

## ON HOW HERMAN BAVINCK RESPONDS TO THE THEORY OF EVOLUTION: THE PRIMACY OF BIBLICAL REVELATION

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### ABSTRACT

In his discussion of evolution, Bavinck offers a modified theory of development, rooted not under a mechanistic and naturalistic worldview, as Darwin does, but under a “theistic-friendly” framework. This article argues that Bavinck’s discussion of evolution as a whole endorses a modified Aristotelian/Thomistic framework in order to understand the theory of development, and thus overcomes the challenges raised by Darwin’s naturalistic worldview to biblical revelation.

### KEYWORDS

Darwinism; Evolution; Evolutionary worldview; Theology-science dialogue; Theory of development.

### INTRODUCTION

Current scholarship on Herman Bavinck’s view of the theory of evolution has tended to be unified in affirming that despite his criticism of it, Bavinck seems to provide some room for evolution. On one hand, from his discussion in *Reformed Dogmatics* (originally published in Dutch between 1895-1901) and other writings,<sup>1</sup> it may be concluded that Bavinck fights fiercely against

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics II*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic), 407-529; Bavinck, “Creation or Development,” trans. Hendrik De Vries in *The Methodist Review* (1901): 849-74; Bavinck, “Evolution,” in *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 105-118.

Darwin's evolutionary project and seems to reject it completely. On the other hand, in those same discussions where he treats the topic, one also observes that Bavinck seems to be willing to concede some kind of "evolution" as well. For those who believe that Bavinck retains the notion of biological development of natural creatures in the Darwinian sense, in order to integrate it into his understanding of biblical revelation, one issue emerges: while Bavinck appropriates the concept of "development" from the theory of evolution, he seems to use the term in an opposite sense from that of Darwinism. Taking this into account, it is the thesis of this paper that in his discussion of evolution, Bavinck progressively endorses a modified Aristotelian/Thomistic notion of development in order to overcome the challenges raised by Darwin's methodology and naturalistic worldview to biblical revelation.

When Bavinck debated evolution, he objected to a series of features of Darwin's theory of development. These objections include the theory's features of naturalism, its mechanistic understanding of the world, its atheistic worldview, and its teleological characteristic of natural organisms. Although there exists scholarship that discusses Bavinck's approach to evolution, however it largely overlooks how Bavinck understands the notion of development in his dialogue with the theory of evolution. In this respect and in order to narrow this research, I will focus exclusively on Rob P. W. Visser and Abraham C. Flipse's works, which develop the theme of evolution in greater detail.<sup>2</sup>

Rob P. W. Visser's study, "Dutch Calvinists and Darwinism, 1900-1960," in *Nature and Scripture in the Abrahamic Religions*, offers an historical analysis of the reception of Darwin's theory of evolution among the Calvinists in the Netherlands. Visser's work emphasizes the role that Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck played in the theological renewal at the beginning of the twentieth century in the Dutch community (VISSER, 1998, p. 312). Visser suggests that, although Darwin's theory of evolution was rapidly integrated into the Dutch university system by the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the Dutch Calvinist response tended to be slow and negative (VISSER, 1998, p. 293). Both Kuyper and Bavinck emphasized the necessity of differentiating Darwin's theory of evolution as a scientific theory from its metaphysics, Visser claims (VISSER, 1998, p. 294). In his view, unlike Kuyper, Bavinck was more positive about the theory of evolution for two main reasons. First, he believed that evolution relays part of the truth

<sup>2</sup> See, Rob Visser, "Dutch Calvinists and Darwinism, 1900-1960," *Nature and Scripture in the Abrahamic Religions* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 293-316; Abraham C. Flipse, "The Origins of Creationism in the Netherlands: The Evolution Debate among Twentieth-Century Dutch Neo Calvinists," *Church History* 81, n. 1 (March 2012): 104-47. For background information, read George Harinck, "Twin Sisters with a Changing Character: How neo-Calvinists Dealt with the Modern Discrepancy between Bible and Natural Sciences." In *Nature and Scripture in the Abrahamic Religions: 1700-Present*. Leiden: Brill, 2008: 317-370.

about the natural world. Second, Bavinck believed that current species were not identical with those that God originally created. In this respect Visser writes,

Bavinck did not subscribe to Darwin's explanation of evolutionary development. Natural selection ruled out divine intervention and was for this reason unacceptable. He defended the idea that evolution was a teleological and organic rather than a mechanical process, which opened its existence to an intelligent cause. 'Design, law, goal, and direction,' and not selection, were the keywords to understand and explain organic evolution. Bavinck like Kuiper regarded God as the ultimate cause of evolution. Bavinck presented his combination of creation and evolution as a Christian alternative for Darwin's theory (VISSER, 1998, p. 296).

Visser reads Bavinck as one who seems willing to accept the development of natural species, but finds unacceptable Darwin's proposal of natural selection because of its rejection of a teleological character.<sup>3</sup> It is such a reading that leads Visser to affirm that both Kuiper and Bavinck succeeded in integrating evolution and biblical revelation:

Kuiper and Bavinck removed the controversial elements [of Darwin's theory of evolution], notably natural selection and the descent of man. Evolutionary change was the only aspect of the theory that they could accept...They [introduced] organic mutability into divine providence, which enabled them to incorporate their modified view of biological evolution in their theology (VISSER, 1998, p. 297).<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, it is noteworthy to mention the context in which such integration happens. In this respect Visser writes,

The response of Kuiper and Bavinck to Darwin occurred in the context of attempting to develop a new understanding of Scripture as revelation resulting from both divine and human action. They referred to this new understanding as organic insertion. It contrasted with the mechanical inspiration that became dominant in the seventeenth century. In this Calvinist orthodoxy God was believed to have verbally dictated the text with no contribution by the human writer. As a result, God became the warrant for a text that was considered objective and could be used in rational argument. The Bible became a source of objective factual information about nature and history (VISSER, 1998, p. 298).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Harry R Boer, "Evolution and Herman Bavinck." *Reformed Journal* 37, n. 12 (December 1987): 3-4, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> See also, Eduardo J. Echeverria, "Review Essay: The Philosophical Foundations of Bavinck and Dooyeweerd." *Journal of Markets & Morality* 14, n. 2 (2011): 463-483, pp. 465-67.

