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Along with ongoing translations of his work into English, the last decades have seen a renaissance of scholarly interest in the thought of Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck (1854-1921; conferences to commemorate the centenary of his death will take place by the end of 2021 in Kampen and Brisbane). During his lifetime, Bavinck was the closest theological ally of Abraham Kuyper in elaborating a neo-Calvinist worldview that was very influential in Dutch society in the first half of the twentieth century, and continues to be so even in other parts of the world. In Dutch theology, Bavinck is often portrayed as the more profound theological mind as compared to Kuyper – an assessment that seems to have been shared by the late British theologian John Webster who valued Bavinck highly. Thus, an international retrieval of Bavinck's theological thinking next to (and in part following on) the recent flow of international Kuyper-studies is most welcome. *God and Knowledge*, written by the young Indonesian theologian Gray Sutanto, is part of this current attempt to situate Bavinck's thinking in its proper historical context and probe its ongoing theological relevance. The book started life as a doctoral dissertation written at the University of Edinburgh under the supervision of another Bavinck-scholar, James Eglinton.

Even though the international interest in Bavinck's theology is of a relatively recent date, various schools of interpretation have already been formed that in part oppose each other. This was the situation with which Sutanto saw himself confronted when exploring Bavinck's theological epistemology – a field to which Bavinck devoted a great deal of scholarly attention. On the one hand, previous scholars like John Bolt and Paul Helm had portrayed Bavinck's epistemology as standing firmly in the classical Thomistic tradition. Like Aquinas, it is argued here, Bavinck by and large offered a realist account of knowledge according to which knowledge entails the (hardly problematic) correspondence between the human intellect and reality, and perception is the most natural way to acquire such knowledge. Bavinck's fierce criticisms of Aquinas's epistemology are then explained as resulting from the neo-scholastic mis-reading of Aquinas's work (in terms of nature-grace dualism) that was common in Bavinck's time. Interestingly, drawing on contemporary conservative Roman Catholic scholars Sutanto suggests that this neo-scholastic reading and by extension Bavinck's

critical assessment of Aquinas' epistemology may in fact have been (partially) right. Yet, this criticism leaves unaffected that Bavinck shared a basic realist orientation with Aquinas. On the other hand, scholars like Henk van den Belt and Cornelis van der Kooi have pointed to an undeniably modern, post-Kantian strand in Bavinck's epistemological thinking, in which Bavinck lends precedence to the constructive role of human consciousness in knowledge formation, even to such an extent that it brought him on the brink of subjectivism.

In order to both explain and overcome this impasse in current scholarship, Sutanto argues that Bavinck's epistemology can only be properly assessed from Bavinck's deployment of what is called 'the organic motif'. This key term, which Sutanto adopts from his supervisor Eglinton, comes with many repetitions and derivations ('organic worldview', 'organic language' 'organic connectedness', 'organicism' and even a 'Christian confession of the organic connectedness of all things', 55), but – rather frustratingly to the analytically-minded reader – without a clear definition. Taking into account some analogies that Sutanto provides later on (97-100), it can probably best be described as the principle according to which a diversity of insights can coherently be kept together as a unity-in-diversity. This organic way of thinking (usually opposed to more 'mechanic' and materialistic thought patterns) was prevalent in Bavinck's time, especially in circles influenced by nineteenth century Romanticism. Yet, Bavinck deployed it in his own, strongly anti-reductionist way, so that his 'unique organicism resulted in a theologically interpreted synthesis of classical and modern patterns of thought, between [...] realism and absolute idealism' (9). Indeed, Sutanto elegantly, and to my mind quite convincingly, shows how this approach enabled Bavinck to use insights eclectically from various epistemological traditions without surrendering himself to any of these. Along with idealism of various stripes, Bavinck held that there is a gap between our mental representations and the things-in-themselves; along with realism, however, he held that generally speaking we can have confidence that our faculties of perception provide us with knowledge of the external world.

As has been observed earlier by Nicholas Wolterstorff, when it comes to this realist strand in his thinking Bavinck is in basic agreement with common sense philosopher Thomas Reid. Both were adamant that sense perception transmits knowledge of the external world in a reliable way. Yet, Sutanto makes clear that it is less convincing to consider Bavinck along with Reid as another precursor of present-day Reformed epistemology. Unlike Reid, Bavinck held fast to representationalism, and therefore had to answer the question how such disparate realities as physical objects and mental representations can correspond. As a result, the epistemological accounts of Bavinck and Reid differ substantially, and, following up on an earlier suggestion by Henk van den Belt, Sutanto makes a reasonable case for the view that Bavinck in fact derived his account from the work of German philosopher Eduard von Hartmann (1842-1906). In doing so, Bavinck critically adapted von Hartmann's monistic leanings to his own Christian theological outlook. Whereas von Hartmann suggested that our mental representations do connect us to the outside world because both participate in an absolute Unconscious whole, Bavinck replaces this Unconscious whole with the divine wisdom or Logos and its revelation in creation as well as (at an unconscious

level) in the human mind. Since both subject and object, the human mind and the external world, have been created and attuned to each other as a unity-in-diversity by the Logos, there is an underlying unity which explains their correspondence. In this way, Christian theism provides the natural fit (or 'organic link', 55) between the divine wisdom as embodied in the world and revealed in human consciousness.

In this connection, I am not convinced by Sutanto's claim that Bavinck's epistemology represents a form of internalism, although certain sentences of Bavinck seem to suggest this. The fact that 'we have to possess cognitive access to these rich theological insights [viz. the underlying unity of subject and object established by the divine Logos] to ground the knowing situation' (146) does not imply that knowledge is only possible on the condition that one has such access. On a more overall reading of Bavinck, epistemic justification is not dependent on our ability to refer to this divinely-bestowed unity of thought and world, but comes along with the proper functioning of our cognitive apparatus. Therefore, it seems to me that Bavinck belongs to the externalist camp, and in that sense at least later Reformed epistemologists such as Plantinga and Wolterstorff can claim continuity with him.

