedia of theology, and philosophy. From 1895 to 1901 he published his *Gereformeerde dogmatiek* (*Reformed Dogmatics*) in four volumes.⁵ Shortly after the completion of this *opus magnum* Bavinck succeeded Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) as professor in systematic theology at Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam. Although he was influenced by Kuyper, he maintained his independence and his own theological emphases.⁶ In Amsterdam his

¹ R.H. Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck en zijn tijdgenoten*, Kampen 1966, 379. His friend H.E. Dosker wrote shortly after his death: “The pulpit was his father’s throne, and there he displayed what his son once, in my hearing, described as a ‘healthy mysticism.’” H.E. Dosker, ‘Herman Bavinck,’ *The Princeton Theological Review* 20 (1922), 450.

² One of the lecturers at Kampen Anthony Brummelkamp (1811-1888) accused Jan Bavinck of delivering his son to the lions. J.H. Landwehr, *In Memoriam Prof. Dr. H. Bavinck*, Kampen, 1921, 9. Brummelkamp tried to persuade the faculty to pronounce its disapproval. M. Te Velde, *Anthony Brummelkamp (1811-1888)*, Barneveld 1988, 414.

³ H.G. Hubbeling, ‘Synthetisch Modernisme: J.H. Scholten als wijsgeer en theoloog,’ *Nederlands theologisch tijdschrift* 16 (1961), 107-142, 127.

⁴ He wrote to Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje: “If I am indebted to Leiden for anything it is this: try to understand your opponent.” V. Hepp, *Dr. Herman Bavinck*, Amsterdam 1921, 84.

⁵ The second and enlarged edition of the *Gereformeerde dogmatiek* was published from 1908 to 1911. The third edition (1918) remained unchanged. In the fourth edition a few misprints were emended and the page numbers were changed. Quotations in this study are from the fourth edition, except when a different edition is mentioned. H. Bavinck, *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*, 4th ed., Kampen 1928-1930 (*GD* stands for *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*). Cf. H. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics 1: Prolegomena*, trans. J. Vriend, ed. J. Bolt, Grand Rapids 2003 and H. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics 2: God and Creation*, trans. J. Vriend, ed. J. Bolt, Grand Rapids 2004. (*RD* stands for *Reformed Dogmatics*). The English translation is not exactly followed, because some terms from the Dutch original like *testimonium* and *principium* are rendered in Latin in this study.

⁶ A detailed study of their relationship is made by Bremmer, *Bavinck als dogmaticus*, 13-64. D. Van Keulen has compared their doctrines of Scripture and has sixteen major points of resemblance and fourteen major points of difference. D. Van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek: Schriftbeschouwing en schriftgebruik in het dogmatisch werk van A. Kuyper, H. Bavinck en G.C. Berkouwer*, Kampen 2003, 171-174. In this extensive study he brings all the sources and previous studies together.

interests shifted to the field of practical theology, psychology, and pedagogy. Bavinck died in 1921 at the age of 66.

6.1 Some Characteristics of Bavinck's Theology

Bavinck desired to revitalize Reformed theology by turning to the sources of the Reformation. "Tradition is the means by which all treasures and possessions of former generations are transmitted to the present and the future."⁷ In his *Reformed Dogmatics* he opens every locus with biblical references, but continues with a historical survey of the development of the specific theological doctrine from the church fathers through the Middle Ages and the Reformation to Reformed orthodoxy. He valued Reformed orthodoxy and its scholastic method positively.⁸ Nevertheless, the development of Reformed orthodoxy had come to an end in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and needed to be revitalized.⁹ His *Reformed Dogmatics* betrays a profound knowledge of the development of Christian theology throughout the centuries. It was Bavinck's desire to make Reformed theology fruitful for modern times. One of the issues that he faced in his doctrine of Scripture was the developing historical-critical research. "Biblical criticism is a burning issue. We can avoid it for some time, because of more important work, but it forces itself upon us from every side and does not leave us alone, until we have taken a definite position."¹⁰

Bavinck was also an irenic theologian; Reformed theology was catholic theology for him. He approached his opponents in a positive way, reiterating their opinion as objectively as possible and always pointing at the value of their standpoint and the elements of truth he could find in it.¹¹ He wrote in the *Certainty of Faith*:

Furthermore we must not be blind to the great faith, true conversion, complete surrender, fervent love for God and neighbor evident in the life and work of many a Roman Catholic Christian. The Christian life is too rich to unfold its full glory in only one form or within the walls of one church.¹²

He approached theological issues in a synthetic rather than antithetic manner and searched for the catholic elements. In his churches this attitude was exceptional and sometimes caused suspicion. In 1888 Bavinck delivered an address at Kampen titled *The Catholicity of Christendom and Church*. He said that the church "is one, and without exception comprises all believers from all nations, from all ages and from all places."¹³ A Christian who isolates himself within a narrow circle does not understand

⁷ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 463. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 492.

⁸ "The *theologica scholastica* desired to find the systematic unity in the thoughts of God and to re-think them scientifically." Bavinck, *GD* 1, 60. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 84.

⁹ Bavinck for instance found the theology of Francis Turretin a mere reproduction lacking productive power. H. Bavinck, 'Fr. Turretinus: Review of G. Keizer, *François Turretini, sa vie et ses oeuvres et le consensus*, Lausanne 1900,' in *De Bazuin* 48 (1900), 11.

¹⁰ H. Bavinck, 'Voorrede,' in J. Orr, *Het Oude Testament beschouwd met betrekking tot de nieuwere critiek*, trans. J.C. de Moor, Kampen 1907, vi. Cf. J. Orr, *The Problem of the Old Testament Considered with Reference to Recent Criticism*, New York 1906.

¹¹ J. Veenhof, *Revelatie en inspiratie: De openbarings- en schriftbeschouwing van Herman Bavinck in vergelijking met die der ethische theologie*, Amsterdam 1968, 114. Cf. Bremmer, *Bavinck als dogmaticus*, 386.

¹² Bavinck, *Zekerheid des geloofs*, 40. Cf. Bavinck, *Certainty of Faith*, 37.

¹³ H. Bavinck, *De Katholiciteit van Christendom en Kerk*, ed. G. Puchinger, Kampen 1969, 1-2.

true catholicity and will never experience its power and comfort in his own life. Bavinck warned against separatist inclinations and against the temptation to turn away from public life.¹⁴

Bavinck was influenced by the Ethical Theology.¹⁵ This school followed Schleiermacher and can be compared with the German *Vermittlungstheologie* in its rejection of rationalism, standing between Modernism and Orthodoxy.¹⁶ Terms like conscience, consciousness, person, and personality were frequently used to emphasize the personal aspect of the Christian faith over against the rationalism of modern theology.¹⁷ Bavinck shared the interest in the relationship of Christianity and culture, but differed in the foundational issues of the Christian faith and the doctrine of Scripture. Ethical Theologians laid the seat of religion in the heart, in the moral consciousness instead of in the head; the foundation of the faith was sought in religious experience.

Bavinck related theological knowledge to the personal relationship with God. This existential element was not only evident in *Reformed Dogmatics*, but also in his more popular theological writings. It was his intention to give the dogmatic reflection an existential character. Bavinck stood in between the two poles of his pietistic background and his passion for the issues of modern culture.

According to Bavinck, the Christian theologian must take his starting position in the Christian revelation, because he cannot deny the light that he has received.¹⁸ He did not take his starting point in empty neutrality, but always presupposed faith in his dogmatic thinking, for instance in his discussion of apologetics.

Theology is an independent science and has its own *principia* and does not borrow them from philosophy. [...] Apologetics cannot and may not precede dogmatics, but presupposes dogma and receives the modest though beautiful task to maintain and defend this dogma against all opposition.¹⁹

¹⁴ Cf. J.D. Tangelde, 'Dr. Herman Bavinck 1854-1921: Theologian of the Word,' *Christian Renewal* 19 (2001), 14-15.

¹⁵ Cf. Bremmer, *Bavinck als dogmaticus*, 65-114; Veenhof, *Revelatie en inspiratie*, 547-582. Bavinck developed his own theology in confrontation with the older representatives of this movement like D. Chantepie de la Saussaye (1818-1874) and J.H. Gunning (1829-1905). The ongoing discussion with the younger generation of Ethical Theologians remained a stimulus for his dogmatic reflection. It is difficult to translate the Dutch term *Ethisch*, because the literal translation 'moral' or 'ethical' does not apply here; the term *Ethisch* must be understood in an existential sense. "The first [party] was the Ethical, which sought to promote the Pietistic element in the Revival, represented in the German 'Vermittlungstheologie,' especially under leadership of Chantepie de la Saussaye." H. Bavinck, 'The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands,' *The Princeton Theological Review* 8 (1910), 433-460, 448.

¹⁶ Veenhof, *Revelatie en inspiratie*, 89.

¹⁷ A.J. Rasker, *De Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk vanaf 1795: Geschiedenis, theologische ontwikkelingen en de verhouding tot haar zusterkerken in de negentiende en twintigste eeuw*, 3rd ed., Kampen 1986, 131-132.

¹⁸ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 54. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 78. Van Keulen calls this the "inside perspective" (*binnenperspectief*). Van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek*, 101, 116. Bavinck was beyond his time in his emphasis on the contextuality of science. Cf. Bavinck, *GD* 1, 532. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 564.

¹⁹ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 33. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 56.

6.1.1 Two Views of Apologetics

The differences between Warfield's approach to the certainty of faith and Bavinck's position appear clearly in their different views of apologetics. The differences between both theologians serve as introduction to Bavinck's position on the foundational issues of faith. Warfield made some critical remarks on the view of apologetics of Kuyper and Bavinck, whom he respected very much.²⁰ He criticized Kuyper's view in the introduction to F.R. Beattie's *Apologetics: or the Rational Vindication of Christianity* (1903), where he expressed his regret that Kuyper gives the apologetics a very subordinate place.²¹ Warfield agreed with Kuyper that all the demonstrations in the world cannot make a person a Christian. "Faith is the gift of God; but it does not in the least follow that the faith that God gives is an irrational faith, that is, a faith without grounds in right reason."²² The Holy Spirit does not work a blind or ungrounded faith in the heart and he does not supply a ready-made faith, rooted in nothing and clinging without reason to its object, but a new ability of the heart to respond to the grounds of faith that are sufficient in themselves. Therefore Warfield could say that "we believe in Christ because it is rational to believe in him, not though it be irrational."²³ To explain this he referred to the Reformed orthodox distinction between the *argumentum* on account of which we believe Scripture and the efficient cause and *principium* by which we are led to believe.²⁴

The part that Apologetics has to play in the Christianizing of the world is rather a primary part, and it is a conquering part. It is the distinction of Christianity that it has come into the world clothed with the mission to *reason* its way to its dominion. Other religions may appeal to the sword, or seek some other way to propagate themselves. Christianity makes its appeal to right reason, and stands out among all religions, therefore, as distinctively 'the Apologetic religion.' It is solely by reasoning that it has come thus far on its way to its kingship. And it is solely by reasoning that it will put all its enemies under its feet.²⁵

Warfield also disagreed with Herman Bavinck and criticized him in a review of

²⁰ Warfield calls Kuyper "probably the most considerable figure in both political and ecclesiastical Holland." B.B. Warfield, 'Introduction' in A. Kuyper, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology: Its Principles*, New York [etc.] 1898, xi-xix, xii. Cf. P.S. Heslam 'The Meeting of the Wellsprings: Kuyper and Warfield at Princeton,' in *Religion, Pluralism and Public Life: Abraham Kuyper's Legacy for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. L.E. Lugo, Grand Rapids 2000, 22-44, 22.

²¹ Warfield, 'Introduction to Francis R. Beattie's *Apologetics*,' 95. S.H. Rooy concludes that for Warfield a truth had to be credible to the mind before belief was possible while Kuyper asserted that the final certainty of the believer was the witness of the Spirit. S.H. Rooy, 'Kuyper vs. Warfield: An Historical Approach to the Nature of Apologetics' [unpublished S.T.M. essay for the Union Theological Seminary], 1956, 46.

²² Warfield, 'Introduction to Francis R. Beattie's *Apologetics*,' 98.

²³ Warfield, 'Introduction to Francis R. Beattie's *Apologetics*,' 99.

²⁴ "The Reformed fathers always posited in the production of faith the presence of the *argumentum propter quod credo*, as well as the *principium seu causa efficiens a quo ad credendum adducor*." Warfield, 'Introduction to Francis R. Beattie's *Apologetics*,' 99. Cf. Turretin, *Institutio*, II.vi.6. Cf. Turretin, *Institutes* 1, 87.

²⁵ Warfield, 'Introduction to Francis R. Beattie's *Apologetics*,' 99-100. Riddlebarger comments that Christianity will reason its way to dominion, not because Warfield exalts human reason over revelation, but because Christianity is objectively true, and God the Holy Spirit will create faith, not apart from evidence, but through these evidences, which are sufficient in themselves to serve as the ground for faith. Riddlebarger, 'The Lion of Princeton,' 329.

Bavinck's booklet on the *Certainty of Faith*. Warfield's review was positive; he appreciated Bavinck's theological work and admitted that he never consulted *Reformed Dogmatics* "without the keenest satisfaction and abundant profit."²⁶ Still, Warfield disagreed with Bavinck's disapproval of apologetics; Bavinck did not leave enough room for the objective evidences of faith in his theology. Warfield did not understand the aversion of the Dutch theologians against apologetics and remarked that "it is a standing matter of surprise to us that the school which Dr. Bavinck so brilliantly represents should be tempted to make so little of Apologetics."²⁷ Warfield's critique was especially directed against the way in which Bavinck laid the foundation of faith.

6.1.2 *The Certainty of Faith* (1901)

In Bavinck's oeuvre *The Certainty of Faith* has a special place.²⁸ It has a pastoral tone, dealing especially with doubt, which Bavinck calls the "soul-sickness of our century."²⁹ In the second edition (1903) several thoughts are developed and explained more broadly to meet the questions and remarks that are made about the first edition.³⁰ Bavinck has taken notice "of the friendly and instructive review" of Benjamin B. Warfield.³¹ Bavinck replies to Warfield by adding a few paragraphs.

The Certainty of Faith is divided into four chapters. In the "Introduction" Bavinck places the problem of the certainty of faith in a historical perspective and defines the certainty of faith in the second chapter titled "What certainty means in religion and science." It is the deepest religious need of the soul to know that God exists and that he is our God. The human race has always sought for certainty, for every religion is born from and carried by a desire for eternal survival.³² Science cannot satisfy our hunger for certainty, it is the task of theology to deal with the mystery of ultimate certainty and to prove itself in practical life.

²⁶ B.B. Warfield, 'A Review of H. Bavinck, *De Zekerheid des Geloofs*' (1903), Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings* 2, 106-123, 123.

²⁷ Warfield, 'Review of *Zekerheid*,' 117. Cf. "It is therefore characteristic of the school of thought of which Dr. Bavinck is a shining ornament to estimate the value of Apologetics somewhat lightly." Warfield, 'Review of *Zekerheid*,' 114.

²⁸ The booklet was first published as *Tijdschrift voor gereformeerde theologie* in December 1901 and not in 1902; so Bremmer, *Bavinck als dogmaticus*, 427, 432. According to Berkouwer, it is a concentration point of his whole work. G.C. Berkouwer, 'Bavinck over de zekerheid des geloofs,' *Gereformeerd Weekblad* 10 (1954), 188.

²⁹ Bavinck, *Zekerheid des geloofs*, 8. Cf. Bavinck, *Certainty of Faith*, 8.

³⁰ H. Bavinck, *De zekerheid des geloofs*, 2nd ed., Kampen 1903, [5]. Bavinck inserted a discussion of the relationship between the certainty of faith and the assurance of salvation. Cf. Bavinck, *Zekerheid des geloofs*¹, 70, Bavinck, *Zekerheid des geloofs*², 92-94, Bavinck, *Zekerheid des geloofs*³, 91-92. Cf. Bavinck, *Certainty of Faith*, 85-86. In *De Bazuin* he had previously answered a question on this point. H. Bavinck, 'Geloofszekerheid,' *De Bazuin* 50 (1902), 6. Cf. C. Veenhof, *Volk van God: Enkele aspecten van Bavincks kerkbeschouwing*, Amsterdam 1969, 297-302. The third and final edition was printed in 1918 and only showed a few minor corrections; Bavinck gave titles to the chapters of the book in the third edition. Bavinck, *Zekerheid des geloofs*, [5].

³¹ Bavinck, *Zekerheid des geloofs*², [5].

³² Bavinck, *Zekerheid des geloofs*, 13. Cf. Bavinck, *Certainty of Faith*, 13. In the first edition Bavinck refers to W.B. Kristensen, *Het verband tusschen godsdienst en de zucht tot zelfbehoud*, Leiden 1901. Bavinck, *Zekerheid des geloofs*¹, 15.

Certainty differs from truth. Truth is the correspondence of thought and reality, a relationship between the content of our consciousness and the object of our knowledge. Certainty is not a relationship but a state of the knowing subject, a complete resting of the spirit in the object of its knowledge. The certainty of faith is different than all forms of scientific certainty, for our deepest conviction is not the result of evidence. The roots of this certainty lay very deep; our consciousness as children falls in with the religious ideas in which we are brought up and so mostly the certainty of faith is born. This certainty is weaker than the scientific certainty in the objective sense. Scientific certainty rests on rational grounds; the certainty of faith rests on revelation and on authority and is the fruit of faith that acknowledges this authority. The subjective power of the certainty of faith, however, is much stronger than that of scientific certainty. Religious convictions are the deepest and most intimate of all because they root in the heart. The certainty of faith is the most perfect rest, the highest liberty of the spirit.³³ “And with at least as much right as Descartes posited his *cogito ergo sum* – I think and therefore I am – the believer can say: *credo ergo sum, ergo Deus est* – I believe and therefore I am and therefore God is.”³⁴ This statement sounds extremely subjective; God exists because I believe, but Bavinck uses it to illustrate the strength of religious certainty and not to demonstrate the truth of God’s existence.

The third chapter deals with the different ways in which this certainty has been sought, outside of and especially in the Christian religion. Catholicism disallowed the emancipation of Christians, keeping the souls in a restless and so-called wholesome tension.³⁵ The Reformation was born from the quest for the certainty of salvation. Luther and Calvin held a new and original view of the essence of Christianity; for them faith was a certain knowledge and a firm trust, a conviction that excluded all doubt.³⁶ In Protestantism the faith of the sixteenth century was exchanged for the orthodoxy of the seventeenth century; the confession of faith was replaced by faith in the confession. This evoked Rationalism that sought the essence of religion in the intellect and Pietism that sought this essence in the experience.

In the last chapter on “The Way that Leads to Certainty according to Holy Scripture” Bavinck gives his own answer to the problem of the certainty of faith. He rejects the two alternatives of an objective demonstration and a subjective retreat. Religious feeling cannot be the foundation of the faith, because then there is no objective standard for the truth; we cannot draw a conclusion from our religious emotions to the truth of our faith. Otherwise everyone could say the same as Nicolas Ludwig Von Zinzendorf (1700-1760): “It is so to me, my heart tells me so.”³⁷

³³ Bavinck, *Zekerheid des geloofs*, 31. Cf. Bavinck, *Certainty of Faith*, 30.

³⁴ “En met minstens evenveel recht als CARTESIUS zijn cogito, ergo sum, ik denk, daarom ben ik, poneerde, kan de geloovige zeggen: *credo, ergo sum, ergo Deus est*, ik geloof, daarom ben ik en daarom is God.” Bavinck, *Zekerheid des geloofs*, 32. Cf. Bavinck, *Certainty of Faith*, 30.

³⁵ Bavinck, *Zekerheid des geloofs*, 40-41. Cf. Bavinck, *Certainty of Faith*, 37. Cf. Bavinck, *GD* 1, 543.

³⁶ Bavinck, *Zekerheid des geloofs*, 43. Cf. Bavinck, *Certainty of Faith*, 40.

³⁷ Bavinck, *Zekerheid des geloofs*, 77. Cf. Bavinck, *Certainty of Faith*, 72. Cf. N.L. Von Zinzendorf, ‘Eine Rede von dem klaren und unumstößlichen Beweise der Evangelischen Predigt,’ in ‘Anhang,’ in N.L. von Zinzendorf, *Hauptschriften: in sechs Bänden*, ed. E. Beyreuther and G. Meyer, vol. 4, Hildesheim 1963, 15-28, 17-18. “Es gibt keine andere demonstrationem evangelicam, die man an führen kan, es gibt keinen andern beweis der bibel-

In his review Warfield expressed that it was not clear to him what Bavinck exactly meant by certitude.

If we understand Dr. Bavinck, he considers that the two things most commonly connoted by the term always go together: that ‘certitude of the truth of the Christian religion’ and ‘assurance of faith’ imply one another, and neither is ever present without the other – both being the fruit indeed of one single act of faith.³⁸

For Warfield the way in which we are brought to objective certainty was different from the way in which we are brought to subjective assurance. Faith always rests on evidences; it “is a specific form of persuasion or conviction, and all persuasion or conviction is grounded in evidence.”³⁹ And the evidence that the Christian religion is true is not necessarily the same as the evidence that I am a Christian. According to Warfield, Bavinck reversed the natural order by assuming that the act of saving faith is a necessary prerequisite of the certitude of the truth of the Christian religion.⁴⁰ The conviction of the truth of Christianity, on the contrary, preceded the commitment to Christ, according to Warfield. “‘Faith’ is the gift of God. But it does not follow that the ‘faith’ that God gives is not grounded in ‘the evidences.’”⁴¹ Warfield disagreed with Bavinck on the function of the evidences for faith. For Bavinck they were only an extra posterior means of assurance; for Warfield faith principally rested on evidences even if the believer was unconscious of the fact. “What is supplied by the Holy Spirit in working faith in the heart is ... a new power to the heart to respond to the grounds of faith, sufficient in themselves and already present to the mind.”⁴²

Bavinck wrote that the evidences only touched the external side of the facts, did not penetrate into the heart, and at the best only led to a historical faith. Bavinck repeated that the rational arguments could produce nothing more than ‘historical faith.’ Warfield replied:

This is true. But then ‘historical faith’ is faith – is a conviction of mind; and it is, as Dr. Bavinck elsewhere fully allows, of no little use in the world. The truth therefore is that rational argumentation does, entirely apart from that specific operation of the Holy Ghost which produces saving faith, ground a genuine exercise of faith.⁴³

The telling differences between the first and later editions of *The Certainty of Faith* are probably influenced by Warfield and illustrate the disagreement about the function of the evidences. Bavinck acknowledges Warfield’s critique: “The question regarding the certainty of faith therefore is two-fold. It can be related to the truth of the religion that we ought to confess and it can be related to the personal share that we have in the salvation promised in that religion.”⁴⁴ Both kinds of certainty must be kept close together, but still they have to be distinguished. “The act of faith by which I accept the truth is different from the act of faith by which I am assured of my own salvation.”⁴⁵ In the first edition he says that the evidences are insufficient to prove the truth of Christianity.⁴⁶ Now he says that the

wahrheit als: mein herz sagt mirs, das ist der evangelische beweis.” Cf. O. Uttendörfer, *Zinzendorfs Weltbetrachtung*, Berlin [1929], 233-234.

³⁸ Warfield, ‘Review of *Zekerheid*,’ 112.

³⁹ Warfield, ‘Review of *Zekerheid*,’ 112.

⁴⁰ Warfield, ‘Review of *Zekerheid*,’ 113.

⁴¹ Warfield, ‘Review of *Zekerheid*,’ 114.

⁴² Warfield, ‘Review of *Zekerheid*,’ 115.

⁴³ Warfield, ‘Review of *Zekerheid*,’ 115.

⁴⁴ Bavinck, *Zekerheid des geloofs*, 29. Cf. Bavinck, *Certainty of Faith*, 28.

⁴⁵ Bavinck, *Zekerheid des geloofs*, 30. Cf. Bavinck, *Certainty of Faith*, 28.

⁴⁶ Bavinck, *Zekerheid des geloofs*¹, 55

evidences are insufficient to move someone to believe the truth of Christianity.⁴⁷ The same kind of shift is made when Bavinck leaves out the phrase: “A scientific demonstration cannot and should not precede the Christian faith, neither is it necessary.”⁴⁸

These shifts leave the impression that Bavinck is strongly influenced by Warfield, but in fact he maintains his position and remains in discussion with Warfield. In some other additional remarks Bavinck emphasizes that faith does not depend on evidences. If Scripture was normal history and there was no sinful obstinacy in the heart, then the evidences might be sufficient to prove its truth, but this is not the case. If the word of the gospel itself lacks the power to move to faith, how can evidences – brought forth by human beings – have that power? Evidences “are important in the scholarly debate, but they have little religious value, for no person’s religious life is grounded on them or nurtured by them.”⁴⁹

In the first edition Bavinck says that the rational evidences only touch the external side of the facts and do not penetrate into their heart and essence. “At the best they only lead to a historical faith.”⁵⁰ Warfield writes that for Bavinck the rational arguments can of themselves produce nothing more than “historical faith.”

This is true. But then ‘historical faith’ is faith – is a conviction of mind; and it is, as Dr. Bavinck elsewhere fully allows, of no little use in the world. The truth therefore is that rational argumentation does, entirely apart from that specific operation of the Holy Ghost which produces saving faith, ground a genuine exercise of faith.⁵¹

In the second edition of *The Certainty of Faith* Bavinck says that “historical faith reduces revelation to an ordinary history that took place in the past and no longer concerns us; it takes away from the Word of God exactly that which is the core and heart and what still makes it a Gospel – the good news of salvation – today.”⁵² For Warfield historical faith – the result of rational argumentation – is the porch of saving faith – the result of the enlightening of the mind by the Spirit, by which we are convinced of the validity of the evidences. For Bavinck saving faith and historical faith are essentially different and therefore he rejects the rational approach of Warfield. “For faith has from the beginning [...] a religious character. It is not first historical knowledge that is later supplemented by trust or love, but it is of itself a religious attitude, a practical knowing that applies to myself an approbation of the promises of God made to me.”⁵³

These differences illustrate the two different ways in which Warfield and Bavinck deal with the Reformed heritage. Warfield emphasizes the work of the Spirit through the means of the arguments and the human intellect, while Bavinck insists on the essential difference between the arguments that lead to historical faith and the work of the Spirit

⁴⁷ Bavinck, *Zekerheid des geloofs*¹, 55, Bavinck, *Zekerheid des geloofs*, 63. Cf. Bavinck, *Certainty of Faith*, 59.

⁴⁸ Bavinck, *Zekerheid des geloofs*¹, 64, Bavinck, *Zekerheid des geloofs*, 79. A comparison of the subsequent editions of *Reformed Dogmatics* reveals the same shift of emphasis. Bavinck adds a paragraph to the discussion of the historic-apologetic method in which he emphasizes the positive aspects of apologetics. Bavinck, *GD* 1, 481. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 515. This paragraph is missing in *GD* 1¹, 430.

