John Livingstone Lowes wrote a fascinating literary-detective work, *The Road To Xanadu*, to reveal what elements had entered the mind of Coleridge for the creating of two poems. A study of Bavinck's thoughts on Christianity and culture uncovers many sources that fed the sweep of his mind and heart.

Bavinck was first of all a theologian as his four-volume *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* and his chairs at Kampen and Amsterdam testify. But he was a theologian with a philosophic, aesthetic, and practical bent. His thirst for knowledge is evident from his carefully prepared and heavily documented works whether they be intended for the class room, the popular lecture platform, or publication.

His scholarship is marked by thoroughness, honesty, and fairness. He advised his students, "I do not ask that you solve the problem, but that you posit it clearly." Again and again he runs the whole gamut from the earliest Greek thought to the positivism of his day, from the Old Testament to contemporary Christian thinking. He was moved by a passion for a "wetenschap," that is, science in its deepest and broadest sense as organized knowledge.

His appreciation of the best that has been thought, said, and done is evident from these words: "Without doubt we may enrich ourselves with the glorious forms of beauty which Greece and Rome have saved for us. For all is ours if we are Christ's; not only Paul and Cephas and Apollos but also Homer and Horace, Demosthenes and Cicero." He also used the phrase: "the divine Plato."

He was disturbed by sects and the sectarian spirit, the negativism of Anabaptism which separated creation from re-creation, nature from grace, and preferred separation to reformation. He would agree with Richard Niebuhr in calling the position of anticultural Christianity both necessary and inadequate. The distinction between Christ and Caesar, revelation and reason, God's will and man's is essential, but redemptive revelation is aimed also at the transformation of culture in its rich and varied fields.

Bavinck was not, however, a thinker and dreamer in an ivory tower. He was concerned about relating Christianity to the whole realm of culture. In that great field God is also revealing himself and his purposes with man and the world. "God is busy doing great things in these times."

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1 *De Welsprekendheid*, pp. 78, 79.
3 *Modernisme en Orthodoxie*, p. 11.
An exhaustive study of his works acquaints us with the Christian Approach to the Problem, Sources of the Christian Understanding of the Problem, the Roots of Culture, How Culture is Preserved, and the Future of Culture, but also with scientific and practical concern as to the areas of culture such as Theology, the Philosophy of Revelation, the Psychology of Religion, the Natural Sciences, Evolution, the Meaning of History, Beauty and Aesthetics, Principles Governing Society, the Family, the Position of Women, Education, Politics, and War.

It has also been rewarding to set his teaching within the framework of contemporary thinking on the subject.4

In this article we can deal only with a fundamental fragment of his thinking, trusting that from it we can gather something of the comprehensiveness of Bavinck's teachings in which the positive and irenic are well-balanced.

I. TOWARDS A DEFINITION

"The well-known preacher, J. Christian Blumhardt, once said that man needs a twofold conversion, first from the natural to the spiritual life and then from the spiritual to the natural." With this paradoxical statement Bavinck begins his lecture on "Revelation and Culture."5

It is this double conversion that pictures the Christian's relation to, and attitude towards, culture. That first conversion is man's spiritual ascent after his descent into sin. The spiritual life tends upward. "Whom have I in heaven but thee?" is not merely an echo from the Old Testament but is the cry of the Christian heart as well.

However, man is living in a world rich with good things from God. Not only his religious but also his cultural task lies there. His conversion from the natural must follow from his conversion to the spiritual. Neither may be separated from the other. Religion and culture go together. Cultus and culture are sisters bound by love like Martha (culture) and Mary (cultus).

The right to culture and the duty to it are spoken by God: "Be ye fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, and subject it."

Culture exists because God gave us the power to rule the earth, to form it for ownership and as an organ of personality, to turn the whole riches of created life, spiritual, moral, and natural into a pure organism, and to rule it.6


5 "Wijbegeerte der Openbaring," p. 207.

6 "Het Rijk Gods Het Hoogste Goed" in Kennis en Leven, pp. 49, 50.
All culture is a power whereby man rules over nature. Art and science are a triumph of the spirit over matter. But culture like cultus must be rooted in the same principle. The relationship to God and to man must bear the same character and must be ordered by the same moral law.

Although culture is rooted in creation, in a sense it began in earnest after the fall. Culture in itself is by no means sinful or wrong. In Genesis there is evidence of cultural progress which is not condemned. Scripture distinguishes proper use from abuse. Bavinck disagrees with Bishop South who spoke of Aristotle as the rubbish of Adam and of Athens as the rudiments of Paradise.

It is only Christianity that gives the proper interpretation of religion and culture. Creation and re-creation cannot stand over against each other as higher and lower. They are both glorious works of the triune God. “All our modern civilization, art, science, literature, ethics, jurisprudence, society, state, politics are leavened by religious, Christian, supernatural elements and still rest on the foundation of the old view of the world.”

