

CALVIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

The Pluriformity of the Church by
Herman Bavinck and Abraham Kuyper

Research Paper in the course: the Theology of Dutch Neo-
Calvinism

Daniel Jin Su Hwang
Spring, 2015

Under the instruction of Dr. John Bolt

Introduction

Throughout many generations during and after the apostolic churches were found, there has been a constant quest to define what it means to be the church of Christ. When first few centuries were spent mainly on the discussions of the doctrine of Trinity, the church developed institutionally by installing a hierarchical structure of the papal magistrate. Despite persecutions against Christians by the Roman Empire, the church has won the battle by regenerating the state. Thus, the age of Christendom, the Christian state, has begun. In 312 AD, the name Roman Catholic Church arose after Constantine legalized the church. Catholic indicated a uniformity of Christ's church.

Nonetheless, the church split after the Great Schism in 1054. The Greek and Latin churches excommunicated each other. Once more, the Church of Rome experienced a break by the rise of the Reformation initiated by Martin Luther with his Ninety Five Theses in 1517. Then, the expansion of many denominations occurred. As if people were going against church divisions, a movement of ecumenism arose from the influence of modernism's universal idea in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

To this uniformity, Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck liberated the idea that church divisions were the result of sin. Rather, God providentially revealed the way it's supposed to be. The history of the church under the guidance of Holy Spirit emphasized the importance of multiformity in the creation. Thereby, Kuyper and Bavinck raised their voice for a better understanding of the church: the doctrine of the pluriformity of the church.

Only handful scholars enticed the wisdom veiled in the comparison of Kuyper and Bavinck. First, Cornelis Veenhof exposed Bavinck slightly contrasting to Kuyper's approach

concerning the pluriformity of the church.¹ Following after Veenhof yet disagreeing, Gerrit Cornelis Berkouwer depicted that Bavinck shared Kuyper's generosity by resigning to separation rather than diversity.² Meanwhile, Henry Zwaanstra first introduced Kuyper's perception of the pluriformity of the church.³ Then, Martien B. Brinkman clarified further Kuyper's doctrine of the pluriformity of the church in the dialogue between Th. F Bendsorp and Kuyper.⁴

Recently, Barend Kamphuis added to the debate between Veenhof and Berkouwer that Bavinck is very confusing. "On the one hand, Bavinck is ashamed of the endless schisms of Protestantism. On the other hand, these schisms have some beauty, according to him."⁵ In addition to this debate, James Eglinton stated, "That the church should prize non-uniformity as its ideal is another application of the church as organism principle found in seed form in Bavinck's writings and in fuller form in Kuyper's work."⁶

Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck accorded many similarities. They had the same threat presented by the modernistic uniformity. Thereby, they introduced their doctrine of the pluriformity of the church. By analyzing the multiformity present in the creation, they concluded God's creational order as unity-in-diversity. Furthermore, they acknowledged the weakness of humanity because they saw the brokenness on earth from the historical development of the

¹ Cornelis Veenhof, *Volk van God: Enkele aspecten van Bavincks kerkbeschouwing* (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 1969), 168; Cornelis Veenhof, "Church and Church Unity," *Life Is Religion* (St. Catherines: Paideia Press, 1981), 159-170.

² Gerrit C. Berkouwer, *The Church: Studies in Dogmatics*, trans. James E. Davison (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 55; cf. Herman Bavinck, "The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church", trans. John Bolt, *Calvin Theological Journal* 27 (1992), 227, 234, 247.

³ Henry Zwaanstra, "Abraham Kuyper's Conception of the Church," *Calvin Theological Journal*, vol. 9, no.2 (1974), 176-177.

⁴ Martien B. Brinkman, "Kuyper's Concept of the Pluriformity of the Church," *Kuyper Reconsidered: Aspects of his Life and Work*, ed. Cornelis van der Kooi and Jan de Bruijn (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 1999), 111-122.

⁵ Barend Kamphuis, "Herman Bavinck on the Catholicity of Christianity and Church," *Beiheft zur Okumenischen Rundschau: Christliche Traditionen zwischen Katholizitat und Partikularitat*, no. 85, ed. Leo J. Koffeman (Frankfurt: Lembeck, 2009), 154; cf. Barent Kamphuis, "Herman Bavinck on Catholicity," *Mid-America Journal of Theology*, 24 (2013), 103.

