

JAN BAVINCK'S (1826-1909) REFORMED PIETY: EXPERIENTIAL AND HOLISTIC

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ABSTRACT: This article introduces the theology of a neglected figure in the Dutch Reformed (*Gereformeerde*) tradition of the nineteenth century: Jan Bavinck (1826-1909), the father of Herman Bavinck (1854-1921). The approach to his theology is done by describing his definition of piety (*vroomheid* or *godzaligheid*), a fundamental subject within the Reformed tradition. The relevance of piety is briefly described in the theology of John Calvin (1509-64) and the *Nadere Reformatie* in order to argue for the necessity of exploring Jan Bavinck's description of the nature and application of godliness. After analysing some primary sources, I argue that Jan Bavinck's theology of piety can be described as experiential and holistic. In this way, it may be considered, in general terms, as a bridge between the *praxis pietatis* of old Calvinism – characterised by Calvin and the *Nadere Reformatie* theologians – and neo-Calvinism, represented by Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) and Jan's son Herman Bavinck.

KEYWORDS: Jan Bavinck, Reformed piety, experiential Calvinism, neo-Calvinism, *Nadere Reformatie*.

Introduction

This [Reformed] Church has need, a great need for godly, solid and scientifically-educated servants of the Gospel. Intentionally, I place “piety or godliness” in the first place because I believe that true and genuine piety is a main requirement in him who acts to proclaim the Gospel as a minister of Christ - Jan Bavinck.¹

The development of Herman Bavinck's (1854-1921) studies has been welcomed among Reformed and Evangelical scholars during the last years. This can be noticed by the special journal editions — such as this one — dedicated to Bavinck's

¹ DO: ‘Die Kerk heeft behoefte, groote behoefte aan godvruchtige, degelijke, wetenschappelijk-gevormde dienaren des Evangelies. Met opzet plaats ik het attribuut »vrome of godvruchtige» voorop, omdat ik meen, dat ware en echte vroomheid een hoofdvereischte is in hem, die optreedt om als een dienaar van Christus het Evangelie te verkondigen.’ (Bavinck 1883: 19).

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theology, by the Dutch publications of Bavinck's *Gereformeerde ethiek* (2019) and *Filosofische ethiek* (2021), by the new translations of Herman Bavinck's works into multiple languages, and also in the tremendous effort of the neo-Calvinist Institute in publishing online the entire collection of Bavinck's archives. In the same line, and to better grasp Bavinck's thought, James Eglinton's *Bavinck: A Critical Biography* (2020) fills a fundamental gap in the Bavinckian scholarship. Previously, Eglinton's research has been crucial in setting up a new reading of Bavinck's works through its organic motif. In this line, Eglinton's biographical account introduces Bavinck's persona to appreciate and interpret him more accurately. For this, Eglinton begins his critical biography with an influential person in Herman's life, his father, Jan Bavinck (Eglinton 2021: 17-39).

Jan Bavinck has been a figure that, for the moment – and except for the introductions to his life in the biographies dedicated to Herman Bavinck by Ron Gleason (2010) and Eglinton – has not received much attention in recent scholarship. Therefore, Jan Bavinck's theology remains a pivotal subject to be studied in order to understand it on its own terms, but also to compare it with the other Bavincks, such as Herman Bavinck and his neo-Calvinistic project, his other son Coenraad Bernardinus Bavinck (1866-1941), and his grandson, Johan Herman Bavinck (1895-1964).

The question remains, where should we begin in studying Jan Bavinck's theology? Although such a study could be explored, for example, from his pastoral aspect, I describe his theology from another theme: *Gereformeerde vroomheid* or Reformed piety. To highlight the relevance of this theme within the Reformed tradition and to support the analysis of piety in Jan Bavinck's thought, I will briefly introduce the place of *pietas* both in John Calvin's theology and life (1509-1564) and in the Dutch Reformed movement identified as *Nadere Reformatie*. After this, I will focus on describing Jan Bavinck's definition and application of piety in its experiential and holistic aspects. Finally, I will conclude that Jan Bavinck's concept of piety could be considered as a bridge between the old understanding of *praxis pietatis* found within the old Reformed tradition and the development of piety within the first generation of the neo-Calvinist movement led by Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) and Herman Bavinck.

Pietas in the Reformed tradition: from John Calvin to the Nadere Reformatie.

From the first to the last edition of *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, piety occupies a prominent place in the theology of John Calvin. In the dedicatory letter to the French king, Calvin expressed part of his treatise's purpose, namely, that Christians 'might be shaped to true godliness [*veram pietate*]' (Calvin 1986: 1). In 1538,

Calvin published a Latin Catechism based on the French version of *Instruction of Faith* (1537). In the preface to the Latin version, Calvin shows the intention of his new treatise, which was addressed to those who 'devoutly honor the gospel...and the increase of true godliness [*pietatis*]'. In this instance, he aimed to seek unity among the different churches. For Calvin, it is to their benefit that 'all churches embrace one another in mutual love' (Hesselink 1997:1). The zeal for cooperation and peace is given in the urgency of unity of doctrine (*doctrinae*) and minds (*animorum*) in order to advance in fear of God, unfeigned holiness and sincere piety (*sincera pietate*). From a catholic disposition, Calvin proceeds to define what *pietas* is. True piety is defined as a 'sincere feeling which loves God as father as much as it fears and reverences him as Lord, embraces his righteousness, and dreads offending him worse than death' (Hesselink 1997: 8).

As such, piety occupies a significant place in Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. According to John T. McNeill and Ford Lewis Battles, Calvin's theology is 'his piety described at length' (Calvin 1960: li). Furthermore, godliness was a theme reflected both in Calvin's persona and writings. In Herman Bavinck's words, 'life and doctrine with him [Calvin] were one' (Bavinck 1909: 465). This is reflected, for example, in the chapter on 'the Christian life', which was added to the second edition of Calvin's *Institutes* during his period in Strasbourg. As Battles observed, 'it must be said that the Strasbourg sojourn was crucial in working out pastorally and practically and liturgically the full meaning of *pietas*.' (Battles 2009:31). In sum, *praxis pietatis* was a theme ingrafted both in his *Institutes* and in his own life because, for Calvin, godliness was even considered as the soul of life (Calvin 1855: 368).