The Christian faith touches on all sides of human life, lets its influence be felt, and sets its stamp on all elements of culture.

It does this because Jesus came not to condemn the world, but to restore it. He took on human nature and rose from the dead. Through his incarnation Christ honored the whole human race. According to the flesh he is brother of all men. The whole re-creation and restoration of the world and of humanity are the fruit of Christ’s work.

There is, therefore, a cultural mandate for the Christian and for all men. In its widest meaning culture implies all human labor expended on nature. But nature has two aspects, the world of sensation outside of man, and man himself including body and soul. There is the circle of man’s labors towards the production and distribution of material goods. There is also the circle in which man ponders the true, the good, and the beautiful and produces in these fields, thereby developing and civilizing himself.

The Gospel and Christianity are not hostile to culture as such. The former reveals the highest spiritual good; it is the satisfactory answer to man’s yearnings. The latter reflects the Gospel’s light for the whole of life.

However, the Gospel brings its own measuring stick. It relates culture to religion and gives it a moral significance. It relates culture to the supreme revelation in Jesus Christ.

Christianity, the religion of redemption revealing a kingdom that is like yeast, stands for the good in the manifestations of culture. It has served and it serves civilization well in spite of the imperfections of its

\(^{7}\text{W. der O., p. 15.}\)
\(^{8}\text{G. D. III, p. 510.}\)
\(^{9}\text{W. der O., p. 214.}\)
confessors. Man must really become God's son again before he can be in
the genuine sense a cultural being.

Culture can be a blessing, and it can be a curse. Bavinck refers sev-
eral times to the poet Da Costa's words about the invention of printing,
that it can be "a giant's step to heaven or to hell," and maintains that the
same is true of culture. Christianity is the best guarantee of its stepping
heavenwards.

Christianity came and unlocked for us a thought-world sparkling with life
and captivating with beauty. To art a new matter, to thinking a lasting object,
to language an eternal content were given. . . . In Christianity the true reconc-
ciliation is found, not only of God and man, but of all the contradictions that
are found in the pagan world. All that in thinking and discoursing, in action
and delivery is ugly and disharmonious is in conflict with the essence of
Christianity. But all that is true, good, lovely, and well-sounding in the realm
of art and science, among us or our opponents, that is Christian. For the
middle-point of Christianity is the Incarnation of the Word, and in that there
is the reconciliation of God and man, of spirit and matter, of content and
form, of ideal and actual, of soul and body, of thought and language, of word
and gesture.10

Christian man, then, under God has a cultural calling in the world.
That world, though created good, was not "finished." It was man's task
to make it true and good. The coming of sin did not stop man's vocation.
With the help that comes from God man must invade every realm for
God's sake to carry out his purpose. In his personal life, in family, society,
state, in science, and in art it is both his task and his glory to work at the
pile of culture and to permeate it all with the radiance of Christ.

II. SOURCES OF THE CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF THE PROBLEM.

Bavinck's position is that all knowledge of God, all religion, all culture
depend on revelation. The self-disclosure of God manifests itself in a
general and in a special revelation.

By the former we understand God's revelation in nature, history, and
man. "This revelation to which faith answers is found in the widest sense
in all the works of his hands, in all nature, in all history, in the totality
of the universe."

But this general revelation, though it belongs in varied measure to all
people, is best understood in the light of special revelation. Man needs the
latter because without it he cannot see well. Calvin speaks of Holy Scrip-
ture as a pair of spectacles. Subjectively man has need of the eye of faith
to behold God also in his works.

From the beginning of time there was an original revelation with re-
ference to the ideas of Deity as almighty and all-wise origin of all things,
of the world established by wisdom, of the harmony of creation, of the

10De Welsprokendheid, pp. 78, 79.
11"Philosophie des Geloofs" in Verzamelde Opstellen, p. 15.
visible and invisible worlds, of the contrast between truth and error, the conflict between good and evil, of the immortality of the soul and the expectation of judgment.\(^\text{12}\)

The revelation of Israel is joined to this original one, and it is the continuation, the development, and the completion of it.

General revelation, though insufficient, is important for all people and has great significance for the Christian understanding.

1. By means of it the Christian feels at home in the world. A person standing in the faith and in the light of special revelation finds in nature and in history traces of the same God who is his Father. The discovered ground is very rewarding. The Christian sees God in all and all in God.

2. General revelation gives a common ground on which to meet non-Christians. God speaks in creation, nature, and history, in the heart and conscience of all people.

3. Moreover, this revelation keeps nature and grace, creation and recreation, the world of reality and the world of value together and makes the relationship possible. In that setting man comes to a knowledge of the Creator.

