

# An Invitation to Read Herman Bavinck in the Middle East

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Jesus did not come to judge the world, but to save it (John 3:17); the monk leaves the world and judges it by going to the desert. Jesus isolated himself in a deserted place early in the morning (Mark 1:35) to strengthen himself for daily work and his life work; the monk sees the essence of virtue in ascetic exercise itself and changes means into goal.

—Herman Bavinck

## Who Wrote *Bayna al-‘aql wa-al-īmān*?

*Bayna al-‘aql wa-al-īmān*<sup>1</sup> is the Arabic translation of a popular presentation of the Christian faith written by the Dutch theologian

\* This article was written in 2012.—Ed.

<sup>1</sup> Herman Bavinck, بين العقل والإيمان *bayna al-‘aql wa-al-īmān*, 4 vols. (n.p.: Kalimat Alhayat [Arabic Bible Outreach Ministry], n.y.), <http://www.kalimatalhayat.com/doctrine/91-faith-mind.html>; Dutch: *Magnalia Dei: Onderwijzing in de Christelijke religie naar gereformeerde belijdenis* (Kampen: Kok, 1909), <http://www.archive.org/details/magnaliadeionder00bavi> (the main title of the Dutch edition is a Latin phrase that means “the mighty works of God, cf. Acts 2:11; the Dutch subtitle can be translated as “instruction in the Christian religion according to the Reformed confession”); English: *Our Reasonable Faith*, trans. H. Zylstra (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956). The English translation served not only as a basis for the Arabic edition, but also for Chinese and Korean editions. See Eric D. Bristley, *Guide to the Writings of Herman Bavinck (1854–1921)* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 126–29.

Bristley’s guide is a very helpful tool for finding one’s way to Bavinck’s writings and offers an overview of his life and work, a Bavinck bibliography, and an overview of secondary literature both in English and in Dutch. For a couple of comments and additions, see Willem J. de Wit, *On the Way to the Living God: A Cathartic Reading of Herman Bavinck and an Invitation to Overcome the Plausibility Crisis of Christianity* (Amsterdam: VU University

Herman Bavinck (1854–1921).<sup>2</sup> While there has been a renewed interest in Bavinck in Reformed and Presbyterian circles from North America through Italy to South Korea since the last decade,<sup>3</sup> he still seems to be relatively unknown in the Arabic speaking world. This article is an invitation to Christians in the Middle East to read more by and about Bavinck in English (or—ideally—in Dutch) and to consider the translation of some of his other works into Arabic.<sup>4</sup>

For, while *Bayna al-‘aql wa-al-īmān* will easily be recognized as a fair elaboration of the faith of the Reformed/Presbyterian confessions, it should be clear that Bavinck’s oeuvre includes many other writings that are arguably more important and inter-

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Press, 2011), 175–76, which can be downloaded from <http://willemjdwit.com/living-god> (subsequent footnotes will refer to this work as *OWLG*).

For the most recent developments in Bavinck studies, see the website of the Herman Bavinck Institute at Calvin Theological Seminary (<http://bavinckinstitute.org/>). The “Herman Bavinck Bibliography” (<http://bavinckinstitute.org/resources/bibliographies/herman-bavinck-bibliography/>) is kept up-to-date and includes many direct links to works by Bavinck in Dutch and English and studies about Bavinck on the internet. An even larger collection of Bavinck’s writings is available at the Dutch website Project Neocalvinisme (<http://www.neocalvinisme.nl/tekstframes.html>).

<sup>2</sup> The most important biographies of Bavinck are Ron Gleason, *Herman Bavinck: Pastor, Churchman, Statesman, and Theologian* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010); R. H. Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck en zijn tijdgenoten* (Kampen: Kok, 1966); and V. Hepp, *Dr. Herman Bavinck* (Amsterdam: Ten Have, 1921). Factual biographic information in this article has especially been derived from Bremmer’s biography.