But what is the primary purpose of godliness? The end of piety serves the same purpose as creation: both function for the glory of the triune God. The association between piety and God's glorification is clearly expressed in Calvin's theology, as he wrote in the Third Book of his *Institutes*:

Now the great thing is this: we are consecrated and dedicated to God in order that we may thereafter think, speak, meditate, or do nothing except to his glory ...We are not our own: in so far as we can, let us therefore forget ourselves and all that is ours. Conversely, we are God's; let us therefore live for him and die for him. We are God's; let his wisdom and will therefore rule in all our actions (Calvin 1960: 690).

Both in Calvin's theology and life, this God-glorifying theology was not merely theoretical but rather practical at the same time. According to John Hesselink, the language used by Calvin in the quote above is not simply an illustration of profound rhetoric, but it is also a kind of autobiography (Hesselink 2004: 89). This sense of piety permeated both Calvin's theology and life because he 'was constantly over-

whelmed by the majesty of God, [because he] consecrated himself and his theology to the glory of God' (Hesselink 2004: 90). Calvin claimed that this focus on piety started in his 'sudden conversion', where he received 'some taste and knowledge of true godliness [*verae pietatis*]' (Calvin 1845: xl). In his *Calvin* biography, Bruce Gordon describes Calvin's first years as an author, regarding piety as central in the theology of the young Calvin. Gordon notes that Calvin's French preface to the New Testament was a 'song of praise to the glory of God and creation. The preface is strikingly close to the first edition of the *Institutes*, particularly with its concern for true piety' (Gordon 2011: 56).

This experiential theology of living a life that belongs to, and lives for the glory of God, was an influential element formulated in the diversity of Reformed confession-alism of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. For example, a year before Calvin's death, the Heidelberg Catechism (1563) authors expressed that the only comfort for the Christian is to know that he does not belong to himself but to Christ in body and soul, both in life and death. In the same way, the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (1647) declares in its first answer that 'man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.' Through these confessional statements, we can observe the echo of Calvin's ideas and other Reformed theologians, resounding through the first two questions of both Reformed catechisms.

The concept of *pietas* shaped the beginning of post-Reformation Reformed Orthodoxy as a central element in theological training. As Richard Muller notes, 'the older Protestant educational model inculcated both a rigorous engagement with the technical disciplines and a rigorous cultivation of personal and corporate piety' (Muller 2003: 120). The pious-academic theological training was part of early modern Dutch Protestant Orthodoxy.

The Dutch Reformed pietistic movement took a definitive form through the *Nadere Reformatie*. This movement began in the period of early Orthodoxy, matured in the period of high Orthodoxy and in some sense, declined in the late period of Orthodoxy (Beeke 1993: 315-316, Pronk 2019: 11). *Nadere Reformatie* can be translated as 'Further Reformation', or 'more intimate Reformation' (Beeke 1993: 300). In response to the growing nominal Christianity inside the Dutch Reformed Church, the Dutch Further Reformation sought to apply the doctrine to the heart of believers. The goal of *Nadere Reformatie* pastor-theologians was to live reformed lives according to their beliefs, as confessed in their Reformed confessions of faith, which rested in Scripture. In other words, Reformed Orthodoxy for reformed orthopraxy.

Because of this emphasis on piety, the *Nadere Reformatie* called for an experiential fellowship with God, which would bring a reformation in all areas of life (van Lieburg 1994: 414). Significantly, what differentiates the *Nadere Reformatie* from previous

pietistic movements was its formal reformation program. Personal and experiential piety had to be reflected in concrete agendas committed within the reformation of family, church, and politics (op't Hof :216-20). Because of this, we can see four features in the Dutch Further Reformation: (i) experiential and mystical emphasis, (ii) a socio-cultural (moral) reformation, (iii) an ecclesiastical reformation, and (iv) a political (theocratical) reformation (van Lieburg 1994: 414). In other words, Dutch Reformed piety was related to a holistic reformation that began in peoples' hearts and extended outwards to glorify God in every sphere of human life.

However, this holistic programme of reformation in the beginnings Nadere Reformatie developed in a shift observed in the late orthodoxy period (from 1725). If early and high Dutch Reformed Orthodoxy focused both on the individual and the church community, the period of late Orthodoxy focused more on the individual's internal experience, forgetting in some sense the call to reform not just the heart, but also the church and society (Pronk 2019: 21, 36-7; Beeke 1993: 316). [This difference can be observed in Teellinck, Voetius, and Schortinghuis as representatives of the early, high and late Dutch Reformed Orthodoxy, respectively. As Graafland describes, 'For Teellinck the experience of the heart remained central, but then as a center which penetrated a wide area, including not only the family and the congregation, but also the entire church and nation, politics inclusive. For Schortinghuis subjective experience is the fort which the believer withdraws himself from the world and even from the congregation around him' (See Graafland in "Kernen en contouren van de Nadere Reformatie" 55, cited in Beeke "The Dutch Second Reformation" 316). Andreas Beck indicates that Voetius 'was the central figure of the Nadere Reformatie', where in Voetius' theology of missions 'matched the ideal of the Nadere Reformatie to apply saving truth of the grace of God in Jesus Christ to church, school, and society, and thus to relate the Gospel to all areas of life' (Beck 2022:146-147)] The essence of a holistic and experiential reformation of early-high orthodox theologians was declining in the middle of the eighteenth century. In short, individualism, subjectivism, and an inclination to withdraw from society were the tendencies of Dutch Reformed pietism during the second half of the eighteenth century.

The significance of introducing the place of piety (in a general way) in Calvin's theology, as well as in the *Nadere Reformatie*, is due to their direct influence on the ecclesiastical tradition of Jan Bavinck. In other words, the concept of piety had occupied a significant place in the Reformed tradition in the centuries before Jan Bavinck's birth. At the same time, we can note that within the Dutch Reformed tradition, we can observe some tendencies that emphasise experiential/holistic piety or experiential/separatist piety. What kind of *praxis pietatis* did Jan Bavinck conceive of? To answer this question, we must turn to his ecclesiastical tradition.

Piety in the *Afscheiding* (1834)

In general terms, from the first decade of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth-century Dutch society, we can identify a conflict between those who, on the one hand, applied the ideas of the Enlightenment and Revolution to their religious and theological thought, and on the other hand, opposed it (Wintle 1987: xiii). The Secession of 1834 (*Afscheiding*) was one of the movements that opposed the rationalistic and liberal forms of a national Dutch Reformed Church (*Hervormde Kerk*) dominated by the state's authoritative and administrative regulations.