<sup>5</sup> For further discussion, see also James Eglinton, "Bavinck's Organic Motif: Questions Seeking Answers," *Calvin Theological Journal* 45 (1) 20120: 51-71.

There are many layers to debate within Visser's previous citation. One issue is with the suggestion that Bavinck's interest in exploring the theory of evolution is connected to his desire to redefine his understanding of Scripture as revelation. But Visser joins together what Bavinck kept distinct. In that regard, Visser does not seem to describe Bavinck correctly.

Despite his criticism of Darwin's theory of evolution, Bavinck seems to be attracted to this topic and engages seriously with it. In 2011, Willem J. de Wit published a collection of essays titled *On the Way to the Living God: A Cathartic Reading of Herman Bavinck and An Invitation to Overcome the Plausibility Crisis of Christianity*.<sup>6</sup> When writing briefly about Bavinck's worldview and evolution he asks, "Why will [Bavinck] later feel so attracted by the theory of evolution that he does not reject it once and for all but comes back to it again and again?" (DE WIT, 2011, p. 15). De Wit's way of posing this question is itself debatable because it suggests a personal and subjective crisis within Bavinck. However, I think de Wit's question is important to approach.

De Wit discusses the prominence of worldviews in Bavinck's theological work. He states,

From *Creation or Development* (1901) to *The Philosophy of Revelation* (1908/1909) the antithesis between the two worldviews is not just a theme but probably the most important issue for Bavinck. He identifies evolution as the key concept of the modern worldview and revelation as the key concept of the Christian worldview. In his publications on morals, science, education, family, social relations, etcetera, he seeks to make clear how different views in these areas are related to a difference in worldview and reflects on these areas from the perspective of his Christian worldview (DE WIT, 2011, pp. 55-56).

The reason behind Bavinck's interest in evolution has less to do with his obsession than with the reality of the modern spirit which trumpeted Darwinism. In any case, as de Wit suggests, the topic of evolution is not of secondary value in Bavinck's theological discussion. Rather, part of Bavinck's interest is in studying carefully the Christian against the naturalistic worldview. Without understanding properly such a significant aspect, Bavinck's writings can be easily misunderstood, especially those containing dated information.

Another historical study is Abraham Flipse's, "The Origins of Creationism in the Netherlands: The Evolution Debate among Twentieth-Century Dutch Neo-Calvinists." It was published in 2012 and complements Visser's work. Flipse explores the role of Calvinists and their interest "to formulate...[a] coherent view of science, society, and culture" (FLIPSE, 2012, p. 107). This

<sup>6</sup> Willem J. de Wit, *On the Way to the Living God: A Cathartic Reading of Herman Bavinck and An Invitation to Overcome the Plausibility Crisis of Christianity* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2011): 16-94.

exploration sets up the framework for this paper's discussion. Flipse offers his readers another of the main reasons why Bavinck rejected the theory of evolution, besides discussing Bavinck's position on the possibility to rescue the theory itself of some crucial elements. Flipse writes,

The "mechanistic worldview" that, according to Bavinck, underlies the Darwinistic view of evolution, a priori excluded supernatural interventions and prescribed that everything 'should be reduced to mechanical motion.' Therefore, Darwinists claim that mankind has descended from animals, and that life has emerged spontaneously from inorganic matter. How could it have happened otherwise? If the mechanistic, or "modern," worldview were to be abandoned, Bavinck believed, a different worldview could produce a different theory. This theory could contain elements of Darwinism and would still be in harmony with belief in creation (FLIPSE, 2012, p. 112).

Like Visser, Flipse reads Bavinck as not totally opposed to the theory of evolution. This would allow, in Flipse's understanding of Bavinck, that some elements of the theory of evolution could be reinterpreted into a new framework that may be consistent with biblical revelation. This line of reasoning was based in part, because of the emphasis of Bavinck and other Dutch neo-Calvinists on the infallible character of the Scriptures (FLIPSE, 2012, p. 113). That is, human knowledge and Scripture ought to be unified. Of interest to this paper is Flipse's accurate conclusion in his first section: that one of the greatest contributions of Bavinck and Kuyper to the evolution debate was not merely a matter of responding to specific questions. Rather, one of the greatest contributions was their approach to science based on the analysis of worldviews and presuppositions (FLIPSE, 2012, p. 116).

To address this issue, Part I of this paper recounts how Bavinck understood and criticized Darwinism in the second volume of *Reformed Dogmatics*, focusing primarily on his discussion of human origins in §279-83. Here, Bavinck shows a sympathetic reading of Aristotle and his particular use of the term 'evolution.' In this section, it is demonstrated that: a) Bavinck's understanding of 'evolution' or 'development' differs significantly from the interpretation of Darwin and modern evolutionary theory; and b) Bavinck is open to the possibility of accepting some features of Darwinism to be compatible with Scripture, but only in a very limited sense. Part II draws upon Bavinck's two essays "Creation or Development?" and "Evolution." This second part analyzes how Bavinck responded to Darwinism while also holding a high view of biblical revelation. By analyzing the first essay listed above, I demonstrate that Bavinck reframes his discussion on evolution as a worldview issue. By analyzing the second essay, I demonstrate that Bavinck endorses a notion of evolution in a modified Aristotelian sense.