4. General revelation also arouses in man the sense of need for a special revelation.

5. Then again general revelation makes possible special revelation and prepares for it. The former has as purpose the keeping, the latter, the saving of the human race. Both glorify God.

Bavinck gives three reasons why general revelation is not complete and satisfactory. 1. It does not make known the person of Christ; it knows of no saving grace and forgiveness. It can illumine the conscience of man somewhat and check sin, but it can re-create neither the nature of man nor the world. 2. The knowledge it gives is unsure, mixed with error, and unreachable by many. 3. No single people have been satisfied with a so-called natural religion based on such a revelation. The abstractions of the eighteenth century and the historical sense of the nineteenth have left much to be desired. If thinkers have found a measure of satisfaction, the great mass of the people have not.

The basis of our faith and of the faith of those who have gone before rests on a revelation distinct from the general one. The two revelations differ in method and content. General revelation gives us some conception of God, of his goodness, righteousness, and anger, of his greatness and majesty. But nature presents no God of love. The Bible does that definitely.\(^\text{13}\)

Special revelation is contained in Holy Scripture. The Bible is not the revelation but the record of it. In saying this Bavinck warns against those

\(^{12}\)W. *der O.*, p. 159.

\(^{13}\)Modernisme en Orthodoxie, pp. 32-34.
who not only distinguish between the revelation and the record, but who separate them. He accepts organic inspiration and marshals all the data of the Old and New Testaments to prove both the inspiration and authority of Scripture. The uniqueness of the Bible lies in this, that it records the revelation of grace.

Behind this manifestation of grace lies the revelation that began with the human race.

The segregation and election of Israel served the sole purpose of maintaining unmixed and unadulterated, in a continuing and perfecting manner, the original revelation which threatened more and more to be lost, so that it might again in the fulness of time be made the property of the whole of mankind.14

The revelation recorded in Scripture and culminating in Christ does not ask our approval or disapproval, but it places itself far above us and urges us to faith and obedience. The objective revelation must complete itself in the subjective. That is why the Christian Church at all times made confession of the testimonium Spiritus Sancti. Bavinck maintains spiritedly that the doctrine of the testimony of the Holy Spirit is by no means the Achilles' heel of Protestantism. "It deserves rather to be called the corner stone of the Christian confession, the crown and seal of all Christian truth, the triumph of the Holy Spirit in the world, the foolishness of the Cross overcoming the wisdom of the world, the victory of the thoughts of God over the deliberations of man."15

For Bavinck general revelation has tremendous significance. It has more value than is often attributed to it. But it lacks completion and fulfillment. Its best meaning requires the illumination of special revelation. Both revelations complement each other.

III. INSUFFICIENCY OF NATURAL THEOLOGY

Since Bavinck's day the problem of general and special revelation has issued in a vital and at times almost furious debate. In this article we cannot enter into the controversy between Barth and Brunner, nor can we present the views of such scholars as John Baillie, Oscar Cullmann, G. C. Berkouwer, Christopher Dawson, and Gustaf Aulen.16

For Bavinck scholasticism, rationalism, philosophical idealism, and naturalistic humanism in their emphases on natural theology stress reason before faith or at the expense of it. The revelation in these systems and the revelation upon which they prefer to feed have value but again under the illumination of the Word.

Wandering between two worlds, one dead
The other powerless to be born

14W. der O., p. 162.
15G.D., I, pp. 646, 647.
may well be the picture of natural theology that desires to prove how far it can go on its own power and in its own light.

Bavinck, like the Reformers, like Barth, Brunner, Baillie, and other Christian thinkers, cannot speak of natural theology apart from Christian revelation. If he had been invited to deliver the Gifford Lectures, he would have found it not only difficult, but also impossible to meet the requirements of Lord Gifford to treat the subject as a strictly natural science. He would have expressed thoughts akin to William Temple's closing sentences in *Nature, Man and God*:

> Natural theology ends in a hunger for that Divine Revelation which it began by excluding from its purview. Rightly sifting with relentless criticism every argument, it knows what manner of Voice that must be which shall promise relief to mankind, but the Voice is not its own, nor can it judge the message that is spoken. "Come unto me... and I will give you rest;" it is not philosophy that can estimate the right of the Speaker to issue that invitation or to make that promise; that right can be proved or disproved only by the experiment of life (p. 520).

And for Bavinck that experiment would have been full of the experience that comes with God's initiative most fully in Christ.

As the heavens declare the glory of God only to the believer, so general revelation declares that glory only under the aspect of special revelation.

As a disclosure of the greatness of God's heart special revelation far surpasses general revelation, which makes known to us the power of his mind. General revelation leads to special, and special revelation points back to general. The one calls for the other and without it remains imperfect and unintelligible. Together they proclaim the manifold wisdom which God has displayed in creation and redemption.\(^{17}\)

Without special revelation general revelation and all the manifestations of culture lose the best meaning God intends for them.