One of the first leaders of the Secession was Hendrik de Cock (1801-1842). Because of his early approach to liberal ideas, de Cock's early preaching was moralistic. However, at the beginning of the 1830s, de Cock discovered older notions of Orthodoxy and piety via members of his congregation in Ulrum. Copies of the Canons of Dort (given to him by a widow) and Calvin's *Institutes* – and conversations with members of his congregation – contributed to a change in his understanding of salvation, eventually leading to his conversion to experiential Reformed Orthodoxy (Harinck and Winkeler 2015: 460). Dissatisfied with liberal theology, de Cock led a movement that seceded from the *Hervormde Kerk* in 1834. Despite the state persecution against the Seceders that ensued, this movement not only spread through the rural areas but also influenced the German *Evangelisch-altreformierte Kirche* (Evangelical Old Reformed Church in Lower Saxony), a church that in 1838 seceded from the German *Reformierte Kirche*. Herman Bavinck's father Jan, a German who later emigrated to the Netherlands, left the German *Reformierte Kirche* in order to become a member of this local German Reformed church.

The roots of the orthodox piety of the *Afscheiding* can be traced both to John Calvin and the *Nadere Reformatie*. In fact, it is impossible to consider the Secession formation without the last movement (Brienen 1986: 16-24). The leaders of the *Afscheiding* were well versed in several texts produced in the *Nadere Reformatie*. Willem Teellinck (1579-1629), Jacobus Koelman (1632-95), Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635-1722), Herman Witsius (1636-1708) and others were read by ministers and congregations in that setting. Memorably, it was while imprisoned that de Cock read à Brakel's *The Christian's Reasonable Service* (Brienen 1986: 18-9). Despite the low popularity of dogmatic and Puritan books at the end of the eighteenth century, and the removal of pietistic books from circulation until 1795 by the provincial authorities, a direct relationship between the formation of the Secession and the reprint of *Nadere Reformatie* literature during the 1830s can be observed. Indeed, van Lieburg relates the revival of interest in puritan and orthodox books (by both anglophone and Dutch authors) from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the rapid growth of the Secession of 1834 (van Lieburg 2012: 165-68).

The Secession's culture of piety is also related to the kind of sermons preached by its ministers. Unlike the Groningen school's moralistic sermons, where 'Christ was a less bleeding Savior than a model of fully realised humanity; the end of religion was less salvation from sin than the achievement of virtue' (Bratt 1985: 5), one of the central question for Secession's ministers was 'how does one receive salvation?'.² With this view, they were 'at the same tone as in the preaching of the *Nadere Reformatie*' (Brienen 1986: 21) regarding the evangelical emphasis on preaching.

It should be stated that the *Nadere Reformatie* was not a homogeneous group. As we saw previously, its holistic view of reformation changed between the early and late periods of Reformed Orthodoxy. There were also differences among its representatives, for example, between Gisbertus Voetius (1589-1676) and Johannes Cocceius (1603-69), and between à Brakel and Alexander Comrie (1706-74). As such, a significant question arises: which particular Reformed seventeenth-century representatives and ideas influenced the Secession ministers? The answer to this is a complex one. Just like the diversity found in the *Nadere Reformatie*, there were also 'variants within the circle of the Secession' (van den Berg 1992: 173). The variety found in the *Nadere Reformatie* influenced the diversity found in the Secession representatives. As van 't Spijker indicates, 'it must be possible to map the mutual differences between the fathers of the Secession on the basis of their prototypes in the *Nadere Reformatie*' (Brienen :19).³

Having noted the diversity found amongst the Seceders, we can conclude that there were also diverse understandings of piety in the Secession church, as expressed in their views of modernity and culture. What, in that context, was Jan Bavinck's understanding of piety? To this, I will focus now.

Jan Bavinck's Reformed experiential and modern piety

I knew both parents of Doctor Bavinck intimately. They were typical of their environment and cherished all the puritanical and often provincial ideas and ideals of the early Church of Separation. Simple, almost austere in their mode of life, exhibiting something of what the Germans call *Kulturfeindlichkeit* (hostility to culture), they were pious to the core, teaching their children more by example than by precept. – Henry Elias Dosker (1855-1926)

This eulogy, written by Henry Dosker one year after Herman Bavinck's death (Dosker 2008: 15), illustrates a particular feature that has been ascribed in some quarters

2 Secession sermons were rooted in Reformed orthodoxy. This revived sense of Reformed experiential preaching, it is worth noting, was within the framework of the preaching of the *Nadere Reformatie*.

3 DO: 'Het moet mogelijk zijn de onderlinge verschillen tussen de vaderen der Scheiding in kaart te brengen aan de hand van hun prototypen in de *Nadere Reformatie*.'

to Jan and Geziena Bavinck: a form of piety that was hostile to culture. This anti-culture thesis was described previously by Valentine Hepp (1879-1950), who published the first biography of Herman Bavinck three months after Bavinck's death (Hepp 1921: 14). However, this view was challenged by R. H. Bremmer in 1966 and more recently, by Eglinton. Bremmer stated that Jan and Geziena were not narrow-minded (Bremmer 1966: 15). Indeed, both parents supported their son's decision to study under heterodox theologians at Leiden University shows the opposite of that which Hepp imagined. In the same line, Eglinton comments that Jan's influence was directed to support Herman's strivings to be an 'orthodox Calvinist in a later modern culture' (Eglinton 2020: 39). In Eglinton's account, the reason for this was the particular type of piety seen in Jan Bavinck's life.

Eglinton's biography provides a detailed account of Jan's life. In fact, Eglinton begins the second chapter (entirely dedicated to Jan and Geziena) by describing Jan as *pious*. This piety, Eglinton argues, is reflected in two things embraced warmly by Jan: experiential Calvinism and liberal democracy (Eglinton 2020: 17). However, Eglinton does not delve into the essence of Jan's understanding of piety. Therefore, it is necessary to explore and introduce Jan Bavinck's comprehension of *praxis pietatis*.