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. John Bolt, “Herman Bavinck Speaks English,” in Bristley, *Guide to the Writings of Herman Bavinck (1854–1921)*, 28–39; Andrea Ferrari, “Bavinck in Italiaanse context,” in *Ontmoetingen met Herman Bavinck*, ed. George Harinck and Gerrit Neven, AD Chartas-reeks 9, 119–24 (Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 2006); and Hae-Moo Yoo, “Herman Bavinck en de gereformeerde traditie in Korea,” in Harinck and Neven, *Ontmoetingen met Herman Bavinck*, 125–41.

<sup>4</sup> Bavinck’s eloquent Dutch of a century ago, containing relatively long sentences adorned with many synonyms, cannot easily be translated into current academic English, which prefers a more concise and exact style, but may in fact more naturally be rendered into beautiful Modern Standard Arabic.

esting.<sup>5</sup> After a brief sketch of his life, this short article will introduce some of his personal letters, his major four-volume *Reformed Dogmatics*, his works on worldview and education, and his reflections on following Jesus Christ, suggesting how these themes can be relevant for Arab readers and Egyptians in particular.

## Bavinck's Life

Bavinck was born in Hoogeveen, the Netherlands, on December 13, 1854.<sup>6</sup> He and his family did not belong to the major Dutch Reformed Church, but to a smaller, theologically more conservative Reformed denomination, which had its own seminary in the town of Kampen. This denomination was rooted in the 1834 secession from the main church and Bavinck's father was one of its pastors. From 1874 to 1880 Bavinck studied in Leiden, in those days the bulwark of modern, liberal theology in the Netherlands. In 1880 Bavinck completed his studies with a thesis on the ethics of the reformer Huldrych Zwingli (1484–1531). After a pastorate from 1881 to 1882 he became a professor in Kampen. In 1891 he married Johanna Adriana Schippers and after three years the couple had a daughter.

In 1880 Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920), another famous Dutch theologian, founded the Free University in Amsterdam.<sup>7</sup> In 1886 he was one of the leaders of a second secession from the Dutch Reformed Church. In 1892 most churches of the 1834 and 1886 secessions united to form the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands.<sup>8</sup> The new church now had two places to train future

<sup>5</sup> Bremmer calls the Dutch edition of *bayna al-'aql wa-al-īmān* “not very captivating” (*Herman Bavinck en zijn tijdgenoten*, 249).

<sup>6</sup> This section is a mainly a shortened version of *OWLG*, 17–19.

<sup>7</sup> Nowadays, the official English name of the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam is “VU University Amsterdam,” but in Bavinck's day the name was translated as “Free University.”

<sup>8</sup> In Dutch the 1834 secession is usually called “Afscheiding” and the 1886 secession “Doleantie.” In 2004 the history of the secessions partly came to an end when the Dutch Reformed Church and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands united into the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. However,

pastors: the seminary in Kampen and the faculty of theology of the Free University. Bavinck made strong efforts to merge the two, but when these failed in 1902, he moved to Amsterdam and became a professor at the Free University in succession to Kuyper, who had become prime minister of the Netherlands in 1901. In 1911 Bavinck himself became a member of the Upper Chamber of the Dutch Parliament. He died on July 29, 1921.

Although the details of Dutch church history may not be immediately relevant for readers of Bavinck in other parts of the world, his rootedness in the tradition of the secession (“I am a child of the Secession and I hope to remain so”<sup>9</sup>) means that he did not understand himself as a representative of the dominant culture of his day, but rather of the subculture or counterculture of a minority. In fact, this may make it easier for (Protestant) Christians in the Middle East to identify with him.

## Letters

“Will I remain standing? God grant it!” wrote Bavinck in his diary on September 23, 1874, the day he arrived in Leiden to study theology. This struggle to remain standing as a Christian while many of his contemporaries drifted away from the cross is a theme that underlies many of Bavinck’s works and comes more to the surface in some of his letters.

A particularly interesting starting point to begin one’s reading of Bavinck is his correspondence with Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857–1936), with whom he became close friends during his studies in Leiden and who would become one of the leading Western specialists on Islam—his trip to Mecca in 1885 made him famous throughout Europe.<sup>10</sup> The friendship lasted until

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since the nineteenth century several other Reformed denominations have come into being that continue the tradition of the Secession. Being a son of the Secession, Bavinck can be regarded as a father both to the Protestant Church in the Netherlands and to these other Reformed denominations.