⁴⁹ Bavinck, *Zekerheid des geloofs*, 65. Cf. Bavinck, *Certainty of Faith*, 60.

⁵⁰ Bavinck, *Zekerheid des geloofs*¹, 57.

⁵¹ Warfield, ‘Review of *Zekerheid*,’ 115.

⁵² Bavinck, *Zekerheid des geloofs*, 68. Cf. Bavinck, *Certainty of Faith*, 63.

⁵³ Bavinck, *Zekerheid des geloofs*, 88. Cf. Bavinck, *Certainty of Faith*, 82.

that leads to saving faith. Bavinck stresses the *testimonium* of the Spirit as the subjective counterpart of God's revelation in Scripture, in a way that was strange to Warfield. A closer analysis of Bavinck's concept of the *principia* of theology will show whether the positions of both Reformed theologians on the foundation of faith exclude each other mutually.

6.2 The *Principia* of Theology

The doctrine of the *principia* in Bavinck's theology was first discussed by S.P. Van der Walt from South-Africa, who approached Bavinck from a philosophical perspective.⁵⁴ Next the American theologian E.P. Heideman compared H. Bavinck with Emil Brunner (1889-1966) with respect to revelation and reason. He concluded that Bavinck relied on Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas for his concept of the *principia* and accused Bavinck of a pantheistic inclination, because of the close relationship of subject and object in his theology.⁵⁵ In The Netherlands R.H. Bremmer studied the structure of Bavinck's theology, offering a summary of Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*. According to Bremmer, Bavinck derived his theological *principia* from Aristotelian logic and used the concept to connect theological knowledge with general epistemology; he also places Bavinck's philosophical position in the context of Neo-Thomism.⁵⁶ J. Veenhof published a dissertation on the doctrines of revelation and inspiration in Bavinck's theology. He paid special attention to the influence of the Ethical Theology. Veenhof did not deal explicitly with the *principia* but interweaved the theme in his discussion of the inspiration.⁵⁷ The dissertations of S. Meijers and D. Van Keulen also dealt with the issue.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ S.P. Van der Walt, *Die wysbegeerte van dr. Herman Bavinck*, Potchefstroom 1953. According to Heideman, Van der Walt overemphasized the role of regeneration, neglecting the differences between Kuyper and Bavinck. E.P. Heideman, *The Relation of Revelation and Reason in E. Brunner and H. Bavinck*, Assen 1959, 143 n. 1 Cf. Bremmer, *Bavinck als dogmaticus*, 331.

⁵⁵ Heideman, *Revelation and Reason*, 144.

⁵⁶ Bremmer, *Bavinck als dogmaticus*, 155. Cf. Bavinck, *GD* 1, 183. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 211. For the possible influence Neo-Thomism cf. Bremmer, *Bavinck als dogmaticus*, 315, 328-330.

⁵⁷ Veenhof, *Revelatie en inspiratie*, 391-398, 489-498.

⁵⁸ In the dissertation of S. Meijers, the relationship between objectivity and existentiality in Bavinck's theology is the object of research. Meijers also discusses Bavinck's successors Berkouwer and Kuitert along these lines; his train of thought is rather difficult to follow. S. Meijers, *Objectiviteit en existentialiteit: Een onderzoek naar hun verhouding in de theologie van Herman Bavinck en in de door hem beïnvloede concepties*, Kampen 1979. H.M. Vroom deals with the notion of the *principia* in relation to the doctrine of Scripture in the theology of Kuyper and Bavinck. He discusses Scripture as the *principium externum*, but does not deal with the *principium internum* in Bavinck's theology. H.M. Vroom, 'De gelezen schrift als principium theologiae,' in *100 jaar theologie: Aspecten van een eeuw theologiseren in de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (1892-1992)*, ed. M.E. Brinkman, Kampen 1992, 96-160. R.B. Gaffin summarizes the theology of "Old Amsterdam" with respect to the doctrine of Scripture in two articles, one on Kuyper and one on Bavinck. He only covers the *principium externum* due to his special interest in the doctrine of inspiration and he does not discuss the *principia* as such. R.B. Gaffin, 'Old Amsterdam and Inerrancy?' [1], *The Westminster Theological Journal* 44 (1982), 250-289. R.B. Gaffin, 'Old Amsterdam and Inerrancy?' [2], *The Westminster Theological Journal* 45 (1983), 219-272.

From these studies a few things become clear. In the first place the *principia* form an important structuring principle for Bavinck's prolegomena. On the objective side stands the revelation of God in Scripture, the *principium externum* and on the subjective side the acceptance of this revelation through faith, the *principium internum*. In the second place it is clear that the concept of the *principia* stems from Aristotelian logic and that Bavinck fastens upon the use of this concept in Reformed orthodoxy. In the third place several studies show that Bavinck relates this theological concept to general epistemology and that the *principia* function as a bridge between theology and science. Finally Bavinck uses the concept of the *principia* to answer the question of the certainty of faith. The quest for certainty is one of the main forces of his theological thought. In the discussion of the *principia* he is searching for the deepest ground of faith.

In these studies it does not become clear where Bavinck borrows the idea of the *principia* and especially the distinction between the *principium externum* and *internum* from; Aristotle, Reformed orthodoxy and Neo-Thomism are mentioned, but the relationship between the theological and philosophical tradition and Bavinck's own position is not made clear. We will study Bavinck's sources to answer the question why the *principia* are so essential for him that his whole discussion of the prolegomena rests upon them. There seems to be a difference between Bavinck and Reformed orthodoxy at this point. In our discussion of Reformed orthodoxy we have seen that the distinction between *principium externum* and *principium internum* is rare in Reformed orthodoxy; Scripture is the *principium unicum* of theology. In some cases in Reformed orthodoxy the Holy Spirit is called the *principium internum* of theology, but we have not found faith as a *principium internum*. Moreover, in the prolegomena of Reformed orthodox theology *principium externum* and *principium internum* do not function as a structuring principle. Therefore it is unlikely that Bavinck copies this distinction immediately from Reformed orthodoxy. We are interested in the exact relationship of Bavinck to the Reformed tradition at this point. In this paragraph (6.1) we will examine Bavinck's sources for the *principia* and especially for the distinction between the *principium externum* and *internum*.

We are also interested in the relationship of the term αὐτόπιστος to the *principia*. Our question therefore is whether Scripture is self-convincing for Bavinck and how this relates to the *principia*. We will have to examine how the *autopistia* of Scripture functions in the context of the certainty of faith. The role of the term αὐτόπιστος in Reformed theology is the main object of our whole study. Bavinck uses the term in the context of the ecclesiology and the doctrine of Scripture. We will discuss this point at length in paragraph 6.3 on "Scripture or the Church."

Finally, we are interested in Bavinck's philosophical epistemology. The relationship between object and subject is essential for Bavinck both in his general epistemology and in his discussion of the final ground of faith. Maybe the term αὐτόπιστος is helpful to understand this difficult point in Bavinck's theology. An extra difficulty lies in the fact that Bavinck's definition of the *principium internum* remains unclear.⁵⁹ Mostly faith is the *principium internum*, but sometimes Bavinck also mentions the *testimonium* of the Spirit as internal cognitive principle. In other cases the

⁵⁹ Cf. Veenhof, *Revelatie en inspiratie*, 491, n. 12, Van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek*, 124.

believer's reason is the *principium internum*. We will discuss these questions in the paragraph on "Object and Subject" (6.3) and on the *testimonium* (6.4).

6.2.1 *The Science of Holy Theology* (1883)

In his inaugural address, entitled *The Science of Holy Theology*, at Kampen in 1883 Bavinck uses the concept of the *principia* for the first time. In four chapters he discusses the principle, the content, and the goal of theology.⁶⁰ "Scripture is the only *principium* from which theology is drawn and its only source of knowledge."⁶¹ The term *principium* expresses the relation of theology to Scripture. "The Bible is the principle, from where theology starts, the seed out of which it grows. Materially everything that we know of God is included in the Holy Scriptures."⁶² In line with Reformed orthodoxy Bavinck makes a distinction between the *principium essendi* and the *principium cognoscendi* of theology.

Of course we owe the fact that theology exists – that we can and may know God – only to God; therefore the 'principium essendi' of theology is God himself. Our theology, provided that it is true, is nothing else than the imprint and the reflection in our consciousness of that knowledge, which God has of himself and has decided to communicate to his creatures. But the 'principium cognoscendi', from which the knowledge of God is derived for us, is only Holy Scripture.⁶³

God first knows himself, secondly he has made himself known to us in his revelation and thirdly he has imprinted that knowledge in our consciousness. Bavinck connects the distinction of the *principium essendi* and the *principium cognoscendi* of theology to the Reformed orthodox distinction of the *theologia archetypa* – the knowledge that God has of himself – and the *theologia ectypa* – the knowledge of God that is communicated to human beings. "Our whole theology is ectypal."⁶⁴

This twofold principle of theology – God and Scripture – fences Reformed theology off from rationalism that takes human reason as the *principium* of theology and from mysticism that takes the human heart with its feelings and consciousness as the *principium* of theology. Bavinck characterizes the position of the school of Schleiermacher as mystical and pantheistic.⁶⁵ He refers to the first chapters of Charles Hodge's *Systematic Theology*: "The Schleiermacher doctrine is purely mystical."⁶⁶

⁶⁰ H. Bavinck, *De wetenschap der Heilige Godgeleerdheid*, Kampen 1883, 8. On the *autopistia* of Scripture in Bavinck's theology, cf. H. Van den Belt, 'De autonomie van de mens of de autopistie van de Schrift,' in *Ontmoetingen met Herman Bavinck*, ed. G. Harinck and G. Neven, Barneveld 2005, 287-306.

⁶¹ Bavinck, *Wetenschap der Godgeleerdheid*, 10.

⁶² Bavinck, *Wetenschap der Godgeleerdheid*, 55, n. 2. Bavinck refers to an article of Kuyper, who criticizes J.H. Gunning (1829-1905) one of the representatives of Ethical Theology, because he says that Scripture is not the *principium*, but only the norm of theology. Bavinck, *Wetenschap der Godgeleerdheid*, 55, n. 9. Cf. A. Kuyper, *De Heraut* 30 (1878).

⁶³ Bavinck, *Wetenschap der Godgeleerdheid*, 12. Bavinck had this idea in common with A. Kuyper, who also asserts that the self-consciousness of God is the *principium essendi* and Scripture the only *principium cognoscendi* of theology. A. Kuyper, *De hedendaagsche schriftcritiek in haar bedenkelijke strekking voor de gemeente des levenden Gods*, Amsterdam 1881, 10.

⁶⁴ Bavinck, *Wetenschap der Godgeleerdheid*, 29.

⁶⁵ For the charge of pantheism cf. Bavinck, *GD* 1, 214 and *GD* 2, 84. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 242 and *RD* 2, 115.

⁶⁶ Hodge, *Systematic Theology* 1, 66. For the pantheistic tendency of mysticism cf. Hodge,

Bavinck's attitude towards Schleiermacher is ambivalent; he counts his theological position more dangerous than rationalism, because it makes the human consciousness the *principium* of theology. Still, there is an element of truth in Schleiermacher's position. "We do not only confess a 'principium externum' i.e. Holy Scripture, but also a 'principium internum' i.e. the Holy Spirit, who dwelling in the church makes the things of the kingdom known to her."⁶⁷ It is important for the understanding of the prolegomena of *Reformed Dogmatics* to realize that the distinction of the *principium cognoscendi* in a *principium externum* and *principium internum* stems from his discussion with Schleiermacher and his disciples in the Ethical Theology.⁶⁸

Bavinck emphasizes that the *principium* of theology does not depend on anything else. Scripture is the postulate, the basic axiom of theological science and therefore it cannot be deduced from a more basic *principium*.⁶⁹ This axiomatic principle of theology is not unscholarly; on the contrary, every science proceeds from an axiom that is accepted *a priori* without being proved. The proof for the truth of the axiom can only be given *a posteriori* in the science that is built on this *principium*. It is impossible to build a house on sand. "Physics, mathematics and logic would be impossible if the unprovable theses that form their foundation would not stand firm."⁷⁰ There is a difference between the *principia* in science and in theology. We accept the *principia* of sciences because of their own evidence as innate ideas, common notions and eternal truths.⁷¹ The *principium* of theology, however, is not evident to human nature and is not

Systematic Theology 1, 76-79. Bavinck finds a point of orientation in Princeton theology and cites Hodge's well known remark that Scripture contains the truths for the theologian, just as nature offers the facts of natural science and he refers to the remark that it is no uncommon thing to find theologians with two theologies, one of the intellect and the other of the heart. Bavinck, *Wetenschap der Godgeleerdheid*, 12, 56, n. 14. Cf. Hodge, *Systematic Theology* 1, 16, 17. In the second edition of *Reformed Dogmatics* Bavinck is more critical of Hodge. He places his own synthetic-genetic method over against Hodge's empirical method. Bavinck, *GD* 1, 70. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 94. This remark is not yet found in the first edition. Bavinck, *GD* 1, 30. Kuyper also criticized Hodge at this point. Kuyper, *Encyclopedie* 2, 268-269.

⁶⁷ Bavinck, *Wetenschap der Godgeleerdheid*, 15.

⁶⁸ In 1884 Bavinck charged the Ethical theologian Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye (1818-1874) that in his theology Scripture was not the final ground of faith. The *testimonium* had a different place in Saussaye's theology than in the Reformed theology, because it was not only the means for but also the ground of the faith in Scripture. H. Bavinck, *De theologie van Prof. Dr. Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye: bijdrage tot de kennis der ethische theologie*, Leiden 1884, 54-55, cf. 92.

⁶⁹ Bavinck cites Lucas Trelcatius jr. (1573-1607): "Principii principium haberi non postest nec quaeri debet." L. Trelcatius, *Scholastica et methodica locorum communium S. theologiae institutio, didactice et elenctice in epitome explicata*, Amsterdam 1651, 26. Trelcatius does not distinguish between a *principium externum* and a *principium internum*, but he does discuss the *principium essendi* and the *principium cognoscendi* in an introduction to the first part of his *Institutio* in which he deals with the doctrine of Scripture and the doctrine of God. Cf. Bavinck, *GD* 1, 426 where he mentions the same quotation as an explanation of the term αὐτόπιστος and also refers to Trelcatius.

⁷⁰ Bavinck, *Wetenschap der Godgeleerdheid*, 20.

⁷¹ Bavinck is influenced by C.B. Spruyt, *Proeve van eene geschiedenis van de leer der aangeboren begrippen*, Leiden 1879. Later Bavinck was more critical of the concept of innate ideas. Cf. Bremmer, *Bavinck als dogmaticus*, 330.

accepted by the human mind without struggle and resistance.⁷² Instead of an objection, Bavinck sees this as an affirmation of his position. The principles of other sciences rest in human nature, but the *principium* of theology comes from outside of us and is only acknowledged by us and implanted in us with the new life of rebirth. “And this is what I assert, that by that new, spiritual and heavenly life – and that only can be taken into account – the acceptance of this principle of all true theology occurs just as spontaneously and of itself as it occurs with the so-called axioms of the sciences.”⁷³ Bavinck does not use the term αὐτόπιστος here, but it is clear that the authority of Scripture is to be accepted axiomatically. “For the faith of the heart the thesis that Holy Scripture is the only and sufficient source of knowledge for theology, is immediately evident and a priori established.”⁷⁴

The inaugural address shows that Bavinck must have acquired the distinction between *principium externum* and *principium internum* early in his theological development.⁷⁵ Scripture is the only *principium* of theology, but still the *principium internum* is indispensable. For Bavinck our knowledge of God rests in God’s self-knowledge. He connects the Reformed orthodox distinction of the *principium essendi* and the *principium cognoscendi* with that of the *theologia archetypa* and the *theologia ectypa*. There is a parallel between the function of the *principia* of theology and the first principles in other sciences. Both have a self-convincing character, although the axioms of science are self-evident to the natural mind and Scripture is only self-convincing for faith. Without using the term αὐτόπιστος Bavinck takes his starting point in the *autopistia* of Scripture as the self-convincing *principium* of theology. In this metaphorical application of the *principia* of science to theology Bavinck reminds us of the introduction of αὐτόπιστος by Calvin.

The emphasis on the *principia* must be understood against the background of the discussion with the Ethical Theology.⁷⁶ Bavinck uses the concept of the *principia* both to acknowledge an element of truth in that position and to explain that that position leads to subjectivism, mysticism, and even pantheism.⁷⁷ He values the attention for the religious subject positively, but the religious subject may never become the principle of our knowledge of God. Bavinck is influenced by Charles Hodge in his disapproval of

⁷² Bavinck refers to P. Van Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica Theologia*, Amsterdam 1724 and W. Ames, *Mergh der Ghodtgeleerdtheidt*, Amsterdam 1656. This is a translation of W. Ames, *Medulla theologica*, Amsterdam 1623. Cf. Ames, *Marrow of Theology*, 77.

⁷³ Bavinck, *Wetenschap der Godgeleerdheid*, 20.

⁷⁴ Bavinck, *Wetenschap der Godgeleerdheid*, 20.

⁷⁵ Bremmer says that the distinction between the *principium externum* and the *principium internum* is one Bavinck’s earliest ideas. Bremmer, *Bavinck als dogmaticus*, 176.

⁷⁶ According to Bavinck, the main difference with the Ethical Theologians does not concern the *principium essendi* but the *principium cognoscendi* of theology. H. Bavinck, ‘Antwoord aan Prof. Dr. J.H. Gunning Jr.,’ *De Vrije Kerk: Vereeniging van Christelijke Gereformeerde Stemmen* 10 (1884), 287-292, 291.

⁷⁷ Cf. H. Bavinck, ‘Het dualisme in de Theologie,’ *De Vrije Kerk: Vereeniging van Christelijke Gereformeerde Stemmen* 13 (1887), 11-39, 17-18. “But because both Scheiermacher and Kant start from the human subject and search for the foundation and the content of religion there, the character of theology has been changed totally by both.”

mysticism. It is an interesting question whether his acknowledgement of the element of truth in Scheiermacher's position is compatible with this disapproval.

6.2.2 Correspondence with Snouck Hurgronje

The correspondence with his friend Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857-1936) – a Dutch Arabist who studied theology at Leiden together with Bavinck – sheds some light on the background of this inaugural address. Bavinck sent a copy of his inaugural address to his friend and Snouck Hurgronje responded with a few questions. He was willing to accept that the Spirit witnessed to the truth of Scripture but not that this witness implied infallibility. He found it impossible to take Scripture as an infallible axiom for theology even from Bavinck's perspective and he criticized his friend for not really dealing with the problems of the infallibility of Scripture.⁷⁸

Bavinck replied that he did not intend to deal with the whole field of Scripture or the problems of historical-critical research, but with the foundations of theology. "This only had to come to light that the theologian, if he wished to be what he had to be, was as firmly bound to the Bible as the natural scientist to nature."⁷⁹ Bavinck understood the charge that his axiomatic approach was arbitrary, but there was no alternative. "Theology is knowledge of the true God and thus supernatural; it must therefore start with a leap, but that is not the same as a salto mortale."⁸⁰ There is no bridge between the finite and the infinite, faith means a jump into liberty and therefore must start from an *a priori*. For others that do not share this point of view, the only proof of its truth lies in the result; the firmness of the foundation appears from the building that rests on it.

In one of the previous letters from the Franeker parsonage Bavinck wrote to his friend about the *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae* he had recently edited.

I did this to be able to study a little of Reformed theology at the same time. I am better at home with it now than before and it has had quite an influence – and I believe a positive influence – on my theological view. [...] So I am working on the field of the 'Prinzipienlehre' of theology; this issue first has to be straightened out.⁸¹

The study of Reformed orthodoxy helped him to find his own position. Bavinck may have derived the concept of Scripture as the self-convincing *principium* of theology from his intensive study of the *Synopsis*, but it is a common place in Reformed orthodoxy that Scripture is the *principium* of theology and it is also possible that he was familiar with the concept from his study in Leiden.⁸²

It is more difficult to trace the source of the distinction of the *principium externum* and the *principium internum*. As we have seen this distinction is rare in Reformed orthodoxy and does not function as a dividing principle of the prolegomena. The terms *principium externum* and *principium internum* do not occur in the *Synopsis*; Scripture is

⁷⁸ H. Bavinck and C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Een Leidse vriendschap: De briefwisseling tussen Herman Bavinck en Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje 1875-1921*, ed. J. De Bruijn and G. Harinck, Baarn 1999, 107-108.

⁷⁹ Bavinck and Snouck Hurgronje, *Leidse vriendschap*, 111. Again the influence of Charles Hodge is clear.

⁸⁰ Bavinck and Snouck Hurgronje, *Leidse vriendschap*, 111.

⁸¹ Bavinck and Snouck Hurgronje, *Leidse vriendschap*, 100.

⁸² Scholten was acquainted with the terminology of Reformed orthodoxy; he lists 64 Reformed orthodox authors among his sources. J.H. Scholten, *De leer der Hervormde kerk in hare grondbeginselen: uit de bronnen voorgesteld en beoordeeld*, 4th ed., Leiden 1861, 67-74.

the *principium unicum* of theology. Maybe Bavinck hooks on to the subdivision of the mode of revelation in *internum* (ἐνδιάθετον) and *externum* (προφορικόν).⁸³ He also may be influenced by the distinction between an external and internal *vocation* in soteriology.⁸⁴ The external call only becomes effective through the internal application of the Spirit. It is possible that Bavinck transformed the distinction between the two modes of revelation or the two modes of the vocation into a structuring principle for his prolegomena, but then the influence from the *Synopsis* is indirect. We will turn to *Reformed Dogmatics* and study Bavinck's sources to answer the question from where he derived the distinction between the *principium externum* and the *principium internum*.

6.2.3 *Principia* in Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*

The first volume of *Reformed Dogmatics* consists of four parts; after the introduction Bavinck deals with the *principia* of dogmatics in the three chapters; first with the *principia* in general then with the *principium externum* and finally with the *principium internum*.⁸⁵ The *principia* are the structuring principle of the prolegomena of *Reformed Dogmatics*. The distinction between the *principium externum* and the *principium internum* runs parallel with the distinction between objective truth and subjective knowledge of the truth. Still this distinction does not take away the fact that God's revelation in Scripture is the *unicum principium theologiae*. Bavinck uses the term *principium* for Scripture rather than *fons* (source), because *fons* implies a mechanical relation between Scripture and theology – the dogmas are drawn from Scripture as water from a well – while *principium* points to an organic relation.⁸⁶

Ethical Theology called Scripture the *fons* and *norma*, but not the *principium* of theology. In an article titled "Confession and Dogmatics" (1891) Bavinck explains his preference for *principium*; a dogma is a truth taken from Scripture and passed through the human intellectual consciousness. Therefore it is less correct to call Scripture the source or fountain of theology; Scripture is not a source from which the truth is drawn like water from a well, this idea is mechanical.

Scripture is an organic principle, the seed, the root, out of which the plant of dogmatics grows. Mechanical use of Scripture is therefore entirely blocked off. Dogmatics is not a scroll of texts or a collection of dicta probantia. On the contrary, it is the truth of Scripture itself taken up in and elaborated independently by the intellectually and scholarly formed consciousness of the believer and confessed and maintained as his own conviction also in the field of science.⁸⁷

⁸³ *Synopsis*, i.15.

⁸⁴ *Synopsis*, xxx, 32. In Reformed orthodox soteriology the distinction between *internum* and *externum* is far more common than in the doctrine of Scripture and the *Synopsis* is no exception this rule. The development of the doctrine of the *testimonium* and the acceptance of the Word through faith do not properly belong to the prolegomena, but to the field of soteriology. Muller, *PRRD* 1², 443.

⁸⁵ In the translation the original division in chapters has been changed. J. Bolt, 'Editor's Introduction,' in Bavinck, *RD* 1, 11-22, 21.

⁸⁶ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 66. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 89. According to J. Bolt, Bavinck distances himself from the empirical-inductive method of Hodge at this point. As we have seen this was a later development in his theology; he appreciated Hodge's approach in the *Wetenschap der Godgeleerdheid*.

⁸⁷ H. Bavinck, 'Confessie en Dogmatiek,' *Theologische Studiën* 9 (1891), 258-275, 267. Cf.

Bavinck places the questions of the authority of Scripture in the broader perspective of the certainty of faith. The question how to gain certainty is fundamental for his dogmatic method. This becomes clear in his introductory paragraphs on the dogmatic method where Bavinck concludes that this method is controlled by the question how we can gain certainty in religious matters.⁸⁸ There must be a different method to gain certainty in religion than in science. In science there are several methods, such as observation, intuition, the testimony of witnesses, and rational proof. Religious certainty cannot be derived from observation, because the object of religion is invisible; neither can it be gained by proof, because religious certainty is absolute. Religious certainty rests on revelation; God's authority is the foundation of religion and therefore the *principium* of theology.

The importance of the *principia* in Bavinck's theology appears already in the first paragraphs of his *Reformed Dogmatics*. Bavinck derives the definition of 'dogmatics' from the meaning of the term 'dogma,' which always has an authoritative element in philosophy and theology. A philosophical dogma rests on the authority of its self-evidence or its argumentation, while a religious or theological dogma derives its authority from divine witness.⁸⁹ There is a correspondence between the *principia* in philosophy and in theology. Just as the philosophical dogmas finally rest on the *principia* of philosophy, so the Christian dogmas finally rest on the authority of divine witness. The main question for the dogmatic method is where this divine witness can be found. In the Roman Catholic tradition and in the school of Schleiermacher dogmas ultimately rest on the church or on the believer, but in Reformed theology they can only rest on Scripture. Scripture is the *principium* of Reformed theology and the Reformation does not acknowledge any truth that does not rest on the authority of God in Scripture. "Therefore among the Reformed theologians this proposition occurs time and again: principium, in quod omnia dogmata theologica resolvuntur, est: Deus dixit."⁹⁰ "God has said so" is the principle that resolves all Reformed dogmatic statements and therefore Scripture is the end of all contradiction in theology. Although Bavinck does not mention his source it is almost certain that he derived the expression *Deus dixit* from Amandus Polanus von Polansdorf.⁹¹ In his *Syntagma theologiae christianae* Polanus discusses the *theologia nostra* and says that the Word of God is its immediate and proximate efficient cause and consequently its principium. "Primum siquidem principium, in quod omnia dogmata Theologica resolvuntur, est, DOMINUS DIXIT seu DEUS DIXIT."⁹² The *Syntagma*

Bavinck, 'Antwoord aan Gunning,' 291. "That Word is the truth, the seed of the church en the principium of theology."

⁸⁸ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 52. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 76. The ruling motive for the prolegomena of Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* is the certainty of faith. Van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek*, 153.

⁸⁹ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 4. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 29.

⁹⁰ "The principle, in which all theological doctrines are resolved, is: 'God has said so'" Bavinck, *GD* 1, 5. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 30.