To understand Jan's piety, the type of Reformed experiential *vroomheid* must be appropriately considered according to the Dutch religious context of the second half of the nineteenth century. Within Reformed circles, some people, alongside their traditionalism and conservatism, 'identified themselves with the idea of *bevinding* (experience)', where conversion experiences were written in the form of autobiographies. These groups of *bevindelijke gereformeerden* ('experiential Reformed') were characterised by their agglomeration in communities, enthusiasm for old Reformed literature, and opposition to Kuyper's neo-Calvinism. Due to their particular vision of the doctrine of divine providence, some rejected cultural and modern advances, including, for example, the use of the steam train (van Lieburg 2012: 176-8, 181). Was this the kind of experiential Calvinism to which Jan Bavinck adhered? His writing—found in his autobiography, sermons and articles—shows the opposite.

Eglinton describes Jan Bavinck's autobiography, 'A Short Sketch of My Life', as demonstrating his identification with late European modernity. Countering the previous example of the *bevindelijke* rejection of train travel, Eglinton identifies a significant detail in his Herman Bavinck's biography: Jan's admiration for the steam train on account of its redefinition of how quickly he could move around the world. While the coming of the train 'upset pious souls because of the unnatural acceleration of life' (van Lieburg 2012: 181), for Jan Bavinck, 'it was a thing of beauty' (Eglinton 2020: 20). This example shows Jan's appreciation for at least one modern technological advancement. Furthermore, Jan's autobiography can also be another example of

Jan's consideration of modernity and experiential Calvinism. His ego-document was both modern in its genre (Eglinton 2020: 18-19) and pietistic in content. In sum, it is possible to identify modern and pietistic approaches in Jan's thought.

In his 'Short Sketch', Jan describes episodes from his childhood, conversion and adult decisions that shed some light on his understanding and experience of piety. Regarding his childhood, he mentions that while he received a religious education, he was never taught about 'internal Christianity' or things 'experienced' by God's children. Actually, Jan recognises that he was never admonished to believe and repent, or to 'bend his knees' before Jesus to 'seek' and 'desire' him as his Saviour. Nevertheless, the 'things of eternity' weighed on his heart, even though he could recall no mention of true godliness (*godsvrucht*) and piety (*godzaligheid*) in his own upbringing (Bavinck n.d.: 4).

His conversion is also another example of experiential faith. This happened under the preaching of a Calvinist preacher – Jan Sundag (1810-1893) – who received his theological training in the Netherlands with de Cock. His attendance at Sundag's preaching, and after praying several times, led Jan to abandon his former church to embrace the old experiential Calvinist tradition reflected in the seceded German Reformed church. In his words: 'in order to stay Reformed, I separated myself from the [German] Reformed Church and joined the Old Reformed Church' (Eglinton 2020: 29). The church he joined (seceded in 1838) was influenced by the Dutch *Afscheiding* and sent Jan to the Netherlands to receive his theological education in Dutch Secession Church, where Jan eventually became a pastor.

As part of the expressions of piety within which Jan emerged, lots were cast both for his appointment to begin his theological training (1845) and later in his nomination to be part of the teaching faculty of the Seceder's new Theological School in Kampen (1854). Because of this way of making critical decisions, Jan Bavinck rejected his nomination to teach theology in Kampen—an incident that brought considerable frustration to his life. Providentially, his son would teach in Kampen, where he once remarked in a class on Reformed Ethics, that 'casting lots and losing often makes one cantankerous' (Eglinton 2020: 22). Interestingly, in his teaching about casting lots, Herman Bavinck used two *Nadere Reformatie* authors as references: Bernardinus de Moor (1709-1780) and à Brakel (Bavinck 2019: 438; cf. Bavinck 1903: 168).

Jan Bavinck's preaching also sheds light on his view and experience of piety. He recorded of his ministry in Kampen that, 'a great crowd could listen to the preaching and seemed to devour the words of the preacher! There was hunger and thirst for the Word of God, and the words of life were food and drink for hungry and thirsty souls. I may believe that my work in those days was not without fruit and blessing' (Eglinton 2020: 34). This reference to himself in the third person encourages us to ask about the

type of piety in his sermons. Even though Gleason introduces the English-speaking audience to the kind of preaching of Jan Bavinck – through his summary of two sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism (Gleason 2010: 439-48) – a few examples of some of his sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism will be vital to exploring the concept of piety both in its experiential and holistic aspects.

In 1903 and 1904, while he was living with Herman Bavinck in Amsterdam, a widowed Jan published two volumes on this Reformed catechism. The foreword reveals his primary sources: old-Calvinism and neo-Calvinism. To enrich his sermons, he not only made use of the works of ‘our Reformed Writers’ (*onze Gereformeerde Schrijvers*), but he particularly consulted the writings of two neo-Calvinistic representatives: *E Voto Dordraceno* by Abraham Kuypers and the *magnum opus* of his own son: *Reformed Dogmatics*. This trend is also manifested in the intention of the holistic scope of Reformed truth through his sermons. For example, Jan Bavinck argued that in the gospel of grace, sinners are saved, not through civilisation (*beschaving*) and enlightenment (*verlichting*), but it is ‘only through the power of this truth – which is there in Christ Jesus our Lord, and which is so beautifully and simply set forth in our Heidelberg Catechism’ –⁴ that society (*maatschappij*) can be rescued from the spirit of rebellion (*opstand*) and revolution (*revolutie*) (Bavinck 1903: prologue). In this way, for Jan Bavinck, Reformed preaching is directed toward the salvation of *sinners* and *society*.

Jan Bavinck also echoes the doctrine-life (*leer-leven*) character of the *Nadere Reformatie* when he mentions that, on the one hand, ‘in the form of questions and answers, our textbook contains an instruction in the doctrine of truth, which is according to Godliness, in the hope of eternal life’ (Bavinck 1903: 1).⁵ And also, on the other hand, that the doctrinal emphasis is closely connected to the daily living because the catechism ‘is very practical in nature’ (Bavinck 1903: 2).⁶

The experiential aspect of his theology is reflected in the subjective experience of believers and in the application aspect of his sermons. Preaching on questions and answers twenty-four and twenty-five of the Heidelberg Catechism, Jan Bavinck highlights both the objective and subjective aspects of the certainty of the doctrine of the Trinity in the life of the believer. In his words ‘and you, children of God, you know, based on God’s infallible Word, through personal experience, that God is a Triune God’ (Bavinck 1903: 134).⁷

4 DO: ‘maar alleen door de kracht dier waarheid, welke daar is in Christus Jezus onzen Heere, en welke in onzen Heilighen Catechismus zoo schoon en eenvoudig wordt uiteengezet.’