<sup>9</sup> C. Veenhof, “Uit het leven van de Theologische Hogeschool 6,” *De Reformatie* 30 (1955): 123–24 (Veenhof quotes a report of a speech by Bavinck).

<sup>10</sup> The correspondence has been published as Herman Bavinck and Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, *Een Leidse vriendschap: De briefwisseling tussen*

Bavinck's death. While the letters give us some insight into Bavinck's views on Islam,<sup>11</sup> one can especially learn from them that even (or perhaps, especially) a pastor and a theologian may have to struggle with doubt and halfheartedness. For example, reflecting on his studies in Leiden Bavinck wrote:

The innocence of a child's faith, of the unlimited trust in the truth that has been instilled in me, you see, that is what I have lost and that is much, very much. . . .

I know that I will never regain it. . . . Sometimes, when I still meet some people in the congregation, who possess it and fare so well by it and are so happy, well I cannot help, but I wish I could believe again as they do, so happily and so cheerfully; and then I feel that, if I had this and could preach in such a way, animated, warm, always fully convinced of what I was saying, yes one with it, indeed, then I would be strong, powerful, then I could be useful; living myself, I would live for others.

But I know that it is over, that it is no longer possible.<sup>12</sup>

And a few years later he confessed:

Sometimes I perceive in my own soul an unspoken desire that Scripture might not be true, that the newer criticism might be right, and in this I see something of that secret enmity that the sinful heart feels against the Holy One and that can only be overcome by faith and prayer. . . . Exactly this experience of

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*Herman Bavinck en Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, 1875–1821*, edited by J. de Bruijn and G. Harinck, Passage Reeks 11 (Baarn: Ten Have, 1999). *OWLG* offers an English translation of a good number of fragments from the correspondence.

<sup>11</sup> For Bavinck's views on Islam, see Dirk van Keulen, *Een blok aan het been? Gereformeerde mannenbroeders in debat over de islam* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2011); Anton Wessels, "Bavinck en de islam," in Harinck and Neven, *Ontmoetingen met Bavinck*, 63–85; and P. S. van Koningsveld, "Bavinck's bijdrage aan de studie van de islam in gereformeerde kring," *Radix* 25 (1999): 62–67.

<sup>12</sup> Bavinck to Snouck Hurgronje, January 13, 1881, *Een Leidse vriendschap*, 81. English translation in *OWLG*, 28–29. See also George Harinck, "‘Something That Must Remain, If the Truth Is to Be Sweet and Precious to Us’: The Reformed Spirituality of Herman Bavinck," *Calvin Theological Journal* 38 (2003): 253–54.

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the soul, in connection with others, ties me to Scripture and confession, although I feel in my mind the objections that can be brought against Christianity as deeply as you do.<sup>13</sup>

This is not to say that Bavinck lost his faith or was always struggling. One of his students remembered:

He did much more than mere teaching. As a Christian he was able to make one feel the width and glory of God's revelation in Christ, to make one realize the limits of the temporary over against the eternal, to make one look forward from knowing in part to the day of the full solution of the mystery. He carried one away to kneel before the throne of the Lamb.<sup>14</sup>

Bavinck's letters can offer readers a mirror in which to face their own struggles and that reading them together, for example as students or as pastors, can open a conversation about questions that are otherwise not so easily shared.<sup>15</sup>

## Dogmatics

Bavinck's main contribution to Reformed theology is his four-volume *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* [Reformed Dogmatics], originally published from 1895 to 1901, revised from 1906 to 1911, and published in English from 2003 to 2008 and in Korean in 2011.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Bavinck to Snouck Hurgronje, December 22, 1888, *Een Leidse vriendschap*, 136. English translation and discussion in *OWLG*, 29–31.

<sup>14</sup> H. W. van der Vaart Smit, "De dogmatische betekenis van Dr H. Bavinck," *Vox theologica* 8 (1936): 43. English translation and similar testimonies in *OWLG*, 36.

<sup>15</sup> *OWLG*, 20, proposes a *cathartic* reading of Herman Bavinck.