⁹¹ In one of his early articles Bavinck refers to Polanus: "We should always keep the beautiful word of Polanus a Polansdorf in memory: Principium, in quod omnia dogmata theologica resolvuntur, est: Dominus dixit." Bavinck, 'Dualisme in de Theologie,' 39. Cf. Bavinck, 'Confessie en Dogmatiek,' 265. "Principium, in quod omnia dogmata theologica resolvuntur, est: Dominus dixit."

⁹² "Indeed, the first principle, in which all theological doctrines are resolved, is: THE LORD HAS SAID SO or GOD HAS SAID SO." Polanus von Polansdorf, *Syntagma theologiae Christianae*, 16

theologiae christianae is one of the Reformed orthodox sources that Bavinck uses very frequently. The resemblance of the wording is striking enough to conclude that Polanus is his source. Bavinck switches from *Dominus dixit* in the first edition of *Reformed Dogmatics* to *Deus dixit* in the later editions.⁹³ The expression *Deus dixit* influenced Karl Barth in his doctrine of the Word of God; Barth borrowed the expression from Bavinck.⁹⁴

The term ‘dogma’ also has a social element; dogmas are accepted in a certain circle and convey more than a personal opinion. Bavinck distinguishes between a dogma *quoad se* and a dogma *quoad nos*. A thesis resting on the authority of Scripture is a dogma in itself (*quoad se*), but only when a truth from Scripture is brought to general acceptance by the Holy Spirit in the church it becomes a dogma for us (*quoad nos*). This social element is important to avoid the equation of our personal opinions with God’s truth. “Accordingly, the confession of the church can be called the dogma *quoad nos* or the truth of God as it has been taken up in the consciousness of the church and confessed by it in its own language.”⁹⁵ Bavinck denies that the authority of the church is the foundation of a dogma; the church only has a subordinate authority. Still, Bavinck emphasizes the importance of the acceptance by the church to correct individualism. The confession of the church is a standard to check our personal opinions. The authority of the biblical truths does not rest on the confession or on the church, but authority that is not accepted by the church remains empty and meaningless. There is a connection between the truth *quoad se* and *quoad nos*; a dogma can be true in itself, but it “is intended to be accepted and it has an inherent impulse in itself to be accepted by us. Truth always desires to be honored as truth and can never live at peace with error and deception.”⁹⁶ The truth has an intrinsic power to convince, it is self-convincing and

(I.xiv). Cf. Muller, *PRRD* 1², 441. Statements like this on the *principia* were often copied. Alsted says: “Atqui omnia dogmata Theologica resolvuntur in hoc principium, Dominus dixit, seu, Deus dixit.” Alsted, *Praecognitorum Theologicorum*, 125. Bavinck also refers to this work several times. Bavinck, *GD* 1, 64, 180, 277. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 88, 306. Cf. Alsted, *Theologica didactica*, 7 “Primum principium, in quod omnia dogmata Theologica resolvi debent, est, DEUS DIXIT.” It is probable that Alsted copied the phrase from Polanus, because the *Syntagma theologiae christianae* is from 1609 and the *Praecognitorum Theologicorum* from 1614; moreover, Alsted studied under Polanus in Basel. It is possible that both derived the phrase from a third source. The expression goes back to early Lutheran theology. Cf paragraph 3.5.4.

⁹³ Bavinck, *GD*¹ 1, 4.

⁹⁴ K. Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik*, vol. 1.1, Zurich 1955, 116, 118-119. On Bavinck’s influence cf. K. Barth, *Unterricht in der Christlichen Religion: Prolegomena* 1924, vol. 1, Zurich 1985, 12. Cf. K. Barth, *Die christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf: Die Lehre vom Wort Gottes Prolegomena zur christlichen Dogmatik* 1927, ed. G. Sauter, vol. 1, Zurich 1982, 65, n. 8 and Van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek*, 117, n. 221. Barth mistakenly assumed that the quotation stemmed from Ursinus, because Bavinck mentions Ursinus’s *Volumen Tractationem Theologicarum* just before the quotation. Sauter suggests Polanus’s *Syntagma* as a possible source for Bavinck, but the quotation he offers differs largely from Bavinck’s text. Sauter does not mention the quotation from Polanus’s *Syntagma*, which we have discussed above. For the use of *Deus dixit*, cf. Berkouwer, *De Heilige Schrift* 2, Kampen 1967, 10, 22, 39, 46, 111, 140.

⁹⁵ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 5. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 30. Bavinck’s emphasis on the faith of the congregation is influenced by the Ethical Theology.

⁹⁶ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 5. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 30. This quotation is missing in the first edition. Bavinck, *GD*¹ 1, 5.

therefore the dogmas cannot remain authoritative *quoad se* without becoming authoritative *quoad nos*.

Bavinck holds to the authority of Scripture as the only *principium* of theology, but he is fully aware of the fact that this authority only has a meaning if it is accepted by believers and handed down in the church from generation to generation. This seems to be a concession to the position of Schleiermacher. Bavinck, however, emphasizes the collectivity of believers in the confession of the church of all ages to correct the subjectivistic character of this position.

6.2.4 *Theologia Archetypa and Ectypa*

The first paragraph of the chapter on the *principia* in general is titled “The Meaning of the Principia.” Bavinck refers to the use of ἀρχή and *principium* in ancient philosophy.⁹⁷ In classical logic the distinction is made between a threefold *principium*: *principium essendi*, *existendi*, and *cognoscendi*; the *principia* deal with being, becoming, or knowing.⁹⁸ In early Christian theology God the Father is called the ἀρχή of the Son and the Spirit or the *principium* of the whole Godhead.⁹⁹ In the scholastic tradition God is not only the *principium essendi* of all that is created, but also of all our knowledge of Him. All knowledge about God rests in the knowledge of God; therefore God’s self-consciousness is the *principium essendi* of theology.¹⁰⁰

Theology is related to the other sciences and at the same time has a special place in their midst, because it is founded on faith. Therefore theology has its own principles, which must be developed from the perspective of faith. Bavinck links the concept of the *principia* with the locus *de theologia* and the distinction first made by Junius between *theologia archetypa* and *theologia ectypa* with the *principium essendi* and the *principium cognoscendi* of theology.

So we have discovered three principia. In the first place God as the *principium essendi* of theology. Next the *principium cognoscendi externum*, viz., the self-revelation of God that has

⁹⁷ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 182-183. Bremmer calls it a masterly hit that Bavinck made the *principia* of logic fruitful for the formal structure of the dogmatic-theological doctrine of the *principia*. Bremmer seems to overlook the influence from Reformed orthodoxy at this point. Bremmer, *Bavinck als dogmaticus*, 315. Cf. 155.

⁹⁸ Bavinck quotes a definition from Aristotle: “The first common element of all principles (ἀρχαι) is that whence something either is or becomes or is known.” Bavinck, *GD* 1, 183. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 211 “πᾶσων μὲν οὖν κοινόν των ἀρχῶν το πρῶτον εἶναι ὅθεν ἢ ἐστὶν ἢ γίγνεται ἢ γινώσκεται, id unde aliquid aut est aut fit aut cognoscitur.” Bavinck, *GD* 1, 182. The quotation is from Aristotle, *Metaphysica* 5.1, 1013a. Cf. Aristotle, *The Metaphysics*, trans. and ed. H. Tredennick and G.C. Armstrong, vol. 1, Cambridge (Mass.) 1961, 210-211. Cf. R. Eisler, *Wörterbuch der philosophischen Begriffe und Ausdrücke*, Berlin 1899, 589. Bavinck mentions this dictionary as one of his sources.

⁹⁹ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 183. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 211. Cf. Augustine, *De Trinitate* 4.20, *PL* 42:908.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 212. As we have seen in our chapter on Reformed orthodoxy the characterization of God as the *principium essendi* and Scripture as the *principium cognoscendi* is common in the Reformed tradition. Bavinck refers to Bartholomaeus Keckerman (1571-1609) as an example for the distinction of the *principium essendi* and the *principium cognoscendi*. Bavinck, *GD* 1, 80. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 103. For Keckermann God is the *principium essendi* and the revelation of God the *principium cognoscendi* of theology. B. Keckerman, *Systema sacrosanctae theologiae, tribus libris adornatum*, Coloniae Allobrogum [Geneva] 1611, 165. For the importance of the distinction cf. Muller, *PRRD* 2², 162-163.

an instrumental and temporary character as far as it is laid down in Scripture; and finally, the *principium cognoscendi internum*, the illumination of a human being by God's Spirit. These three are one in the respect that they have God as author and one identical knowledge of God as their content. The *theologia archetypa* in the divine consciousness, the *theologia ectypa* granted in revelation and recorded in Holy Scripture; and the *theologia in subjecto*, the knowledge of God, as far as it proceeds from revelation and is taken up in the human consciousness; all three of them are from God.¹⁰¹

According to Bavinck, God is the *principium essendi* of theology, precisely because he only knows himself fully (*theologia archetypa*). God's revelation makes the knowledge of God available for creatures; his revelation in Scripture is the *principium cognoscendi externum* of theology, because the limited and creaturely knowledge of God (*theologia ectypa in se*) depends on it. Finally, the illumination of the human mind by the Spirit is the *principium cognoscendi internum* of theology, because through this illumination the revealed knowledge of God is received in the human consciousness (*theologia ectypa in subjecto*). This last form of *theologia* is the final goal of God's revelation; the self-revelation of God cannot remain merely external, but is meant to become internal. According to Bavinck, the *principium essendi* corresponds with the *theologia archetypa*, the *principium cognoscendi externum* with the *theologia ectypa in se* and the *principium cognoscendi internum* with the *theologia in subjecto* (or the *theologia ectypa interna*). Bavinck connects this double trio with the doctrine of the Trinity. "These three kinds of principia – distinct and still essentially one – rest in the Trinitarian being of God. It is the Father, who imparts Himself through the Son as the Logos in the Spirit."¹⁰²

6.2.5 Bavinck's sources

In the paragraph of *Reformed Dogmatics* on 'The Principia in General' Bavinck distinguishes a *principium externum* and *internum* because God's self-revelation is essentially meant for the human consciousness. It must carry itself on in human beings and this implies that the revelation cannot be merely external, but also must be internal. "Formerly a distinction was made between *principium cognoscendi externum* and *internum*, *verbum externum* and *internum*, *revelatio* and *illuminatio*, the working of God's Word and of His Spirit."¹⁰³ The word "formerly" refers to the Reformed tradition. Bavinck does not give specific sources in a footnote at this point; therefore we will first look at the general references.

In the heading of this paragraph Bavinck mentions three philosophical works.¹⁰⁴ These references are quite specific and do not lead to the distinction between a

¹⁰¹ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 185. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 213-214. Bavinck writes *theologia archetypa* twice, but the second time *ectypa* is meant. Cf. Bavinck, *GD*¹ I, 144.

¹⁰² Bavinck, *GD* 1, 186, cf. 254. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 214, cf. 279. Cf. Bremmer, *Bavinck als dogmaticus*, 157, 160, 162.

¹⁰³ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 184-185. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 213.

¹⁰⁴ R. Eisler's short survey on the term *Prinzip* only offers some general information on the use of the term *principium*. Eisler, *Wörterbuch der philosophischen Begriffe und Ausdrücke*, 589. J.F. Buddeus gives a short definition of the *principia* and distinguishes between the *principium essendi* and *cognoscendi*. J.F. Buddeus, *Elementa philosophiae instrumentalis seu institutionum philosophiae eclecticae*, 5th ed., Halle 1714, 140, 288. The third reference is to M. Liberatore, *Institutiones Philosophicae*, 8th ed., Rome 1855, vol. 1, 217. The Italian philosopher and theologian Matteo Liberatore (1810-1892) stood at the center of the revival of interest in the

principium externum and a *principium internum*. The first theological work that Bavinck mentions is Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*, question 1. Thomas codified the theological use of *principium*, but he did not distinguish between a *principium internum* and a *principium externum*. Moreover, the concept of the *theologia archetypa* and the *theologia ectypa* stems from Reformed orthodoxy. Secondly, Bavinck mentions *De vera theologia* the work in which Junius introduced the terms *theologia archetypa* and *theologia ectypa* into Reformed theology. Junius, however, does not connect this distinction to the idea of the *principia*. In the third place, Bavinck mentions Franciscus Gomarus's *Disputationes Theologicae*. In his disputation on theology (*De Theologia*) Gomarus does not use the term *principium* in the same sense as Bavinck either. There are resemblances with Junius's division of the different kinds of theology, although Gomarus does not make the distinction between the archetypal and ectypal theology. John Owen's *Θεολογουμενα*, is the next work Bavinck mentions as a source for his concept of the *principia* of theology.¹⁰⁵ This work is a survey of the history of redemption and the different modes of the knowledge of God. Bavinck mentions Owen, just like Junius and Gomarus as example of a Reformed discussion of the locus *de theologia*. The distinctions Junius introduced into Reformed theology are copied by Owen, but neither of them relates the concept of the *theologia archetypa* and *ectypa* to the *principia* of theology. The distinction of a *principium internum* and a *principium externum* is absent in the work. The two remaining sources from the heading of the paragraph on the *principia* in general, are Johann Heinrich Alsted and Abraham Kuyper.¹⁰⁶

6.2.6 Johann Heinrich Alsted

In his survey of the development of Reformed orthodoxy Bavinck mentions Johann Heinrich Alsted as an early representative of a scholastic approach to Reformed theology and as one of the theologians who developed the Reformed doctrine of the *testimonium Spiritus sancti*.¹⁰⁷ Our survey of Reformed orthodoxy showed that Alsted

philosophy of Aquinas. Bremmer suggests that his Neo-Thomism influenced Bavinck. Cf. Bremmer, *Bavinck als dogmaticus*, 328-330. The possible influence of Neo-Thomism on Bavinck deserves further study.

¹⁰⁵ J. Owen, *Theologoumena pantodapa, sive de natura, ortu, progressu, et studio verae theologiae libri sex*, Oxoniae [Oxford] 1661. Cf. Owen, *Works of John Owen* 17. Cf. Owen, *Biblical Theology*.

¹⁰⁶ In the first edition of *Reformed Dogmatics* Bavinck also mentioned the discussion of the locus *de theologia* in the dogmatic works of Francis Turretin (1623-1687), Johannes Cocceius (1603-1669), John À Marck (1656-1731), Bernard De Moor (1709-1780), and Campegius Vitringa (1659-1722). cursory reading of the introductory chapters of their theological systems shows that this distinction does not function as a structuring principle in their prolegomena. We have checked Turretin, *Institutio*; J. Cocceius, *Summa theologiae ex scripturis repetita*, Amsterdam 1665; J. À Marck, *Compendium theologiae Christianae didactico-elencticum*, Groningen 1686; B. De Moor, *Commentarius perpetuus in Johannis Marckii Compendium theologiae Christianae didactico-elencticum*, Leiden 1761-1778 and C. Vitringa, *Doctrina Christianae religionis, per aphorismos summatim descripta*, Franeker 1714.

¹⁰⁷ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 155, 553 n. 3, 557 n. 1. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 180, 584, n. 62, 587, n. 71. In the first edition of *Reformed Dogmatics* Bavinck also mentions Alsted's *Methodus sacrosanctae theologiae*, in the list of sources. It is not clear why this work is not mentioned in his later editions. Bavinck, *GD*¹ 1, 145. J.H. Alsted, *Methodus sacrosanctae theologiae octo libris*

discusses the *principia* of theology in the context of the *theologia viatorum* or the *theologia nostra* and distinguishes between the external and internal side of the Word of God in his *Praecognitorum Theologicorum*.¹⁰⁸ God's Word is either internal or external; the *sermo Dei* flows from God in two modes either *interne* or *externe*, therefore Scripture consists of both a *verbum internum* and a *verbum externum*.¹⁰⁹ Alsted also distinguishes between a *Scriptura interna* – the writing of the Spirit in the heart – and a *Scriptura externa* – the writing of the prophets and the apostles that transmits the sound doctrine of heavenly wisdom to posterity. The external Scripture is not sufficient for our salvation without the internal Scripture. Alsted places the distinction of the *verbum externum* and *internum* in the context of the discussion of the *theologia ectypa*. He does not conclude that the *verbum internum* is a *principium internum* of theology, but expressly says that the *verbum externum* (*Dominus dixit* or *Deus dixit*) is the *principium unicum* of our theology, the principle that resolves all theological doctrines.¹¹⁰

The impression that Alsted has influenced Bavinck at this point is confirmed by a reference in the introductory chapter of *Reformed Dogmatics*, where Bavinck concludes that the first integral part of dogmatics is the development of the *principia*, “which are twofold, *principium externum* and *internum*, *objectivum* and *formale*.”¹¹¹ In a footnote Bavinck mentions Voetius's *Disputationes Selectae* (I, 2) and Alsted's *Theologia scholastica didactica*.¹¹² Voetius indeed distinguishes between *principium externum* and *internum* incidentally, but Bavinck refers to the disputation on scholastic theology (*De theologiae scholastica*), where Voetius does not make the distinction.¹¹³

In his *Theologia scholastica didactica*, Alsted repeats that the only *principium* of theology is *Deus dixit*, but he distinguishes between the *principium essendi* (God) and the *principium cognoscendi* (the Word of God).¹¹⁴ He divides the Word of God into two species: *verbum internum* and *verbum externum* and explains the two species from the two modes of revelation: *internum*, the inspired Word or *verbum inspiratum* and *externum*, the enunciated Word or *verbum enuntiatum*.¹¹⁵ The Word of God as it is inspired to the writer is the *verbum internum*, while the Word of God as it is expressed by the writer is the *verbum externum*. We can also say that the *verbum internum* for Alsted is the inspiration of the Word in the authors of Scripture and the *verbum*

tradita, Hanover 1623. Bavinck does not appreciate Alsted's emphasis on a separate *theologia naturalis*. Bavinck, *GD* 1, 276-277. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 306.

¹⁰⁸ Alsted, *Praecognitorum Theologicorum* 1, 47.

¹⁰⁹ Alsted, *Praecognitorum Theologicorum* 1, 117-118, 124.

¹¹⁰ Alsted, *Praecognitorum Theologicorum* 1, 125. Cf. Alsted, *Theologia didactica*, 12. *Libri Canonici sunt principium cognoscendi primum & ultimum in sacra Theologia*.

¹¹¹ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 86. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 109, n. 82.

¹¹² In the footnote Bavinck makes a mistake: “Alting, Theol. Schol. Didact. Bl. 10.” Hendrik Alting (1583-1644) nor his son Jacobus Alting (1618-1679) ever wrote a book with this title; the reference must be to J.H. Alsted, *Theologia scholastica didactica, exhibens locos communes theologicos methodo scholastica, quatuor in partes tributa*, Hanau 1618. Bavinck refers to this work several times in *Reformed Dogmatics*. Bavinck, *GD* 1, 79, n. 1, 109. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 102, n. 66.

¹¹³ Voetius, *Disputationes Selectae* I.2.

¹¹⁴ Alsted, *Theologia didactica*, 7.

¹¹⁵ Alsted, *Theologia didactica*, 8-9. This distinction runs parallel to the distinction *internum* (ἐνδιάθετος) and *externum* (προφύρικός).

externum is the result of their writing. Therefore he says: The *verbum internum* is principal, the *verbum externum* is instrumentale.¹¹⁶

Bavinck picks this distinction up and says: “The *verbum internum* is the *verbum principale* because it brings the knowledge of God into us. [...] The *verbum externum*, the revelation as it is laid down in the Holy Scripture serves as a means, it is *verbum instrumentale*.”¹¹⁷ Objective revelation is not enough if it is not completed in subjective revelation; the first is only a means, the second the goal. “The *principium externum* is instrumentale; the *principium internum* is the *principium formale* and *principale*.”¹¹⁸ Bavinck applies the distinction of the *verbum externum* and the *verbum internum* to his concept of the *principia*. This has the strange result that the *principium internum* is the *principium principale*; the internal principle of theology is the “principal principle.” But why is the external principle less principal and still the *principium unicum* of theology? The tension in Bavinck’s thought is caused by his application of the Reformed orthodox distinction of the modes of revelation to the *principia* of theology.

For Bavinck the final goal of revelation lies in the eschatological knowledge of God. Scripture is only a means for the pilgrim on his journey to the blessed state in which he will know God as he is. It is only a means and at the same time it is the only means. Bavinck calls God’s revelation in Scripture an *actus transiens*. “Scripture is also a means, an instrument and not a goal. [...] just as the whole revelation it is also an *actus transiens*.”¹¹⁹ Revelation is the way in which Christ carries out the inhabitation of God in us and that is the final goal of revelation.

Bavinck consciously draws upon the Reformed tradition, but there are also essential differences between that tradition and Bavinck’s concept of the *principia*; he gives Alsted’s terms a different meaning. The shift from a *verbum internum* to a *principium internum* is rather significant, especially when this *principium internum* is not the Spirit but faith. The *verbum internum* is *principale* in Alsted’s theology because it precedes the *verbum externum* chronologically; the Word of God first occurs in the mind of the author and then it is written down. For Bavinck the *verbum internum* is *principale* because the final goal of revelation is the knowledge of God in our hearts; therefore the *verbum internum* is also *finale*. Moreover, the distinction *externum* versus *internum* does not function as a structuring principle of the prolegomena in Reformed orthodoxy, but only plays a minor role. Although the distinction between the *principium externum* and the *principium internum* can be found in Reformed orthodoxy it is much less foundational for the division of the theological system than Bavinck suggests. Bavinck uses a detail of Reformed orthodoxy to structure his prolegomena, to introduce faith as *principium* into the foundations of his theology, and thus to incorporate a subjective element in his discussion of the ground of certainty.

Bavinck derives the concept of the *principia* of theology and the distinction *externum* and *internum* from Reformed orthodoxy and not only from Alsted. In the *Synopsis* we find the same distinction between the two modes of revelation: *internum* (ἐνδιάθετος) and *externum* (προφώρικος) and it is used in the *loci* concerning soteriology. Voetius says that the *principium* of theology is either *externum*: the Word of God – or

¹¹⁶ Verbum Dei internum est principale, externum instrumentale. Alsted, *Theologica didactica*, 9.

¹¹⁷ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 185. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 213.

¹¹⁸ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 471, 465. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 506, 494.

¹¹⁹ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 352, cf. 349. Cf. Bremmer, *Bavinck als dogmaticus*, 169.

internum: the illumination of the Holy Spirit or the infusion of supernatural light into our mind. Turretin makes similar statements. These and other Reformed orthodox writers also influenced Bavinck, but the similarity and the explicit reference to Alsted as a source at crucial moments in *Reformed Dogmatics*, render it probable that Bavinck leans primarily on Alsted for his elaboration of the *principia*.

Bavinck does not copy the tradition, but gives his own interpretation of the terminology. Remarkably, he does not present this as an innovation of Reformed theology. Because of his many references to the Reformed orthodox tradition the impression rises that this subdivision of the prolegomena is common in the Reformed tradition. The question rises why Bavinck suggests continuity with the Reformed tradition and does not make the discontinuity explicit. It is possible that he is not fully aware of the discontinuity because he interprets the Reformed tradition from the perspective of modernity and finds a tool in the distinction of the *principium externum* and the *principium internum* to deal with the object- subject dichotomy. It does not seem very likely, however, that Bavinck who is so familiar with Reformed orthodoxy, is completely unaware of the discontinuity. It is possible that he does not make it explicit because the issue is so foundational in his discussion with the Ethical Theology. In his concept of the *principia* Bavinck fences his position off from subjectivism, but the *principium internum* enables Bavinck to give the religious subject a positive place and acknowledge an element of truth in Ethical Theology.

6.2.7 Abraham Kuyper

In the list of his sources Bavinck also mentions the second volume of Kuyper's *Encyclopaedia of Sacred Theology*.¹²⁰ The first volume of the *Encyclopedia* offers an introduction to the terminology and a historical survey of the development of the theological encyclopedia; the second volume deals with science in general, the character of theology, and the theological principles, and the third with the proper division of the theological subjects. The second volume was published in 1894, only a year before the publication of the first volume of Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*. Since Bavinck developed his concept of the *principia* of theology much earlier, it is unlikely that the publication of the *Encyclopedia* changed his concept fundamentally. This does not mean that Kuyper did not influence this development at all.

We will summarize Kuyper's position and compare it with Bavinck's concept, especially regarding the *theologia archetypa* and *ectypa*, and the distinction between the *principium externum* and the *principium internum*. The *Encyclopedia* is the most proper source, because this book deals with the doctrine of Scripture extensively and of all Kuyper's theological works it has the most scholarly character and was authorized by Kuyper himself.¹²¹ In the introduction to the second volume, Kuyper explains that he wishes to return to and renew the Reformed doctrine of the *principium* of theology in

¹²⁰ Bavinck refers to the second part of this volume, in which Kuyper deals with the character and the *principium* of theology. A. Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie der heilige Godgeleerdheid*, 3 vol., Amsterdam 1893-1894. We use the first edition of the *Encyclopaedie*, because that was Bavinck's source.

¹²¹ His other publications are more or less occasional works and the *Dictates* are not authorized by Kuyper. A. Kuyper, *Dictaten Dogmatiek van Dr. A. Kuyper*, 2nd ed., 5 vol., Kampen [1910]. Cf. Van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek*, 21-23.

order to lay a foundation for the whole of Reformed theology.¹²² In his discussion of the character of theology Kuyper refers to the Reformed orthodox distinction between the *theologia archetypa* and the *theologia ectypa*. According to Kuyper, this distinction should not be followed uncritically, although it contains an essential element of truth, namely that all our knowledge of God rests in his self-revelation.¹²³ All our knowledge of God (*theologia ectypa*) depends immediately on God's knowledge of himself (*theologia archetypa*).¹²⁴ Kuyper uses the distinction to stress that our knowledge of God is true and to exclude doubt and subjectivism.¹²⁵

Kuyper does not connect this scheme immediately with the *principium* of theology, but discusses the *principium* in a separate chapter. In the natural sciences nature is the *fons* of science, while the *principium* of the scientist is the human intellect. According to Kuyper, theology must have a special *principium* that is essentially different from this general *principium*.¹²⁶ "God is never a passive phenomenon, but all knowledge of him must be the fruit of his self-revelation."¹²⁷ The *principium speciale* flows from the self-revelation of God and is deposited in Scripture, is the principle of theology. For Kuyper this *principium* is broader than Scripture: it includes all the acts of God's revelation.¹²⁸ In *Hedendaagsche Schriftcritiek* Kuyper says that the Ethical Theology rejects Scripture as *principium* of theology.