⁶ James P. Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism: Towards a New Reading of Herman Bavinck's Organic Motif* (New York: T&T Clark, 2012), 200.

church. Nevertheless, Kuyper and Bavinck hoped in God's providential revelation in the history and determined that the division of the church was necessary.

However, their presupposition differed. When Abraham Kuyper grounded the doctrine of ecclesiastical pluriformity in the creation, Herman Bavinck stepped further to elaborate Triune God through the creation. Therefore, it is fitting to describe Bavinck's pluriformity of the church as the triformity of the church.

Similarities between Kuyper and Bavinck in the Pluriformity of the Church

The Threat of Modernism in Uniformity and Monism

In the 19th century, modernism was gradually engulfing the church. Hence, Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck foresaw a great danger lying ahead of the church. Kuyper keenly defined this danger as uniformity. As he had worried, the uniformity penetrated into the society, the culture, and the perception among the people.⁷ On the other hand, Bavinck quarried deeper into the modern philosophical influence. Through the patterns of materialism and pantheism, Bavinck labeled this influence as monism.⁸ To this modern cavity, both Kuyper and Bavinck presented a prescription of the pluriformity.

Kuyper understood this influence of Modernism as the curse of the uniformity. This curse marginalized variation and differences. In his speech on April 22nd, 1869 in Amsterdam, Kuyper pointedly found five historical facts to prove his claim. By looking at the architecture of the cities, he first embodied a portrait that the beauty of sweet home is lost to coarse and monotonous apartment complexes. Peculiarity of each building with unique patterns and variety of colors was tarnished by the repetition of simple, boring, and dull designs. Secondly, he

⁷ Abraham Kuyper, "Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life," *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 19-44.

⁸ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Prolegomena*, vol. 1, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2003), 367-72.

carefully examined the youth wanting to be like the old. Controversially, adolescents refuted their true identities to be youthful, active, and energetic. The old also lost the value in their wisdom, experience, and responsiveness. They preferred to be young. In addition, men and women sentimentalized attributes of a neutral syndicate of the two. As a result, the fashions of these people were platitude; they did not express much variance. Lastly, Abraham Kuyper illustrated uniformity in the language. The refined beauty of Dutch language, which elaborated distinct perceptions and nuanced variances, assimilated to the simplicity of the global culture. This curse of uniformity was the principle of modernism. Everything equalized and leveled. All diversity engraved down. To this problem, Abraham Kuyper boldly proclaimed, “If multiformity is the undeniable mark of fresh and vigorous life, our age seeks to realize its curse in its quest for uniformity.”⁹

On the other hand, Herman Bavinck systematically found the root of uniformity in a modernistic worldview namely monism. To Bavinck, this monism could be differentiated into two systems: materialism and pantheism. Materialism took a stance only admitting atoms as fundamental ground. These atoms, according to its distinct attributes, functioned from a set of mechanical laws. Whether it is by combining or separating, the atoms were formulating a foundation in a being. Materialism looked at the creation disregarding spiritual realm.

In this sense, pantheism, acknowledged an actuality of a shared element in all things. This single unity of shared element, then, according to one law, was believed to alter itself. In other words, pantheism believed in the cosmos having a supernatural nature and equated it as a god. To added sum of materialism and pantheism, Bavinck said, “The worldview that is opposed

⁹ Abraham Kuyper, “Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life,” 25-30.

to Scripture and must in principle oppose all revelation... Monism... strives to reduce all the forces, materials, and laws perceptible in nature to a single force, material, and law.”¹⁰

To this common enemy of uniformity issued by modernism and monism, both Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck dynamically sought to provide an answer. Thereby, the concept of the pluriformity of the church was structured. However, church and her leaders were either passive and indifferent or reactive with vulgar attitude. Affirming latter to be more appropriate, Abraham Kuyper boldly raised his voice to appreciate modernism while defending Christian faith against modernism.¹¹ Growing influence of modernism was clearly a threat to both Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck.