<sup>16</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*, 4 vols. (Kampen: Bos, 1895–1901), <http://www.neocalvinisme.nl/tekstframes.html>; *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*, 4 vols., 2nd ed. (Kampen: Bos [vol. 1, 2], Kok [vol. 3, 4], 1906–1911); English: *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols., ed. John Bolt, trans. John Friend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003–2008), also available as a Logos Bible Software electronic edition; for the publication details of the Korean edition, see the Herman Bavinck Bibliography at the website of the Bavinck Institute.

While Bavinck was well-versed in Reformed theology of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, he also had a clear affinity with patristic and medieval theology: “Men like Irenaeus, Augustine, and Thomas do not exclusively belong to Rome. They are Fathers and Doctors to whom the whole Christian church has obligations.”<sup>17</sup> This “catholic” (ecumenical) basis may make his dogmatics interesting even for orthodox churches in the Middle East. While Bavinck did not see Calvinism as the only truth<sup>18</sup> and spoke about John Wesley<sup>19</sup> with appreciation, his discussion of Israel and the millennium in his chapter on eschatology follows the main stream of the Reformed/Presbyterian tradition and may be especially appreciated by those who are concerned about the influence of dispensationalism among Protestants in the Arab world.

Bavinck’s doctrine of Scripture has especially drawn much attention.<sup>20</sup> While he himself admitted by the end of his life that

<sup>17</sup> Bavinck, *Gereformeerde dogmatiek* (1895), 1:iii; English translation in *OWLG*, 47.

<sup>18</sup> “Let American Christianity develop according to its own law. . . . Calvinism is surely not the only truth!” Herman Bavinck, *Mijne reis naar Amerika*, ed. George Harinck, AD Chartas-reeks 2 (Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 1998), 58; see *OWLG*, 44.

<sup>19</sup> See e.g. Herman Bavinck, “Nader bescheid,” *De Wachter* (October 20, 1909), 3; cf. *OWLG*, 50–51.

<sup>20</sup> See especially Jan Veenhof, *Revelatie en inspiratie: De openbarings- en schriftbeschouwing van Herman Bavinck in vergelijking met die der ethische theologie* (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 1968); Dirk van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek: Schriftbeschouwing en schriftgebruik in het dogmatisch werk van A. Kuyper, H. Bavinck en G. C. Berkouwer* (Kampen: Kok, 2003), 68–225 (pages 69–70 give an overview of earlier literature on Bavinck’s doctrine of Scripture; just as Veenhof’s study, this work contains a summary in English); Henk van den Belt, “Autopistia: The Self-Convincing Authority of Scripture in Reformed Theology” (Proefschrift [doctoral thesis], Leiden University, 2006), 249–314, <https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/handle/1887/4582>; Henk van den Belt, *The Authority of Scripture in Reformed Theology: Truth and Trust*, Studies in Reformed Theology 17 (Leiden: Brill, 2008); and Richard B. Gaffin, *God’s Word in Servant Form: Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck and the Doctrine of Scripture* (Jackson, MS: Reformed Academic Press, 2008).

“the problem of Scripture” still waited a solution,<sup>21</sup> his contribution is important as an attempt to get rid of a mechanical (“dictation”) view of inspiration and to replace it with an organic view of inspiration, which recognizes the specific circumstances and personalities of the biblical authors without diminishing Scripture’s authority as the Word of God. My impression is that Bavinck can help Christians to articulate their distinct understanding of inspiration in a context in which the dominant model for inspiration is that of the sending down of the Qur’ān from heaven.

While the mystical union with Christ has been proposed as the main theme of Bavinck’s dogmatics<sup>22</sup> and was perhaps an important point in his own spiritual life as well,<sup>23</sup> more often the phrase “grace restores nature” is seen as the central theme.<sup>24</sup> Grace, Bavinck taught, does not alienate us from (earthly) life in general, but redeems it from the consequences of sin and will eventually bring it to completion.

## Worldview and Education

Although Bavinck is best known for his *Reformed Dogmatics*, he did not see dogmatics as the be all and end all of Christianity. In

<sup>21</sup> Hepp, *Dr. Herman Bavinck*, 331; cf. *OWLG*, 77–82.