5 DO: ‘In de vorm van vragen en antwoorden bevat ons Leerboek eene onderwijzing in de leer der waarheid, die naar de Godzaligheid is, in de hope des eeuwigen levens.’

6 DO: ‘is zeer praktisch van aard.’

7 DO: ‘En gij, kinderen Gods, gij weet, op grond van Gods onfeilbaar Woord, bij eigen ervar-

The application is aimed at the conscience or heart of the listeners in the middle and end of his preaching. Thus, it is possible to find both *questions* that lead to the spiritual self-examination of the listeners, and *promises* that remind people about the spiritual blessings and realities in believers. Regarding the believers' only comfort in question/answer one of the *Heidelberg Catechism*, Jan asks in the middle of his sermon: 'but, is this comfort also your comfort?... have you surrendered to Jesus by faith? Do you now live by, with and for Christ, that faithful Saviour? Or do you still belong to yourself, living in and for the world?'. (Bavinck 1903:7)⁸ So too, Jan reminds his listeners (and future readers) about the privilege (*voorrecht*) of belonging to Jesus. Actually, the emphasis lies on the *object* to whom believers belong, that is, the one who is 'the radiance of God's glory and the exact imprint of his nature', the 'only-begotten Son', 'the Word', 'God himself' and so on. In this sense, self-examination should lead believers to the objective foundation of subjective piety.

The emphasis on the object of salvation (i.e. Christ), becomes essential for the harmony between the confession and practice, especially regarding the place of piety in Reformed circles. By preaching on questions/answers 28-30 (Jesus the Saviour), Jan comments that 'we, Reformed [people]' (*wij, Gereformeerden*) confess that Jesus Christ is the only one who can save and make sinners happy (*gelukkig*). Nonetheless, many people praise Christ with their mouths, while in practice, they deny him. How can this be? According to Jan Bavinck, it happens when we 'seek and aim' (*zoeken en bedoelen*), something 'outside/apart' (*buiten*) of Christ. When a sinner looks up to Christ as the only Saviour (*eenigen Zaligmaker*) but still thinks that he can find something in 'his own doing' (*in zijn eigen doen*, emphasis original), or in 'his own piety' (*zijne eigene vroomheid*, emphasis original) on which he can build his salvation, he does not honour the Saviour properly. Thus, sound piety must grow from Christ, in Christ and to the glory of Christ. Jan's exhortation is straightforward: 'Get rid of everything outside of Jesus' (*Weg met alles wat buiten Jezus is*, Bavinck 1903:178). In this sense, a sound piety is not centred in piety itself but in Christ, and Christ alone: 'Expect your salvation from none other than Him. Not from yourself, [not] from your piety....but from Jesus and Jesus alone' (Bavinck 1903:181).⁹

From the centrality of Christ, the practical notion of a 'godly walk' can be better understood. Commenting on question XX, he declares, 'A testimony in words, that

ing, dat God een Drieëenig God is. Gij hebt Hem als Vader, Zoon en Heilige Geest leeren kennen uit de werkingen, die gij in uw hart gevoeld hebt en nog gevoelt.'

8 DO: 'Maar is deze troost, Gel., ook uw troost?... Hebt gij door het geloof aan Jezus overgegeven Leeft gij nu door, met en voor Christus, dien getrouwen Zaligmaker Of behoort gij uzelfen nog toe, en leeft gij in en voor de wereld?'

9 DO: 'Maar verwacht dan ook uw heil van niemand anders dan van Hem. Ook niet van zelve, van uwe vroomheid...maar van Jezus en van Jezus alleen.'

is not confirmed with a godly walk, lacks its power' (Bavinck 1904: 600).¹⁰ Following the same idea, a 'messy and sinful walk' will 'break the power of words' in witnessing. Thus, Christians can benefit their neighbours through a godly walk (*godzaligen wandel*).

Jan Bavinck's God-centred, experiential and holistic piety can be identified in his editorial work for *The Witness* (*De Getuigenis*, 1868). As Eglinton mentions, Jan's attention to modern cultural concerns is visible in this magazine: 'Jan addressed cultural themes far more directly.'¹¹ What were the purposes of this publication? According to the editors, Helenius de Cock and Jan Bavinck, piety (*godzaligheid*) stood at the forefront, being explicitly mentioned both in the title and end of the opening editorial:

The Witness.

Monthly writing for the sake of the Truth and Piety

... for the dissemination of knowledge, and for the maintenance and defense of His truth,

and also for the promotion of true godliness. (Bavinck 1869: 6) 12

In this way, Jan Bavinck's *praxis pietatis* can be described as one that resonated with the holistic character of the first generation of neo-Calvinism, and the sort of experiential Calvinism drawn from the first generation of Seceders. As Bremmer illustrates: 'His piety was that of the first generation of Secession preachers and had a pietistic character' (Bremmer 1966: 15).¹³ However, and according to the diversity of notions of *pietas* found in those particular Reformed circles, Jan's experiential piety was not anti-cultural. He did not support the kind of some pietistic tendencies, which over-emphasised experiential excesses. As his son C.B. Bavinck described, the Bavinck children were influenced by Jan 'through his mysticism, his fellowship with God and his prayer, which made a deep impression on us as children, while all this was preserved through father's clearheadedness for all sickly excesses' (Hepp 1921: 22).¹⁴

10 DO: 'Een getuigenis in woorden, dat niet bevestigd wordt met een godzaligen wandel, mist zijne kracht.'

11 Eglinton, *Bavinck*. 34.

12 DO: 'tot verbreiding van de kennis en ter handhaving en ter verdediging Zijner waarheid, en tevens tot bevordering van ware godzaligheid.'

13 DO: 'Zijn vroomheid was die van de eerste afgeschieden predikantengeneratie en had een piëtistische trek.'

14 DO: 'vader ook door zijn mystiek, zijn gemeenschapsleven met God en zijn gebed, dat op ons als kinderen een diepen indruk maakte, terwijl dat alles tech door vaders helderheid van hoofd bewaard werd voor alle ziekelijke excessen.'