The Doctrine of the Pluriformity of the Church

To challenge the influence of Modernism, Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck consonantly advocated the doctrine of the pluriformity of the church as an appropriate answer. Kuyper introduced the doctrine of pluriformity to English-speaking audiences, mainly on his Stone Lecture series on Calvinism.¹² Meanwhile, Bavinck introduced the pluriformity through his magnum opus: *Reformed Dogmatics*.¹³

At Princeton Theological Seminary in 1898, Kuyper encouraged his Calvinistic principle to be spread on the American soil. In these lectures, Kuyper introduced many important themes, including the doctrine of pluriformity. Kuyper presupposed God’s creation from the ground for the doctrine. Through the differences observed in man and woman, in physical and spiritual gifts, in wealth and poor, Kuyper highlighted the variation as God’s created order. God ordained the

¹⁰ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Prolegomena*, 367.

¹¹ Abraham Kuyper, “Modernism: A Fata Morgana in the Christian Domain,” *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 87-124, see at 87-91.

¹² Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931).

¹³ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Prolegomena*; Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, vol. 4, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2008), 275, 291, 295, 319, 439.

world to be so beautiful in the gradation of colors, in the contrast of light and shadow, and in the lamination of lights shining in the sky and reflected from the horizon over the sea. Witnessed by this vastness of creation, pluriformity excelled. As a result, Abraham Kuyper saw multiformity as the principle and the vitality of creation and of humanity.¹⁴

Abraham Kuyper, then, advised his audience to understand the church as the body of Christ in which comprises of the congregation of believers. Accordingly, because the church is the gathering of confessors based on different environment, nation, history, and worldview, the church would result in this richness of creation as well.¹⁵ Thereby, he, looking at church's historical development, argued that the pluriformity of the church was inevitable despite her scars realized through her divisions and splits.¹⁶ Kuyper accentuated this insight by requesting the state to "honor the complex of Christian churches as the multiform manifestation of the Church of Christ on earth."¹⁷ In this sense, he advocated the multiformity of the church so that the limited subjectivity of humanity would comprehend fuller mysteries of the church.¹⁸

In Reformed Dogmatics, Herman Bavinck supplemented the conversation about the doctrine of pluriformity of the church. Just like Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck established the pluriformity of the church presupposing the conception of the church as the body of Christ. Then, Herman Bavinck distinctively discerned the etymology of the church in Hebrew and in Greek, in German, and in Dutch.¹⁹ By doing so, Herman Bavinck enlarged Abraham Kuyper's illustration of the doctrine of pluriformity hermeneutically and linguistically. Many references from Pauline epistles and the various passages from the four gospels supported that the biblical

¹⁴ Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 26.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 63-4.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 106.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 194.

¹⁹ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, 296-7.

themes of the church as the people of God are solid. Therefore, Bavinck confirmed the essence of the church as a gathering of true believers.²⁰

In this sense, Herman Bavinck applied a comparable notion of the body of Christ as Kuyper did. Bavinck said this body of Christ is understood rightly as Christ's brothers and sisters who are many and diverse. Thus, the multiformity of the church granted a natural aspect of the church to be the communion of saints. Bavinck stated, "And in this oneness the Spirit does not undo the diversity that exists among believers but rather maintains and confirms it."²¹ These understandings showed a correspondence to Abraham Kuyper's pluriformity grounded in creation and in providence of the Spirit.

However, it would be wrong just to assume Kuyper and Bavinck promoted only the multiformity. Their multiformity rather is better understood as the unity-in-diversity. Kuyper was clearly right to say that "In the unity of the kingdom of God diversity is not lost but all the more sharply defined... Though the wall of *separation* has been demolished by Christ, the lines of *distinction* have not been abolished."²² Bavinck did not much differ from Abraham Kuyper, for he marked the created order as coinciding unity and diversity.²³

The Apologetics of the Pluriformity of the Church

Both Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck knew the objections that may arouse from misunderstanding the pluriformity of the church. For the multiformity could be understood as the support of sectarianism, Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck emphasized church's history because it is the only defense for pluriformity. First, they argued that history is under Sovereign God's providence. Secondly, they defended the necessity of church-split along the history. Not

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 296-8.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 299.