## 1. DARWINISM IN BAVINCK'S *REFORMED DOGMATICS*

In his *Reformed Dogmatics*, Bavinck introduces the topic of creation and 'evolution' in relation to Darwinism. Although he seems to remain open to the possibility of any eventual appropriation of aspects that might not be in contradiction with biblical revelation, such openness must be understood in a very limited sense. In order to establish a distinction between the former theory of evolution which had a Christian-Aristotelian framework from the modern interpretation of evolution which clings to a materialistic and naturalistic framework, Bavinck tries to detach the term 'development' or 'evolution' from its association with Darwinism and the eighteenth century non-teleological theories. To achieve his purpose, Bavinck proceeds to sympathetically read Aristotle and his understanding of 'evolution' and 'development' and from such a position, becomes critical of Darwin's theory of evolution.

### 1.1 *Evolution is not a modern construct*

Bavinck argues that the notion of evolution was developed by the Greek philosophers. Among those he cites, Aristotle is a significant reference.<sup>7</sup> For Bavinck, Aristotle rightly "attributed an organic and teleological character" to the notion of development: the transition from potentiality into actuality (BAVINCK, 2004, p. 513).<sup>8</sup> With such understanding, Christianity and the notion of 'evolution' would not contradict each other. In this respect, Bavinck writes, "From the Christian position there is not the least objection to the notion of evolution or development as conceived by Aristotle; on the contrary, it is creation alone that makes such evolution possible" (BAVINCK, 2004, p. 513). One observes that Bavinck here offers a sympathetic reading of Aristotle's view on 'evolution,' and seems to agree with him at least in general terms.

More useful for this paper's argument is Bavinck's assertion that during the eighteenth century the notion of evolution departed from this Aristotelian notion of development into other philosophical positions: "But in the eighteenth century evolution was torn from its basis in theism and creation and made serviceable to a pantheistic or materialistic system" (BAVINCK, 2004, p. 513). Bavinck correctly charges Rousseau, Kant, Goethe, Hegel, and others of promoting such departure. However, one difference, Bavinck claims, existed between the position of these philosophers listed earlier and the modern approach to evolution: the notion of 'evolution' still held its organic and teleological

<sup>7</sup> Among those Greek philosophers who discussed the topic of 'development or evolution,' Bavinck cites the natural philosophers (e.g. Anaximenes, Heraclitus) and the Atomists. Bavinck clarifies that while Heraclitus presented his theory with a pantheistic view, the Atomists used a materialistic framework instead.

<sup>8</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics II*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend. Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2004: 407-529, p. 513.

character. Bavinck argues that it was through French naturalists J. B. Pierre de Lamarck and E. G. Saint-Hilaire, along with English biologist and philosopher Herbert Spencer, among other scholars, that this “[Aristotelian] evolutionary theory was so refashioned that it led to the descent of humanity from animal ancestry” (BAVINCK, 2004, p. 513).

Although, in the previous sentence Bavinck does not explicitly include the term ‘Aristotelian,’ he seems to refer to it. Bavinck first rightly claims that the departure of the ‘theistic-creationist’ evolutionary theory had started before Darwin; and secondly, that Darwin’s observations about humanity and animals were “serviceable to a hypothesis that was already dominant” (BAVINCK, 2004, p. 513). In sum, the notion of ‘evolution’ for Bavinck must not be understood exclusively as a product of Darwinism or modern theories.

*Interlude: how did Bavinck understand Darwinism?*

When Bavinck discusses Darwin’s theory of evolution or Darwinism, he understands it as

the theory that the various species into which organic entities used to be divided possess no constant properties, but are mutable; that the higher organic beings have evolved from the lower, and that man in particular has gradually evolved, in the course of centuries, from an extinct genus of ape; that the organic, in turn, emerged from the inorganic; and that evolution is therefore the way in which, under the sway of purely mechanical and chemical laws, the present world has come into being (BAVINCK, 2004, p. 514).

This concise definition allows us to better comprehend how Bavinck understood Darwinism. Careful attention must be paid into the series of considerations Bavinck offers of Darwin’s theory of evolution: nature’s struggle for life, natural and sexual selection, certain properties passing to future generations, and perfection of the organism by and through mutations. Bavinck argues that all these considerations constitute mere “assumptions and interpretations” (BAVINCK, 2004, p. 514). For him, scholars, particularly theologians, philosophers, and scientists rightly recognized Darwin’s theory as a flawed and even a contradictory system (BAVINCK, 2004, p. 514-15). There’s no doubt that Bavinck shares such assessments and agrees with them. His position, however, is reflected more clearly when he offers his major criticism to the modern theory of evolution.

One notable aspect that must be clarified is Bavinck’s distinction between Darwinism in the broader sense versus its restricted sense. While the latter refers to the “explanation that Darwin, with his theory of natural selection, offered for the origin of species,” the former refers to “the opinion that the higher organism evolved from the lower organisms and that the human species therefore gradually evolved from animal ancestry” (BAVINCK, 2004, p. 516). Bavinck

believes that the restricted sense of Darwinism was generally discarded, and the broader sense still enjoyed a good reputation during his era as it had earlier (BAVINCK, 2004, p. 516). Even as Bavinck pays little attention to the restricted sense of Darwin's theory in relation to the broader one, it does not mean he accepts it or finds it compatible with biblical revelation. On the contrary, Bavinck seems to reject the theory of natural selection without further consideration.