<sup>22</sup> See Ron Gleason, “The Centrality of the *unio mystica* in the Theology of Herman Bavinck” (Ph.D. dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary, 2001). Cf. Hans Burger, “Een eeuwigdurende verbondenheid: Bavincks concept van de *unio mystica*,” in Harinck and Neven, *Ontmoetingen met Herman Bavinck*, 265–86, and Hans Burger, *Being in Christ: A Biblical and Systematic Investigation in a Reformed Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 87–139.

<sup>23</sup> See e.g. the quotation from his manuscript “De mensch, Gods evenbeeld” in *OWLG*, 34.

<sup>24</sup> See especially Jan Veenhof, *The Relationship between Nature and Grace According to H. Bavinck*, Wetenskaplike bydraes, series F1, no. 322 (Potchefstroom: Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir Christelike Hoër Onderwys, 1994); cf. Syd Hielema, “Herman Bavinck’s Eschatological Understanding of Redemption” (Th. D. thesis, Wycliffe College [Toronto School of Theology], 1998) and *OWLG*, 87 n132.

his view (Reformed) Christians should engage in all areas of culture. In an early article he wrote:

The Reformed is a complete view of world and life. It puts humans in a special relationship to God and therefore also in a specific relationship to all things: to family, state, society, art, science, etc. Besides dogmatic principles, there are also moral, political, social, scientific, and aesthetical principles. Nothing exists on which Reformed principles do not put their peculiar mark.<sup>25</sup>

These words anticipate much of what Bavinck would later write, especially during the last two decades of his life. In 1904 he published a book entitled *Christelijke wereldbeschouwing* [Christian Worldview]<sup>26</sup> and many of his other books and articles can be read as elaborations of his Christian worldview for a specific area of life, for example the family, ethics, the sciences, social relationships, and aesthetics.<sup>27</sup>

His works on education deserve special mention. His *Paedagogische beginselen* [Principles of Education]<sup>28</sup> has been called

<sup>25</sup> Herman Bavinck, “De wetenschappelijke roeping onzer kerk,” *De Vrije Kerk* 8 (1882): 104, <http://www.neocalvinisme.nl/tekstframes.html>.

<sup>26</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Christelijke wereldbeschouwing: Rede bij de overdracht van het rectoraat aan de Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam op 20 oktober 1904* (Kampen: Bos, 1904), <http://www.neocalvinisme.nl/tekstframes.html>; German: *Christliche Weltanschauung*, trans. H. Cuntz (Heidelberg: Winter, 1907).

<sup>27</sup> A collection of his essays in these areas has been published in English: Herman Bavinck, *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, ed. John Bolt, trans. Harry Boonstra and Gerrit Sheeres (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008). See also Herman Bavinck, “General Biblical Principles and the Relevance of Concrete Mosaic Law for the Social Question Today (1891),” trans. John Bolt, *Journal of Markets & Morality* 13 (2010): 437–46, <http://www.marketsandmorality.com/index.php/mandm/article/view/103/97> and John Bolt, “Herman Bavinck’s Contribution to Christian Social Consciousness,” *Journal of Markets & Morality* 13 (2010), 413–36, <http://www.marketsandmorality.com/index.php/mandm/article/view/102/96>.

<sup>28</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Paedagogische beginselen* (Kampen: Kok, 1904); summarized and discussed in English in C. Jaarsma, *The Educational Philosophy of Herman Bavinck: A Textbook in Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1935) and J. Brederveld, *Christian Education: A Summary and Critical*

as relevant for Christian philosophy of education as Calvin's *Institutes* were for subsequent theology.<sup>29</sup> Interacting with the leading educational theories of his time, he developed a distinctly Christian view of the goal, starting point, and method of education. A key verse for him was 2 Timothy 3:17: "... that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (ESV).

Whether one agrees with his position or not, his works can open the eyes of Christians to the reality that fundamental reflection on education from a Christian perspective is possible. In a context in which some groups seek to put a more distinctively Islamic stamp on school education, Bavinck's work can stimulate Christians to reflect on and articulate their own ideal of education.