²² Abraham Kuyper, "Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life," 35

²³ Herman Bavinck, *Christelijke Wereldbeschouwing* (Kampen: Kok, 1904), 50; Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2004), 330.

only did humanity fragment the church but also God revealed it providentially. Thirdly, they, as people belonging in history, succeeded implementing pluriformity into the unification of two different secession movements of *afscheiding* and *doleantie*.

First, they narrated a profound history of the church centrally focused on the Reformation. During the 16th century, one did not yet come to appreciate a strongly felt compassion for multiformity of the church because the absolutism of catholicity of the church veiled the truth. Regardless, when Luther nailed 95 theses into many people's hearts, "the multiformity of churchly life became thereby *eo ipso*, a fact."²⁴ To this, Bavinck similarly stated, "The change that the Reformation made in the Roman Catholic view of the church also had practical consequences. Uniformity forever gave way to multiformity."²⁵ In this sense, Kuyper and Bavinck elaborated on the development of the doctrine as necessary and inevitable. Since, the Holy Spirit evidentially guided this historical development of the pluriformity.²⁶

Secondly, not only conveying the true spirit of the Reformation but also directly expressing from their distinct secession movements of *doleantie* and *afscheiding*, Kuyper and Bavinck were familiar with the problems of church split. Many could claim against that the multiformity of the church can be greatly mistaken as the result of sin. They will likely protest pluriformity is neither a created order nor the providence of God. It could be seen as the euphemistic doctrine defending the split of the church as necessary.

Both Kuyper and Bavinck readily defended this objection. Formerly, Kuyper acknowledged the division of the church. Initiated by the fruit of the Reformation, the gap

²⁴ Abraham Kuyper, *De Gemene Gratie*, vol. 3, (Amsterdam: Hoveker & Wormser, 1904), 269; Abraham Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, 659-661

²⁵ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol.4, 489.

²⁶ Abraham Kuyper, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology: Its Principles*, trans. Hendrik De Vries (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1898), 662; Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Prolegomena*, 375; Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, 372, 439, 460.

widened between Rome and reformers. Different interpretations of the Bible arose. Distinct confessions segregated them further. Even among the Protestants, Lutherans, Zwingli, and Calvinists disagreed on many dogmas. Stretched-out breach may, indeed, demonstrate negative effects of sin.²⁷ Even so, he stepped further to depict positive light in God's ordinance by saying, "But we are equally conscious of the fact that *we alone* do not constitute the Church of Christ in the earth."²⁸ Kuyper implicitly called forth a hope in direct interference of the Holy Spirit.

Correspondingly, Bavinck, agreeing to Kuyper, said, "As Christians we cannot humble ourselves deeply enough over the schisms and discord that have existed all through the centuries in the church of Christ."²⁹ Bavinck, too, anguished over the evidence of sin testified repetitively in the history. Moreover, he pointed out this division did not originate from the Reformation. The apostolic churches, to Bavinck, already disclosed separation. There were serious uproars between Peter and Paul, and between Paul and Barnabas. In addition, hostility existed between the Jews and the Gentiles. Corinthian church was also divided into parties based on one's possession of wealth. In this notion, various opinions of individuals and of groups from many cultures caused hindrance to the unity among the church. Still, Bavinck hoped in Jesus Christ, who tore the curtain and made unity possible. The Spirit of Christ unified the church in the multiform.³⁰

Thirdly, Kuyper and Bavinck accounted painstaking events in their times. Their concern did not just remain in the formulation for an answer to the problem issued by the curse of modernism, but also in the secession movements of *afscheiding* and *doleantie*. The division of the church was not only an event from the history, but also a reality to them. In 1886, Kuyper led his *doleantie* movement out of the Dutch Reformed Church (NHK). As the prominent leader,

²⁷ Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 105; Abraham Kuyper, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology: Its Principles*, 325.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 326.

²⁹ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, 316-25.

³⁰ Herman Bavinck, "The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church", 226-7.