### ***1.2 Darwinism is incompatible with science and revelation***

Bavinck offers four major critiques to the modern theory of evolution. The first one is that the theory of descent has not clearly demonstrated the origin of life. Bavinck argues that evolution makes matter, movement, and life eternal. By doing so, the modern evolutionary theory adds a metaphysical dimension to the notion of evolution (BAVINCK, 2004, p. 517).<sup>9</sup> This situation may be problematic for an eventual integration with biblical revelation, especially if the new added metaphysical dimension is in tension with what Scripture says regarding human protology.

Second, Bavinck argues that Darwinism has not successfully explained the development of organic life in contrast to the Genesis narrative, which – by claiming that animals and plants have come forth from the earth by divine order since the beginning of creation – gives sense to evolution (BAVINCK, 2004, p. 517). By using the notion of diversity and dissimilarity, Bavinck claims that Darwinism is unable to explain the development of organic life. In Bavinck's view this proves the failure of Darwinism. Thus, he writes, “[N]atural and sexual selection are insufficient to make possible such changes in the species and have accordingly already been significantly limited and modified by Darwin himself” (BAVINCK, 2004, p. 518). In addition, empirical observation or science, Bavinck claims, has not shown a gradual transition of species from one to another. On the contrary, they have demonstrated that “all kinds of species existed side by side from the beginning” (BAVINCK, 2004, p. 518).<sup>10</sup> In a few words, what Bavinck suggests here is that Darwinism, if true science, must necessarily base its theories and conclusions only on demonstrable facts.

In this respect, Bavinck believes that “[m]aterialism and Darwinism are both historically and logically the result of philosophy, not of experimental science. Darwin himself, in any case, states that many of the views he presented were highly speculative” (BAVINCK, 2004, p. 518-19).<sup>11</sup> With this assertion,

<sup>9</sup> See also footnote #19 on p. 517.

<sup>10</sup> Besides this, Bavinck gives two other reasons in order to support his point: the lack of abundant transitional forms of species and the belief that acquired properties are not passed on through heredity. Regarding the latter point, nevertheless, Bavinck acknowledges that scholarship is enormously divided.

<sup>11</sup> In this respect Bavinck adds, “According to Haeckel, Darwin did not discover any new facts; what he did was combine and utilize the facts in a unique way. The profound kinship between humans and ani-



Bavinck claims that Darwin was basically offering a philosophical response to the problem of evolution. By this, he suggests that Darwin's account of evolution was not based on scientific facts, but on mere philosophical speculation.

The third aspect in which Bavinck criticizes Darwinism is regarding the serious issues this system encounters when it tries to explain human origin. To support his criticism, Bavinck argues that there does not truly exist any positive proof that demonstrates humans have indeed descended from animal ancestry. Bavinck offers two arguments: the actual difference between humans and animals has always existed, as well as the assumption of some transitional species. These arguments are closely related to Bavinck's belief that Darwinism is highly speculative.

The fourth criticism Bavinck makes is the failure of Darwinism to explain humanity from a mental/psychic dimension. One of the main problems Bavinck finds in that sense is that Darwin tries "to derive all the mental phenomena [e.g., consciousness] to be found in humans" from the analogy of animal phenomena (BAVINCK, 2004, p. 519). Unlike biblical revelation, Bavinck believes natural science has limitations in addressing mental phenomena and answering ultimate questions.

It becomes clear that, with this general criticism of Darwin's approach to science, Bavinck proceeds to reject Darwinism. The problem further complicates with the close connection of Darwinism and materialism. Bavinck argues that Darwinism significantly relies on a materialistic framework. Even worse, it "paves the way for the subversion of religion and morality and the destruction of our humanness" (BAVINCK, 2004, p. 520). Besides its tension with empirical science, Bavinck argues that the theory of descent is also in tension with biblical revelation by "violat[ing] the image of God" in humanity and "degrad[ing] the human into an image of the orangutan and chimpanzee" (BAVINCK, 2004, p. 520). From this, one concludes that, in Bavinck's view, the doctrine of the image of God and evolutionary thinking are simply incompatible.

### ***1.3 Biblical revelation has priority over science***

Bavinck defends one single kind of science where biblical revelation has priority over worldviews and natural science. However, one must be cautious in that regard. Bavinck's theology is anti-dualistic, and strongly dichotomizing revelation against science would be an error. What Bavinck seems to defend is that scientific data must be interpreted in light of biblical revelation, and not vice versa. In this respect, Bavinck defends the position that Scripture is

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mals comes through in the concept of 'rational animal.' But in earlier times this fact was not yet combined with the monistic philosophy which says that from a pure potency, which *is* nothing – like such things as atoms, chaos, or cells – everything can nevertheless evolve." BAVINCK, 2004, pp. 518-19. Noteworthy to observe is Bavinck's reference to Aristotle's concept of potency and his monistic philosophy.

the one that offers a real account of humanity's origins, and of the different languages, cultures, races, and alike. For him, all these human dimensions point "to a single act of God, by which he intervened in the development of humanity" (BAVINCK, 2004, p. 525). Bavinck's commitment to finding in Scripture ultimate questions is prominent. Despite the diversity of languages and human ideas, he claims, there is still unity and that against such unity, Darwinism is unable to provide an objection (BAVINCK, 2004, pp. 525-26).