It is interesting, by the way, that in spite of the subtitle of his book, Sutanto seems more interested in Bavinck's general theory of knowledge than in his more specific *theological* epistemology. That is to say, the further question of how according to Bavinck human knowledge *of God* is actually possible is not treated with equal depth (though Sutanto does so elsewhere). I presume that Sutanto dubs Bavinck's epistemology theological because of the strongly theological grounding provided by Bavinck to the general process of human knowledge formation.

While Bavinck's theory of knowledge formation offers the clearest, and perhaps the most convincing, example of how Bavinck's organic approach enabled him to overcome well-known binary oppositions, Sutanto demonstrates that Bavinck also applied this approach to many other topics in fundamental theology. Time and again, Bavinck dealt eclectically with his sources and brought disparate insights into equipoise by considering them as 'unities-in-diversity'. For example, as Bavinck saw it, rather than standing in some kind of hierarchical relationship, general and special revelation form an organic unity (37-43, 98-100), as do the sciences (though with theology as their 'queen', 45-73). Recapitulating previous research, Sutanto further argues that Bavinck held an organic view of the created order (18-22), the human being (30-37) and even the triune God (22-30). Indeed, Bavinck grounds his organic thinking in the doctrine of the Trinity, arguing that 'just as God is one in essence and distinct in persons, so also the work of creation is one and undivided, while in the unity it is still rich in diversity' (28; *Reformed Dogmatics* 2, 64). Sutanto overstates his case, however, when suggesting that, as Eglinton put it, 'a theology of Trinity ad intra *requires* cosmology of organism ad extra' (20; my italics), since that would of course unduly constrain God's freedom. In Reformed theology in particular, the notion of the divine decree has been elaborated at great length precisely to counter any intimations of a natural link between Creator and creation (e.g., Calvin even rejected the *vestigia Trinitatis*). At

best, we might say that, given God's tri-unity, it is *fitting* that creation displays a pattern of unity-in-diversity as well.

When one surveys this list, one wonders whether the 'organic motif' really is such a panacea that it may solve all these complex issues. Like 'holistic' (a term which Sutanto also uses to characterize Bavinck's approach), 'organic' can easily become a buzz word that papers over serious conceptual problems instead of actually solving them. Though he occasionally relates Bavinck's work constructively to current debates in philosophy, Sutanto's work is more focused on historical reconstruction than on systematic analysis. Throughout the book he implicitly seems to side with Bavinck on the issues discussed, or at least he tries to show the coherence of Bavinck's position. In his Conclusion, he comes up with a more distanced assessment of Bavinck's lasting significance in light of present-day research, asking whether 'Bavinck's organicism ultimately hold[s] up under greater critical scrutiny' (178). In this connection he rightly points out that Bavinck's account was profoundly shaped by nineteenth-century continental philosophy. Today, the representationalism that Bavinck took for granted in his epistemology has largely been left behind under the influence of Wittgenstein and Heidegger, and epistemology itself has become the subject of much more sophisticated debates in analytical philosophy. Also, the unifying capacity that Bavinck ascribed to (Reformed) theology among the sciences could not even stand the test of time at his own Vrije Universiteit. It is one thing to develop a theory on theology's academic role vis-à-vis the other disciplines, Sutanto intimates, it is something else to show how this might play out in actual practice. And finally, given the requirements of academic freedom, theological departments can no longer favor one theological vision only within their murals but have to take into account the plurality of religious and theological voices in the public domain. Sutanto even wonders, and I think rightly so, whether Bavinck's ideals for the role of theology in the academy perhaps may have been 'inherently unachievable' (179).

In spite of all this, Sutanto convincingly shows that Bavinck's organic motif and his concomitant eclecticism enabled him to resist false binaries and to avoid the inconsistencies of which he has been suspected by previous interpreters (event to the effect that there were 'two Bavincks', an orthodox and a modern one). He therefore suggests that contemporary theologians might learn from Bavinck by emulating his scholarly attitude rather than by subscribing to his specific construal of the epistemic situation. Indeed, Bavinck's 'organic' way of thinking inspired him to look for connections rather than to go along with traditional divisions, and this attitude may prove extremely worthwhile now that we are confronted with so many global problems (e.g. climate change) that require a strongly interdisciplinary approach. Bavinck was exemplary indeed in the way in which he looked beyond the boundaries of his own discipline, relating his theological vision critically but constructively to the philosophical movements of his own time. We can therefore endorse Sutanto's claim that, perhaps more than anything else, it is Bavinck's 'desire to produce coherence and develop orthodoxy from such a wide stream of sources that is worthy of emulation' (178). In any case, Sutanto has rendered us a marvelous service in excavating the sophisticated ways

in which Bavinck used his sources to forge an epistemological account of his own that was deeply inspired by (and inherently rooted in) his Reformed theological views.

Finally, perhaps I may allow myself a note that is related to my own recent work on Reformed theology and evolutionary theory. It seems to me that Bavinck's organicism could have made him much more open to the theory of biological evolution (either of the Darwinian variety or otherwise) than he actually was. Clearly, evolutionary theory has brought to light the organic connectedness of all forms of life more clearly and convincingly than any other scientific theory. One therefore wonders what would have happened if the debate about evolution had not already been polarized to such an extent in Bavinck's time, that he had little choice but to repudiate it. In any case, like Kuyper, Bavinck was keen to see the difference between the 'sober' biological theory of evolution on the one hand and evolutionism as an atheistic worldview on the other, and his criticisms were of course mainly directed to the latter.