The principium of our knowledge of God, the organic beginning, the seed from which all knowledge of God in all its parts comes forth and in which thus potentially the whole treasure of theology is included, is not the tradition, not the Christian consciousness and not the higher life that is implanted in us, but only Holy Scripture.¹²⁹

This *principium* is not divided into a *principium externum* and *internum* by Kuyper; he consistently speaks of the *principium* of theology and not of *principia*. Kuyper deals with the application of the revelation in his discussion of the *testimonium Spiritus sancti*. According to Kuyper, this *testimonium* is "a witness that proceeds immediately from the Holy Spirit, the author of Scripture, to our personal self."¹³⁰ This *testimonium* is often called an *argumentum externum* because it did not come from within the human self, but from outside of us from God. Through the witness of the Spirit the conviction is formed in the heart of the regenerated Christian that Scripture has absolute divine authority. This implies that regeneration is necessary to accept the authority of Scripture.¹³¹ For Kuyper Scripture becomes the *principium* of theology through the *testimonium* of the Spirit. Even the *argumenta interna* of the divine nature of Scripture, as the majesty of the doctrine and the fulfillment of prophecies, cannot convince human

¹²² Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie* 2, vi.

¹²³ Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie* 2, 197. Cf. A. Kuyper, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology: Its Principles*, trans. J.H. De Vries, New York 1898, 248.

¹²⁴ Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie* 2, 201. Cf. Kuyper, *Encyclopedia*, 252.

¹²⁵ Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie* 2, 202-203. Cf. Kuyper, *Encyclopedia*, 253-255. Cf. Van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek*, 25-26.

¹²⁶ Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie* 2, 291-292. Cf. Kuyper, *Encyclopedia*, 341-342.

¹²⁷ Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie* 2, 298. Cf. Kuyper, *Encyclopedia*, 348.

¹²⁸ Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie* 2, 347-348. Cf. Kuyper, *Encyclopedia*, 398.

¹²⁹ Kuyper, *Hedendaagsche schriftcritiek*, 10.

¹³⁰ Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie* 2, 505. Cf. Kuyper, *Encyclopedia*, 556-557.

¹³¹ Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie* 2, 505-506. Cf. Kuyper, *Encyclopedia*, 557-558. Cf. Van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek*, 38.

reason without the divine illumination granted in regeneration.¹³² Compared with Bavinck, Kuyper turns the word-pair around: the *testimonium* is *externum* and the evidences are *interna*.

Though Kuyper uses the same terminology as Bavinck he does not connect the *archetypa* – *ectypa* scheme with the *principia* of theology. In his use of the *externum-internum* distinction as the structuring principle of his prolegomena, Bavinck is not influenced by Kuyper, but makes his own application of the Reformed orthodox tradition. In fact this is one of the most important differences with Kuyper.¹³³ Both use the same terminology against the Ethical position, but Bavinck acknowledges an element of truth in its attention for the religious subject.

Further study of the way in which Kuyper and Bavinck deal with objective truth and subjective knowledge may show more clearly how their different positions are related to each other and to the Reformed tradition. Bavinck's distinction of the *principium externum* and the *principium internum* has had a large impact on the development of Neo-Calvinism. In his concept of the correlation between revelation and faith Gerrit Cornelis Berkouwer (1903-1996) draws back on Bavinck. Probably, the roots of the relational concept of the truth, expressed in the synodical report of the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland *God met ons* (1981), lay in Bavinck's prolegomena.¹³⁴

6.3 Autopistia: Scripture or the Church

In a survey of Reformed theology for school-teachers Bavinck summarized the Catholic and Protestant positions: "Scripture did not derive its authority from the Church, but from itself. It had to be believed on its own account (autopistia); Scripture did not rest on the church, but, on the contrary, the church rested on Scripture."¹³⁵ This quotation illustrates both the importance of the *autopistia* for Bavinck's theology and the relationship of the *autopistia* with ecclesiology.

6.3.1 The Dogmatic Method

In *Reformed Dogmatics* Bavinck uses the term αὐτόπιστος for the first time in discussing the right dogmatic method. The Christian theologian must take his starting position in the Christian revelation. Objective neutrality is impossible for a Christian, because he cannot reject the light of God's revelation in perceiving nature, history, and

¹³² Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie* 2, 506. Cf. Kuyper, *Encyclopedia*, 558.

¹³³ Van Keulen does not mention this point in his comparison of Kuyper and Bavinck. Van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek*, 171-174.

¹³⁴ T. Baarda, J. Davidse, and J. Firet, *God met ons: ...over de aard van het Schriftgezag...* [Kerkinformatie, vol. 113], Leusden 1981. Cf. T. Baarda, J. Davidse, and J. Firet, *God with Us: On the Nature of the Authority of Scripture*, trans. The Secretariat of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, Grand Rapids 1982. This does not mean that Bavinck's position necessarily leads to the later development. There is a difference between his position and the concept of correlation, just as there is a difference between that concept and the relational concept of the truth. Cf. Van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek*, 504, n. 250.

¹³⁵ H. Bavinck, *Handleiding bij het Onderwijs in den Christelijken Godsdienst*, Kampen 1913, 41.

the non-Christian religions.¹³⁶ The question where this revelation can be found, determines the dogmatic method. Rationalism and mysticism take the human subject as the source of revelation, but the human subject cannot be a proper source of knowledge of the truth. The mind and heart, reason and conscience, feeling and imagination are not the sources of truth, but the organs by which it is absorbed and appropriated. In Scripture the source of knowledge or the rule of the truth is never the human subject, but always the objective revelation. “And even when the objective truth becomes our own through faith, that faith is never like a fountain, that brings the living water forth from itself, but always like a channel, that brings the water to us from another source.”¹³⁷

Roman Catholicism admits that taking a starting point in the autonomous religious subject is impossible and therefore has bound the faith of the individual to the church. An infallible church and pope constitute the faith of the Roman Catholic; “*Papa dixit* is the end of all contradiction.”¹³⁸ Rome justly rejects subjectivism, but the hierarchical power of the church becomes a galling bond for the conscience, as church history shows.

Bavinck tries to find a balance between traditionalism and subjectivism; the church is not the ultimate source of faith, but we receive the content of our faith through the church. The theologian looks at Scripture through the glasses of the tradition the church holds before his eyes. The idea of objective neutrality is not only practically impossible, but also theoretically wrong. Scripture is not a law code, but an organic living unity. The doctrines of faith must be derived from the Scriptures as a whole. For individual believers this is an impossible task; it can only be accomplished in the communion of saints, by the church of all ages.

A good dogmatic method will take all three aspects, Scripture, the church, and the Christian consciousness, into account and therefore it is of great importance how these three are related to each other.¹³⁹ The truth of God’s revelation flows from Scripture through the church into the consciousness of the believer. Pedagogically the church comes before Scripture, but logically Scripture is the *principium unicum* of the church and of theology. “Not the church but Scripture is ἀυτόπιστος *judex controversiarum*, sui ipsius interpres. Nothing can be placed on one line with it. Church, confession, tradition, everything must be directed according to and subjected to Scripture.”¹⁴⁰ All Christian churches acknowledge that Scripture is a *principium* of theology, and all the churches of the Reformation acknowledged it as the *principium unicum*.

Bavinck contrasts this *principium* with the confessions of the church. Confessions are necessary to explain the Word and defend the church against heresies, but the authority of Scripture is unique. “Scripture only is the *norma* and *regula fidei et vitae*; the confession only deserves to be believed because and in as far as it is in agreement with Scripture and remains fallible human work that can be revised and examined by the

¹³⁶ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 54. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 78.

¹³⁷ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 57. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 81.

¹³⁸ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 57. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 81.

¹³⁹ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 60. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 84. In the first edition Bavinck had: Scripture, the church and the personal conviction of the theologian. Bavinck, *GD*¹ 1, 14, 21.

¹⁴⁰ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 63. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 86. The expression “*judex ἀυτόπιστος*” may have been derived from the *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae*. Cf. *Synopsis*, iii.18.

standard of Scripture.”¹⁴¹ Bavinck concludes that although there is some knowledge of God from nature, systematic theology still only has one *principium externum*, Holy Scripture and similarly only one *principium internum*, the believer’s reason.¹⁴²

Bavinck’s discussion of the correct dogmatic method shows that Bavinck uses αὐτόπιστος in the sense of the ultimate authority and connects the Greek term with *principium*, in line with its meaning in the philosophical and theological tradition. Though the church and the Christian consciousness are important, only Scripture is αὐτόπιστος. Bavinck also uses the term to distinguish Scripture from the church and confessions; only Scripture is to be believed on its own account. Moreover, he connects the term with the Reformation principle of interpretation; Scripture is the judge of all controversies and its own interpreter. The emphasis on Scripture as the self-convincing *principium unicum* of theology is a safeguard against subjectivism, while the distinction between *externum* and *internum* makes it possible to do justice to the human consciousness. This leads to the question how the *autopistia* of Scripture and the *principium internum* – that Bavinck remarkably identifies with reason here – are related.

6.3.2 Ecclesiology

There is a tension between the authority of Scripture as a *principium* of theology and the authority of the church and the Christian tradition. In his *Catholicity of Christendom and Church* Bavinck acknowledges that the Protestant principle is problematic. *Sola scriptura* does not only lead to reformation, but also to disintegration of the church.¹⁴³ In 1885 he asks Kuyper in a letter how the ecclesiastical or Reformed character of theology matches with the statement that Scripture is the only *principium* of theology. “If there is an ecclesiastical element or factor in the dogmas – and that cannot be denied – then the church must also be a *principium* of theology, but that contradicts the statement.”¹⁴⁴

In his methodological introduction Bavinck places the term αὐτόπιστος in the context of the relationship between the church and Scripture; he picks this point up again in his ecclesiology in the last volume of *Reformed Dogmatics*. There he says that the Reformation rejected the ultimate authority of the church and replaced it by the ultimate authority of Scripture. “The Reformation presupposed that the church was not αὐτόπιστος, that it could err and dissent from the truth and that there was a higher authority to which the church ought to be subjected.”¹⁴⁵ Over against the Roman Catholic charge that the Reformation leads to subjectivism, Bavinck states that Rome takes the same subjective starting point as the Reformation. The *notae ecclesiae* are

¹⁴¹ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 63. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 86. This phrase is remarkable because of the fierce debate in the Dutch churches in the time of the Secession whether the confession must be believed because (*quia*) it was in agreement with Scripture or as far as (*quatenus*) it was in agreement with it. The orthodox party insisted on *quia*, but here Bavinck uses both.

¹⁴² Bavinck, *GD* 1, 64. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 88.

¹⁴³ Bavinck, *Katholiciteit van Christendom en Kerk*, 50.

¹⁴⁴ In a letter from Bavinck to Kuyper on September 14th, 1885. The Kuyper-archive of the *Historisch Documentatiecentrum* at the Free University, nr. 3567. Cf. M.E. Brinkman, ‘Bavinck en de katholiciteit van de kerk,’ in *Ontmoetingen met Herman Bavinck*, ed. G. Harinck and G. Neven, Barneveld 2005, 307-324, 312.

¹⁴⁵ Bavinck, *GD* 4, 296.

nothing else than *indicia* in which the true church reveals itself, and not *criteria* by which the church can be judged. For the Reformation Scripture is αὐτόπιστος and for Rome the church is αὐτόπιστος; in both cases the Spirit of God is needed to convince believers. The *indicia* cannot produce faith; only God's Spirit can convince the believer inwardly and surely of the truth of divine revelation. "The deepest ground of faith is also for Rome not Scripture or the church, but the *lumen interius*."¹⁴⁶

One of the arguments of Rome against the Reformation is its implicit subjectivism because it bases its belief in the Scriptures on the *testimonium* of the Spirit. For Rome the external authority of the church safeguards the certainty of the Christian faith. Bavinck shows that the Roman Catholic position is at least as subjective as the Reformed position, because the belief of the Roman Catholics in the authority of the church ultimately rests on the inner conviction of the individual by the Spirit of God.

Bavinck admits that also the belief of the Reformed in the authority of Scripture ultimately rests on the same subjective conviction. He rejects subjectivism, but acknowledges the subjective character of the Protestant position in the discussion with Rome. The deepest ground of faith lies in the *testimonium Spiritus sancti*, which he even calls the *lumen interius*. We will further discuss this difficult tension in Bavinck's theology when we examine his concept of the *testimonium*.

In his ecclesiology Bavinck also uses the term αὐτόπιστος to explain the difference between Scripture and the confessions. He says that the qualifying authority of the church to confess its truth and to maintain this confession flows from the *potestas docendi*.

With such a confession the church does not do violence to the perfection of Scripture, but only expresses what is contained in Scripture. The confession does not stand next to and certainly not above, but far beneath Scripture, which is alone αὐτόπιστος, binding us unconditionally to faith and obedience and unchangeable, while the confession is and remains examinable and revisable.¹⁴⁷

6.3.3 Inspiration and Incarnation

In the third chapter of *Reformed Dogmatics* Bavinck devotes a paragraph to the *theopneustia* of Scripture. There are a few differences between the first edition and the later editions of *Reformed Dogmatics*; the sequence of the subparagraphs is switched, starting with biblical data instead of a historical survey; the relationship between revelation and Scripture is emphasized; and the term *theopneustia* is used in a more prominent way.¹⁴⁸ The term *theopneustia* (2 Tim. 3,16) has a double meaning in Bavinck's theology; it refers to the original fact of inspiration and to the character of Scripture as the inspired Word of God.¹⁴⁹ *Theopneustia* is the influence of God's Spirit

¹⁴⁶ Bavinck, *GD* 4, 293. Cf. Bavinck, *GD* 1, 549-550, where Bavinck makes exactly the same point, referring to Melchior Cano (1509-1560) as an example of a Roman Catholic theologian, who openly confessed this "subjective" perspective. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 579-580.

¹⁴⁷ Bavinck, *GD* 4, 401.

¹⁴⁸ Van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek*, 99-100. We will not discuss Bavinck's concept of inspiration at length, because this has already been done extensively. Cf. Bremmer, *Bavinck als dogmaticus*, 168-176, Veenhof, *Revelatie en inspiratie*, 416-477, Van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek*, 99-116.

¹⁴⁹ Van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek*, 103. Van Keulen is correct in his remark that R.B. Gaffin could better not have translated the term *theopneustie* as "inspiration" because there is a

in the consciousness of the writers.¹⁵⁰ Bavinck refers to an article from Warfield titled ‘God-Inspired Scripture’ (1900) for the interpretation of the Greek term θεόπνευστος as God-breathed.¹⁵¹ For Bavinck *theopneustia* is the working of God’s Spirit in and upon the consciousness of the authors that served to guarantee the content of Scripture.¹⁵² Inspiration stands in the broader context of the work of God the Father, who takes special care for the organs of his revelation, of the work of the Son, who is center of all revelation, and of the work of the Spirit, who is present in the world and in the church.¹⁵³ The right definition of inspiration hinges on the relationship between the primary author and the secondary authors.¹⁵⁴

Bavinck differs from Warfield in placing the organic theory of inspiration over against the mechanical theory and criticizes Reformed orthodoxy. Those who favor a mechanical inspiration do injustice to the activity of the secondary authors.¹⁵⁵

A mechanical notion of revelation one-sidedly emphasizes the new, the supernatural element that is present in inspiration, and disregards its connection with the old, the natural. This detaches the Bible writers from their personality, as it were, and lifts them out of the history of the time. In the end it allows them to function only as mindless, in inanimate instruments in the hand of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵⁶

Both Bavinck and Kuyper used the term “organic” in relation to the inspiration of Scripture. It is possible that Bavinck was influenced by Kuyper in his use of the term “organic inspiration.” Bavinck, however, was more consequent at this point, for Kuyper sometimes presented a mechanical concept of the inspiration of Scripture.¹⁵⁷ The term “organic” in Bavinck’s theology refers to the fact that all revelation occurs through means. The revelation of God in the inspiration of Scripture has come to us via historical and psychological mediation.¹⁵⁸ In a strict sense there is no immediate

different in nuance in Dutch between *theopneustie* and *inspiratie*. Van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek*, 103, n. 161. Cf. Gaffin, ‘Old Amsterdam and Inerrancy?’ [2], 229-230.

¹⁵⁰ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 353. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 381.

¹⁵¹ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 395, n. 1. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 425, n. 78. Cf. Warfield, ‘God-Inspired Scripture,’ 280. “What is θεόπνευστος is ‘God-breathed,’ produced by the creative breath of the Almighty.”

¹⁵² Bavinck, *GD* 1, 353. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 381. Cf. Van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek*, 104.

¹⁵³ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 396-397. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 426-427.

¹⁵⁴ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 398. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 428.

¹⁵⁵ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 400. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 430. The contrast “organic” versus “mechanical” was widely used in the nineteenth century, especially in German philosophy and represented two opposite worldviews in Romanticism. In the early industrial period the term denoted that something was alive and not dead like a machine. F. Mauthner, *Wörterbuch der Philosophie: neue Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, Leipzig 1923, vol. 2, 508-518 s.v. “organisch.”

¹⁵⁶ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 401. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 431. Cf. H. Bavinck, *Magnalia Dei: onderwijzing in de christelijke religie naar gereformeerde belijdenis*, Kampen 1909, 104.

¹⁵⁷ Van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek*, 67, 163. Both were possibly influenced by J.H. Scholten who adhered to an organic worldview and rejected a mechanical worldview. Veenhof, *Revelatie en inspiratie*, 260. Veenhof discusses the terminology in the theology of Kuyper and Bavinck at length, basing the definition of “organic” on R. Eucken. Veenhof, *Revelatie en inspiratie*, 250-268. Cf. R. Eucken, *Geistige Strömungen der Gegenwart*, 3rd ed., Leipzig 1904, vol. 5, 125-150. Bavinck refers to this work. H. Bavinck, *Christelijke wereldbeschouwing*, 3rd ed., Kampen 1929, 50, n. 1.

¹⁵⁸ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 409. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 438. Van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek*, 107. Cf. Veenhof, *Revelatie en inspiratie*, 445-446 and Meijers, *Objectiviteit en existentialiteit*, 48.

revelation either in nature or in grace, because God always uses means. “Even when he reveals himself internally in the human consciousness through the Spirit, this revelation always occurs organically and therefore mediately.”¹⁵⁹

Warfield acknowledged that God used means and not only inspired the authors of Scripture at the moment of writing, but also prepared them for their task. He compared God to a musician, who tuned his instrument and played the music. Bavinck distanced himself from the view in which the secondary authors were compared to a cither, a lyre, a flute, or a pen in the hand of the Holy Spirit; although he acknowledged that these examples did not necessarily indicate a mechanical view. He emphasized that the insight in the historical and psychological mediation of revelation only came into full clarity in modern times.¹⁶⁰

Bavinck also draws a parallel between incarnation and inspiration in a paragraph, titled “Revelation and Holy Scripture.”¹⁶¹ Revelation and Scripture have been identified in the older theology. It seemed as if there was nothing behind Scripture and as if Scripture had suddenly dropped out of heaven.¹⁶² This position is untenable, for sometimes there is a long period between the moment of revelation and the moment of writing. The newer theology, however, switches to the opposite extreme by a separation of revelation and Scripture, making Scripture a human testimony of the divine revelation. “Not the letter but the Spirit; not Scripture but the person of Christ; not the Word but the fact became the *principium* of theology.”¹⁶³ This is even more dangerous than the first extreme, because the *theopneustia* itself is a special act of God’s revelation. Moreover, we know nothing of God’s revelation in Israel and Christ without Scripture; therefore Scripture is the only *principium* of theology. The first opinion leads to intellectualism, the second to spiritualism. “The right view is the one that does not identify Scripture with revelation and also does not detach it from or place it outside of revelation.”¹⁶⁴

In this context Bavinck refers to the doctrine of incarnation and draws a parallel between God’s revelation in Christ and God’s revelation in Scripture to explain how revelation and Scripture are related. According to Bavinck, script is the *σάπξ* or the *ἐνσάρκωσις* of the word.¹⁶⁵ Just as the thought is embodied in the word, so the word is embodied in writing; God embodies his revelation in Scripture.

In prophecy and miracles the revelation condescends so deeply that it does not despise the meanest means of human and religious life. The Logos itself does not only become a human being (*ἄνθρωπος*) but also a slave (*δοῦλος*) and flesh (*σάρξ*). So also the word of revelation takes on the imperfect and inadequate form of writing.¹⁶⁶

¹⁵⁹ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 281. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 309.

¹⁶⁰ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 401. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 431.

¹⁶¹ This is a separate paragraph in the later editions of *Reformed Dogmatics* but the text of this paragraph hardly differs from the text in the first edition. According to Van Keulen, Bavinck thus emphasizes in his second edition that this paragraph forms the hinge between the doctrine of revelation and the doctrine of Scripture. Van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek*, 99.

¹⁶² Bavinck, *GD* 1, 352. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 381.

¹⁶³ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 353. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 381.

¹⁶⁴ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 354. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 382.

¹⁶⁵ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 349, 352. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 378, 380.

¹⁶⁶ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 352. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 380. In Dutch “Scripture” and “writing” are the same word *schrift*. Bavinck uses *Schrift* with a capital letter when he means Scripture and *schrift* with

Scripture flows from the incarnation and is in a certain sense its continuation. For Bavinck incarnation and inspiration not only run parallel but are essentially connected. It is the same condescending revelation of God that comes to us in the birth and in the writing down of Scripture. According to Bavinck, only the organic inspiration does justice to Scripture; organic inspiration “is the elaboration and application of the central fact of revelation, the incarnation of the Word. The Λόγος became σάρξ and the Word became Scripture; these two facts not only run parallel but are also most intimately connected.”¹⁶⁷ Bavinck refers to Philippians 2 where Paul says that Christ took the form of a servant upon him. So revelation takes the form of a servant upon itself in Scripture. The weak and humble servant form of Scripture does not imply that Scripture is fallible. Just as the weak and humble human nature of Christ remains free from sin, so also Scripture is conceived without sin (*sine labe concepta*).¹⁶⁸ The analogy is foundational for Bavinck; he also uses it when he discusses the correct dogmatic method. It is a consequence of the incarnation of the Word that Scripture is not meant to be repeated, but to be rethought. “Just as truly as the Son of God became man, so truly the thought of God is laid down in Scripture and becomes flesh and blood in the human consciousness.”¹⁶⁹

Bavinck possibly is influenced by Kuyper who says that the incarnation of Christ and the inscripturation of Scripture are related mysteries.¹⁷⁰ The parallel has old roots in Christian theology, but Kuyper and Bavinck may have been influenced by Isaac Da Costa (1798-1869) who says that “the written Word has a divine and a human nature as well as the personal Word of God.”¹⁷¹ Anyhow, the analogy is fundamental for Bavinck’s doctrine of Scripture and organic inspiration and the corner stone of Bavinck’s doctrine of revelation.¹⁷² His ambivalent attitude towards historical-criticism

a small letter when he means writing; the wordplay can hardly be translated into proper English. Vriend translates: “the imperfect and inadequate form of Scripture,” but this can lead to the wrong conclusion that Scripture is imperfect, according to Bavinck.

¹⁶⁷ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 405. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 434. Bavinck already expressed this idea in his first inaugural address. Bavinck, *Wetenschap der Godgeleerdheid*, 9.

¹⁶⁸ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 406. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 435.

¹⁶⁹ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 59-60. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 83.

¹⁷⁰ Kuyper *Encyclopaedie* 2, 350, 424-425. Cf. Kuyper, *Encyclopedia*, 401, 476-477. Cf. A. Kuyper, *Dictaten dogmatiek* 2, 59.

¹⁷¹ I. Da Costa, ‘Het Woord en de Schrift van God,’ in I. Da Costa, *Opstellen van godgeleerden en geschiedkundigen inhoud*, Amsterdam [1862], vol. 4, 1-10, 5. Cf. R.H. Bremmer, ‘De Heilige Schrift als Woord Gods,’ *In die Skriflig* 1 (1966), 11-30, 15; cf. Van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek*, 112, n. 202. The parallel of the incarnation of the divine *Logos* and the inscripturation of the Word of God in Scripture goes back to Origenes; “sicut Christus celatus venit *in corpore* ... sic est et omnis scriptura divina *incorporata*.” H. Haag, ‘Die Buchwerdung des Wortes Gottes in der Heiligen Schrift,’ in *Mysterium salutis: Grundriss heilsgeschichtlicher Dogmatik*, ed. J. Feiner and M. Löhrer, vol. 1, Einsiedeln [etc.] 1965, 289-427, 303.

¹⁷² Veenhof calls the analogy “the essential relationship between incarnation and inscripturation.” Veenhof, *Revelatie en inspiratie*, 443, 420-421. Cf. Bremmer, *Bavinck als dogmaticus*, 169, 173, Meijers, *Objectiviteit en Existentialiteit*, 73 and Van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek*, 112, n. 202. Haitjema goes further than Bavinck, stating that Scripture is not an inscripturation of the *Logos*, but that the Holy Spirit has become Scripture. “Wir haben es in der Heiligen Schrift nicht mit einer ‘Inscripturation’ (Schriftwerdung) des *Logos* zu tun. Der *Logos* ist in Bethlehems Stall Fleisch geworden. Das ist die Erniedrigung der zweiten Person der Heiligen

must be understood from this perspective; Scripture is truly human. In its weakness it is subject to historical research; the form is imperfect and cripple. Still, Scripture is truly divine, its message and content are infallible and can stand the test of all human criticism. The analogy with the incarnation has governed Bavinck's doctrine of Scripture to the end of his life; in a handwritten manuscript on the authority of Scripture he notes:

What God wished to communicate of himself to human beings has become flesh, weak, has entered into human existence, thought, life and history; it bears a historical character, yes even stronger it has become writing (inscripturatio), written with ink on paper, printed etc. The form is completely human from the beginning to the end.¹⁷³

B.B. Warfield mentions the connection of incarnation and inspiration in his article for *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* on 'Inspiration' (1915): "It has been customary among a certain school of writers to speak of the Scriptures, because thus 'inspired,' as a Divine-human book, and to appeal to the analogy of Our Lord's Divine-human personality."¹⁷⁴ It is not clear who Warfield had in mind, for the analogy is also found outside of the Reformed camp.¹⁷⁵ It is very well possible that he is referring to the school of Amsterdam.¹⁷⁶ He is afraid that the analogy "may easily be pressed beyond reason. There is no hypostatic union between the Divine and the human in Scripture; we

Trinität. Der Heilige Geist ist Scriptura (Schrift) geworden. Das war und ist im Heilsvorgang die Erniedrigung der dritten Person der Dreifaltigkeit." Th. L. Haitjema, 'Bibel, Bekenntnis, Dogma,' *Die Furche* 22 (1936), 303. Cf. Krusche, *Wirken des Heiligen Geistes*, 160, n. 186.

¹⁷³ H. Bavinck, 'Als Bavinck nu maar eens kleur bekende': *Aantekeningen van H. Bavinck over de zaak-Netelenbos, het Schriftgezag en de situatie van de Gereformeerde Kerken (november 1919)*, ed. G. Harinck, Amsterdam 1994, [58]. Bavinck tones down the analogy by remarking that it is nothing more than just an analogy. Bavinck, 'Als Bavinck nu maar eens kleur bekende', [56]. Cf. H. Bavinck, *De Welsprekendheid*, 4th ed., Kampen 1918, 36 and H. Bavinck, *Roeping en Wedergeboorte*, Kampen 1903, 212.