One can observe that Bavinck seems to be open to the possibility of appropriation of some evolutionary ideas. In that regard, current scholarship on Bavinck is correct. Nonetheless, one must also consider that Bavinck allows such an appropriation only if it does not enter conflict with biblical revelation. For instance, discussing the diversity of current organisms, Bavinck concedes that perhaps Darwinism might be useful to clarify the truth. He writes, "Darwinism indeed furnishes the conceptual means of explaining the possibility of a wide assortment of changes within a given species as a result of various climatic and lifestyle influences. To that extent, it renders excellent service to the defense of truth" (BAVINCK, 2004, p. 526). As seen, Bavinck considers that the notion of 'biological change' can be a tool for biblical revelation. One must not assume, nonetheless, that such 'change' must be understood in the Darwinian sense, as Visser and Flipse seem to have concluded. The fact that Darwinism might have some elements of truth does not mean the entire system does.

Furthermore, in discussing the different views on the interpretation of paradise and the Garden of Eden in Genesis 2, Bavinck again gives priority to biblical revelation over any other system of interpretation, and in this case, science. Bavinck, for example, boldly claims that there is nothing in science that "compels us to abandon the stipulation of Holy Scripture" in regard to the earthly paradise and the first human beings, despite the fact that we do not know the original place where the first humans resided (BAVINCK, 2004, p. 528-29). For Bavinck, biblical revelation must be trusted and we should believe that, despite being unknown, the first humans beings lived in a defined and particular place at the beginning of the creation of humanity. This demonstrates that Bavinck is committed to understand the insight offered by science under the biblical framework and not vice versa. It is important to mention that one should not confuse what biblical revelation establishes in Scripture with our particular reading or interpretation of such revelation.

As appreciated in Part I, with such critical assessment Bavinck seems not to provide a lot of room for the theory of evolution to be understood as compatible with Scripture. Besides the areas where Darwin's theory is openly incompatible with biblical revelation, there are other incompatibility issues that

arise.<sup>12</sup> In light of Bavinck's preliminary view, Darwinism has transgressed its limits as a plausible theory to reinterpret 'evolution.' Darwinism moved from interpreting scientific data objectively to the field of explaining ultimate questions. If there is something to be appropriated from Darwinism, such elements must not contradict biblical revelation which has priority. Therefore, Bavinck's openness regarding an eventual appropriation from the theory of evolution must be understood in a very limited sense.

## 2. HOW DOES BAVINCK TRY TO INTEGRATE EVOLUTION AND BIBLICAL REVELATION?

In his essays, "Creation or Development?" (1901) and "Evolution" (1908), Bavinck examines in-depth Darwinism and evolutionary theory. In both essays, readers will be able to appreciate Bavinck's argumentative progression and deeper engagement with evolution along with a thought-provoking response on what aspects Bavinck believes evolution might be or not be compatible with biblical revelation.

### 2.1 In the essay "Creation or Development?"

In his essay "Creation or Development?" Bavinck presents to his readers the issue of evolution as he previously did in his *Reformed Dogmatics*. This time, nonetheless, Bavinck reframes his discussion on evolution as a world-view issue. Bavinck discusses how the human being has tried to explain the world in terms that leave out God and spirituality and instead has focused on "data of matter and force".<sup>13</sup> For him, eighteenth century philosophers such as Spinoza, later Hegel and Feuerbach, have all failed in the task of successfully explaining the origin of the world. It is within this challenging context, Bavinck claims, that Darwin's theory of development appears and embraces a "new worldview which undertakes to interpret... [all things] without exception independent of God" (BAVINCK, 1901, Intro, Par.1). Bavinck in this essay introduces Darwinism as a 'theory of development.' In doing so, Bavinck acknowledges that Darwinism constitutes a theory that has tried to explain

<sup>12</sup> The previous four critiques discussed in this section are not the only ones Bavinck made against Darwinism. Bavinck also argues other aspects such as a) that evolution also contradicts the Scriptures in other aspects than humanity origin. "[T]he age, the unity, and the original abode of the human race" are areas where evolution and biblical revelation also differs. Par. §281 "The Age of Humanity in Bavinck," BAVINCK, 2004, p. 520-22; b) that Darwinism is unable to successfully respond to questions about the origin of humanity and its age, because in the large period of time that it assumes is difficult to point out a first human being. Par. §282 "The Unity of the Human Race" in BAVINCK, 2004, p. 525; c) that science, including Darwinism, has not said anything certain about the home of humanity, except "conjunctures" since it "knows nothing about the origin and abode of the first humans." Par. §283 "The Original Abode of Humanity" in BAVINCK, 2004, p. 528.

<sup>13</sup> Herman Bavinck, "Creation or Development," *The Methodist Review* (1901), transl. Hendrik De Vries, 849-74, Introduction, Par. 1.

the issue of evolution, although such attempt has failed. This is an important fact for this paper in light of Bavinck's assumed interest in appropriating and reframing key aspects of Darwinism and evolution which might not conflict with biblical revelation.

### 2.1.1 Darwinism is not science but a worldview

One observes that Bavinck is not interested in responding a list of questions regarding evolution and how it challenges Christianity. Rather, Bavinck departs from another point where he rejects the idea that Darwinism is a solid scientific theory. In this respect, Bavinck, in his *Reformed Dogmatics*, claims that Darwinism is mere speculation and a philosophical system. He reinforces this position and argues Darwinism is also a worldview in the first section of "Creation or Development?".

Bavinck clarifies his understanding of natural science as "an insight into the essence of things, and an understanding of the idea, the logic, and the universal which is to be observed in things" (BAVINCK, 1901, Section I, Par.1). Such a notion sets the framework from which Bavinck evaluates 'evolution' and its relation to biblical revelation. He proceeds to discuss some ultimate questions, such as the origin of life and all things. He asserts that Darwinism's theory of evolution (the development theory), addresses the ultimate question about the source of things. In this respect Bavinck states, "[Its answer is that] there is no origin and no beginning of things. All what is always was, though, it be in other forms, and always shall be" (BAVINCK, 1901, Section I, Par.4).

