

Book Reviews

Christian Worldview. By Herman Bavinck. Translated and Edited by Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, James Perman Eglinton, and Cory C. Brock. Wheaton: Crossway, 2019, 140 pp., \$24.99.

Reviewing one of the great theologians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries can be a daunting task, especially as the questions raised in this work line up perfectly with our modern debates over philosophical and moral issues. Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) was one of the chief dogmatists of the Dutch Reformed tradition of theology and philosophy. He succeeded Abraham Kuyper as professor of systematic theology at the Free University of Amsterdam in 1902. Bavinck's profile has risen in recent years due to the popularity of his monumental *Reformed Dogmatics* and the newly released *Reformed Ethics*.

Published in English for the first time in 2019, Bavinck's *Christian Worldview* is another monumental work in of itself as he provides a rich, theologically informed, and robust foundation for Christian philosophical and ethical thought in opposition of the popular philosophies of the day—a scientific materialism that dominated the nineteenth century, but is still very much alive and well in the twenty-first century. Bavinck divides this work into three parts with each section focusing on a certain aspect of philosophical inquiry, as he seeks to dismantle the scientific materialism of his day seen in the works of Ernest Renan. It should be noted that Bavinck prefers the term “world-and-life view”, which emphasizes a key aspect of what he sees lacking in worldview discussions—namely the full orbéd nature of our system of beliefs and how they encompass the entire objective domain outside ourselves as well as the entirety of the human subject.

Bavinck argues clearly that there are certain fundamental questions that every worldview must answer such as “What am I?”, “What is this world?”, and “What is my place and task in this world?” (29). He argues that “autonomous thinking finds no satisfactory answer to these questions ... but (that) Christianity serves the harmony and reveals to us a wisdom that reconciles the human being with God, and through this, with itself, with the world, and with

life” (29). Opposed to the materialism of the day and the prevailing notion of the separation of faith and reason, Bavinck seeks to show the reader how Christianity and the meaning of reality fit together like “lock and key” (28).

His argument is broken into three sections that follow the main sub-sections of philosophy: “Thinking and Being” in which he addresses the epistemological foundations of knowledge and truth, “Being and Becoming” in which focus on metaphysics and the nature of reality, and finally “Becoming and Acting”, through which he highlights ethics and the actions of humanity.

Bavinck shows that the Christian world-and-life view is the only way that we as humans can truly know reality and truth. He argues that “all autonomy of the human mind falls away, as if it could produce truth out of its own reason and through its own means” (47). In the first section primarily dealing with epistemology, Bavinck rightly points out the Christian underpinnings to the pursuit of knowledge but argues this primarily from a special revelation perspective. It may have been more compelling to non-Christians, who he is also engaging in this world, if he focused on a natural law understanding of epistemology that is in itself grounded in the God of the universe. It is a debated point amongst scholars, such as John Bolt, David VanDrunen, and Nelson B. Kloosterman, if Bavinck holds to a proper natural law theory. Bavinck does allude to this in the second section of the work on metaphysics by saying there are, in reality, “only two worldviews, the theistic and the atheistic” (73). The slight addition of natural law theory to his section on epistemology would flesh out his concept of Nature that is referenced throughout the second section on “Being and Becoming.”

In the latter part of the book as he addresses the ethics and morality, Bavinck rightly shows the vacuity of the naturalistic and materialistic worldviews on the study of ethics by saying that “autonomy becomes a principle that undermines every authority and all law” (102). He goes on to point out that human autonomy means that we are only bound to ourselves and thus the basis for morality is on unstable footing or even lost all together. Christianity is not hostile, as some argue even today, to the sciences though. As Bavinck states, “science can stand only if the theistic worldview, which lies at the foundations of Christianity, is correct” because science is based on certain unchanging laws of nature and reality, which must have a starting point (121). Again, here he makes a natural law type argument—without being explicit—for epistemology and ethics, yet seems to stray away at

times from that theory because he argues that it is by the Scriptures alone that all of this is known to us, not from an explicit natural law perspective. This is in line with Bavinck's understanding of Christ as the unifying of the entire human person.

On the whole, Bavinck provides a short, yet thorough and impressive work that engages many of the modern questions concerning philosophy that we still ask in today's world with the push for a materialistic understanding of the world in many of the science and technologies such as artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and other emerging fields. Bavinck's emphasis on the cogency of the Christian world-and-life view in the face of these modern arguments is laudable and sorely needed in today's context as well as his own. This is because humanity will continue to grapple with the reality of God's existence and creation. Bavinck helps to ground those facing these challenges to the faith once for all delivered to the saints by equipping readers to give a salient argument for the hope within us as followers of Christ and to bring clarity to the discord that all people feel as we try to navigate this life with wisdom and truth.

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God in Himself: Scripture, Metaphysics, and the Task of Christian Theology. By Steven J. Duby. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019, 352 pp., \$40.00.

Steven J. Duby welcomes the renewed interest in the doctrine of God and the attendant issues of epistemology, metaphysics, biblical exegesis, and the incarnation. Indeed, if God is the one from whom and for whom all things exist, then contemplation of the triune God "remains paramount" (1). Yet, while many join Duby in this refrain, the impulse to posit a dissonant relationship between a doctrine of God predicated upon natural theology and metaphysics, on the one hand, and a theology proper grounded in the incarnation, on the other, remains. Duby, however, rejects this impulse, aiming to trot a *via media*. Self-consciously extending the work of Katherine Sonderegger and John Webster, Duby contends that natural theology, metaphysics, and the incarnation need not generate "conflicting agendas for