

Bavinck Institute
Bavinck Society

Classic Reformed Theology: Still Serving the Church

The Bavinck Conference: October 12-14, 2011

"After 9/11/11 ... What? Reformed Theology and the Church's Global Mission Today"

What did Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck know and say about Islam? Can the Dutch Reformed, neo-Calvinist theological tradition that shaped the Christian Reformed Church and its institutions still speak to us today? How do we use the treasures of our Reformed theological heritage to help the church today in its mission to the world?

These are the sort of questions that just over one hundred presenters and attendees at the second Bavinck Conference wrestled with during the seminary's reading week in October 2011. (The first Bavinck Conference in September 2008 celebrated the centenary of Herman Bavinck's Stone Lectures at Princeton Seminary in 1908 on *The Philosophy of Revelation*.)

The conference was opened with an illustrated lecture by Dr. Bert De Vries from Calvin College's History Department on Abraham Kuyper's visit to the Holy Land in 1907-08. Kuyper kept a detailed travel journal and published his reflections in a two-volume work, *Around the Ancient World-Sea (Om de Oude Wereldzee)*. As always, Kuyper had clear and distinct views about what he saw, and De Vries helped sort out the useful from the time-bound.

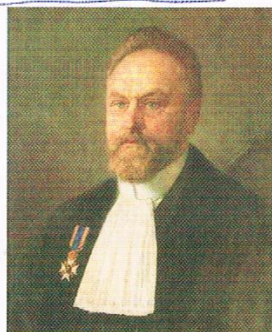
Conference presenters took the theme seriously by exploring the contributions of Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, and Bavinck's nephew, the missiologist J. H. Bavinck, to helping the church understand its mission, learning from mistakes as well as solid insights, and applying old truths in new and creative ways. Topics included: Comparisons between Kuyper's and Bavinck's views on Islam; Dutch colonial policy and missions in Indonesia; the missiology of Samuel

Zwemer; the "Insider/Outsider" debate in Islamic missions; J. H. Bavinck's theological interpretation of religious consciousness; the problem of voluntary and involuntary dhimmitude; and whether the challenge of Islam forces Reformed thinkers to adjust their traditional commitment to pluralism. A highlight on Thursday evening was the testimony of five Calvin Seminary students and a Calvin College professor about what it is like to live as a Christian minority in Muslim majority contexts—namely, Egypt, Ethiopia, the Sudan, Indonesia, and Malaysia. The evening concluded with focused prayer for our brothers and sisters in Christ in those places.

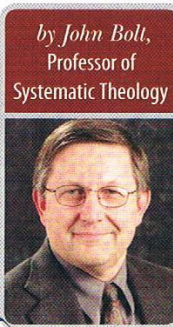
At the close of the conference, conferees were joined by several hundred more guests at a public lecture in the Calvin College Covenant Fine Arts Center given by the Honorable Dr. Jan Peter Balkenende, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of the Netherlands from 2002-2010. Dr. Balkenende is a Reformed Christian who attended Christian schools and graduated from the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, with degrees in



Dr. Jan Peter Balkenende
Prime Minister, Kingdom
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Dr. Herman Bavinck
(1854-1921)
Professor at Vrije Universiteit,
Amsterdam



by John Bolt,
Professor of
Systematic Theology

history and law. He served the Vrije Universiteit as a Professor of Christian Social Thought on Society and Economics and played a significant role in the strengthening of the Christian Democratic Alliance, the new Christian political party formed from the older Calvinist and Roman Catholic political parties.

In recognition of his service, the Bavinck Institute awarded Dr. Balkenende the first annual "Bavinck Prize for Outstanding Contribution to the Church, the Academy or Public Life." The evening was topped off by Dr. Balkenende's public lecture, "Reinventing Responsibility in the 21st Century: New Orientations and the Heritage of Neo-Calvinism." Prime Minister Balkenende's presence among us and his forward-looking lecture served as a reminder to us North Americans, who often look across the Atlantic with pessimistic eyes, that a Reformed political witness in the tradition of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck persists in the Netherlands.

In conjunction with the conference, the Bavinck Institute at Calvin Seminary also sponsored an essay contest for Ph.D. students, offering \$1,000 scholarships and an opportunity to have their papers discussed by a panel of Bavinck scholars. The students with the five best proposals presented the fruit of their research on Wednesday, October 12, prior to the conference start that evening. Their papers will be published in the electronic journal *The Bavinck Review*, available on the seminary's website.

The conference and work of the Bavinck Institute at Calvin Seminary arise from our commitment to be faithful to both our Reformed roots and to the call that God places before us today. Yes, classic Reformed theology is relevant!