The issue, Bavinck finds here, is the philosophical suggestion on the eternity of matter and substance. Substance has become, according to Bavinck, the "Deity of the newer worldview" (BAVINCK, 1901, Section I, Par.6). Therefore, development or evolution has "displace[d] Divine Providence" by becoming an "eternal law" (BAVINCK, 1901, Section I, Par.7). Despite Bavinck's assertion that this law has tried to explain the origin of the universe and how the earth has become a habitable place for organisms through a process of development, Bavinck's tone is one of irony, in order to make his point that current development theory has indeed displaced providence. This seems to be confirmed with the following paragraph where Bavinck describes the new state of affairs under the newer theory of development:

This is the new and newest interpretation of the origin of things. There is something imposing, something which takes hold of one mightily in this view. There is contained in its unity of thought, boldness of conception, and sequence of principle. It is readily understood that it charms many. Yes, when one does not believe in revelation which furnishes another interpretation of all creatures, one is bound in a similar way to render the origin of things in some measure intelligible to himself. They must have come from somewhere and have originated in some way. The theory may still be incomplete and leave many phenomena in

the physical and psychical world unexplained, nevertheless, according to Straus, Darwin is hailed as the greatest benefactor of the human race, because he has opened the door through which a more fortunate posterity will be able to cast out the miracle for good. An age which denies the supernatural and even shakes off all religion, cannot do other, all opposition notwithstanding, than expect all salvation from the reason, its own thinking, and to see the solution of all the riddles of the world in development (BAVINCK, 1901, Section I, Par.8).

After this criticism, Bavinck continues further and states that the theory of development “is not a product of science, but of imagination... It is no science in any serious sense, no science exact, as it is claimed to be, but a worldview...a philosophy as uncertain as any system of the philosophers...” (BAVINCK, 1901, Section I, Par.9). Because idealism is entirely based on imagination, such a worldview becomes contradictory when it addresses human origin. Idealism has failed to provide convincing evidence in favor of humanity having an animal ancestry (BAVINCK, 1901, Section I, Par.14). In sum, one notes that for Bavinck, Darwinism’s claims are based on philosophical assumptions and imagination rather than on actual facts.

#### 2.1.2 Darwinism misappropriates the notion of development

In the second section of his essay, Bavinck focuses on the essence of things. For Bavinck, in this new worldview, all creatures are just one, constituted by a single substance that changes indefinitely, an idea that suggests there is no God and spiritual world (BAVINCK, 1901, Section II, Par.2). This would make the creation a big “machine which has construed itself, which continuously holds itself in motion, and which, completely blind, without reason and purpose, eternally runs on and never down.” With such properties, creation is no longer a “living, animated organic unity” but an “eternal existence of one and the same sort” (BAVINCK, 1901, Section II, Par.2).

Bavinck goes on with his critical assessment and offers a series of philosophical characteristics of the modern theory of development: the lack of an ontological difference between humanity and animals, the negation of the human soul and other human dimensions, the reductionist view of humanity’s spiritual dimension, and the promotion of anthropocentrism.

The implications of a system with such features are important. In this new worldview and in contrast to biblical revelation, “there is no difference of good and evil, of right and wrong, of truth and falsehood. Everything is good and beautiful and true in its time and place, according to the individual faith and choice” (BAVINCK, 1901, Section II, Par.6). This leads Bavinck, among other factors, to argue that this development theory is a failure in being unable to “interpret the richness and variety of creation.” Therefore, evolutionists, for Bavinck, have misappropriated the concept of development by understanding

it under a mechanical framework, and thus concealing the drawbacks of their system of thought (BAVINCK, 1901, Section II, Par.10).

Due to this fact, Bavinck argues that ‘development’ itself is not against the notion of creation, “but is only possible upon its foundation and belong to its confession” (BAVINCK, 1901, Section II, Par.10). To that end, Bavinck clarifies what he means and writes,

Development produces nothing of itself, it is not the mother of being or of life; it is only a form of motion, which can only reveal what lies hidden inwardly in the germ. But the so-called development theory has no knowledge of germs; it knows nothing of disposition or capacity, of fitness and susceptibility. In its system there is no room for anything save atoms and complexes of atoms, which are altogether passive in themselves and are collocated only and alone in a mechanical or chemical manner by circumstances from without. This makes no mention of development in its real sense (BAVINCK, 1901, Section II, Par.10).

Bavinck here seems to defend a concept of development. In doing so, he suggests that development, understood from a creationist perspective, could be retrieved. This retrieval would be possible if it is conceded that “beings by way of [a process of] organic growth” can become “what in germ and principle they already are.” This can be so because development itself “refers to thought, plan, law, end” and, “he who names development names God” (BAVINCK, 1901, Section II, Par.10).

One may observe Bavinck’s reference to Aristotle’s notion of potentiality and actuality. In effect, he indeed seems to adopt an Aristotelian/Thomistic framework to understand development: the transition between potentiality (what a being is in germ and principle) and actuality (what the being has become in accordance to what they already are). Understanding development in this way is what I think allows Bavinck to incorporate the notion of ‘development’ in his theological thought while having a high view of biblical revelation. This is demonstrated by Bavinck’s words when he states,

So little does development stand over against creation that there is scarcely any choice left between creation with the richest development on one side and mechanical combination by the accident of a host of similar atoms on the other. Development stands between origin and end; under God’s providence it leads from the first to the last and unfolds all the riches of being and of life to which God gave existence (BAVINCK, 1901, Section II, Par.10).