## Following Jesus Christ

Following Jesus Christ is an important theme in Bavinck's life. In the diary that he wrote during his studies in Leiden he repeatedly expressed the hope that he would be a "worthy follower of Jesus."<sup>30</sup> On two occasions he wrote about "the imitation of Christ" (following Christ) in more detail: in a series of articles in 1885–1886 and in a brochure in 1918. In 1886 he criticized the monastic ideal of imitation: "Jesus did not come to judge the world, but to save it (John 3:17); the monk leaves the world and judges it by going to the desert. Jesus isolated himself in a deserted place early in the morning (Mark 1:35) to strengthen himself for daily work and his life work."<sup>31</sup>

Although Bavinck's remark about the monk in the desert might suggest that he had Saint Anthony and the Coptic Orthodox Church in mind, it is much more likely that this "monk" refers to the many in his own Reformed denomination who, in his view,

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*Discussion of Bavinck's Pedagogical Principles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Smitter, 1928).

<sup>29</sup> A. B. W. M. Kok, *Dr Herman Bavinck* (Amsterdam: Bakker, 1945), 74.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck en zijn tijdgenoten*, 32.

<sup>31</sup> Herman Bavinck, "De navolging van Christus," *De Vrije Kerk* 11 (1886): 322, <http://www.neocalvinisme.nl/tekstframes.html>. Cf. *OWLG*, 43.

thought “too exclusively.”<sup>32</sup> He saw the tendency to leave the world symbolized in the seminary in Kampen: it was not a university but only a separate seminary, and it was not in a real city but only in the small town of Kampen. His ideal was a Christian university and he saw this ideal partly realized in the Free University.<sup>33</sup> Writing to Snouck Hurgronje, he emphasized that his work on the catholicity of the Christian faith—in the sense of its relatedness to all areas of life—was intended as a “medicine against the separatist and sectarian tendencies that sometimes show up in our church.” He added, “There is so much narrow-mindedness and so much pettiness among us, and, worst of all, this is counted as piety.”<sup>34</sup>

In 1900 Bavinck reviewed Charles Sheldon’s famous book, *In His Steps: What Would Jesus Do?*, remarking that the question posed in its subtitle not well formulated:

Jesus did not occupy a post in society and did not hold an office in church or society. He was neither a husband nor a father of a family, neither a farmer nor a merchant, and neither a scholar nor an artist. . . . He was something else and infinitely more: He was the Redeemer of sinners, the Savior of the world.

For this reason, the question “what would Jesus have done in my case?” is not well posed . . .

. . . If one cannot imagine that Jesus would have been a husband or a father of a family—and that cannot be imagined

<sup>32</sup> Bavinck to Snouck Hurgronje, December 23, 1884, *Een Leidse vriendschap*, 124.

<sup>33</sup> See Bavinck to Snouck Hurgronje, December 23, 1884, *Een Leidse vriendschap*, 124. Cf. *OWLG*, 43.

<sup>34</sup> Bavinck to Snouck Hurgronje, December 22, 1888, *Een Leidse vriendschap*, 136. See also *OWLG*, 29–30. In this passage, Bavinck explains to Snouck Hurgronje the intention of his published lecture *De catholiciteit van christendom en kerk: Rede bij de overdracht van het rectoraat aan de Theol. School te Kampen, op 18 dec. 1888* (Kampen: Zalsman, 1888), <http://www.neocalvinisme.nl/tekstframes.html>; English: Herman Bavinck, “The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church,” trans. John Bolt, *Calvin Theological Journal* 27 (1992): 220–51. This work has been called “Bavinck’s most principal treatise of public theology.” See Kees van der Kooi, “Inleiding,” in *Gereformeerde catholiciteit 1888–1918*, by Herman Bavinck, *Klassiek Licht*, 9–16 (Barneveld: Nederlands Dagblad, 2008), 12–13.

indeed—, one might decide to abstain from marriage or to leave one's family and to do nothing but traveling through the country, preaching and performing miracles.