Kuyper proclaimed the pluriformity of the church as an assurance.³¹ Meanwhile, Bavinck belonged to a family of an *afscheiding* minister. *Afscheiding* was another secession movement out of NHK earlier in 1834. Having grown amidst of the persecutions against the secession movement, Bavinck cautiously raised his voice to support the pluriformity as well.³² Nevertheless, Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck did not stop justifying the division through the doctrine of pluriformity. They advanced forward together in order to seek earnestly the unity presented in their doctrine of pluriformity. In 1892, the unified church altogether rejoiced in the efforts of Kuyper and Bavinck.³³

Kuyper and Bavinck labored in formation for theology and reality of the pluriformity. They believed the history was under the providence of God. Their faith witnessed the division of the church with hope, despite her gloomy scars. Hence, they were able to bring two suffering churches into unity. The doctrine of the pluriformity of the church exemplifies their passion to solve the threat posed by the uniformity and the division of the church.

Differences between Kuyper and Bavinck in the Pluriformity of the Church

Although Kuyper and Bavinck consonantly fought against the uniformity, generated the pluriformity, shared many historical insights, and defended the pluriformity, they deviated from one another. There is one way they divulged: the presupposition. They grounded the doctrine of pluriformity of the church differently. While Kuyper formulated the doctrine out of his intuition in the creation, Bavinck dogmatically bounded it in Triune God. Because their presuppositions contrasted, their applications of the doctrine surfaced slightly dissimilar.

³¹ Cf. Karel Blei, *The Netherlands Reformed Church, 1571-2005* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 77-79.

³² *Ibid.*, 64-67; Robert P. Swierenga, and Elton J. Bruins, *Family Quarrels in the Dutch Reformed Churches in the Nineteenth Century*, 5-35.

³³ Karel Blei, *The Netherlands Reformed Church, 1571-2005*, 80-83.

Abraham Kuyper's Presuppositions of Creation

Inspired by Calvin, Kuyper more vigorously presupposed the church in God's creation. The vestiges of multiformity in Creation evidently supported Kuyper's supposition of pluriformity. He especially expressed this idea applied to human life in the famous work, "Sphere Sovereignty." Life principle of humanity took place in multi spheres such as the family, the state, the school, the arts, and even the church. In each sphere, Sovereign God has distinct authority over the realm of creational life. This pluriformity of spheres, indeed, invigorates the human life:

This perfect Sovereignty of the *sinless* Messiah at the same time directly denies and challenges all absolute Sovereignty among *sinful* men on earth, and does so by dividing life into *separate spheres*, each with its own sovereignty.

Our human life, with its visible material foreground and invisible spiritual background, is neither simple nor uniform but constitutes an infinitely complex organism... the cogwheels of all these spheres engage each other, and precisely through that interaction emerges the rich, multifaceted multiformity of human life.³⁴

Consequently, Kuyper's pluriformity is rooted in the creational order of God. The church, as a divinely ordained "sphere" in the center of human life, is located in the creation. In this sense, Kuyper understood the church as the people of God. These people of God, thereby, have a particular mandate to be confessional.

This presupposition of creation is also shown in Kuyper's defense of pluriformity. Now in such a condition as it came about and exists, partly according to God's ordinance of creation, partly as the fruit of history, partly through our sin, excluding anybody who does not feel, think and profess the same with us from the true church, all over this earth and among all nations, is simply a total absurdity. For the church exists for us in its parts.³⁵

He viewed the history as God's ordinance of creation. Despite the sinful humanity causing the division of the church through the Reformation and beyond, the grace of God restored the evil

³⁴ Abraham Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 467.

³⁵ Cf. Martien B. Brinkman, "Kuyper's Concept of the Pluriformity of the Church," *Kuyper Reconsidered: Aspects of His Life and Works*, 116; Abraham Kuyper, *De Gemene Gratie*, vol. 3, 245.

into the goodness of created order: multiformity. Kuyper applies this perception even to the narrative of Babel tower. God dispersed the language after its kind. Even so, “That all life should multiply ‘after its kind,’” Kuyper said, “after its own, unique, given character is the royal law of creation which applies to more than seed-bearing herbs.”³⁶ His inspiring words provided hope and stirred up motivation to many people to join together in secession movement of *doleantie*. He called out for neo-reformation in the Netherland rooted in the doctrine of the pluriformity as evidential and necessary providence of God.