¹⁷⁴ Warfield, 'Inspiration,' 108. For criticism on the analogy cf. M.E. Brinkman and C. van der Kooi, eds., *Het calvinisme van Kuyper en Bavinck*, Zoetermeer 1997, 123. J.A. Montsma calls the parallel untenable. J.A. Montsma, *De exterritoriale openbaring: De openbaringsopvatting achter de fundamentalistische schriftbeschouwing*, Amsterdam 1985, 228. Other more recent examples of the use of this analogy are J.R.W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*, Grand Rapids 1982, 145, 150 and R. Fernhout, 'The Bible as God's Word. A Christological View,' in H.M. Vroom, J.D. Gort, eds., *Holy Scriptures in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Hermeneutics, Values and Society*, Amsterdam [etc.] 1997, 57-68. Cf. Van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek*, 45, n. 127.

¹⁷⁵ Warfield also mentions the analogy in a review of a Lutheran study of the doctrine of inspiration by W. Koelling. B.B. Warfield, 'Review of W. Rohnert, *Die Inspiration der heiligen Schrift und ihre Bestreiter*; A. Bolliger, *Das Schriftprinzip der protestantischen Kirche einst, heute, in der Zukunft*; W. Koelling, *Prolegomena zur Lehre von der Theopneustie* etc.,' in *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, 4 (1893), 487-499, 490. Berkouwer refers to the encyclical of Pius XII, *Divino Afflante Spiritu* and to Karl Rahner, as examples of this analogy in the Roman Catholic tradition. Berkouwer, *Heilige Schrift* 2, 123, n. 43. Cf. Pius XII, *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, Hilversum 1949, 44. Cf. K. Rahner, *Über die Schriftinspiration*, Freiburg 1958, 22.

¹⁷⁶ In the list of literature he mentions both Kuyper's *Encyclopedia* and Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*. "A. Kuyper, 'Encyclopedie der heilige Godegeleerdheid,' 1888-89, II, 347 ff., ET 'Enc of Sacred Theol.,' New York, 1898, 341-563; also 'De Schrift het woord Gods,' Tiel, 1870; H. Bavinck, 'Gereformeerde dogmatiek²,' Kampen, 1906, I, 406-527." Warfield, 'Inspiration,' 111-112.

cannot parallel the ‘inscripturation’ of the Holy Spirit and the incarnation of the Son of God.”¹⁷⁷ Although Warfield refuses to proceed beyond the comment that in both cases divine and human factors are involved, he is willing to use the analogy to underline the inerrancy of Scripture.

Even so distant an analogy may enable us, however, to recognize that as, in the case of our Lord’s person, the human nature remains truly human while yet it can never fall into sin or error [...] so in the case of the production of Scripture by the conjoint action of human and Divine factors, the human factors have acted as human factors and have left their mark on the product as such, and yet cannot have fallen into that error which we say it is human to fall into, because they have not acted apart from the Divine factors, by themselves, but only under their unerring guidance.¹⁷⁸

A more important difference lies behind this analogy. Both Warfield and Bavinck place the authority of Scripture in the prolegomena, but while Warfield interprets it in apologetic terms, Bavinck interprets it in Christological terms.

6.3.4 The Attributes of Scripture

After the paragraph on the *theopneustia* of Scripture Bavinck discusses the attributes of Scripture, especially the *auctoritas*, *necessitas*, *perspicuitas*, and *perfectio*. According to Bavinck, the Reformation brought a change in the relationship between Scripture and the church. “For the church fathers and the scholastics Scripture stood far above church and tradition, at least in theory. It rested in itself, was αὐτόπιστος and the *norma normans* for church and theology.”¹⁷⁹ For Augustine and Bonaventura the authority of Scripture was independent of the church. Even the Counter-Reformation theologian Peter Canisius (1521-1579) and Robert Bellarmine subjected the church to the authority of Scripture.

All these theologians believed that Scripture could sufficiently be proved to be true from and by itself; it did not depend on the church, but reversely the church depended on it; the church with its tradition may be *regula fidei*, but that does not make it *fundamentum fidei*; that distinction belongs to Scripture.¹⁸⁰

After the Reformation, Rome tends to ground the authority of Scripture on the church. *Quoad se* Scripture does not depend on the church, because the church does not make Scripture inspired and canonical, but *quoad nos* Scripture depends on the church, because only the church can infallibly know that these Scriptures are inspired and canonical. “Over against this Roman Catholic doctrine the Reformation placed the autopistia of Scripture.”¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁷ Warfield, ‘Inspiration,’ 108.

¹⁷⁸ Warfield, ‘Inspiration,’ 108-109. It might be interesting to compare the concept of inspiration of both theologians more in detail, but for the study of the *autopistia* of Scripture, this is a by-road.

¹⁷⁹ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 420. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 452. Cf. “Church fathers and scholastics often still taught the autopistia of Scripture, but the driving force of the Roman Catholic principle place the church more and more before Scripture.” Bavinck, *GD* 1, 424. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 455.

¹⁸⁰ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 421. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 452-453.

¹⁸¹ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 425. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 456. Bavinck mentions his sources in a footnote, making clear that he derives the term αὐτόπιστος from Calvin and Reformed orthodoxy. “*Calvijn*, Inst. I c. 7. *Ursinus*, Tract. Theol. 1584 bl. 8v. *Polanus*, Synt. I c. 23-30. *Zanchius*, de S. Scriptura, Op. VIII 332-353. *Junius*, Theses Theol. c. 3-5. *Synopsis* pur. theol. disp. 2 § 29 v. *Gerhard*, Loci theol. I c.3 enz.” Bavinck, *GD* 1, 425 n. 1. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 456 n. 17. Cf.

The difference is not a denial of the role of the church regarding Scripture. The church must be accepted as an important *motivum credibilitatis*. The church leads us to Scripture as a guide or moves us to believe Scripture, as Augustine says in the famous quotation from *Contra epistolam Manichaei quam vocant fundamenti*. In Protestant theology this dictum is mostly interpreted as if Augustine only referred to the way in which faith arises. Bavinck criticizes this interpretation of Augustine by John Calvin and others.¹⁸² The church is not only an initial aid to become a Christian but a permanent motive for the faith of a Christian. “But there is a difference between a motive and the final ground of faith.”¹⁸³ Augustine always highly respects the authority of the church; it moves him to believe and strengthens him in doubts and struggles. “But Augustine does not wish to say that the authority of Scripture depends on the church, that it is the final and deepest ground of his faith. Elsewhere he clearly says that Holy Scripture has authority through itself and must be believed because of itself.”¹⁸⁴ In a different context Bavinck says that for Augustine the church was an important motive to believe, but not the final and deepest cause of his faith, for that was only God’s grace (*gratia interna*).¹⁸⁵

For Bavinck the final authority of Scripture lies exclusively in Scripture itself. “For if the church is the final and most basic reason for me to believe Scripture, than the church and not Scripture is αὐτόπιστος.”¹⁸⁶ There are only two possibilities: (1) Scripture contains a witness, a doctrine regarding itself, regarding its inspiration and authority and then the church can only accept and confirm that witness, or (2) Scripture does not contain such a doctrine and then the idea of the authority of Scripture becomes meaningless; for the church cannot attribute an authority to Scripture that it does not have of itself. “The church can only acknowledge what already exists not create what does not exist. [...] Scripture itself clearly teaches that not the church but the Word of God, written or unwritten is αὐτόπιστος.”¹⁸⁷ Scripture presents itself as the inspired and authoritative revelation of God and therefore the church acknowledges it as such. For Bavinck it is evident that Scripture contains a doctrine regarding its inspiration and authority.

Bavinck admits that there is circularity in the Protestant argument, but denies that Rome has a good alternative, because the objection of circular reasoning also applies to the Roman Catholic position, where the church is proved from Scripture and Scripture from the church. From their side a distinction is made, for when Scripture is used to prove the church, it functions merely a human trustworthy testimony and not as the final

Ursinus, *Opera theologica* 1, 445. Polansdorf, *Syntagma theologiae Christianae*, 28-44. Zanchius, *Opera theologica* 8, 332-353. Junius, *Opuscula Theologica Selecta*, 110-119. *Synopsis*, ii.29-34. Gerhard, *Loci theologici* 2, 36. These references are not very exact for the use of αὐτόπιστος. Zanchi prefers the term ἄξιόπιστος and in the *Synopsis* the term occurs in *Synopsis* ii.11.

¹⁸² Bavinck, *GD* 1, 425, n. 2. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 457 n. 18. Bavinck also mentions Amandus Polanus von Polansdorf, Francis Turretin and John Gerhard.

¹⁸³ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 425. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 457.

¹⁸⁴ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 425-426. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 457.

¹⁸⁵ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 548. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 578.

¹⁸⁶ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 426. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 457.

¹⁸⁷ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 426-427. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 458.

ground of faith in the church. Bavinck replies that the Protestants also can say that the doctrine of inspiration flows from Scripture as a trustworthy human witness. Even if Scripture is only seen as a human testimony, its authority forces itself on us. Scripture claims to be inspired and if we accept this trustworthy witness we will have to accept the entire authority of Scripture. If we reject it, the authority of Scripture is lost and the church cannot rescue it. In this manner Scripture can be proven to be the Word of God from its trustworthy human claim of inspiration.

Bavinck's statements remind us of Warfield, who reasoned from the claim of inspiration, via the acknowledgement of the apostolic church, to the divine authority and infallibility of Scripture. In contrast to Warfield Bavinck only speaks hypothetically. He is quick to add that it is much more important that in every discipline of science including theology the *principia* are treated as given. The truth of a *principium* cannot be demonstrated, but only acknowledged.¹⁸⁸

In these paragraphs on the attributes of Scripture Bavinck interprets the term αὐτόπιστος in a "catholic" way, mentioning church fathers and Catholic theologians as witnesses for *autopistia* of Scripture. When he draws the representatives of the Counter-Reformation into his camp he seems to do injustice to the historical facts, for they accepted Scripture as a *principium* but denied its *autopistia quoad nos*. Regardless whether his exegesis is correct, Bavinck's evaluation of the interpretation of Augustine's dictum shows that he allows a more important role for the church as a witness to the authority of Scripture than Calvin who interpreted this passage as a reference to the preparatory function of the church for unbelievers. Calvin denied that believers need the help of the church to believe the authority of Scripture. Bavinck, however, is willing to admit the pedagogical authority of the church for believers, provided that the church does not become the ground of their faith.

Bavinck always uses αὐτόπιστος in a context in which he places Scripture and church over against each other. The *necessitas* of Scripture is not accepted by Catholics, because "for Rome the church is αὐτόπιστος, self-sufficient, living from and through the Holy Spirit, she possesses the truth and keeps it faithfully and purely through the infallible office of the pope."¹⁸⁹ If the church is the ultimate basis for the authority of Scripture, Scripture is not necessary for the church; on the contrary, the church is necessary for Scripture. In his popular summary of Reformed dogmatics, titled *Magnalia Dei*, Bavinck says that over against the decay of the Roman Catholic Church the Reformation finds its certain principle "in the Word of Christ that is trustworthy in and by itself, necessary for the life and wellbeing of the church but also completely sufficient and clear."¹⁹⁰ Not the church, but Scripture is αὐτόπιστος. In his application of αὐτόπιστος to the Catholic ecclesiology Bavinck uses the term improperly, because the Roman Catholic church does not claim *autopistia*.

¹⁸⁸ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 426. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 457. Bavinck adds two Latin quotes "Principium creditur propter se, non propter aliud. Principii principium haberi non potest nec quaeri debet." The first quotation is not found literally in the sources Bavinck mentions; the second is from Trelcatius.

¹⁸⁹ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 435. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 466.

¹⁹⁰ Bavinck, *Magnalia Dei*, 129.

6.4 Object and Subject

Our third question concerns Bavinck's epistemology. Most studies on Bavinck's theology emphasize the link between Bavinck's prolegomena and his general epistemology without examining this relationship in detail.¹⁹¹ The only exception is Van der Walt, who discusses this relationship extensively in *Die Wysbegeerte van Dr. Herman Bavinck*. Although Van der Walt admires Bavinck's concept of a philosophy of revelation, he criticises the fact that Bavinck does not distinguish between theological and philosophical *principia*.¹⁹² Van der Walt is influenced by Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977), a Dutch Calvinist philosopher and the godfather of the Reformational philosophy.¹⁹³ Van der Walt overlooks the continuity between Reformed orthodoxy and Bavinck's concept of the *principia* and accuses him of confusing theology and philosophy.¹⁹⁴ The complicated relationship of Bavinck with his Reformed predecessors justifies a new look at Bavinck's epistemology because he links his concept of the *principium externum* and *principium internum* to Reformed orthodoxy, but interprets this distinction in his own way along the lines of the object-subject scheme and uses it to structure his prolegomena. In this paragraph we will discuss his definition of the *principium internum* and look carefully at the relationship between his theological epistemology and his general epistemology. We are interested to see whether αὐτόπιστος forms a bridge between the two epistemologies. First we will give a short survey of the object-subject scheme in Bavinck's theology and then turn to the paragraph "The Ground of Faith" in *Reformed Dogmatics*.

6.4.1 Correspondence

According to Bavinck, one of the main philosophical questions is how the mind inside of us can be conscious of the things outside of us. Bavinck is interested in the relationship of the human subject to the object of its knowledge; the relationship between thought and existence. "Knowledge always is exactly and cannot be anything else than a relation between subject and object."¹⁹⁵ Human life itself rests on the reciprocal correspondence between subject and object. Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) describes life "as the continuous adjustment of internal relations to external relations."¹⁹⁶ The term correspondence is essential for Spencer's concept of evolution. In the evolutionary development the degree of life varies as the degree of correspondence of the inner actions with the outer actions. Bavinck apparently

¹⁹¹ Heideman, *Revelation and Reason*, 143, Bremmer, *Bavinck als dogmaticus*, 157-161 and Van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek*, 123-124.

¹⁹² Van der Walt, *Wysbegeerte*, 157-158.

¹⁹³ This philosophy is sometimes called the "philosophy of the law-idea." H. Dooyeweerd, *De wijsbegeerte der wetsidee*, Amsterdam 1935-1936, 3 vol. Cf. H. Dooyeweerd, D.H. Freeman, W.S. Young (transl.), *A new critique of theoretical thought*, Philadelphia, 1953-1958, 4 vol.

¹⁹⁴ Van der Walt, *Wysbegeerte*, 163, 171.

¹⁹⁵ Bavinck, *Christelijke wereldbeschouwing*³, 19. Cf. Bavinck, *GD* 1,186. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 214.

¹⁹⁶ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 466. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 501. Bavinck refers to H. Spencer, *The Principles of Psychology*, London 1855, § 120. Cf. H. Spencer, *The Principles of Psychology*, 2nd ed., London 1870, vol. 1, 293.

illustrates his own point with a reference to this philosopher and evolutionist, for he is not always so appreciative of Spencer and of this remark.¹⁹⁷

In Bavinck's theology the correspondence of object and subject has three levels. He discusses the *principia* on the level of science, the level of general revelation, and the level of special revelation. On these three levels there is a correspondence between the objective *principium externum* and the subjective *principium internum*.¹⁹⁸

In his discussion of the *principia* on the level of science, Bavinck states that we are lost if we abandon the notion of a fundamental relationship between thought and reality, following his teacher in philosophy J.P.N. Land (1834-1897) who asserted that the search for the relationship between thought and reality must not be given up, however difficult it may be to formulate an accurate theory of knowledge.¹⁹⁹ Bavinck agrees with his former teacher and asserts that if we deny the fact that our observations lead to trustworthy knowledge of the objective reality and split subject and object in two different spheres we undermine all truth and science.²⁰⁰ In his *Reformed Dogmatics* Bavinck colors this epistemological relationship theologically, connecting it with his concept of the divine *Logos*. The same *Logos* has created both the reality outside of us and the laws of thought within us and has placed both in an organic connection and correspondence with each other.

The created world is thus the *principium cognoscendi externum* of all science. But that is not enough. In order to see we need an eye. 'If the eye were not related to the sun, how could we see the light?' There must be correspondence, kinship between object and subject.²⁰¹

All knowledge of the created world outside of us must correspond with laws of thought inside of us. Knowledge of the truth is only possible if subject and object, knowing and being correspond with each other.²⁰² The world displays the divine *Logos*, through which all things are made. Human beings are created in the image of God and therefore they are able to discover the wisdom of God that is displayed in creation. The same *Logos* that shines in the world also sheds light in our consciousness. The *intellectus* or *ratio* that comes from the *Logos* and discovers and acknowledges the *Logos* in the things is the *principium cognoscendi internum*.²⁰³ Bavinck gives his general

¹⁹⁷ Bavinck *GD* 4, 67, 590.

¹⁹⁸ "A *principium internum* in human beings must correspond to the *principium externum*" Bavinck, *GD* 1, 466. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 501.

¹⁹⁹ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 205, n. 1. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 231, n.57. Cf. J.P.N. Land, *Inleiding tot de wijsbegeerte*, 2nd ed., ed. C. Van Vollenhoven, The Hague 1900, 17-18, 250. Land discusses the grounds of certainty and says that the human mind is lost if it does not dare to rely on itself. It would be interesting to study the relationship between Bavinck's epistemology and the philosophy of his teacher at Leiden.

²⁰⁰ H. Bavinck, *Christelijke wereldbeschouwing*³, 20. Cf. 102 where Bavinck states that the Christian worldview stands opposite to the autonomy and anarchy of the modern society. This autonomy breaks the bond between subject and object and creates a chaos.

²⁰¹ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 207. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 233. In his discussion of the *cognitio Dei insita* Bavinck makes a similar remark. "It cannot be denied, after all, that for us to see we need both the light of the sun (objectively) and our eyes (subjectively)." Bavinck, *GD* 2, 41. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 2, 70.

²⁰² Bavinck, *Christelijke wereldbeschouwing*³, 21. Cf. 33.

²⁰³ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 207. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 233. He quotes Goethe in German: "War' nicht das Auge sonnenhaft, wie könnten wir das Licht erblicken?" Cf. Bavinck, *GD* 1, 466. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 501. Human beings elevate themselves to the world of intelligible things through the

epistemology a theological foundation. The certainty of all knowledge – the correspondence of the intellect with the object of its knowledge – rests in the creation by the divine *Logos*. On the level of general knowledge and science, the *principium internum* is the human intellect.

In his discussion of the second level, the level of general revelation, Bavinck says that a certain faculty or aptitude in human beings corresponds with the objective general revelation of God. There are three *principia* in religion, just as in science: a *principium essendi*, a *principium cognoscendi externum*, and a *principium cognoscendi internum*.

And so there is not only an external and objective, but also an internal and subjective revelation. The former is the *principium cognoscendi externum* of religion and the latter the *principium cognoscendi internum*. Both *principia* are most intimately related, as light is to the eye and the design in the world to human reason.²⁰⁴

Nature and history are the external objective means of God's general revelation, while intellect and reason, conscience and heart are the internal means by which God makes his general revelation known to us. Here there is also a correspondence between the subject and the object. There is a revelation of God outside of, but also inside of human beings. But this revelation of God in us is not an independent source of knowledge alongside nature and history, but serves as a subjective organ that enables us to receive and understand the revelation in nature and history. The *semen religionis* corresponds with the revelation of God in nature and history.²⁰⁵

Discussing the third level, Bavinck says that the special revelation in Christ and in Scripture corresponds with a special internal or subjective revelation. "Just as in science the subject must correspond with the object and in religion the *religio subjectiva* must correspond with the *religio objectiva*, so external and objective revelation demands an internal revelation in the subject."²⁰⁶ This *principium internum* on the level of special revelation is defined in different ways by Bavinck. In the discussion of the *principia* in general Bavinck says that the illumination by the Spirit is the *principium cognoscendi internum* of theology.²⁰⁷ In most cases Bavinck defines the *principium internum* as faith. "Mostly in Scripture, at least in the New Testament, this *principium internum* is

Logos within them and so trace the *Logos* embodied in the visible realm.

²⁰⁴ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 253. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 279. J.G. Woelderink (1886-1956) criticizes this by stating that not the testimony of the Holy Spirit, but faith is the eye that catches the light. J.G. Woelderink *De gevaren der doopersche geestesstooming*⁴, The Hague 1946, 56, 57, n. 1. Cf. Veenhof, *Revelatie en inspiratie*, 491, n. 12. Veenhof agrees with Woelderink, but since for Bavinck the *testimonium* and faith are so closely connected, it is to be questioned if this criticism is entirely correct. He could also have said that faith is the eye. The difficulty is found precisely in equating these two; Bavinck does not distinguish enough between faith and testimony, between the believing subject and the Spirit who testifies in the believer. In his definition of the *testimonium* Bavinck does not distinguish between what happens *a parte Dei* and what happens *a parte hominis*. Veenhof, *Revelatie en inspiratie*, 491, n. 12.

²⁰⁵ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 312. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 341. Cf. H. Bavinck, 'Voorwoord,' in Van der Sluis, *Ethische richting*, [iii], where he says that Reformed theology "took its position in the *semen religionis* and the *testimonium Spiritus sancti* that correspond with God's revelation in nature and Scripture."

²⁰⁶ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 320. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 348. Cf. H. Bavinck, 'Philosophie des geloofs,' in H. Bavinck, *Verzamelde opstellen op het gebied van godsdienst en wetenschap*, Kampen 1921, 9-16, 15.

²⁰⁷ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 185. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 213.

called faith.”²⁰⁸ In the discussion of the relationship between faith and theology, however, Bavinck says: “The real principium cognoscendi internum of theology is thus not faith as such but believing thought, the ratio Christiana.”²⁰⁹ The different definitions make Bavinck’s thoughts complicated at this point.²¹⁰ The internal revelation of the Holy Spirit may not be disconnected from the external and objective revelation in Christ and Scripture; otherwise it loses its criterion and leads to all kinds of arbitrariness and fanaticism. For Bavinck general and special revelation both have an objective and a subjective side. The *principium internum* of general revelation is the *semen religionis* and the *principium internum* of special revelation is the saving work of the Holy Spirit.

In Bavinck’s epistemology the correspondence of subject and object is the only way to gain trustworthy knowledge.²¹¹ This scheme determines his view of science, of religion, and of special revelation. He continually distinguishes between the objective principle outside of us and the subjective principle inside of us. Bavinck sees a parallel in the *principia* in science, in general revelation, and in special revelation. In all these cases the *principium essendi* is God. The *principium cognoscendi externum* differs: in science it is the created world, in religion it is the revelation of God in creation and history, and in Christianity it is God’s revelation in Scripture. The *principium cognoscendi internum* also differs: in science it is the human intellect, in religion it is the human consciousness of God, and in Christianity it is faith. The confusion about the exact meaning of the term *principium internum* flows partly from a confusion of the different levels. Even within the third level Bavinck’s definition of the *principium internum* is not exactly clear. This complexity is caused by the combination of the Reformed orthodox concept of the *principia* of theology, the use of the *externum-internum* distinction, and a philosophical epistemology that is dominated by the object-subject dichotomy.

Bavinck keeps the *principium externum* and the *principium internum* together in the creative activity of the *Logos*. The correspondence of the internal *logos* and the external *logos* ultimately rests on the fact that both are created by the divine *Logos*.²¹² In this way Bavinck gives his general epistemology a theological foundation. In a grasp for unity he incorporates general epistemology into his theological system. All knowledge ultimately depends on the knowledge of God, who is the *principium essendi* of all science. This knowledge of God, however, is not infused to us immediately, but it is mediated through the creation in which God displays the divine *Logos*. The human mind – created in the image of God – has a faculty to discern the *Logos* in the created world, the *principium cognoscendi internum*.

There is a tension between theology and philosophy at this point: Bavinck places theology in the general scientific and philosophical context, but he intends to keep it free from strange influences. Therefore he keeps science, general revelation, and special revelation together in his concept of the *principia* and at the same time distinguishes

²⁰⁸ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 533. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 565.

²⁰⁹ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 577. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 609. “Dogmatics only has one principium externum i.e., Holy Scripture and also only one principium internum i.e., believing reason.” Bavinck, *GD* 1, 64. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 88.

²¹⁰ Cf. Van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek*, 124.

²¹¹ Veenhof, *Revelatie en inspiratie*, 391-392.

²¹² Veenhof, *Revelatie en inspiratie*, 392, n. 6 Cf. Heideman, *Revelation and reason*, 143.

them in different levels. This tension becomes clear when Bavinck discusses the *principium internum* of special revelation. First he refers to the previous chapters on the *principia* in science and in religion, but then he says that theology has its own epistemology and is independent of all philosophical systems.²¹³

The discussion of the source of *externum-internum* revealed a shift in his use of the terms compared with Reformed orthodoxy. This shift can be partly explained from the influence of philosophy. Bavinck borrows the concept of correspondence between object and subject from philosophical epistemology and introduces it in his theology connecting it with the terminology of Reformed orthodoxy. That is why the object-subject scheme determines Bavinck's prolegomena.

Bavinck fits his general epistemology into his theological framework via the concept of the divine *Logos*. Therefore it seems as if he approaches philosophy from a theological perspective, but his prolegomena are so influenced by his philosophical epistemology, that in reality he approaches theology from a philosophical perspective. It is an interesting point of further study how Bavinck's theology is influenced by contemporary philosophy, especially concerning the relation of object and subject. Bavinck incorporates a philosophical concept into Reformed theology, using and developing distinctions from the Reformed tradition.²¹⁴

Kuyper developed an original concept of science, from a Reformed perspective.²¹⁵ In his epistemology Kuyper took the subject-object split as a starting point, but tried to bridge the gap via the scholastic concept of the *Logos*. Kuyper's concept of the sovereignty of God clashed with the critical idealism of Kant, because for Kant the human subject gave meaning to the universe.²¹⁶ According to Kuyper, the laws and relations of nature were not the product of the human subject, but merely the reproduction of the laws and relations that were objectively present in creation. The human subject did not give sense to the universe, but discovered the sense that God had given to it. Kuyper's position was related to the critical realism in the philosophical school of Karl Robert Eduard Von Hartmann (1842-1906). Kuyper based the unity of object and subject on the scholastic concept of the *Logos*, by which both were invented

²¹³ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 468. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 503.

²¹⁴ Bavinck's successor Valentijn Hepp (1879-1950) wrote a dissertation on what he called the *testimonium generale* and distinguished between a general *testimonium internum* and a general *testimonium externum*. V. Hepp, *Het Testimonium Spiritus Sancti*, vol. 1, Kampen, 1914, 139-147. For the relationship between Bavinck and Hepp at this point, see G.C. Berkouwer, *De Heilige Schrift* 1, Kampen 1966, 61-66.

²¹⁵ J. Klapwijk, 'Abraham Kuyper over wetenschap en universiteit,' in *Abraham Kuyper: zijn volksdeel, zijn invloed*, ed. C. Augustijn, Delft 1987, 61-94, 63. Cf. Van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek*, 25, n. 22.