Bavinck’s redefinition of ‘development’ allows him to “embrace not merely a few but all phenomena” of the Christian worldview. This is because, in the Christian worldview, the world is “an organic, living whole [containing] not only matter and force, but also spirit and consciousness, reason and will.” For Bavinck, God’s creation (e.g., the world) is a unity which “reveals itself in the

richness and most beautiful variety” (BAVINCK, 1901, Section II, Par.11). Unlike Darwinism, all organic life follows its own law and nature. In this respect, Bavinck claims,

And although the creatures are thus distinguished, they are not separated from each other. Together they form one whole, one organism, one art product, of which God himself is the artist and the master builder. In him, in his counsel, in his will all created things find their origin and maintain their existence (BAVINCK, 1901, Section II, Par.11).

Bavinck concludes his second section of his essay emphasizing that the newer worldview has no knowledge of biblical revelation. Thus, the difference between evolution in Darwinist terms and evolution in Aristotelian/Thomistic sense becomes clearer.

### 2.1.3 Darwinism lacks an adequate teleology

In the third section of his essay, Bavinck addresses the teleological aspect of the things. He commences his essay claiming that, by this third section, he has shown the theory of development (Darwinism) fails again because of its “insufficiency and unsatisfactory character” (BAVINCK, 1901, Section III, Par.2). Such lacking is teleological; the theory does not provide space for universal history. For Bavinck, although evolutionists speak sometimes of purpose in their theory, such purpose is futile and without warrant. He writes,

The system of the development theory offers no room for a plan or a purpose. Nothing is dominant, then, save the compulsion of fate or the capriciousness of accident. Everything is as it is, without reason and without purpose. The theory of evolution furnishes no answer whatever to the inquiry to what purpose everything serves. On this question it remains silent (BAVINCK, 1901, Section III, Par.2).

Bavinck’s critique here is about the lack of an adequate teleology that can explain the purpose of humanity, yet not limited to it. In a non-teleological system in which the spiritual dimension is lacking, Bavinck suggests, there is no purpose at all. If the created order does not have purpose, the importance of history is undermined. In other words, “[H]istory...is dominated just like the physical world, and with equal necessity, by mechanical forces and laws” (BAVINCK, 1901, Section III, Par.3-4). Having this line of reasoning in mind, Bavinck asserts that “the development of humanity cannot be taken as endlessly progressing.” The end would be chaos and destruction, which ultimately would lead to the extinction of the created order, where “death [will be] the end of the world as well as of the individual man and of the entire human race” (BAVINCK, 1901, Section III, Par.5). Therefore, this theory of development lacks an adequate eschatological aspect in its worldview.

As appreciated in this part, unlike biblical revelation, the evolutionary worldview denies the teleological aspect of humanity and the created order. For this reason, Bavinck writes the following critical assessment: “[C]omplete bankruptcy, moral and spiritual, is the end of the modern worldview” (BAVINCK, 1901, Section III, Par.12). Bavinck entirely discards Darwin’s interpretation of the theory of development. By reframing it as worldview, Bavinck demonstrates that Darwinism is not true science, but an interpretative system imposed on scientific data. And as such, Bavinck claims that this interpretative system is flawed. This becomes clearer when Bavinck claims that the ‘true’ development theory is to be found only in biblical revelation where history has a teleological course shaped by Scripture, and there is an “expectation of the future” (BAVINCK, 1901, Section III, Par.13).

## 2.2 *In the essay “Evolution”*

In his “Evolution” essay, Bavinck begins by warning his readers about the unstable character of the term ‘evolution’ throughout history, and thus the diversity of the term’s meanings. Bavinck clarifies the term, making a reference to Leibniz who was the first one to use the Latin term “*evolutio*” with the connotation of “becoming of things in nature”.<sup>14</sup> Such an aspect is of high weight for this paper, because of the different ways Bavinck has used the term. Alongside previous criticism, the fact that Bavinck redefines evolution as ‘development’ in an Aristotelian sense shows that he has indeed endorsed an Aristotelian/Thomistic framework to understand evolution. Bavinck has already justified the reasons of such redefinition, and now he has taken a further step in the progression of his ideas at the intersection of evolution and biblical revelation.

### 2.2.1 The Christian idea of development is based on Aristotle’s notion of evolution

Bavinck had previously discussed that, although the term ‘evolution’ was not used by Greek philosophers, they did discuss the idea behind it. The idea of being, Bavinck tells us, was known to the Greeks, especially Heraclitus, who rejected the notion of being in favor of only becoming (BAVINCK, 2008, p. 106). The balance between being and becoming was then a topic later philosophers discussed, such as Empedocles, Anaxagoras, the Atomists, Plato, and Aristotle, among others. For Bavinck, however, it is Aristotle the first Greek philosopher to present a development theory. Bavinck writes:

<sup>14</sup> Herman Bavinck, “Evolution” in *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, ed. John Bolt. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2008: 105-118, p. 105.





And one can rightly say that the last-named philosopher [Aristotle] was the first to devise a 'system of development.' Aristotle conceived of that which is as the being that is developing in the phenomena. True being does not consist in isolation above and beyond, but it is within things. However, it does not immediately and initially fully exist there, but it gradually comes into being by way of a process. All becoming (happening, moving) consists in the transition from potential to actuality...