In this presupposition of creation, Kuyper defines the purpose of multiformity as to give glory to God. “The sun, moon, and stars in the firmament, the birds of the air, the whole of Nature around us, but, above all, man himself, who priestlike, must consecrate to God the whole of creation, and all life thriving in it.”³⁷ In this worship of all creation, the doctrine of pluriformity of the church is essential. Despite the effects of sin, the call to worship must be practiced through the church in multiform. Kuyper stated right “Uniformity in God’s creation! No, rather infinite diversity.”³⁸

Herman Bavinck’s Presupposition of Triune God

As mentioned earlier, Herman Bavinck proposed his pluriformity comparable to how Abraham Kuyper established. Indeed, Bavinck would agree with Abraham Kuyper that the church is in God’s creation. Observing creational order, Bavinck would accord that the development within the history under the church’s division is also a part in the guidance of the Holy Spirit.³⁹ Moreover, to Bavinck, all people have numerous spiritual gifts and physical talents, for God created them in multiform. God calls these people to be the body of Christ in order to for

³⁶ Abraham Kuyper, “Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life,” 34.

³⁷ Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 52.

³⁸ Abraham Kuyper, “Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life,” 34.

³⁹ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, 299.

them to serve the church of Christ and to worship God.⁴⁰ Certainly, one may understand the presupposition of Herman Bavinck is not much different from that of Kuyper.

However, Herman Bavinck advanced beyond Abraham Kuyper. Bavinck was a dogmatician. He followed strictly to the definition he found as “Dogmatics”:

More precisely and from a Christian viewpoint, dogmatics is the knowledge that God has revealed in his Word to the church concerning himself and all creatures as they stand in relation to him.⁴¹

Bavinck did not presuppose the doctrine of pluriformity of the church in the creation. He took another step to ground the doctrine in the greater Triune God. He considered creation as a tool revealing the divine economy of Triune God. Creation is only a stepping stone to reveal who God is. Thereby, the pluriformity of the church is God ordained method of revealing His relationship to the world and to His covenantal people.

In this sense, Bavinck described further that the church has a unique spiritual power: the power renews and sanctifies. Approving Kuyper’s sphere of sovereignty, Bavinck stated, “Thus the church exists in the midst of the world with an origin, essence, activity, and purpose of its own. While in every respect it is distinct from that world, it never stands apart from or alongside the world.”⁴² This church in the world has power given by Holy Spirit, mediated in Christ and decreed by the Father as it was in the beginning.

In the beginning, God the father decreed the world into creation. Christ, as the mediator, is the Son by whom God created all things. The Holy Spirit is same God from the creation who hovered over the waters and adorned the heavens. The creation was good until sin entered this world through the first created humanity. Sin totally depraved everything – spiritual life as well as natural life. This sin is neither substantial nor material but formal, attached to the creation as a

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 359.

⁴¹ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Prolegomena*, 38.

⁴² Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, 435.

cavity. However, Triune God's power extended to regeneration and sanctification of God's people. Creation and re-creation, thereby, exemplifies good works of one Triune God.⁴³

Moreover, this power is introduced to His people: the church. Thereby, Bavinck emphasized, "The creation is incorporated and restored in [the process of] re-creation. Persons who are born again are substantially no different from what they were before regeneration. *Incorporated in the church, they nevertheless remain in the world and must only be kept from the evil one.*"⁴⁴ The pluriformity of the church, therefore, spreads to the world – the family, society, occupation, business, art, science, and so forth – by regenerated people through their renewing and sanctifying influences decreed by the Father, mediated in Christ, and guided through the Holy Spirit.

Bavinck also testified the presupposition of God when he argued against modernistic monism. Theism as the appropriate answer, Bavinck suggested a doctrine of pluriformity:

According to this theistic worldview, there is a multiplicity of substances, forces, materials, and laws. It does not strive to erase the distinctions between God and the world, between spirit (mind) and matter, between psychological and physical, ethical and religious phenomena. It seeks rather to discover the harmony that holds all things together and unites them and that is the consequence of the creative thought of God. *Not identity or uniformity but unity in diversity is what it aims at.*⁴⁵

Here, Bavinck finds unity in diversity, too, just like Abraham Kuyper. However, Bavinck's presupposition in the doctrine of pluriformity is rightly described as "triniform"⁴⁶ for the doctrine subsumes Triune God.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 436;

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 436; emphasis added.

⁴⁵ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Prolegomena*, vol. 1, 368; emphasis added.