²¹⁶ Klapwijk, 'Abraham Kuyper over wetenschap en universiteit,' 71.

and created.²¹⁷ When we study the relations between objects, “we merely re-think the thought by which the Subject that brought these relations into being defined them.”²¹⁸

Von Hartmann’s epistemology can be characterized as critical realism; an epistemological position in between naïve realism and the transcendental idealism of Kant. He is often quoted in Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics*.²¹⁹ Possibly Bavinck’s concept of faith as the *principium internum* of theology is influenced by Von Hartmann, who says that faith as a uniform human religious function must correspond with a uniform divine religious function, which is revelation.²²⁰ Bavinck draws the distinction between object and subject deeper into his concept of revelation than Kuyper. Both refer to the concept of the divine *Logos* for a theological interpretation of human knowledge. The Creator of the universe guarantees the certainty of human knowledge regarding that universe.

6.4.2 The *Principia* in Trinitarian Perspective

Bavinck makes the transition from the *principium externum* to the *principium internum* in a condensed paragraph. He says that the answers to the question how and why persons believe are divergent. Some think that human beings have a natural faculty that is sufficient to recognize and accept the revelation of God. The faculty for the acceptance of the revelation is identified by some as the intellect; faith then rests on historical and apologetic grounds. Others identify it as reason; faith then rests on speculative argumentation. Finally, some identify it as the conscience or the heart; in that case faith rests on religious experience or on practical ethical grounds. Before dealing with these four positions in detail, Bavinck says that these approaches necessarily fail to uncover the deepest ground of faith, because the human intellect, reason, and conscience are empty unless they obtain a religious content from without, if we lose sight of this fact, we will fall into rationalism or mysticism and sacrifice the

²¹⁷ According to Klapwijk, Kuyper derived the concept of the *Logos* from the writings of J. Woltjer (1848-1917), professor at Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam. Klapwijk, ‘Abraham Kuyper over wetenschap en universiteit,’ 71. Woltjer for instance said: “The logos in us knows the logos in the things.” J. Woltjer, *Leven en wetenschap*, Leiden 1897, 18. Cf. Van der Walt, *Wysbegeerte*, 44.

²¹⁸ Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie* 2, 23. Cf. Kuyper, *Encyclopedia*, 77-78. Not that Bavinck was only influenced by Kuyper at this point; the interrelationship of the subject with the object of its knowledge and the link with the idea that human beings are created after the divine *Logos* was also elaborated by Schöberlein. Schöberlein, *Princip und System der Dogmatik*, 20-21.

²¹⁹ Bavinck refers to his main work K.R.E. Von Hartmann, *Philosophie des Unbewußten*, vol. 1-3 *Eduard von Hartmann’s ausgewählte Werke*, vol. 7-9) Leipzig [1889] but even more to K.R.E. von Hartmann, *Religionsphilosophie*, vol. 1,2, *Eduard von Hartmann’s ausgewählte Werke*, vol 5, 6. Leipzig [1888]. The copy of Von Hartmann’s *Religionsphilosophie* in the library of Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam was owned by Bavinck and most of his quotations from the book are marked by pencil. Von Hartmann was a pantheist and his main principle was “the Unconscious” a designation for the absolute all-embracing ground of all existence. The relationship between this German philosopher and Bavinck’s deserves more detailed study.

²²⁰ Von Hartmann, *Religionsphilosophie*, 2, 69. Bavinck refers to this chapter when he writes: “Faith therefore is the *principium internum cognoscendi* of revelation and thus also of religion and theology.” Bavinck, *GD* 1, 534. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 565.

object to the subject.²²¹ Religion is a unique phenomenon, distinct from science, art, and morality, because revelation is its source.

But if religion has its own *principium cognoscendi externum* in virtue of its own nature, there must also be a unique *principium cognoscendi internum* in human beings that is in agreement with it. Just as the eye answers to light; the ear to sound, the logos within us to the logos outside of us, so there must be in human beings a subjective organ that corresponds to the objective revelation of God.²²²

Human beings are religious beings by nature, but this religious disposition needs to be re-created, because of the corruption of human nature and therefore a natural human being cannot be a competent judge of God's revelation in Scripture.²²³ The revelation that comes to us in Christ through Scripture does not place itself beneath us, but takes a position high above us. "The revelation of God in Christ does not ask for human support or approval. It posits and maintains itself in sublime majesty. Its authority is normative as well as causative. It fights for its own victory. It conquers human hearts for itself. It makes itself irresistible."²²⁴ Bavinck says the same in his paragraph on the right dogmatic method:

Therefore Scripture teaches that objective revelation completes itself in subjective illumination. The Reformed doctrine of Scripture is most intimately tied in with that of the testimonium Spiritus Sancti. The verbum externum does not remain outside of us, but through faith becomes a verbum internum. The Holy Spirit who gave Scripture, also gives witness to that Scripture in the heart of believers. Scripture takes care for its own triumphant victory in the consciousness of the church of Christ.²²⁵

The revelation divides itself into two grand dispensations: the economy of the Son in objective revelation and the economy of the Spirit in subjective revelation. God is also the author of this subjective revelation, this illumination or regeneration. "The Holy Spirit is the great and mighty Witness to Christ, objectively in Scripture and subjectively in the spirit of human beings. Through that Spirit they receive an adequate organ for external revelation. God can only be known by God; the light can only be seen in his light."²²⁶

Bavinck defines God as the *principium essendi* of religion and theology, the objective revelation in Christ as it is recorded in Scripture as the *principium cognoscendi internum*, and the Holy Spirit, who has been poured out in the church and still regenerates and guides us, as the *principium cognoscendi internum*. Objective revelation is not enough; it must prolong and complete itself in subjective revelation. The former is the means, the latter the goal. The *principium externum* is the

²²¹ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 470. Strange enough this sentence is missing in the English translation. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 504.

²²² Bavinck, *GD* 1, 470. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 505.

²²³ "Psychische mens" is a biblical expression derived from 1 Cor. 2,14 and can be translated as "natural human being." Bavinck, *GD* 1, 470. Cf. 54, 404.

²²⁴ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 471. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 505.

²²⁵ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 69. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 92.

²²⁶ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 471. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 506. Cf. Bavinck, *GD* 1, 355. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 383. "The dispensation of the Son then makes way for the dispensation of the Spirit. Objective revelation passes into subjective approbation." Already in his inaugural address at Kampen Bavinck said that a new dispensation occurred as soon as the Holy Spirit started to dwell in the church. Bavinck, *Wetenschap der Godgeleerdheid*, 9-10. Cf. Veenhof, *Revelatie en inspiratie*, 396-398.

instrumental principle; *the principium internum* is the formal and principal principle, therefore the Christian Church always has made confession of the *testimonium Spiritus sancti*.

Without using the term αὐτόπιστος in this paragraph, Bavinck expresses the self-convincing character of God's revelation, which maintains itself and makes itself irresistible. The sublime and self-sufficient authority of God's revelation in Christ through Scripture is the keynote of Bavinck's theology. Faith is the result of the triumph of God's revelation in Christ. From the self-convincing character of God's revelation Bavinck proceeds to the work of the Spirit, moving from objective to subjective revelation. God's objective revelation has an inherent power to convince and to gain the triumph over the world, but this inherent power only becomes effective through the work of the Spirit in the hearts of believers.

Bavinck connects God's revelation with the concept of his self-knowledge. Only God knows God. In a different paragraph Bavinck says: "The mind of a natural human being is insufficient to discern the things of the Spirit of God. God can only be known by God. Those who are of God hear the words of God."²²⁷ The self-knowledge of God is the ultimate source of revelation.²²⁸ In the wording of Reformed orthodoxy the *theologia ectypa* rests in the *theologia archetypa*.

Bavinck applies the epistemological distinction between object and subject and their reciprocal correspondence to the realm of special revelation. The objective revelation in Christ through Scripture is not complete without subjective revelation in the hearts of believers through the illumination of the Spirit. Bavinck relates this twofold revelation to the Trinitarian dogma; objective revelation belongs to the economy of the Son and subjective revelation to the economy of the Spirit. Bavinck furthermore defines objective revelation as the *principium cognoscendi externum* and the Holy Spirit as the *principium cognoscendi internum* of religion and theology. These definitions do not run parallel; the expected parallel to objective revelation is subjective revelation and not the Spirit. In other paragraphs Bavinck equates the *principium cognoscendi internum* on the level of special revelation with the work of the Spirit or with faith. Here Bavinck defines the *principium internum* as the Holy Spirit, due to the association with the Trinitarian dogma.

It seems as if the distinction of the *principium externum* and the *principium internum* flows from the doctrine of the Trinity, but Bavinck transposes the object-subject scheme into the doctrine of the Trinity, by explaining the dispensation of Christ as objective and the dispensation of the Spirit as subjective. It is possible that this distinction of the dispensations of the revelation of the Son and the Spirit is influenced by the economical approach to the doctrine of the Trinity in the school of Schleiermacher and in the Ethical Theology.

6.4.3 Four Wrong Methods

In the last part of his prolegomena Bavinck searches for the final and deepest ground of faith. The questions of theological epistemology are far more difficult than the questions

²²⁷ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 557. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 587. Bavinck connects 1 Cor. 2,14 and John 8,3. The second text is in Greek in the Dutch edition. For the expression "God can only be known by God," see Bavinck, *GD* 1, 259. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 287.

²²⁸ Cf. Veenhof, *Revelatie en inspiratie*, 491, n. 12 and Van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek*, 73.

of philosophical epistemology.²²⁹ It is unfeasible for most believers to explain why they believe and even theologians cannot give an *a priori* demonstration of the validity of their theological epistemological theory. Moreover, the object of examination lies so deep in the human soul that it often escapes our own perception and even more that of others. “The question, how and why do I know? is so difficult that all our philosophical powers have not yet succeeded in answering it. Even more difficult, however, is the question, how and why do I believe?”²³⁰

Bavinck discusses four methods that are used to explain the foundation of the Christian faith. The first is the historical-apologetic method of the theological school of Utrecht. J.I. Doedes (1817-1897) and J.J. van Oosterzee (1817-1882) placed much emphasis on apologetics and defended biblical revelation against the attacks of naturalism and modernism.²³¹ They concentrated on the supernatural elements of the Christian faith, defending the possibility of revelation and miracles. But their opinion left little room for the specific role of the *testimonium Spiritus sancti* in Christian apologetics. The *testimonium* only gained a place after the Christian faith was proved by evidences. According to Bavinck, the Protestant Reformation took its starting position in faith and not in reason. Later Protestant theologians did not adhere to this principle and often returned to the doctrine of the *theologia naturalis* giving historical proofs for the truth of revelation. “Calvin says that it would be easy for him to prove the divinity of Holy Scripture and mentions various grounds for it.”²³² Many other Reformed orthodox theologians said the same.²³³ The idea that the proofs were sufficient for a *fides humana* was the beginning of rationalism in the Protestant churches and, according to Bavinck, this development started with the *Institutes*. Bavinck rejects the historical-apologetic method. Although apologetics have a place in Christian theology to demonstrate the plausibility of the revelation, human reason can never be the ground of faith. The apologetic method ends in rationalism and has been refuted by the critical philosophy of Kant. Apologetics do not precede faith and therefore must not be discussed as an introduction to the Christian dogmatics, but necessarily presuppose faith and must therefore be seen as an integral part of the Christian dogmatics.

Secondly, he discusses the speculative method in the school of G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831), who derived the dogmas of Christian faith such as the Trinity and the incarnation from philosophical speculation. Hegel influenced the theology of Schleiermacher and the German *Vermittlungstheologie*, which had the same subjective starting point. The theology of Bavinck’s teacher J.H. Scholten was an example of this speculative method. Bavinck’s main objection to the method is the conclusion from thought to being. “The equation of thought and being is the πρῶτον ψεῦδος of

²²⁹ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 468 Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 503.

²³⁰ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 469 Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 503.

²³¹ Veenhof, *Revelatie en inspiratie*, 53.

²³² Bavinck, *GD* 1, 479. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 512-513.

²³³ “*Ursinus*, Tract. Theol. bl. 1-33. *Zanchius*, Op. VIII col. 335v. *Polanus*, Synt. Theol. Ic. 17 v.c. 27, 28. *Synopsis* pur. theol. disp. 2, 10v. *Du Plessis-Mornay*, Traité de la vérité de la religion chrétienne contre les Athées etc. Anvers 1581. *Abbadie*, Traité de la vérité de la religion chrét. 1684 enz. Verg. *Heppe*, Dogm. der ev. ref. K. bl. 20-22. *Hase*, Hutt. Rediv. § 37. *Schmid*, Dogm. der ev. luth. K. bl. 32. 33.” Bavinck, *GD* 1, 479, n. 2. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 513, n. 18.

speculative philosophy.²³⁴ Bavinck rejects speculative theology because the existence of things is a consequence of God's will and not of our mind. In other words the objective reality always comes before the subjective knowledge of reality.

The religious-empirical method of the Lutheran theologians, who belonged to the Erlangen School and derived the whole system of faith from rebirth, is the third Bavinck discusses. He pays special attention to F.H.R. Frank (1827-1894), who developed a theology based on the religious experience of the Christian in his *System der Christlichen Gewissheit*.²³⁵ Bavinck values the starting point within the Christian faith positively, but accuses Frank of subjectivism because he does not only describe how the Christian gains certainty, but also derives the truths of Christianity from rebirth.²³⁶ Frank does not distinguish between objective truth and subjective certainty. In the first edition of *Reformed Dogmatics* Bavinck discusses the religious-empirical method as part of the speculative method, but in the later editions he deals with it separately.²³⁷ Apparently he attempts to fence off his own position from the subjectivism of Frank.

In the fourth place, the moral-psychological method is discussed by Bavinck. It shows resemblances with the third method in its subjective starting point, although the emphasis is more on the conscience and the religious needs. This method is based on Kant's three postulates of morality: liberty, the immortality of the soul and God. Bavinck extensively discusses the theology of A. Ritschl (1822-1889), mentioning R.A. Lipsius (1830-1892) and J.W. Hermann (1846-1922) as representatives of this method. The idea that the truth of the Christian faith can be proved from its function in the soul of believers is rejected by Bavinck; comfort is important for believers, but does not prove the truth of Christianity, for all religions offer some kind of comfort.²³⁸ Bavinck also rejects the dualism between faith and knowledge that lies at the bottom of this method.

The discussion of these four methods reveals Bavinck's struggle with the relationship of object and subject. He takes his starting-point in the believer, but he refuses to ground the content of faith on the experience or morality of the believer. Bavinck admits that he prefers the third and fourth methods to the first and second.²³⁹ In *Certainty of Faith* (1901) he only mentions two methods: rational demonstration of the truth and an appeal to experience.²⁴⁰ This simplification reveals Bavinck's double front; the ground of faith cannot be found either in the human mind – the mistake of rationalism – or in human experience – the mistake of subjectivism. Although he admits his preference for the subjective methods, Bavinck refuses to cross the Rubicon of subjectivism, drawing back for the implication that the certainty of the Christian faith depends on the religious subject.

²³⁴ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 488. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 521.

²³⁵ F.H.R. Frank, *System der christlichen Gewissheit*, 2 vol., Erlangen 1870-1873.

²³⁶ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 496. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 528.

²³⁷ Bavinck, *GD*¹ 1, 439-444.

²³⁸ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 523. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 552.

²³⁹ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 523. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 551.

²⁴⁰ Bavinck, *Zekerheid des geloofs*, 62, 69, Bavinck, *Certainty of Faith*, 57, 64. Cf. Veenhof, *Revelatie en inspiratie*, 547.

6.4.4 Faith as Part of the Prolegomena

After the discussion of the four wrong methods, Bavinck turns to faith. It is remarkable in the light of the Reformed orthodox tradition that Bavinck discusses faith in his prolegomena. Generally faith is discussed in the context of the work of the Spirit, and more specifically as a part of soteriology. Bavinck is aware of the fact that the discussion of faith in the introduction of a dogmatic system is an exception in the Reformed tradition. In the paragraph on the proper order of dogmatics he remarks: “Already at an early stage an introduction was inserted prior to the actual dogmatics, in which the concept of theology and the doctrine of Scripture and occasionally as in Amesius and Mastricht also the essence of faith was treated.”²⁴¹

Bavinck does not explain why he discusses faith in his prolegomena, but it may be partly due to his choice to start from the perspective of the believer. Bavinck is very clear that the prolegomena do not precede the dogmatic system, but form an integral part of them. His philosophical and theological epistemology is also dominated by the correspondence between object and subject. The discussion of Scripture as the *principium externum* of theology leads to the discussion of the *principium internum* of theology. At this point Bavinck differs from Reformed orthodoxy, for even Ames and Mastricht do not call faith the *principium internum* of theology. A further reason possibly lies in the quest for the deepest ground of faith; Bavinck opens his paragraph on faith with the remark that the *principium internum* of the Christian religion and theology cannot lie in the mind or in reason, in the heart, or the will of the natural human being.²⁴² “No proofs or demonstrations, no religious experience or moral satisfaction can constitute the deepest ground of faith; they all presuppose a firmer foundation upon which they are built and from whence they derive their value.”²⁴³

Faith has a certainty of its own kind; it is different from the scientific certainty that rests on observation, argumentation, and self-evidence. The certainty of faith is stronger than the certainty of knowledge; martyrs are willing to die for their faith, not for a scientific thesis.²⁴⁴ Faith, however, cannot be its own final ground; it does not prove the truth of that what is believed. “There is a great difference between subjective certainty and objective truth. In the case of faith everything depends on the grounds on which it rests.”²⁴⁵

Bavinck’s definition of the *principium internum* is so complex, because he discusses faith in the prolegomena. The dual structure of *principium externum* and *principium internum* in Bavinck’s epistemology, naturally leads to an identification of the *principium internum* with faith as soon as faith is moved from its place in soteriology to the prolegomena. Or rather, as soon as the subject-object split determines the *principia* of theology, faith must be transposed from soteriology into the prolegomena. The price for this decision is the introduction of a subjective element into the foundational structure of the dogmatic system. This subjective element stands next to the objective reality of God’s revelation in Scripture; in order to avoid subjectivism Bavinck has to be very careful in defining the exact relationship between the objective

²⁴¹ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 79. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 102.

²⁴² Bavinck, *GD* 1, 532. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 563.

²⁴³ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 532. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 563.

²⁴⁴ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 546-547. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 577-578.

²⁴⁵ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 547. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 578.

and the subjective element of the prolegomena. This is exactly what Bavinck does in the beginning of this paragraph, even before he discusses the nature and the certainty of faith.

Exactly because the *principium internum* cannot lie in the mind or the reason, the heart, or the will of natural human beings, faith itself must be the *principium internum* of theology. This implies that the Christian theologian starts from the human subject.²⁴⁶ It is wrong to accuse the theologian of subjectivism because of this perspective. “There is no other starting point in any area of knowledge and science. All that is objective exists for us only by means of a subjective consciousness; without consciousness the whole world is dead for us.”²⁴⁷ Christian theology is born out of faith and therefore has always taken its starting point in the human subject. Scripture itself teaches that God’s revelation in Christ must be accompanied by the illumination of the Spirit. The accusation of subjectivism is only valid “if the subjective condition that is necessary to know the object were elevated to a *principium* of knowledge.”²⁴⁸ Bavinck, of course, means *principium externum*, and not *principium internum*. Apparently, the problem of the definition of the *principium internum* is caused by fear of subjectivism. Calling faith a *principium* implies that it stands on the same level as Scripture. Therefore Bavinck rather identifies the *principium internum* as the illumination or *testimonium* of the Spirit, or as the Spirit itself.²⁴⁹ We analyze his discussion of the *testimonium* to find out how Bavinck gives the human subject a place in the foundational structure of his theology without falling into subjectivism.

6.5 The *Testimonium* of the Spirit

In this section we will examine how the *principium internum* is connected to the *testimonium* of the Spirit. Three questions are of importance in relation to this topic. In the first place, we will have to define the *testimonium* in the theology of Bavinck. This is difficult, because his use of the term is just as complicated as the use of the term *principium internum*.²⁵⁰ Secondly, we are interested in how the Spirit gives certainty to believers through the *testimonium* and whether this is related to the *autopistia* of Scripture. Finally, we will face the question whether Bavinck succeeds in his attempt to avoid subjectivism.

²⁴⁶ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 532. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 563.

²⁴⁷ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 532. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 564. Cf. Bavinck, ‘Dualisme in de Theologie,’ 33-34. “Yes, the whole world, all things and God himself only exist for us in and through our consciousness. Without consciousness I am dead for the world and the whole world for me.”

²⁴⁸ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 533. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 564. Bavinck dealt with philosophical subjectivism in a discussion with F.M. Ten Hoor (1855-1934). See K.J. Popma, ‘Levend Verleden,’ *Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift* 62, 1/2 (1962), 1-16, 10. Cf. Bremmer, *Bavinck als dogmaticus*, 46-54.

²⁴⁹ The translation of the chapter titles “Principium Externum” and “Principium Internum” as “Revelation (Principium Externum)” and “Faith (Principium Internum)” is a simplification. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 6.

²⁵⁰ Bavinck’s concept of the *testimonium* has led to criticism and discussion. Cf. Woelderink *Gevaren der doopersche geestesstooming* and D. Van Dijk, ‘Het Testimonium Spiritus Sancti,’ *Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift* 22 (1921), 200-212, 251-265. Cf. Veenhof, *Revelatie en inspiratie*, 491, n. 12, 14. Cf. Van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek*, 131-132, 37, n. 94.

6.5.1 The Ground of Faith

In *Reformed Dogmatics* Bavinck stresses the *testimonium Spiritus sancti internum* as essential for the true certainty of faith; the first paragraph on the *principium internum* offers a summary of his concept of the *testimonium*. The Christian church has always confessed the *testimonium Spiritus sancti*, because there must be a *principium internum* or subjective revelation that corresponds to the *principium externum* of God's revelation in Christ and Scripture.²⁵¹ For Rome the *testimonium* expresses itself exclusively through the church as an institution – the church is the *mediatrix* between God and believers – while in the Reformation the *testimonium* belongs to the church as an organism, to the community of all believers.

Bavinck deals extensively with the *testimonium* in the paragraph on “The Ground of Faith” that follows the paragraph on “Faith” in *Reformed Dogmatics*.²⁵² Rational proofs cannot be the final and deepest ground of faith. They may show that it is not unreasonable to believe, but they are powerless to move us to faith; Roman Catholicism takes the same subjective standpoint as the Reformation.

It is the Spirit of God alone who can make a person inwardly certain of the truth of divine revelation. The deepest ground of faith is also for Rome not Scripture or the church, but the *lumen interius*. [...] The revelation of God can be believed only in a religious sense on the basis of God's authority. But the voice of that authority of God can only be heard either outside of myself in Scripture or in the church – whose final ground of faith we are examining – or within myself, in the grace that moves me to believe, in the *lumen interius*, in the *testimonium Spiritus sancti*.²⁵³

Rome and the Reformation differ in their answer to the question where God has revealed himself – in Scripture or in Scripture and in the church – but ultimately Rome and the Reformation take the same subjective starting point. The only difference is that Rome denies this formally and the Reformation acknowledges it willingly. “Also for Rome the deepest ground of faith lies, just like in Protestantism, in the subject.”²⁵⁴

Luther, Zwingli, and Melanchthon only referred to the *testimonium* occasionally, but Calvin developed this doctrine and brought it into relationship with the authority of Scripture.

Scripture brings its own authority with it, it rests in itself, it is αὐτόπιστος. Just as light differs from darkness, white from black, sweet from bitter, so Scripture is known by its own truth. But

²⁵¹ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 472. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 506. An extensive discussion of Bavinck's ideas about the *testimonium Spiritus sancti* can be found in Berkouwer, *Heilige Schrift* 1, 41-82. Cf. Veenhof, *Revelatie en inspiratie*, 489-498.

²⁵² The problem of the ground of faith has also played a role in the discussion concerning J.B. Netelenbos (1879-1934). According to Bavinck, the general objection against Netelenbos's view of the authority of Scripture lies in “the opinion that the books of Holy Scripture only gain divine authority through the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers.” Bavinck disagrees with this objection, because Netelenbos declared that the Holy Spirit does not create the objective authority in the hearts of believers but only causes its acknowledgment. His opponents confuse the ontological foundation with the epistemological foundation. The ontological foundation (*zijnsgrond*) of the authority of Scripture is the inspiration or the divine nature of Scripture itself, and the epistemological foundation (*kengrond*) is the witness of the Holy Spirit. Bavinck, ‘*Als Bavinck nu maar eens kleur bekende*’, [38], [40].

²⁵³ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 549-550. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 579-580. Cf. Bavinck, *GD* 1, 483-484. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 517.

²⁵⁴ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 552. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 582-583.

for us that Scripture only gains certainty as the Word of God through the testimony of the Holy Spirit.²⁵⁵

Although proofs and reasoning have their value, the *testimonium* far surpasses them all. This testimony is related to the testimony of the Spirit in Scripture. God is his own witness in his Word and his Word only finds belief if it is sealed by the internal testimony of the Spirit. Calvin does not isolate the *testimonium*, but closely relates it to the whole work of the Spirit in the hearts of believers and in the church as the community of believers. This *testimonium* is not a source of new revelations, but a confirmation of the truth as it is revealed in Scripture. It is analogous to the testimony of our conscience to the law of God and to the certainty that we have of God's existence.²⁵⁶

The *testimonium* was not only opposed from Socinian, Arminian, and Roman Catholic sides, but it also gradually lost its place of honor in Reformed theology. Some Reformed orthodox theologians – Francis Turretin, Moise Amyraut (1596-1664), and Pierre De Moulin (1568-1658) – identified the *testimonium* with the illumination of the Spirit by which the intellect was enabled to discern the *notae* and *criteria* of the divinity of Scripture, placing the marks between Scripture and faith.²⁵⁷ First the recognition of these *criteria* was attributed to an illumination of the Spirit, but soon rationalism considered this illumination unnecessary and based the authority of Scripture on historical proofs. If the *testimonium* was mentioned it was often transformed into an *a posteriori* proof from experience. This development ended in a total neglect of the *testimonium*. Daniel Frierich Strauß (1808-1874) called the *testimonium* the Achilles' heel of Protestantism.²⁵⁸ According to Strauß, Protestantism does not lay the deepest authority in objective revelation, but in the human heart, in feeling or experience, in the subjectivity of an inner revelation.²⁵⁹ The *Critique of Reason* by Kant and the romanticism of Jacobi and Schleiermacher have resulted in a rehabilitation of the *testimonium*. There is a common conviction that the validation of Christian religion must be grounded in the faith of the church. Most theologians again emphasize the importance of the *testimonium*. Bavinck values this development positively although he is aware of the fact that the *testimonium* is stripped of its original character.

²⁵⁵ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 552. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 583.