. . . The true meaning of following Jesus is not that we copy and imitate him, . . . [but] that we, independent and free, as God's children, in our circumstances and relationships, even if it costs us the greatest self-denial and bearing the heaviest cross, fulfill that same will of God which Christ . . . fulfilled in a perfect way. For whoever does God's will is Jesus' brother and sister and mother.<sup>35</sup>

During the first decade of the twentieth century, Bavinck dealt intensively with the problem that the Christian faith is contested at an intellectual, academic level, a struggle that resulted in his 1908 lectures on *The Philosophy of Revelation*.<sup>36</sup> In his brochure on the imitation of Christ ten years later, when the First World War was in its fourth year and he had been a member of the Upper House of the Dutch parliament for seven years, he located the crisis of Christianity's plausibility much more in everyday moral life than in academic discourse:

All these questions come together in the question about the imitation of Christ and life in the modern world. Is there still room for such an imitation in the cultural life of the present? Can it

<sup>35</sup> Herman Bavinck, "Wat zou Jezus doen?" *De Bazuin* 48 no. 8 (1900).

<sup>36</sup> *The Philosophy of Revelation* is perhaps Bavinck's most profound book: "In this work we meet the matured struggle in Bavinck's own personal life between the Christian faith of revelation [or: belief in revelation] and the evolutionistic, positivistic way of thinking of the nineteenth century. That gives the book, and much of his other writings, an existential trait" (Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck en zijn tijdgenoten*, 251). Bavinck delivered most of the lectures in this book as the Stone Lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1908 and it was immediately published in Dutch, English, and German, and in 2004 also in Italian. Herman Bavinck, *Wijsbegeerte der openbaring: Stone-lezingen voor het jaar 1908, gehouden te Princeton N. J.* (Kampen: Kok, 1908), <http://www.neocalvinisme.nl/tekstframes.html>; and Herman Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation: The Stone Lectures for 1908–1909; Princeton Theological Seminary* (New York: Longmans Green, 1909), <http://www.archive.org/details/philosophyrevel00bavigoog>, also available as a Logos Bible Software electronic edition. For an analysis of the tenth lecture of this work, see *OWLG*, 60–77.

still be taken seriously by people in the state, in industry and business, in the marketplace, the stock-exchange and the bank, in office and factory, in science and art, in war and at the front?<sup>37</sup>

While Bavinck was critical of the spirit of the French Revolution,<sup>38</sup> it is hard to say where he would have stood exactly in the case of the Egyptian revolution of 2011. However, it is clear that he would have recommended that Christians neither seclude themselves from the world in the monasteries of St. Paul and St. Antony, except perhaps for a short retreat, nor withdraw themselves to the confines of an evangelical seminary or a Protestant church, but face the question, difficult as it may be, of what it means to follow Jesus Christ at Midan Tahrir, in a system that is still vulnerable to corruption, or in a public sphere that is—even more than before—dominated by a different religion.

<sup>37</sup> Herman Bavinck, *De navolging van Christus en het moderne leven* (Kampen: Kok, 1918), 7, <http://www.neocalvinisme.nl/tekstframes.html>; and Herman Bavinck, “De navolging van Christus en het moderne leven,” in *Ken-nis en leven: Opstellen en artikelen uit vroegere jaren*, by Bavinck, 115–44 (Kampen: Kok, 1922), 120, <http://www.neocalvinisme.nl/tekstframes.html>; cf. Herman Bavinck, “The Imitation of Christ II (1918),” trans. John Bolt, in *A Theological Analysis of Herman Bavinck’s Two Essays on the Imitatio Christi: Between Pietism and Modernism*, by John Bolt, 402–40 (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2013), 409. The quoted passage is briefly discussed in *OWLG*, 80. For Bavinck’s views on the imitation of Christ, see also Bolt, *A Theological Analysis of Herman Bavinck’s Two Essays on the Imitatio Christi*, and Dirk van Keulen, “Herman Bavinck on the Imitation of Christ,” *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 29 (2011): 78–91.

<sup>38</sup> For example, he wrote a preface to a Dutch “classic” on unbelief and revolution: Herman Bavinck, “Voorrede,” in *Ongeloof en revolutie*, by G. Groen van Prinsterer, 3rd ed., v–xiii (Kampen: Bos, 1904).