IV. RELATION OF REVELATION AND CULTURE

Culture is inseparable from revelation, for the latter implies meanings, God's meanings and intent as far as man can assimilate them.

God did not reject fallen man and the world. On the contrary, he upholds them by his mighty providence and is working out his plan of redemption for them. The fallen world in which we live rests on the foundations of a creation which was very good. Far from letting that fallen world go, God has his increasing purpose in it. In civilization and culture he is working out his plan. All the elements of culture exist only because God has laid down thoughts and powers in his creation, which man under his leading learns to understand. When man views all things *sub specie aeternitatis*, he gets hold of divine meanings.

Scripture itself will not hear of the despising of the body and of the created world. It evaluates them in the divine and human setting. It

\(^{17}\) *W. der O.*, p. 23.
teaches that man in body and soul is the image-bearer of God and that by means of his body he is related to the visible world.

God purposes not only the restoration of man, but also of the cosmos. He desires to wrest the whole world in its organic consistency from the power of sin and to let the glory of God shine in all creatures. Grace did not destroy nature, but it has renewed and sanctified it. Jesus did not come to condemn the world but to restore it.

God’s concern for man and the cosmos, for religion and culture is made known in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Revelation, while having its center in the person of Christ, in its periphery extends to the uttermost ends of creation. It does not stand isolated in nature and in history. . . . With the whole of nature, with the whole of history, with the whole of humanity, with family and society, with science and art it is intimately connected. . . . The foundations of creation and redemption are the same. The Logos who became flesh is the same by whom all things were made. The First-born of the dead is also the First-born of every creature. The Son, whom the Father made heir of all things, is the same by whom he also made the worlds. 18

Without that revelation in Christ man, the cosmos, and the entire realm of culture have little or no meaning.

The wisdom of such a revelation must always be brought into relationship with the divine revelation that comes from the world. When that occurs, the whole realm of culture in all its varied manifestations takes on the meanings God intends.

That makes possible the Christian’s appreciation of culture. He may cherish all that is good and grand in men and that has been brought about by men. He should guard against the despising of gifts and the deifying of man.

The Reformers, looking upon nature in the light of God, saw it not as a deceiving, satanic power, but as a revelation of divine glory, a wonderful work of unity and harmony. So also the Christian can look around him and within and enjoy all that is true, good, and beautiful. Assured of his being a child of God, he can freely look around and enjoy without restrictions all good and perfect gifts coming down from the Father of Lights. All is his because he is Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.

Faith for the Christian is not only the way of salvation, it is also the conquering of the world. The spiritual life does not shut out family and civic life, the social and political, the scientific and artistic. On the contrary, it is the power that enables the faithful carrying out of the earthly calling and stamps the whole of life as a serving of God.

The world under God offers both challenge and enjoyment.

Priest in God’s temple, the believer is, therefore, king over the whole earth. . . . He loves the flowers that grow at his feet and marvels at the stars that

18 v. der O., pp. 22, 23.
twinkle above him. He does not despise art which is a costly gift of God, and he does not rail at science which is God's gift. . . . He believes that every work of God is good, and that nothing is to be rejected but to be accepted with gratitude. . . . He is like a flower which unconsciously spreads its fragrance. In a word, he is a man of God equipped for all good work. And while his life is Christ dying will be gain.\(^{10}\)

Such ecstatic words must be understood in their setting and from the point of view Bavinck is taking at the time. We find such statements in Calvin. We make them ourselves. They do not at all deny the reality of sin and evil, and the darker picture of man.

Bavinck is aware of the light and the darkness as Rembrandt was. That is why he maintains that apart from the full revelation in Christ culture has its limitations. As Brunner says, culture and civilization in themselves do not guarantee the truly human character of life. Man has longings which culture cannot fulfill. For all culture gives satisfaction but also creates and awakens needs. "That is why religion has always existed alongside of culture, or better still, religion preceded culture, and culture everywhere came into existence and developed under the influence of religion."\(^{20}\)

Yet, the Christian must affirm, not deny, the culture-process which under God goes on. It is his mission to appreciate and to cultivate all that is best in creation and redemption. He can do that most tellingly when he considers it his mission to the world to give mankind the comfort of the Christian faith, that all the goods of earth come to man not by chance, but from the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who rules heaven and earth, and in whose light alone life with its prosperity and adversity is to be understood.

In spite of its limitations culture forms a very important part of the Kingdom of God. As a cultural being, active and receptive, the Christian enriches the Kingdom and takes part in the realization of its coming.

That enticing avenue we cannot enter because this article, like, time, must have a stop.

\(^{19}\)De Zekerheid des Geloofs, p. 105.

\(^{20}\)G.D., III, p. 351.