²⁵⁶ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 553. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 584. It is an interesting question whether Bavinck is correct at this point. Calvin does not make the analogy with the conscience and the *sensus divinitatis* explicit. Perhaps Bavinck found this idea in the Reformed theologians that developed the concept of the *testimonium*; he mentions: “*Ursinus*, Tract. Theol. bl. 12. 13. *Zanchius*, Op. VIII 332v. *Polanus*, Synt. Theol. I c. 16. *Trigland*, Antapologia bl. 42v. *Maccovius*, Loci Comm. bl. 28. *Alsted*, Theol. schol. did. 1618 bl. 10v. 29v. *Maresius*, Syst. Theol. I 33. *Edwards*, Works III 132 v. enz.” Bavinck, *GD* 1, 553, n. 3. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 584, n.62. The last reference is corrected in the English translation; it should be “Works IV.” In any case the reference is to J. Edwards, *A Treatise concerning Religious Affections*, 1746. Cf. Bavinck, *GD* 3, 45, n. 2.

²⁵⁷ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 554. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 585.

²⁵⁸ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 554. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 585.

²⁵⁹ D.F. Strauß, *Die christliche Glaubenslehre in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung und im Kampfe mit der modernen Wissenschaft*, Tübingen 1840, vol. 1, 136. Cf. Berkouwer, *Heilige Schrift* 1, 42.

Bavinck denies that there is a real difference between Rome and the Reformation at this point. Both take their starting point in the *gratia interna*. The difference lies in the fact that for Rome the *testimonium* is more institutional, whereas for the Reformation it is more personal. Nevertheless, both have a subjective starting point and Bavinck even says that for both the deepest ground of faith lies in the human subject, in the Inner Light. This starting point does not necessarily lead to subjectivism, but it is remarkable that he makes these remarks at the outset of the discussion.

Bavinck's reception of Calvin also draws our attention. For him Calvin is the theological authority to define the *testimonium*. Bavinck does not yet give a clear definition of the *testimonium Spiritus sancti internum*. It is not isolated from the complete work of the Holy Spirit and it is not a source of new revelations, but a confirmation of the truth as it is revealed in Scripture. Bavinck accurately connects the phrase of the *sensus* of black and white, sweet and bitter things (*Institutes* 1.7.2) with the term *αὐτόπιστος* (*Institutes* 1.7.5). His definition of *αὐτόπιστος* is: bringing along its own authority and resting in itself. Nevertheless, Bavinck seems to place the *autopistia* as a characteristic of Scripture and the *testimonium* as the internal work of the Spirit over against each other. He starts with the *autopistia* of Scripture and then explains the *testimonium* as the way in which the self-convincing Scripture gains the victory in the hearts of believers through the Spirit. Scripture is objectively true (*αὐτόπιστος*) and must subjectively become true for us through the *testimonium*. His reception of Calvin is dominated by the object-subject dichotomy.

Bavinck critically evaluates the development of this doctrine in Reformed orthodoxy, where the *testimonium* is identified with the intellectual discernment of the *notae* and *criteria*. As we have seen in our chapter on Reformed orthodoxy, there is a tendency to interpret the *testimonium* in this way. Still his judgment of Reformed orthodoxy does not seem to be completely fair. He refers to Turretin, but for him Scripture with its *notae* was the argument on account of which we believe, the Holy Spirit the efficient cause and principle by which we believe, and the church the instrument and means through which we believe. The impression is made that this is a late rationalistic development, while already the *Synopsis* stated that the Spirit works through the *notae*, and Whitaker and Junius said that the Spirit gives power (*vis*) to the arguments. Bavinck says that some later Reformed orthodox theologians scarcely dare to speak of the *testimonium internum*, but the examples are inaccurate.²⁶⁰

²⁶⁰ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 554. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 585. Bavinck refers to W. à Brakel, *Redelijke godsdienst*, II.vii. Cf. W. À Brakel, *Logikē latreia, dat is Redelijke godsdienst in welken de goddelijke waarheden van het genade-verbond worden verklaard*, ed. J.H. Donner, Leiden 1881, vol. 1, 21. But Brakel writes on the *testimonium* in Brakel, *Redelijke Godsdienst*, 55 (II.xxxvi). Bavinck also refers to J. À Marck, *Het merch der christene got-geleertheit*², Rotterdam 1723, 23 (II.vi). Cf. J. À Marck, *Johannis Marckii Christianæ theologiæ Medulla didactico-eleantica*, ed. W. Van Irhoven Van Dam, Philadelphia 1825, 21. À Marck does not use the word *testimonium* but *illuminatio*; the first way in which we know that Scripture is inspired by God is through the illumination of the Spirit who enlightens and instructs us as a teacher.

6.5.2 Christian Epistemology

It seems to be disappointing that both the Roman Catholic and Protestant analysis of the deepest ground of faith finally end in the religious subject, but Bavinck is convinced that every other way to prove religious truth and find ultimate certainty leads to a deadlock. He values this subjective starting point positively; it is to the advantage of theology.²⁶¹ Bavinck refers to the general epistemology in sciences. Everything that is objective can only be approached from a subjective perspective. “The world of sound only has reality to those who can hear; the world of ideas only to the thinking mind.”²⁶² A human being is related to the whole world, he is a micro cosmos. God has created and still maintains these relationships and the Spirit of God is the principle and author of all life in us and the world. The life giving Spirit of God does not only bring human beings and animals to physical life, but is also the principle of our intellectual, moral, and spiritual life. *Ratio*, *conscientia*, and *sensus divinitatis* are capacities that come into action through the influence of the related phenomena in the world. This action can be called a testimony of the human mind to the corresponding phenomena. Our mind constantly testifies to the truth that comes to us from outside. It does not produce the truth, but it reproduces it and rethinks it.²⁶³

The testimony of the mind to the truth implies that the distance between the truth and the mind falls away in an immediate connection of both. The truth enters our mind, giving testimony to itself. “It is the same Spirit that objectively displays the truth before us and that subjectively elevates it to certainty within our spirit.”²⁶⁴ Bavinck develops a Christian epistemology; connecting the knowledge of truth in general with the *Logos* who dwells in the world and testifies to our minds. “All knowledge of the truth is essentially a testimony that the human spirit bears to it and in the deepest ground a testimony of God’s Spirit to the Word by whom all things are made.”²⁶⁵ The general testimony in the human spirit regarding the truth is both the supposition and the analogy of the special *testimonium* of the Spirit. At this point Bavinck refers to Calvin who states that the inward law engraved upon the hearts of all human beings affirms the Ten Commandments.²⁶⁶

Analogy does not mean identity; the *principium externum* of the Christian religion is not the general revelation of God in creation but the special revelation in Christ. The *principium internum* of the Christian religion must correspond with that revelation. Only the same Spirit who has spoken through the prophets and apostles can give a

²⁶¹ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 555. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 586.

²⁶² Bavinck, *GD* 1, 555. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 586.

²⁶³ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 556. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 587. The Dutch term *nadenken* (to think) literally means re-think.

²⁶⁴ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 557. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 587.

²⁶⁵ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 557. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 587.

²⁶⁶ Calvin, *Institutes* 2.8.1, *OS* 3, 344. He also mentions S. Maresius and J.H. Alsted in a footnote. Cf. S. Maresius, *Collegium theologicum, sive Systema breve universae theologiae*, Groningen 1659, 11-12. Alsted, *Theologia scholastica didactica*, 31. In the later editions he also refers to P. Rabus, ‘Vom Wirken und Wohnen des göttlichen Geistes in der Menschenseele,’ *Neue Kirchliche Zeitschrift* 15 (1904), 768-786, 825-859. In these articles Rabus approaches the *testimonium* from a general psychological perspective. Rabus only serves as an extra example of this analogy; there are no major differences between the first and the later editions of *Reformed Dogmatics* at this point.

testimony to the truth in our hearts, lift us up above all doubt, and bring us to absolute certainty. Thus the *testimonium* of the Spirit in Scripture precedes and founds the *testimonium* in the hearts of believers. Just like the thoughts of God are objectively embodied in the world and are deduced from it by the human spirit, so also the special revelation is first fully given in Scripture and then sealed in our hearts through the testimony of the Spirit. The *testimonium* is not a new revelation of an unknown truth, but it makes the truth – that exists independently of us – known to us, sealing it to our consciousness. “The relation of the testimony of the Spirit in the hearts of believers to the truth of revelation in Scripture is mutatis mutandis no other than that of the human mind to the object of its knowledge.”²⁶⁷

Bavinck applies the relationship between the *principium externum* of the Christian religion in God’s revelation and the *testimonium* to epistemology. “But the analogy extends even further. The objects of human knowledge are all αὐτόπιστα, they rest in themselves, their existence can be acknowledged but not proved.”²⁶⁸ Demonstration is deduction of uncertain things to certain things and of dubitable theses to theses that are generally accepted. “The *prima principia* on which all proofs ultimately rest cannot be proved; they only stand established through faith and to faith.”²⁶⁹ It is impossible for example to prove that stealing is wrong to some one who denies the authority of the moral law.

The moral law is αὐτόπιστος; it rests in itself; it is like the sun that is only visible by its own rays; it does not depend on proof or argumentation; it is powerful because it exists, postulates and maintains itself. Its power lies in its authority, in the divine majesty with which it brings its ‘you shall’ home to our conscience.²⁷⁰

The answer to the question why one listens to the moral law is because it reveals the will of God, but if it is asked why one believes that the moral law is the will of God, an adequate answer cannot be given. One can refer to the *notae* and *criteria*, but this is only a side road. All *principia* rest in themselves and finally can only be known through faith. In theology therefore only propositions that are derived from its *principium* can be proved. The Deity of Christ can be proved if one recognizes Scripture as *principium*, but the *principium* itself cannot be proved.

The authority of Scripture, however, rests in itself and cannot be proved. Scripture is αὐτόπιστος and therefore the final ground of faith. A deeper ground cannot be given. The only

²⁶⁷ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 558. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 588. According to Van Dijk, Bavinck understands the *testimonium* as something formal, but uses expressions that suggest a material testimony. Van Dijk rejects the word “testimony” because it always suggests some kind of content and would rather speak of “illumination.” Van Dijk, ‘Testimonium,’ 252, 253. Veenhof agrees with Van Dijk’s criticism, but thinks that Bavinck’s expressions that suggest a material witness can be explained by the fact that the testimony that is formal in reality always appears as a seal of the content of revelation in Scripture. Veenhof, *Revelatie en inspiratie*, 491-492, n. 14.

²⁶⁸ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 558. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 589. Cf. “Every science is grounded in general principia that stand by themselves and of themselves. All knowledge rests in faith.” Bavinck, *GD* 2, 41. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 2, 71.

²⁶⁹ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 559. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 589. Bavinck cites the Latin adage: “Contra principia negantem non est disputandum.”

²⁷⁰ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 559. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 589. Aquinas says that the precepts of the natural law are to the practical reason, what the first principles of demonstrations are to the speculative reason; because both are self-evident principles (*principia per se nota*). Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II,q.94,a.2. Cf. I-II,q.91,a.3.

answer to the question: ‘Why do you believe Scripture?’ is: ‘Because it is the Word of God.’ But if the next question is: ‘Why do you believe that Holy Scripture is the Word of God?’ the Christian cannot give an answer.²⁷¹

The *notae* and *criteria* of Scripture cannot be the grounds of our faith; they are only characteristics that we discover in Scripture. The *autopistia* of Scripture is the deepest ground of faith.

Deus dixit is the primum principium to which all the dogmas also those regarding Scripture can be traced back. The bond of the soul to Scripture as the Word of God lies behind the consciousness and underneath the proofs; it is of a mystical nature just like the faith in the principia of the various sciences.²⁷²

While Bavinck takes his starting point in the human subject he maintains that for the believing subject Scripture or the *autopistia* of Scripture is the final ground of faith. This is not strange, because it is essentially the same with the *principia* of science and with the moral law, although the tie of the soul to Scripture is of a mystical nature.

It has become clear why Bavinck links the concept of the *autopistia* of Scripture and the *testimonium* of the Spirit with his general epistemology. The ground of faith lies in the human subject for Bavinck and he demonstrates that this is the case in Roman Catholic as well as in Protestant theology. This analysis, however, brings him close to subjectivity. The Christian believes Scripture because it is the Word of God, but cannot answer the question why he believes that it is the Word of God, for Scripture is αὐτόπιστος. According to Bavinck, this is not a real problem, because the question how we know for sure that the objects of our general knowledge really exist is also unanswerable; they are also αὐτόπιστα, their existence can be acknowledged but not proved.

According to Veenhof, it is characteristic of Bavinck that he bases the doctrine of the *testimonium* on his general epistemology.²⁷³ But Bavinck’s general epistemology is so colored by his theological concept that it is hard to determine whether his epistemology rests on his theology or whether his theological epistemology is based on philosophy. Bavinck expresses the correspondence between object and subject in the terms of the divine *Logos* and says that all knowledge is a testimony of the human spirit to the truth and ultimately a testimony of God’s Spirit to the Word by whom all things are made. The objects of our knowledge are αὐτόπιστα, just like Scripture is αὐτόπιστος. Epistemology and theology are interrelated and united by the all-embracing correspondence between object and subject.

For Bavinck the moral law is an example for this analogy. “For the regenerate person faith in the revelation is just as natural as the recognition of the moral law is for the moral person.”²⁷⁴ The question arises if Bavinck’s appeal to Calvin and the representatives of Reformed orthodoxy for this analogy is correct at this point. Calvin’s incidental remarks on the correspondence of the conscience with the Ten

²⁷¹ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 559. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 589.

²⁷² Bavinck, *GD* 1, 559-560. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 590.

²⁷³ Veenhof, *Revelatie en inspiratie*, 490.

²⁷⁴ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 562. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 592. Bavinck is possibly influenced by Hodge in this analogy. “The faith of a Christian in the Bible is [...] analogous to that which all men have in the moral law.” Hodge, *Systematic Theology* 3, 70.

Commandments form a too narrow basis for a general epistemology.²⁷⁵ The further development of Reformed orthodoxy renders a broader basis for Bavinck at this point, but he rejects this development as rationalistic.

In this paragraph Bavinck has given two more answers to the question what the *testimonium* is not. It is not a source of knowledge and it is not the ground of faith. Scripture as the *principium cognoscendi externum* remains the only source and the final basis of faith. Scripture is *αὐτόπιστος* and therefore the ground of faith; a deeper ground cannot be given. The Spirit creates an organ in the heart of the Christian that corresponds to this self-convincing revelation. This organ makes the Christian sensible for the *testimonium* through which the Spirit of God witnesses inwardly to the truth of God that is revealed in Scripture.

6.5.3 The *Testimonium* and the Christian Life

If the bond of the soul to Scripture is of a mystical nature and the *autopistia* of Scripture is the deepest ground of faith, the Christian faith seems to be arbitrary. Christians simply say that God has given them this faith and do not give reasons why they believe that Scripture is the Word of God, but a Muslim can prove his faith in the Koran and every superstitious person can prove his superstition in the same way.²⁷⁶ Answering this objection, Bavinck points to the evidences of the revelation. The deepest ground of faith is the divine authority of the revelation, but this does not mean that a Christian has to be silent against its opponents; believers and unbelievers are in the same position because the convictions on both sides are rooted in the heart and can only be supported by arguments *a posteriori*. “Historical and rational proofs will not convert anyone, but for the defense of the faith they are as strong as the arguments of the opponents for the justification of their unbelief.”²⁷⁷ Moreover, Bavinck points to the fact that the witness given by believers to divine revelation is universally Christian. The *testimonium* is not the witness of a private spirit but of the Spirit who dwells in all believers; therefore it is also the witness given by the church of all ages to Scripture as the Word of God.

The *testimonium* must be placed in the context of the whole spiritual life of the Christian “Though believers cannot point to a deeper ground for their belief than the divine authority of Scripture, they can explain how they came to this belief.”²⁷⁸ There are various ways in which faith is aroused and strengthened, but it always has a religious-ethical and spiritual nature. “Believing is an act of the intellect, an immediate connection of the consciousness to revelation, unmediated by proofs.”²⁷⁹ But faith never comes alone, it presupposes a change in the relation of the whole person to God; it presupposes rebirth, the transformation of the will. Faith is not an intellectual conclusion of a syllogism, neither is it a decision of the will, people cannot believe at their own command. Believing is “a free and spontaneous acknowledgement of the Word of God by the mind. As the eye in seeing the sun is immediately convinced of its

²⁷⁵ Calvin assumed the existence of the *lex naturae* but he did not develop a theology of natural law. S.E. Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory: Nature and the Natural Order in the Thought of John Calvin*, Durham 1991, 94.

²⁷⁶ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 560. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 590.

²⁷⁷ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 560-561. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 591.

²⁷⁸ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 561. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 591.

²⁷⁹ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 561. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 591.

reality, so the regenerate person perceives the truth of God's revelation."²⁸⁰ Faith is an act of the understanding (*intellectus*) that is moved to acknowledge the gospel by the will (*voluntas*). "The whole person is therefore involved in believing, his understanding, his will, his heart, the person in the core of his being, in the innermost part of his existence."²⁸¹ There is resistance against this faith in the heart of the believer; faith implies a continual struggle between the flesh and the spirit. This natural resistance confirms the faith, for if faith does not arise from human nature and is so contrary to the flesh then its presence is a proof of its truth.²⁸²

The connection between the *testimonium* and the religious-ethical life of the Christian is so important for Bavinck that he criticizes Calvin and the other Reformed theologians for applying the *testimonium* too one-sidedly to the authority of Scripture.²⁸³ This not only isolates the *testimonium* from the life of faith, but also from the witness of the Spirit of adoption. According to Bavinck, the witness of the Spirit gives assurance of salvation and therefore also certainty of the authority of Scripture. The Spirit never brings us to a believing submission to Scripture without also giving us a sense of adoption.²⁸⁴

Thus far Bavinck has merely described what the *testimonium* is not. It is not (1) an institutional phenomenon as it is for Rome, but an organic and personal force. It is not (2) a source of new revelations, but a confirmation of the truth in Scripture. It is not (3) an intellectual ability to discern the *notae* and *criteria* of Scripture, but the testimony that the Spirit gives within the believer to the truth outside of the believer. It is not (4) isolated from the general epistemological testimony of the human intellect to the object of its knowledge; this general testimony rather is an analogy of the *testimonium*. It is not (5) the ultimate ground of faith – only Scripture is ἀυτόπιστος – but it is the only means by which the believer accepts Scripture. It does not (6) exclude evidences for the divine character of Scripture, although proofs never bring a person to faith. It is not (7) an individual or private witness, but the witness of the Spirit who dwells in all believers; and therefore the witness of the church to Scripture. Finally it does not (8) stand isolated from the whole religious-ethical work of the Holy Spirit and therefore it must not be applied exclusively to the authority of Scripture. At this point Bavinck finally gives a positive definition of the *testimonium*:

The *testimonium Spiritus sancti* is first of all an assurance that we are children of God. That is the central truth, the core and focus of this witness. But in that connection it also seals the objective truths of salvation, the transcendent and surpassing truths as Frank called them.²⁸⁵

The *testimonium* is intimately connected with faith itself. It is a witness of the Holy Spirit in, with, and through our own spirit in believing.²⁸⁶ Believing itself is the witnessing of the Spirit in our hearts and through our spirit. Bavinck repeats that the

²⁸⁰ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 562. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 592.

²⁸¹ Bavinck, *Zekerheid des geloofs*, 84. Cf. Bavinck, *Certainty of Faith*, 78.

²⁸² Bavinck, *GD* 1, 563. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 593.

²⁸³ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 563. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 593. It is an interesting question whether this critique is right. Cf. Berkouwer, *Heilige Schrift* 1, 49-51, Veenhof, *Revelatie en inspiratie*, 494-495 and Van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek*, 131, n. 293.

²⁸⁴ Cf. Berkouwer, *Heilige Schrift* 1, 46.

²⁸⁵ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 564. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 594. The reference to Frank is remarkable at this point and also occurs in the first edition. Bavinck, *GD*¹ 1, 504.

²⁸⁶ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 564. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 593.

testimonium is not the cognitive source of knowledge; it does not reveal the truths or enable us to deduce them from our spiritual life. It only gives us a spiritual understanding of the truths revealed in Scripture, sealing them subjectively. The actual object of this *testimonium* is the *divinitas* of the truth in Christ and not the historical facts of salvation history. This is not a restriction, for the *testimonium* extends to all that is revealed in Scripture and may not be narrowed to the religious or moral truths. Bavinck maintains the historical character of the Christian religion; the historical facts are not the object of the *testimonium*, but they belong to the core of the divine revelation. The Spirit does not testify immediately to historical facts, but to the divinity of the revelation of these historical facts. The facts – especially the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ – are essential for Christianity; the revelation of God consists in the words of Scripture as well as in the facts to which these words refer.²⁸⁷

Because the *testimonium* is the witness of the Spirit to the divine character of the revelation of the saving acts of God in history, it also applies to the authority of Scripture. Scripture not only contains a doctrine regarding Christ, but also a doctrine regarding itself. The sealing of the trustworthiness of the Scripture is implicated in the sealing of the *divinitas* of the truth in Christ. We know that the apostolic witnesses are trustworthy because the Holy Spirit confirms the divine nature of the revealed truths and one of these truths is the teaching of the Scripture regarding itself.

The *testimonium Spiritus Sancti* with respect to Scripture does not consist in the fact that the believer receives an immediate heavenly vision of the divinity of Scripture, nor that he mediately comes to the conclusion of this divinity from the *notae* and criteria, nor that he ascends from the experience of the power that radiates from it to its divinity, but it consists in this that he freely and spontaneously acknowledges the authority, with which Holy Scripture everywhere asserts itself and which it repeatedly expressly claims for itself.²⁸⁸

Again the real object of this *testimonium* is not the authenticity or the canonicity or even the inspiration of Scripture, but its divinity, its divine authority. The *testimonium* binds the believer as strongly to Scripture as to the person of Christ. Because the doctrine of Scripture is so important for the whole religious life of the Christian, it cannot rest and does not rest on rational evidences, but has its deepest ground in the witness of the Spirit.

6.5.4 Circular Reasoning

In the first edition of *Reformed Dogmatics* Bavinck admits that the *testimonium* implies circular reasoning.

In a certain sense circular reasoning lies behind this *testimonium*. The *divinitas* of Scripture is proved from this witness and the *divinitas* of this witness is proved from Scripture. The *testimonium Spiritus sancti*, however, occurs here in two ways. The believer first feels that his soul is bound to the Word of God and then he learns from Holy Scripture that that faith in Scripture is worked by the Holy Spirit. Strictly speaking the testimony of the Spirit is not the final ground his faith, for only Scripture is *αὐτόπιστος*, but it is the means by which he acknowledges the divine character of Scripture.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁷ Bavinck agrees with his Princeton colleague Geerhardus Vos: “The Person is immanent in the facts, and the facts are the revelation of the Person.” Bavinck, *GD* 1, 566. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 595. Cf. G. Vos, ‘Christian Faith and the Truthfulness of Bible History,’ *Princeton Theological Review* 4 (1906), 289-305, 304.

²⁸⁸ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 566-567. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 596.

²⁸⁹ Bavinck, *GD*¹ 1, 506.

In the second edition the charge of circular reasoning is explicitly denied; Bavinck summarizes his position by stating that the *testimonium* includes the witness that the Spirit gives in Scripture concerning Scripture. “This witness comes to us indirectly in all the divine characteristics (criteria, notae) that are imprinted in the content and form of Holy Scripture. It also comes to us directly in all those positive pronouncements that Scripture contains regarding its own divine origin.”²⁹⁰ The *testimonium* also includes the witness that the Spirit gives concerning Scripture in the church throughout the ages; indirectly in all the blessings the church has received through Scripture and directly in the united confession of the church of all ages that Scripture is the Word of God. Next to the *testimonium* in Scripture and in the church comes the witness that the Spirit

bears in the heart of every believer concerning the divine authority of Scripture and this witness is included in the bond by which every believer is bound in his spiritual life to Scripture with its self-witness and to the church with its confession and comes to expression in the personal conviction that the Word of God is the truth.²⁹¹

The witness of the Spirit in Scripture is the *principium propter quod credimus*, the witness of the Spirit in the church the *instrumentum per quod credimus*, and the witness of the Spirit in the heart of the individual the *causa efficiens fidei* the *principium a quo seu per quod credimus*.

It seems strange that the *testimonium* is limited to the authority of Scripture in this paragraph, while that limitation is rejected in earlier paragraphs.²⁹² The question rises why this paragraph on the three concentric circles is added.²⁹³ Bavinck corrects the charge of circular reasoning by connecting the *testimonium* to the *notae* and *criteria* of Scripture and by placing it in the context of the confession of the church. If the *testimonium* is only an individual witness of the Spirit to Scripture, it is a form of circular reasoning, because then Scripture is proved from the *testimonium* and the *testimonium* is proved from Scripture. The *testimonium internum*, however, is not individualistic, but related to the *testimonium* of the Spirit in Scripture and confirmed by the *testimonium* of the Spirit in the church.

A footnote refers to Friedrich Spanheim (1632-1701) for the triple *testimonium*. Spanheim says that Scripture is of divine origin both in its content (*materia*) and in its form (*forma*) and therefore authoritative.²⁹⁴ He distinguishes between the recommendation (*suasio*) of this authority by arguments and the persuasion (*persuasio*) of this authority through the *testimonium internum*. This *testimonium internum* is an illumination of the mind, an opening of the heart and a witness to our spirit that the Word is the truth. In this *testimonium* the Spirit principally uses the arguments from

²⁹⁰ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 567. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 597.

²⁹¹ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 567-568. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 597.

²⁹² According to Van Keulen, this new paragraph damages the original lucidity, because Bavinck seems to narrow the *testimonium* to the authority of Scripture, while he first rejected that view. Van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek*, 131, n. 292.

²⁹³ The term “concentric circles” is derived from Bremmer, who says that Bavinck in this extensive résumé showed how he saw the *testimonium* of the Spirit at work in different spheres and as it were in concentric circles. Bremmer, *Bavinck als dogmaticus*, 179.

²⁹⁴ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 568, n. 1. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 597, n. 85. The theological works of Spanheim are divided into exegetical and didactic works. In the second part a few disputations from Heidelberg are included, one of them dealing with *De verbo Dei scripto*. F. Spanheim, *Opera omnia in tres tomos divisa* 3, Leiden 1703, 1200-1204

Scripture itself (the *notae* and *criteriae*) and secondarily the arguments from other sources.²⁹⁵

The ultimate *resolutio* of our faith lies in the witness of holy Scripture (*testimonium Scripturae Sacrae*). As its doctrinal and normative *principium*, it is canonical and beyond proof. This *testimonium Scripturae* can be divided in the *testimonium* of Scripture, “the primary motive of faith or the principium by which faith is generated or the argumentum on account of which we believe (*argumentum propter quod credimus*).”²⁹⁶ The *testimonium externum* of the church “is the second motive or instrument through which we believe (*instrumentum per quod credimus*); it is introductory and supportive.”²⁹⁷ The *testimonium internum Spiritus sancti* “is the efficient cause of faith and the *principium* by which or because of which we believe (*principium a quo seu per quod credimus*); it is originating and effecting.”²⁹⁸

According to Bavinck, the *testimonium* in Scripture, in the church, and in the individual, “is from one and the same Spirit; it comes from Scripture and enters through the church into the heart of the individual believer. Still, in each of these three forms, it has a meaning of its own.”²⁹⁹ Bavinck adopts the distinction of Spanheim, but says that the *testimonium* of the Spirit in Scripture is the *principium* by which or the *argumentum* on account of which Scripture becomes canonical and beyond proof. This differs from saying that Scripture is canonical and beyond proof and that the *testimonium* of Scripture is the *principium* by which or the *argumentum* on account of which we believe this. Bavinck also omits the expression *testimonium externum* with regards to the church; obviously for Spanheim the distinction *externum* versus *internum* did not apply to Scripture versus faith.