⁴⁶ Cf. James P. Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism: Towards a New Reading of Herman Bavinck's Organic Motif*, 54, 67, 79, 201.

Evaluation on Bavinck's Doctrine of the Pluriformity of the Church beyond Kuyper's

The reason why Cornelis Veenhof put Kuyper's pluriformity antagonistically to Bavinck's pluriformity is, perhaps, because Veenhof appreciated something in Bavinck more than that of Abraham Kuyper.⁴⁷ This, in my opinion, was well responded in the work of James Eglinton.⁴⁸

Bavinck discerned the chaotic multiform, the church divisions, away from the providential multiform, variances of the church. To this, Eglinton coined a term, "triniform" of the church. He defined:

Bavinck's organic motif has a somewhat different source – a richly Trinitarian doctrine of God as received by the Patristic and Reformation traditions – and that it accounts for the triniformity so abundant throughout all created reality. God as archetypal (triune) unity-in-diversity is the basis for all subsequent (triniform) ectypal cosmic unity-in-diversity.⁴⁹

What he meant here can be applied to the understanding of the triniformity of the church. Church is the ectypal cosmic unity-in-diversity. Its essence derives from the archetypal unity-in-diversity, which is the Triune God. Without God's intervention, the dualism between the uniformity and the pluriformity would never be solved. In the development of history of all creation, sin may appear prevalent through the church by many divisions, struggles, and conflicts. However, the church is definitely the body of Christ. Her head is none other than Jesus Christ. The actuality of covenantal relationship between God and His people is realized in the church. Therefore, it was more appropriate for Bavinck to presuppose the doctrine of the pluriformity of the church in Triune God.

⁴⁷ Cornelis Veenhof, *Volk van God: Enkele aspecten van Bavincks kerkbeschouwing*, 168; Cornelis Veenhof, "Church and Church Unity," 159-170.

⁴⁸ James P. Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism: Towards a New Reading of Herman Bavinck's Organic Motif* (New York: T&T Clark, 2012), 200-3.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.

On the other hand, I humbly understand Gerrit C. Berkouwer trying to defend Abraham Kuyper over somewhat pointy arguments of Veenhof.⁵⁰ Conversely, Berkouwer, perhaps, missed something. To me, the confusion Kamphuis introduced in his article highlights an important mark Berkouwer might have missed in Bavinck's work.⁵¹ Bavinck was not ambivalent toward the church on the earth. Kamphuis illustrates as if Bavinck at times was ashamed of the church-split and at other times was hopeful in God's providential revelation in the history of the church. Rather, what Bavinck attempted was to provide the readers the cautious tension between the sin caused by humanity and the grace provided by God in the multiformity of the church.

I perceive Abraham Kuyper weak at drawing a clear tension existed in the doctrine of pluriformity of the church. Yes, I admit that Kuyper did acknowledge the division of the church as the result of sin.⁵² However, he passionately sought to fight against the modernism as he elaborated.⁵³ His antithetical arguments appeared too strong that it may be less appealing.

Lastly, Bavinck's triformity of the church is more fitting for his biblical and historical epistemology. Even though Abraham Kuyper mentions that he's approaching certain issues biblically and historically, his epistemology, in the end, is highly influenced by his love toward Romanticism.⁵⁴ Often, it appears to be more speculative than it ought to be. Bavinck as a dogmatician could lead more faithfully by peeling the hidden values in the doctrine of the pluriformity of the church.

⁵⁰ Gerrit C. Berkouwer, *The Church: Studies in Dogmatics*, 55.

⁵¹ Barend Kamphuis, "Herman Bavinck on the Catholicity of Christianity and Church," 154; Barent Kamphuis, "Herman Bavinck on Catholicity," 103.

⁵² Martien B. Brinkman, "Kuyper's Concept of the Pluriformity of the Church," 115-7; Henry Zwaanstra, "Abraham Kuyper's Conception of the Church," 175-7; cf. Abraham Kuyper, "Deformation of Theology," *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology: Its Principles*, 319-26.

⁵³ Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 10; Abraham Kuyper, "Modernism: A Fata Morgana in the Christian Domain," 87; Abraham Kuyper, "Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life," 21-22.