So far, we can see Jan Bavinck's piety as a bridge between the experiential theology of the *oude schrijvers* and the holistic vision of that movement that recovered and developed Reformed Orthodoxy in a late modern context, i.e., neo-Calvinism. In other words, Jan Bavinck displays a phenotype of piety that is both experiential and modern.

However, the question remains to be answered. What is the nature of this experiential and holistic piety? In order to consider the significance of this topic, Jan dedicated an entire article in *De Getuigenis* (1868) to describe the importance of piety.

Het nut der godzaligheid or The usefulness of piety

The title of his article written for *De Getuigenis* can shed some light on the nature and practical aspects of piety in Jan Bavinck's thought. Beginning by quoting 1 Timothy 4:8 – godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come (ESV) – Jan acknowledges both the experiential/holistic aspect of piety – *useful for all things* – and the difficulty of defining piety.

For Jan Bavinck, the question regarding the essence (*wezen*) or the nature (*natuur*) of piety is easier to ask than to answer. The reason is that piety belongs to the phenomena of spiritual life, an aspect that, because of the nature of it, is difficult to explain. Actually, even when the word denotes something lovable (*beminnelijker*) and lovely (*liefelijker*), one 'involuntarily feels that lack the language to this end' (Bavinck 1869: 33).¹⁵ After considering the previous presupposition, Jan indicates that piety is not a specific virtue (*bepaalde deugd*) but rather 'a summary of various Christian virtues, a union of all that is divine, holy, and lovely' (Bavinck 1869: 33).¹⁶

Even when piety is related to something more subjective (the spiritual life), its origin is grounded in an objective foundation, which is God's word. In other words, piety is a fruit of truth (*vrucht der waarheid*); a truth that is revealed to us in his word (Bavinck 1869: 34). This idea reflects the subtitle of this magazine, where Jan is explicit in the affirmation that where the truth lacks, 'there you will not find piety' (Bavinck 1869: 34).¹⁷ This is why even when he acknowledged respect to people such as Socrates, Plato and others, in terms of virtues that they may excel others, they just possess a 'miserable superstition' (*armzalig bijgeloof*). Therefore, piety is a plant that grows (*groeit*) and is cultivated (*gekweekt*) not in heathen but in Christian soil. Significantly, orthodoxy matters when sound doctrine and piety do not have the same meaning, even considering that a person can be 'so orthodox as Calvin' without being godly. Therefore, where the doctrine of truth (*leer van waarheid*) is contested

15 DO: 'dan gevoelt gij onwillekeurig, dat de taal u daartoe ontbreekt.'

16 DO: 'een samenvatting van onderscheidene Christelijke deugden, eene vereeniging van al wat goddelijk, heilig en lieflijk is.'

17 DO: 'daar zult gij de Godzaligheid ook niet aantreffen'

(*bestreden*) and the mystery of godliness is denied (*geloochend*), there is no piety. Piety is born (*geboren*) from and nurtured (*gevoed*) by the truth. Thus, Reformed piety is closely related to Reformed orthodoxy.

After establishing the essential place of truth, Jan proceeds to distinguish and relate some elements to piety. The first is related to the connection between piety and morality (*zedelijkheid*). For Jan, a person can be moral to a certain degree without being godly. So, there is a distinction between a moral and a pious person. The difference lies in their principles. The moral and ungodly person performs actions out of an understanding of decency (*welvoegelijkheid*) or the consequences of immorality. However, the godly have a new principle that, from an ardent love (*vurige liefde*) seeks to please God in all things.¹⁸

Because the godly feels (*gevoelt*) united to God and perceives God's peace, he serves him with humility and sincerity and attracts people to set their hearts aflame with love (Bavinck 1869: 35). However, there is no piety without morality. A person can be moral in a certain sense without being godly, but it is impossible to 'bear the name of a godly [person], without answering to the demands of morality' (Bavinck 1869: 36).¹⁹ That is why godly people must detest (*verafschuwt*) and flee (*vliedt*) everything contrary to morality. Even when the godly is not a perfect person and feels the battle of the flesh against the spirit, he has a solemn purpose of living according to all God's commandments. In this way, Bavinck summarises this relationship by indicating that 'piety sanctifies morality and gives it the right content, while morality grants a firm and venerable character to piety' (Bavinck 1869: 36).²⁰

The second element Jan Bavinck distinguishes from piety is religiosity (*godsdiensstigheid*). In short, a person can be outwardly and strictly religious without being godly. Bavinck argues from daily experience as a minister. He says that one can see people attending the worship service twice every Sunday to hear the word of God, reading the Bible and devotional books, praying and even giving to the poor. Nevertheless, the problem arises when religion is performed mechanically (*werktuigelijk*), as an outward duty. In other words, it is not a matter of the heart. For the godly, this is totally different. For the pious person, the service of God (*de dienst van God*) is a desire (*lust*) and life (*leven*). In this way, Psalm 84 is a reality from the heart. At the

18 Jan Bavinck's affective language (ardent love) and holistic at the same time, reflects in some ways what was described at the beginning of this article with regard to the concept of piety in John Calvin's theology. On the other hand, it is possible to see an appropriation of Calvin's sacramental theology (with regard to the Lord's Supper) by Jan Bavinck (see Bavinck 1904: 539-540).

19 DO: 'onmogelijk kunt gij den naam van een' godzalige dragen, zonder dat gij aan de eisender zedelijkheid beantwoordt'.