Bavinck’s main point is the distinction between the *principium propter quod credimus* and the *principium a quo seu per quod credimus*. Scripture is the final ground of faith the *principium* on account of which we believe and the Spirit is the efficient cause of faith, the *principium* through which we believe.

With this distinction the charge of circular reasoning that is usually advanced against the *testimonium* of the Holy Spirit is deprived of its power. Strictly speaking the testimony of the Spirit is not the final ground but the means of faith. The ground of faith can only be Holy Scripture, or rather the authority of God, that comes to the believer, materially in the content and formally in the witness of Scripture.³⁰⁰

Compared with the first edition Bavinck now denies that the *testimonium* implies circular reasoning and places the witness of the Spirit in the heart of the individual believer in the broader perspective of the witness of the Spirit in Scripture and in the church. The first edition had:

Strictly speaking the testimony of the Spirit is not the final ground his faith, for only Scripture is αὐτόπιστος, but it is the means by which he acknowledges the divine character of Scripture.

²⁹⁵ Spanheim, *Opera* 3, 1202.

²⁹⁶ “tanquam *motivum* κύριον ad fidem, seu principium quo gignitur, vel argumentum *propter quod credimus*.” Spanheim, *Opera* 3, 1202.

²⁹⁷ “tanquam *motivum* alterum, seu *instrumentum per quod credimus*, εισαγωγικόν καί ὑπουργικόν.” Spanheim, *Opera* 3, 1202.

²⁹⁸ “tanquam causam *efficientem* fidei, & *principium a quo seu per quod credimus*, ἀρχηγικόν καί ἐνεργητικόν.” Spanheim, *Opera* 3, 1202.

²⁹⁹ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 568. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 597.

³⁰⁰ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 568. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 597.

Scripture and witness of the Holy Spirit are related to each other as objective truth and subjective assurance, as the first principia and their self-evidence, as the light and the eye.³⁰¹ In the second edition the term αὐτόπιστος is deleted. Bavinck must have felt the tension between the emphasis on the *notae* and *criteria* of Scripture in the second edition and the use of αὐτόπιστος. To avoid circular reasoning the witness of the Spirit in Scripture is underlined; the *testimonium* comes to us indirectly via the divine characteristics of Scripture. The emphasis shifts from the *autopistia* of Scripture to the *notae* and *criteria* of its divinity. In the second edition the acknowledgement of circular reasoning is deleted, because it weakened the “Ground of Faith” in the first edition. The addition regarding the concentric circles is an attempt to avoid subjectivism.

Bavinck possibly was influenced by Warfield’s review of the *Certainty of Faith* published between the first and second edition of Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics*. Warfield emphasized that the Spirit did not work a blind faith, but rendered the power to the soul to respond to the objective grounds of faith. “Our Reformed fathers did not overlook this: they always posited the presence, in the production of faith, of the ‘*argumentum, propter quod credo*,’ as well as the ‘*Principium seu causa efficiens a quo ad credendum adducor*.’”³⁰² Warfield possibly made Bavinck aware of this distinction in Reformed orthodoxy.³⁰³

Bavinck’s theology reveals a tension between the *testimonium* of the Spirit and the *autopistia* of Scripture. The certainty of the *testimonium* is immediate; the Spirit enlightens the mind of the believer and he recognizes the self-convincing authority of Scripture. Nonetheless, the *testimonium internum* cannot be separated from the *notae* and *criteria* of Scripture – the external testimony of the Spirit in Scripture – or from the testimony of the Spirit in the church. Bavinck shifts his emphasis from an immediate witness of the Spirit regarding the authority of Scripture to a mediate witness in the later editions of *Reformed Dogmatics*. In the first edition the *testimonium* is independent of the *notae* and *criteria* while in the final edition the *testimonium* works via the *notae* and *criteria* and via the witness of the church. In both editions Scripture is αὐτόπιστος and the Spirit makes the believer aware of the *autopistia* of Scripture. In the first edition, however, the Spirit works immediately in the second edition more via the evidences.

6.5.5 Achilles’ Heel or Cornerstone

Our final question is whether Bavinck succeeds in his attempt to avoid subjectivism. Some evaluations of Bavinck’s theology emphasize his assertions that he rejects subjectivism. According to Veenhof, Bavinck stands in constant opposition to subjectivism.³⁰⁴ Van Keulen agrees that Bavinck offers resistance to every form of subjectivism, although true knowledge only arises when human beings become

³⁰¹ Bavinck, *GD*¹ 1, 506.

³⁰² Warfield, ‘Review of *Zekerheid*,’ 115. Cf. Warfield, ‘Introduction to Francis R. Beattie’s *Apologetics*,’ 99. Bavinck must have been familiar with both of Warfield’s writings.

³⁰³ It is not likely that these remarks led Bavinck immediately to Spanheim, because Warfield does not mention him, but as we have seen the distinction is also made by Turretin who says that Scripture with its *notae*, is the *argumentum propter quod* of faith; the Holy Spirit is the *principium* or *causa efficiens a qua* of faith and the church is the *medium* and *instrumentum per quod* of faith. Turretin, *Institutio*, II.vi.6. Cf. Turretin, *Institutes* 1, 87.

³⁰⁴ Veenhof, *Revelatie en inspiratie*, 483.

subjectively aware of the objective reality.³⁰⁵ The objectivity of revelation in Bavinck's theology is also emphasized by Meijers; its existentiality rests on that objectivity.³⁰⁶ These assertions are due to the character of these studies. Veenhof compares Bavinck with the Ethical Theology and then his rejection of their subjectivism comes to the foreground. Van Keulen discusses the development of the doctrine of Scripture in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. The position of Bavinck is objective compared with the later development in these churches. Meijers is bound to interpret the subjective elements in Bavinck's theology as existential elements, because he interprets Bavinck from the scheme of objectivity and existentiality.

But this is not the only way to interpret Bavinck. We must be careful not to conclude too quickly that Bavinck's position is not subjective, because he tries to avoid subjectivism and expressly rejects it. Apparently he struggles with the issue and in a theological evaluation the question if he is successful in this struggle must be answered. Bremmer shows that Bavinck sometimes uses expressions that imply subjectivism and ultimately places the ground of faith in the religious subject, in fact taking the same position as the Ethical Theology. Bremmer calls this one of the vulnerable points in Bavinck's theology.³⁰⁷ A few times Bavinck calls the *testimonium internum* the deepest ground of faith.³⁰⁸

In the final paragraph on the "Ground of Faith" a balance is sought between the objective truth of Scripture and the subjective certainty of faith. The *testimonium* is not always equally strong and clear in the heart of the individual believer, because it is intimately tied in with a person's life of faith and is subject to doubt and opposition. "Our faith in Scripture increases and decreases along with our trust in Christ."³⁰⁹ Therefore it is important to remember that the *testimonium* is more than an individual opinion. Scripture has been given to the whole church, to believers of all times and places. The *testimonium* is not a private opinion but the witness of the church of all ages.

The whole confession of the believing community is a *testimonium Spiritus Sancti*. It is the 'yes!' and 'Amen!' which that community utters in response to the truth of God. It is the 'Abba! Father! Your word is truth' that rises up from the hearts of all believers. The *testimonium Spiritus Sancti* is so far from being the Achilles' heel of Protestantism that it should rather be called the cornerstone of our Christian confession, the crown and seal of all Christian truth the triumph of the Holy Spirit in the world. Take away the testimony of the Holy

³⁰⁵ Van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek*, 134, Cf. 118, 154.

³⁰⁶ Meijers, *Objectiviteit en existentialiteit*, 55.

³⁰⁷ R.H. Bremmer, *In gesprek met oudere en nieuwere theologen: de actualiteit van de gereformeerde theologie*, Kampen 1991, 52.

³⁰⁸ Veenhof finds it remarkable that Bavinck lays the deepest ground of faith in the believer and, at the same time, maintains that not the *testimonium internum*, but Scripture is the ground of faith. "The foundation on which a house rests is part of the house itself. But the ground on which the house with its foundation rests is outside of the house. So one can call the believing subject the foundation of faith, insofar as this faith is based on the deepest personal conviction; but the ground of the – in this sense subjective – faith is Scripture." Veenhof, *Revelatie en inspiratie*, 498-499. Veenhof refers to S. Greijdanus, *Heilige geschiedenis volgens de vier evangeliënverhalen: Geboorte van Jezus Christus en aanvang van zijn publieke optreden*, Goes 1951, 25. Cf. S. Greijdanus, 'Erkenningsgrond van den kanon,' *Gereformeerd theologisch tijdschrift* 14 (1913), 269-314, 288.

³⁰⁹ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 569. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 598.

Spirit, not only in relation to Scripture, but to all the truths of redemption, and there is no more church.³¹⁰

Understood as the collective witness of the church of all ages to the truth the *testimonium* is not devoid of apologetic value over against the opponents of the church. Taken individually the “yes” of one person is no stronger than the “no” of another. But conceived as the witness of the Spirit in the hearts of all the children of God it is able to impress even the most persistent opponent. It is not a logical argument or mathematical proof, but retains a power of its own, just like the *principia* of science or the moral law.

The power of all these moral forces lies precisely in the fact that they do not offer rational proof for themselves but with sublime majesty confront the consciousness of every human being. They are powerful as a result of the authority with which they assert themselves. [...] What power in the world is comparable to that of Scripture? The *testimonium Spiritus Sancti* is the triumph of the foolishness of the cross over the wisdom of the world.³¹¹

Bavinck turns the argument of D.F. Strauß around.³¹² What Strauß indicates as weakness is actually the strength of the Christian faith.³¹³ For Bavinck the power of the *autopistia* of Scripture lies in the fact that it does not have to demonstrate itself, but confronts the human conscience with the truth of God. In the *testimonium* of the Spirit through Scripture and to Scripture in the individual and in the communion of saints, the weakness and foolishness of the cross appears to be stronger than the wisdom of the world. His concept of the correspondence between Scripture and faith, between objective truth and subjective assurance of the truth is an ultimate attempt to hold object and subject in balance. He is unable to clarify the last secret of the certainty of faith, but in his weakness lies his strength.³¹⁴ His wrestling with subjective certainty and objective truth displays a search for balance. Perhaps Bavinck is led too much by a dualism between the objective and the subjective approach to the certainty of faith. He can scarcely find a navigable route between these two cliffs. In spite of his sympathy for the Ethical Theology, Bavinck sensed that only an objective revelation that stands over against the believer and comes to him from God’s side with authority can protect the Christian faith from the relativism that is always the consequence of placing the

³¹⁰ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 569-570. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 599.

³¹¹ Bavinck, *GD* 1, 570. Cf. Bavinck, *RD* 1, 599-600.

³¹² Bavinck is probably influenced by an article of C.B. Klaiber at this point. Klaiber writes: “Weit entfernt davon, daß uns diese Lehre als die Achillesferse des Protestantismus, wie Strauß (Dogmatik I, 146) meint, erscheint, dünkt sie uns vielmehr gerade seine rechte Stärke zu seyn.” C.B. Klaiber, ‘Die Lehre der altprotestantischen Dogmatiker von dem *testimonium Spiritus Sancti*,’ *Jahrbücher für deutsche Theologie* 2 (1857), 1-54, 12.

³¹³ There is a parallel between Bavinck and Barth at this point. Barth answers Strauß’s criticism by stating that though there is no Protestant “system,” the Protestant doctrine gladly finds its imperishable power in this weakest spot where nothing else remains than the confession of the *testimonium*. K. Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik*, vol. 1.2, Zurich 1945, 598. Cf. Berkouwer, *Heilige Schrift* 1, 80. A further comparison of K. Barth and H. Bavinck regarding the relationship of the objective truth of revelation and the subjective certainty of the believer would be very interesting. Veenhof points to a parallel between both theologians in the idea that God can only be known by God. Veenhof, *Revelatie en inspiratie*, 491, n. 12. Cf. Bavinck, *GD* 1, 471, 557.

³¹⁴ Cf. Veenhof, *Revelatie en inspiratie*, 129-130. Veenhof cites W.J. Aalders, ‘In memoriam Dr. H. Bavinck,’ *Stemmen des tijds* 10 (1921), 135.

foundation of the faith in the heart.

In faith only one thing remains: clinging to the unknown God who has made himself known in Jesus Christ. Then one does not speak of subjective faith in objective truths, but of the surrender of faith to Him who through Word and Spirit graciously comes to us. In this respect the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti* is truly, although the Achilles' heel of Protestantism, still the cornerstone of the Christian. "Believing is clinging to God as though seeing the Invisible, knowing his love, resting on his grace and hoping in his faithfulness."³¹⁵

6.6 Conclusions and Theological Considerations

We have seen how Bavinck wrestles with the relationship of the *autopistia* of Scripture and the *testimonium* of the Spirit in his quest for the final certainty of faith; his position deserves further theological consideration on the following points:

1. The way in which Bavinck deals with the Christian tradition is fascinating. He wishes to revitalize Reformed theology through a reorientation on the sources. Calvin is his main point of orientation, but he also takes the development of Reformed orthodoxy into account in a positive though critical evaluation. Bavinck highly values the catholic tradition of the church, because true Reformed theology is catholic theology. Bavinck is in continual discussion with the contemporary Ethical theologians and shares their interest in the relationship of Christianity and culture, but tries to fence his position off from its subjectivistic implications. Moreover, the experimental spiritual climate of the Secession places an existential stamp on his theology. It is not always easy to untie the different influences and to discover where Bavinck exactly stands. As we have seen in the example of the *principia* he can use the terminology of the tradition and give it a different meaning, leaving the impression of continuity. Nonetheless, in his profound knowledge of the history and development of Christian theology and in his desire to revitalize the Reformed tradition from the sources and apply it to modern challenges, Bavinck is an example for Reformed theology today. Reformed theology should not be a mere reproduction of timeless truths but a reconsideration of the revelation of God in the contemporary context.

2. The relationship between objective truth and subjective certainty is foundational for Bavinck's theology. The tension between both appears in the distinction *principium externum* and *internum* he chooses as a structuring principle for his prolegomena at an early stage in his theological development. The tension also appears when Bavinck maintains that *Deus dixit* (God has said it) is the *principium* and therefore the end of all contradiction in theology and at the same time admits that faith in the authority of Scripture ultimately rests on a subjective conviction or on the Inner Light. In final analysis both Rome and the Reformation lay the deepest ground of faith in the religious subject. It also appears in his epistemology, which is dominated by the correspondence between object and subject on three levels: the level of science, the level of general revelation, and the level of special revelation. This tension leads to the theological question whether Bavinck was able to avoid subjectivism. The answer to this question largely depends on the perspective. Compared with the Ethical Theology or with the later development of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands Bavinck

³¹⁵ Bavinck, *Zekerheid des geloofs*, 87. Cf. Bavinck, *Certainty of Faith*, 81.

emphasizes the importance of objective and historical truth, but compared with his sources in Reformed orthodoxy and his colleague at Princeton, Bavinck takes a subjective position. He expressly rejects subjectivism and tries to avoid it by stressing the evidences or by pointing to the universal Christian witness regarding Scripture. In the meantime, his theology remains subjectivistic, because Bavinck's epistemology is dominated by the subject-object dichotomy. Something within us must necessarily correspond to the truth outside of us. The predominance of this dichotomy in the *principia*, causes the shift of faith from soteriology to the prolegomena. A subjective element is introduced in the foundational structure of systematic theology, next to the objective revelation in Scripture. This may have had a larger impact on the development of Neo-Calvinism and the acceptance of liberalism in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands than the concept of organic inspiration. The way in which Bavinck struggles with this dichotomy places us for the theological question how to deal with the relationship between objective truth and subjective certainty in a postmodern context. This is one of the most foundational questions for Christian theology at this moment.

3. The *autopistia* of Scripture counterbalances the subjectivistic tendency in Bavinck's theology. The *principium* of theology is connected with the *principia* in other sciences; just like the axioms of science are αὐτόπιστος to the natural mind, so Scripture is αὐτόπιστος for faith. The term distinguishes Scripture from the church, the confessions, and the Christian consciousness. It also indicates the Reformation principle of interpretation: Scripture is αὐτόπιστος and therefore the judge of all controversies and its own interpreter. Bavinck interprets Calvin accurately, connecting the term αὐτόπιστος with the *sensus* of black and white, sweet and bitter things, but his interpretation is dominated by the object-subject dichotomy. Scripture is objectively true (αὐτόπιστος) and must subjectively become true for us through the *testimonium*. Whereas Calvin used the *autopistia* of Scripture as a confessional statement, Reformed orthodoxy saw it as a logical necessity, and Warfield interpreted it as a demonstrable characteristic of Scripture, Bavinck understands the *autopistia* of Scripture as the objective counterpart of the *testimonium internum*. The *autopistia* of Scripture flows from its permanent *theopneustia*. God's objective revelation in Scripture has an inherent power to convince and to gain the triumph over the world. This power only becomes effective through the work of the Spirit in the hearts of believers. Bavinck starts with the *autopistia* of Scripture and then explains the *testimonium* as the way in which the self-convincing Scripture gains the victory in the hearts of believers through the Spirit. The divine Inspirer of Scripture also gives witness to Scripture and therefore Scripture takes care for its own triumphant victory in the consciousness of the church of Christ. Bavinck links the *autopistia* of Scripture with his general epistemology to avoid subjectivism. This leads to the theological question how the *autopistia* of Scripture is related to the work of the Spirit in the inspiration of Scripture and the illumination of the Christian.

4. A fourth point of consideration flows from Bavinck's complicated definition of the *testimonium*. It is not (1) an institutional phenomenon, (2) a source of new revelations, (3) an intellectual ability to discern the *notae* and *criteria* of Scripture; it is not (4) isolated from the general epistemology; it is not (5) the ultimate ground of faith for only Scripture is αὐτόπιστος. It does not (6) exclude evidences for the divine character of Scripture, it is not (7) an individual or private witness and it does not (8)

stand isolated from the whole work of the Holy Spirit. The *testimonium* is first of all an assurance that we are children of God and in that connection it also seals the objective truths. One of these truths is the authority of Scripture. The *testimonium* is intimately connected with faith; it is a witness of the Spirit in, with and through our own spirit. The Spirit creates an organ in the heart that corresponds with the special revelation in Scripture and this makes the Christian receptive to the *testimonium*. Therefore the Christian spontaneously acknowledges the authority, with which Scripture asserts itself. To avoid circular reasoning Bavinck shifts his emphasis from an immediate witness of the Spirit regarding the authority of Scripture to a more mediate witness in the later editions of *Reformed Dogmatics*. Instead of the Achilles' heel of the Protestant system the threefold *testimonium* of the Spirit in Scripture, in the individual, and in the communion of saints, is the cornerstone of the Christian faith. In the authority of Scripture the weakness and foolishness of the cross appears to be stronger than the wisdom of the world.

5. Although only Scripture and not the church is αὐτόπιστος, the authority of the church is valued positively as a counterbalance to subjectivism. The explanation of Augustine's dictum shows that for Bavinck the authority of the church is an important motive to believe Scripture not only for unbelievers, but also for believers. In this emphasis Bavinck stands close to Warfield and it is remarkable that Reformed theology in the context of modernity reemphasizes the importance of the church as a mother, as a guide, and as a coach to encourage and strengthen faith in Scripture. This emphasis on the authority of the church is meant to serve as an antidote against subjectivism. It is an interesting and important theological question how this renewed emphasis on the church can be made fruitful, without returning to the Roman Catholic position in which the church overrules the authority of Scripture and the *sola scriptura* is replaced by *scriptura et traditio* and ultimately by *sola traditio*.

Benjamin B. Warfield and Herman Bavinck agree that the authority of Scripture is foundational for Reformed theology, but there are also some striking differences:

1. Bavinck criticizes the Reformed orthodox view of inspiration as too mechanical and advocates an organic concept of inspiration; the secondary authors may not be lifted out of their original context. Warfield stands closer to Reformed orthodoxy, although he acknowledges a broader work of the Spirit in the preparation of the authors. Warfield compares the authors of Scripture to musical instruments, made, tuned, and played by God as the musician. Although Bavinck does not use the example, in his organic concept God writes the music, but lets the authors play the instruments in a way that is natural to them and their context. The different emphasis at this point is not a large gap. Both adhere to the inerrancy of Scripture and both leave more room for the human side of the process than Reformed orthodoxy, due to the contemporary historical-critical approach to Scripture.

Warfield, however, criticizes the parallel between inspiration and incarnation that is so fundamental for Bavinck, because he is afraid that it will give the human side of Scripture too much room. For Bavinck this analogy is not only an illustration or example, but it is foundational for his concept of revelation. The eternal Word has become flesh and so the spoken Word has become Scripture. Both modes of revelation are intimately connected.

2. For Warfield faith principally rests on evidences even if the believer is unconscious of this fact. Historical faith – the result of rational argumentation – is the porch of saving faith – the result of the enlightening of the mind by the Spirit, by which we are convinced of the validity of the evidences.

For Bavinck the evidences are only an extra means of assurance after one comes to faith; saving faith and historical faith are essentially different and therefore he rejects the rational approach of Warfield. Bavinck insists on the difference between the arguments that lead to historical faith and the work of the Spirit that leads to saving faith. He rejects the equation of the *testimonium* with the intellectual ability to discern the *notae* and *criteria* of Scripture. The difference between both positions within the range of Reformed theology is illustrated by the use of the terms *autopistia* and *testimonium*. Warfield values the emphasis on the *testimonium* in the newer theology negatively as a form of mysticism, while Bavinck values this emphasis positively as a return to the original position of the Reformation. The lack of the term *autopistia* in Warfield's works is related to his view of apologetics; the Christian faith is not self-convincing, but can be demonstrated. The function of *autopistia* as a counterbalance to subjectivity in Bavinck's theology is related to his concept of apologetics as a posterior confirmation of the Christian faith; the evidences do not need to counterbalance the *testimonium*, because the authority of Scripture is self-convincing.

With his emphasis on the evidences Warfield stands close to Reformed orthodoxy, but his position is not exactly the same as theirs. Warfield's neglect of the *autopistia* indicates a difference. For the Reformed orthodox the *autopistia* of Scripture was a logical necessity, while Warfield insists on the demonstrable character of Scripture. The *autopistia* of Scripture as foundation (*principium*) of theology was generally accepted in the scholarly context of the Reformed orthodox, but in Warfield's context the *autopistia* of Scripture is more of a hindrance than of a help for his apologetic approach.

On the other side, for Bavinck the *autopistia* of Scripture also functions differently than in Reformed orthodoxy. Whereas the *autopistia* of Scripture there stood in the context of a generally accepted model of science, Bavinck uses it to claim a special position for theology. In Reformed orthodoxy the concept of *autopistia* connects theology with the other sciences, for Bavinck the concept gives theology an isolated position. Notwithstanding all his efforts to explain the relationship of theology to general science and epistemology, his appeal to the *principia* of theology is more of a retreat, then of a successful victory.

Warfield's position can be understood from the philosophical and epistemological presuppositions of Common Sense Realism, although his position cannot be interpreted as an immediate result of this philosophy. In Common Sense Realism Warfield finds an ally against the subjectivistic tendency in theology, because it confirms his emphasis on objectivity.

Bavinck appreciates the subjectivistic tendency in the contemporary philosophy and theology. Bavinck's position flows from the acceptance of *principia* as logical starting points of all sciences. His connection between faith and general epistemology depends on the prevailing theory of science and becomes problematic as soon as the *principia* are no longer generally accepted.

3. The third difference seemingly goes in the opposite direction. Warfield accepts the results of modern science with an open attitude. There is no contradiction between

scientific facts and the exegesis of Genesis, between the hand of God in his revelation in nature and the mouth of God in his revelation in Scripture. He accepts the modern worldview regarding the antiquity of creation and the evolutionary origin of the human species. Bavinck is more critical of the results of modern science and rejects the evolutionary worldview. There seems to be no immediate relationship between the strictness of the concept of inspiration and the acceptance of the results of modern science in exegetical issues.

The question rises how Warfield who holds a stricter view of inspiration and an objective concept of the truth can be so open to the modern worldview, while Bavinck who incorporates modern subjectivism rejects the modern worldview. Warfield is optimistic, while Bavinck is pessimistic. On a deeper level this difference is less remarkable than at first sight. Bavinck reveals a deeper insight in the character of modernity than Warfield, probably because of the different stages of the development of modernity in Europe and in America and the stronger harmony between science and the Christian faith in America.

We can learn from Warfield that theology cannot give up the unity of the truth. God is one and the truth is one. His hand can seem to contradict his mouth, but the Christian theologian or the Christian scholar cannot give up the search for the unity of both. The tension may not be neutralized by a split of faith and science into two independent realms. Bavinck, however, reminds us of the fundamentally atheistic character of modernity. If we exchange the authority of God for the authority of the human intellect, if we exchange the *autopistia* of Scripture for the *autonomia* of the human individual, we can still give God a place at the edge of our universe, but ultimately we will lose him, because we do not really need him.

While Warfield defends the objectivity of the Christian faith against the subjectivistic tendency of modernism, his optimistic attitude shows that he does not fathom modernism deep enough. Nevertheless, his courage to stand for the unity of the truth is still inspiring today. Bavinck rejects the modern scheme, but still gives the religious subject a place in the foundations of his theology, counterbalanced by the *autopistia* of Scripture. His courage to deal with the true character of modernity theologically is also still inspiring today.

4. The final major difference between the two theologians lies in the structure of their theology. The doctrine of Scripture is placed in the apologetic introduction to theology by Warfield. For Warfield the apologetic character of the prolegomena is foundational for theology as a science and establishes the grounds on which theology rests. God, religion, revelation, Christianity and Scripture, must first be established, as an introduction to theology. Bavinck approaches theology from the believer's perspective and therefore the doctrine of Scripture belongs to theology itself. Moreover, he introduces faith into the foundational structure of theology. Both theologians have a different concept of the prolegomena. For Warfield the prolegomena are the things that have to be said to beforehand as an introduction to theology; for Bavinck the prolegomena are the things that have to be said first within the context of theology. Warfield places the authority of Scripture in the outer court of apologetics and Bavinck places it in the sanctuary next to saving faith.