⁵⁴ Abraham Kuyper, "Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life," 20; cf. James D. Bratt's introduction to "Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life," 19-20.

Conclusion

Bavinck and Kuyper shared many similarities. They had the common enemy of modernism. Through their doctrine of the pluriformity of the church, they pursued unification between their two seceding churches. They are great teachers of the doctrine of the pluriformity not only as theologians on the table but also as practitioners of theology.

Abraham Kuyper, indeed, provided a good starting point of the pluriformity of the church. He was a passionate motivator of pluriformity. Numerous occasions, he set the tone that the threat of modern uniformity is imminent.⁵⁵ He called fellow leaders from the church to engage passionately into this matter.⁵⁶ Additionally, he carefully examined the historical development of the church. In this, he remorsefully acknowledged that the sin has divided the church. At the same time, he proclaimed the hope in the providential guidance of the Holy Spirit. This opening of the new chapters was the decree of God. Presupposing the creation of the unity-in-diversity, Kuyper persuaded exceptionally to the need to stand against the modern uniformity under the teaching of the doctrine of church's pluriformity.

However, the epistemology Kuyper used to structure this doctrine can be seen rather speculative and weak. On the other hand, Herman Bavinck as a dogmatician who presupposed the Triune God. Doing so, he clearly drew the tension between the sinful division of the church and the gracious revelation of God in the church as necessary pluriformity. Thereby, Bavinck resolved the difficult challenge of dualism available in the division of the church and the multiform of the church. Bavinck distinctively established the pluriformity of the church as "triniform."

⁵⁵ Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 10; Abraham Kuyper, "Modernism: A Fata Morgana in the Christian Domain," 87; Abraham Kuyper, "Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life," 21-22.

⁵⁶ Abraham Kuyper, "Modernism: A Fata Morgana in the Christian Domain," 87-88.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Bavinck, Herman. *God and Creation*. Edited by John Bolt. Translated by John Vriend. Vol. 2. 4 vols. *Reformed Dogmatics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004.

_____. *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*. Edited by John Bolt. Translated by John Vriend. Vol. 4. 4 vols. *Reformed Dogmatics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008.

_____. *Prolegomena*. Edited by John Bolt. Translated by John Vriend. Vol. 1. 4 vols. *Reformed Dogmatics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003.

_____. "The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church," Translated by John Bolt. *Calvin Theological Journal* 27 (1992): 220-51.

Kuyper, Abraham. *De Gemeene Gratie*. Vol. 3. 4 vols. Amsterdam: Hoveker & Wormser, 1904.

_____. *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology: Its Principles*. Translated by J. Hendrik de Vries. New York: Scribner's, 1898.

_____. *Lectures on Calvinism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1931.

_____. "Modernism: A Fata Morgana in the Christian Domain (1871)." *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*. Edited by James D. Bratt. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998, 87-124.

_____. "Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life (1869)." *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*. Edited by James D. Bratt. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998, 19-44.

Secondary Sources

Berkouwer, Gerrit C. "Pluriformity?" *The Church: Studies in Dogmatics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976, 51-76.

- Brinkman, Martin E. "Kuyper's Concept of the Pluriformity of the Church." *Kuyper Reconsidered: Aspects of his Life and Work*. Edited by Cornelis van der Kooi and Jan de Bruijn. Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 1999.
- Eglinton, James P. *Trinity and Organism: Towards a New Reading of Herman Bavinck's Organic Motif*. T&T Clark Studies in Systematic Theology 17. London: T&T Clark, 2012.
- Kamphuis, Barend. "Herman Bavinck on Catholicity." *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 24, (2014).
- _____. "Herman Bavinck on the Catholicity of Christianity and Church." Edited by L. J. Koffeman. *Christliche Traditionen zwischen Katholizität und Partikularität/ Christian Traditions between Catholicity and Particularity*. Frankfurt am Main, 2009.
- Veenhof, Cornelis. *Volk van God: Enkele aspecten van Bavincks kerkbeschouwing*. Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 1969.
- _____. "Church and Church Unity." *Life Is Religion*. St. Catherines, Ont: Paideia, 1981.
- Zwaanstra, Henry. "Abraham Kuyper's Conception of the Church." *Calvin Theological Journal*. Vol. 9, no.2. (1974).