20 DO: 'De Godzaligheid heiligt de zedelijkheid en geeft haar de rechte gehalte, terwijl de zedelijkheid een vast en eerbiedwaar dig karakter aan de Godzaligheid verleent.'

house of the Lord, the godly feels at home, where the soul is refreshed and comforted. From there, the believer declares: it is good for me to bear near God. Notably, he is not only pious on the Lord's day but also during the week, an idea reflected in *The kingdom of God* by a young Herman Bavinck. As such, a Christian is also a good citizen, being 'honest and diligent in business and conduct' (Bavinck 1869: 37).²¹ Thus, everything is done with God and to please God, an aspect that is discovered in all his actions 'though he himself does not speak a single word'. In sum, for the godly, 'the service of God is the life of his life, and this involuntarily shines through all his works' (Bavinck 1869: 38).²²

The third point is related to talk. For Jan Bavinck, 'piety also does not exist in godly talk' (Bavinck 1869: 38).²³ Particularly, Jan is not casting reproach on those who love and fear the Lord. Bavinck is far from doing what the world does in condemning the godly for speaking about God and divine things. For Jan, a heart full of the world will speak of the world, but a heart filled with God and divine things — 'as the word "*godzaligheid*" (piety) really means' — cannot be silent about God. In fact, 'silence here is not a rare sign, that the heart is far from the Lord'.²⁴ However, the problem is detected when people talk too much and do too little. Interestingly, in comparing the Christians in the Netherlands, England and America, Jan describes Dutch people with the problem mentioned above, while English and American people talk less and do a little more for God and his cause. In fact, that attitude reflects what true godliness (*ware Godzaligheid*) is (Bavinck 1869: 38-9). By quoting 2 Timothy 3:5, he argues that many people in his days have a form of godliness, but they deny its power. This appearance or form of godliness is the phenotype of hypocrites. That is, when people by their language seem to be 'half-angels' to the point that their listeners even feel ashamed by their talk; however, with their lives and conduct, they are 'half-devils' for the members of their households, living in secret sins and falsehoods. Contrastingly, true piety is manifested in behaviour and walk rather than the mere verbal proclamation that someone is supposedly godly (Bavinck 1869: 39).

After explaining the nature of piety and its relationship with other topics, Jan Bavinck proceeds to describe the usefulness of piety or its practice. Remarkably, it is here where he applies a holistic and practical approach based on 1 Timothy 4:8. Piety is useful for all things. That is, for all kinds of peoples and societies, including kings, subjects, statemen and the ordinary citizen, man, and woman. In his words, 'piety is a matter for all and in all classes and ranks of society, which sheds incalculable gain and

21 DO: 'eerlijk en trouw in handel en wandel'.

22 DO: '...al spreekt hij-zelf geen enkel woord. De dienst van God is het leven van zijn leven, en dit straalt onwillekeurig in al zijne daden door.'

23 DO: 'De Godzaligheid bestaat ook niet in vroom praten.'

24 DO: 'Zwijgen is hier niet zeldzaam een teeken, dat het hart verre van den Heere is.'

benefit' (Bavinck 1869: 40).²⁵ In the same line, Jan indicates that piety is useful for the body regarding its health. While some godly are not cheerful people, Jan denies that godliness is the cause of that. On the contrary, true piety makes us cheerful (*vrolijk*), joyful (*blijde*) and fills our hearts with love, courage (*moed*) and trust (*vertrouwen*). At the same time, godliness keeps people from sins, which are destructive both to the body and the soul (Bavinck 1869: 41).

For Jan Bavinck, piety is especially profitable for the well-being of the soul. The evangelical tone is undeniable in this section. He begins describing the natural state of every human being, that is, a sinner and helpless creature that broke all God's commandments. So too, willingly, we have surrendered to the dominion of sin and Satan, and as a result, we are under the curse that God's word and our consciences testify. Having considered this, Jan asks where people can find rest and peace. The answer is not found in the secrets of sciences (*wetenschappen*) nor the treasures of earth and pleasures of the world, but in something that the godly has: a comfort (*troost*) that is all-sufficient both in life and death. This comfort – which echoes the Heidelberg Catechism – has a double aspect. On the one hand, the complete forgiveness of sins from the one who on the cross cried out, 'it is finished.' On the other hand, the inward renewal and recreation into God's image that Christians experience. In this way, 'the Lord is his all-sufficient portion forever' (Bavinck 1869: 42).²⁶

The holistic aspect of piety reaches all times, circumstances and tasks. In times of prosperity and adversity, that is, in times of health and sick days. In the battle and on the day of death, piety makes people rejoice. With piety, people are happy at all times regardless of the circumstances. For this reason, piety is 'more precious than gold or silver, more useful than all science and understanding' (Bavinck 1869: 43).²⁷ So too, piety is helpful for every task or profession. In fact, piety gives love, desire, courage and strength (*krachten*) to vocations. In the same line, 'piety forms solid men for every position',²⁸ – from ministers to soldiers – and sanctifies all virtues (Bavinck 1869: 43-4). Thus, godliness penetrates every office and vocation, making the most obedient citizens, the most diligent workers, the meekest gentlemen and the best kings. The reason for this is the all-encompassing power of godliness. In his words, 'piety is a power that permeates and sanctifies all'.²⁹ This includes society, family, church and state. In fact, what piety is for the family is also for the church and state. So, if piety blooms, the state also flourishes (Bavinck 1869: 45-6). In this sense, Jan Bavinck's

25 DO: 'voor allen en in alle standen en rangen der maatschappij is de Godzaligheid een' zaak, die onberekenbare winst en voordeel afwerpt'.

26 DO: 'De Heere is zijn algenoezaam deel tot in eeuwigheid'.

27 DO: 'Zij is kostelijker dan goud of zilver, nuttiger dan alle wetenschap en verstand'.

28 DO: 'Godzaligheid vormt degelijke mensen voor elke betrekking'.

29 DO: 'De Godzaligheid is eene kracht, die alles doordringt en heiligt'.

view of sanctifying and all-encompassing piety reflects the vision of early and high *Nadere Reformatie* authors rather than some of the pietistic and anti-cultural *Nadere Reformatie* readers.

Finally, Jan Bavinck finishes his article by indicating the importance of piety for the future. So too, he pastorally considers the Lord's commandment and promise of first seeking the kingdom and all things will be added. This is done by knowing that the Lord is the Shepherd of his sheep; therefore, they will lack nothing. From considering the future and God's promises, Jan Bavinck goes into the conscience of the present reader by finishing in a question form: 'reader! Do you fear and serve the Lord?'.³⁰ This question illustrates the Reformed features of Jan Bavinck's piety: experiential and holistic.

Conclusion

Jan Bavinck's *oratio* in 1883 at the theological school of Kampen provides an example that summarises the experiential and holistic nature of Reformed piety. When Jan asks what the theological seminary does for the church denomination, piety is contained in his answer. The 'difficult', 'important', and 'blessed' task of training future ministers of the gospel have piety as an essential element. In his words,

This [Reformed] Church has need, a great need for godly, solid and scientifically-educated servants of the Gospel. Intentionally, I place "piety or godliness" in the first place because I believe that true and genuine piety is a main requirement in him who acts to proclaim the Gospel as a minister of Christ (Bavinck 1883: 19).³¹

Notably, the previous quotation talks about piety that has a close connection to scientific or academic formation in ministers. This idea reflects part of the modern aspect of his view of theological training. However, in order that that be the case, it must be presupposed that theological students and ministers must have an experiential and saving knowledge of Christ.

For Jan Bavinck, without a knowledge (*kennis*) and love for Christ, a man will never be a worthy minister of Christ, and even if he possesses progress (*ontwikkeling*) and science (*wetenschap*), he will be unable to understand the things of the Spirit of the Lord and therefore, unable to communicate them to others. This is because the truth that a minister proclaims are not dry or abstract concepts but 'life-truths' (*levenswaarheden*) that must be experienced in his own heart. When this reality is established -i.e., an experiential religion- then, besides piety of the heart (*vroomheid des harten*), a minister must possess substantial, solid and scientific knowledge (*flinke*,

30 DO: 'Lezer! vrees en dient ook jij den Heere?.'

31 DO: 'Die Kerk heeft behoefte, groote behoefte aan godvruchtige, degelijke, wetenschappelijk-gevormde dienaren des Evangelies. Met opzet plaats ik het attribuut »vrome of godvruchtige» voorop, omdat ik meen, dat ware en echte vroomheid een hoofdvereischte is in hem, die optreedt om als een dienaar van Christus het Evangelie te verkondigen.'

degelijke, wetenschappelijke kennis) of the things related to his office. That is, in the study of the Bible, for example. In fact, for Jan Bavinck, the one-sidedness of disappointing academic training in ministers is a prejudice. Therefore, when the nature of the Bible and theological studies are considered, one realises the need for the ministers of the gospel to receive solid scientific or academic education (*wetenschappelijke opleiding*).

The importance and necessity of piety and formal studies in theological training previously argued finds its resemblance in the *Nadere Reformatie*. The close bond between *pietas* and *scientia* is key in Gisbertus Voetius' (1589-1676) thought. As Andreas J. Beck indicates, the completion of studies (such as the trivium), gifts and spiritual motives were necessary conditions for the study of theology according to Voetius. In Beck's words, 'a decisive requirement in this [theological training] is the "practice of piety" (praxis pietatis), which both students and professors are to exercise in order to draw nearer to God' (Beck 2022: 109). The same idea is found in Campegius Vitringa, where in his *Lebenslauf*, Anton F. Büsching highlights Vintringa's 'sincere godliness', 'deep scholarship' and his 'great service to the church'. In this way, 'Vitringa believed that piety goes hand in hand with learning. The theologian should be able to give an accurate opinion on any subject that pertains to his area of science [*Wissenschaft*]' (Büsching 2018: xxxvii-viii). In other words, the idea that *praxis pietatis* nurture true scholarship is not innovation *per se*, but for Jan, is part of the retrieval of the holistic and spiritual nature of Reformed scholastic piety.

This leads us to conclude that in the midst of the variety of theological tendencies of late modern society in the Netherlands, Jan Bavinck could be considered as a bridge between the understanding of Reformed piety found on the one hand in Calvin's theology and the early and high period of the *Nadere Reformatie* and, on the other hand, in the first generation of neo-Calvinism. Although space is limited here, and as I indicated (regarding the first group), one can see an echo of Gisbertus Voetius' holistic thought on how *pietas* should be joined with *scientia* in the academic context plus the necessity of experiential understanding of Reformed theology.³² Considering the second group, and emphasising the need for continuing historical and theological research in this area, Jan Bavinck seems to be closer to the all-encompassing reformational thought and spirituality of Herman Bavinck and Abra-

32 The holistic aspect of how piety should accompany the academic activities of lawyers, philosophers, historians, and theologians is one of the themes of *De pietate cum scientia coniugenda*. See Aart de Groot introduction for Voetius' *Godzaligheid te verbinden met de wetenschap* (Voetius 1978: 9-27). Likewise, Voetius highlights the experiential aspect in the lives of academics and students: "Woe to you, woe to me, woe to all theologians, if we are devoted to religion, if we inculcate in others piety that we may have never tasted ourselves (Latin original: *Vae vobis, vae mihi, vae theologis omnibus, si religioni studemus, si pietatem aliis instillamus, cuius gustum forte nunquam percepimus*). See Voetius 1978: 58.

ham Kuyper's neo-Calvinism, rather than the closed and more subjective tendencies of some pietistic groups.³³ In light of this, Jan Bavinck could be considered, in some sense, as a proto-neo-Calvinist that retrieved an Orthodox and Reformed understanding of piety for his own context. However, this idea of 'proto-neo-Calvinist' should be further investigated.

In summary, Jan Bavinck's understanding of *praxis pietatis* shows us that the experiential and orthodox Reformed tradition does not oppose the all-encompassing and academic progress of theology and pastoral ministry. On the contrary, his theology invites us to develop a theological thought that considers the nature and sanctifying power of Reformed piety in every sphere of life. In other words, Jan Bavinck's understanding of piety reminds believers to experience a continual reformation of every square inch of the heart, family, church and society to the glory of God within the challenges of particular periods of history, cultures and church's context.

In light of this, further research should be done to go deeper into the theology of Jan Bavinck³⁴ and other Bavincks – such as Coenraad Bernardinus Bavinck and Coenraad's son, Johan Herman Bavinck – in order to understand the development of the Reformed tradition within three generations of Bavincks and together with this, to have a better understanding of the piety of the Reformed tradition and neo-Calvinism.

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33 Neo-Calvinist spirituality can be seen expressed in many of the devotional writings of Kuyper as well as Herman Bavinck's *The Sacrifice of Praise* or *The Certainty of Faith*. The analysis and comparison of these writings with other treatises published by Jan Bavinck could help deepen the understanding of Jan Bavinck as a bridge between the concept of piety of Dutch Reformed Scholasticism (*Nadere Reformatie*) and the first generation of Neo-Calvinism.

34 The use and/or retrieval of John Calvin's theology, as well as post-Reformation Reformed sources in the writings of Jan Bavinck, is an area that could be investigated to better appreciate the development of mid-century Reformed orthodoxy 19th century in the Netherlands.

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