Aristotle, therefore, does not explain what came to pass – as the Atomists do – from mechanical pleasure to impact, but he borrows his idea of development from organic life. For him becoming is an actualizing, a realization of what is potentially and germinally present in the phenomena; he explains the becoming from the being; for him the genesis exists for the sake of the *ousia*. With this thinking, Aristotle is far ahead of the Atomists because he considers becoming not as determined entirely from the outside through accidental circumstances but as guided from the beginning in a certain direction. The nature, the character, the being, the idea of something indicates the direction in which the development will take place. Since evolution is thought to be organic, it is also thoroughly teleological. And since Aristotle applies this idea of development not only to particular things but also to the world in its entirety, he discovers order and planning, movement and upward mobility in the world of creatures (BAVINCK, 2008, p. 106).

Bavinck argues that Christianity developed Aristotle's notion of development, although he does not mention any name. The important aspect to highlight in this respect is Bavinck's assertion that "Christianity did not replace or dispute [the Aristotelian] idea of development but took it over and enriched it" (BAVINCK, 2008, p. 106). The claim that "matter also originated from and through the word and therefore was a part of divine thought," was the first great contribution of Christianity to Aristotle's development project, a project that in its original form Bavinck finds very dualistic. In this respect Bavinck believes, "nature is not a dark, demonic mass but incarnate word..." With this anti-dualistic line of reasoning, Bavinck rightly concludes that the theory of development presented by Aristotle was "immeasurably enriched" (BAVINCK, 2008, p. 107).

The second way Christianity benefited Aristotle's system of development was that it provided a coherent history of humanity, which starts from a particular point toward eternal life. In that regard Bavinck writes, "Christianity presents a history of humanity, a development that proceeds from a certain point and moves toward a specific goal, progressing toward the absolute ideal, toward true being, toward eternal life" (BAVINCK, 2008, p. 107). So far, Bavinck has held that Christianity appropriated Aristotle's development system and has enriched it. He calls this the "Christian idea of development," an idea which "made its way into the newer philosophy [of the seventeenth



century]” (BAVINCK, 2008, p. 107). Bavinck’s sympathetic reading and affinity to Aristoteles’s notion of development seems to be something that current scholarship has slightly ignored. There is no doubt that Bavinck clings to Aristotle. Such fact has implications on what Bavinck may accept or reject from Darwin’s theory of evolution.

### 2.2.2 Darwinism has departed from Aristotle/Christianity

Previously in his *Reformed Dogmatics*, Bavinck affirmed that the eighteenth-century philosophers left the theistic development system. Here, Bavinck writes, “with many the idea of development is detached from the theistic foundation of which it rests in Christianity” (BAVINCK, 2008, p. 107). Earlier in this essay, we learned that the system was Aristotle’s development theory enriched by Christianity; therefore, it can be concluded that Bavinck seems to endorse a modified Aristotelian framework to understand the theory of evolution. If this claim is true, as has been argued throughout this paper, it will not only help readers better understand Bavinck’s position, but also clarify to what extent he provides room for evolution (in the modern use of the term) with his high view of biblical revelation.

“Evolution is organic and teleological and for that reason it has a progressive character,” Bavinck has argued (BAVINCK, 2008, p. 106). Now he reaffirms such a vision, claiming the different changes that people observe in the created order constitute a “development from within.” This means that such development has been conceived “organically and for that reason retains its teleological character” (BAVINCK, 2008, p. 107). This development is not merely accidental, according to Bavinck. When poets and philosophers speak of “unity in the development” in their “searching... for gradual transitions,” they refer to a “logical, ideal order in the progression [development] of creatures” and not “a physical descent [of humanity]” (BAVINCK, 2008, p. 108). Bavinck clings to this, among other aspects, to claim that philosophers of the nineteenth century departed from such a notion of development and replaced it with “a totally different idea...[yet] was not completely new, for it had been proposed already in antiquity by Leucippus, Democritus, and Epicurus [reemerging] with Descartes...” (BAVINCK, 2008, pp. 108-9). Supported by French naturalists and appropriated by some philosophers, “the [new] idea of development displayed a character that was too philosophic” (BAVINCK, 2008, p. 108). Once again, Bavinck highlights the difference between the two kinds of theories of development – the Aristotelian theory of development and Darwinism.

Important to notice here is Bavinck’s assertion that Darwin provided the scientific character that the new understanding of development needed in order to become a theory of evolution. In this respect, Bavinck writes,

The modern idea of evolution existed already before Darwin, just as socialist expectations had prophets already before Marx. But Darwin endeavored to give this idea of evolution a solid foundation in the facts, in the same way in which Marx, according to the opinion of his followers, changed utopian socialism into a scientific socialism. And Darwin did not leave it at that. Not only did he show us, in an amazing mass of facts, striking analogies that exist between organic creatures, which had been categorized in species by [Carolus] Linnaeus and on which he constructed his theory of descent; he also tried to explain this descent by this hypothesis of ‘natural selection,’ which in the ‘struggle for life’ assures the ‘survival of the fittest,’ and thus assures the development also as progress... As a result, evolution received a completely different meaning in the newer science than it had before (BAVINCK, 2008, p. 108-9).

Bavinck here is bold about his rejection of Darwinism and Darwin’s appropriation of the notion of development, which was previously understood as “an organic, progressive, teleological process” that has the purpose of “posit[ing] a logical, idealistic order between creatures” (BAVINCK, 2008, p. 109). Although Bavinck does not indicate it, he seems to make a reference to Aristotle’s Great Chain of Being, especially with his explanation of the purpose of the former theory of development.

Rightly, after his clarification about Darwin’s misappropriation, Bavinck proceeds to offer a brief explanation of the claims made by the new theory of development (Cf. BAVINCK, 2008, p. 109). Modern readers must not assume that the previous list is exhaustive in the aspects Bavinck rejects from Darwinism. Such an integral perspective is only reached when taking into account at least his exposition in *Reformed Dogmatics* and his “Creation or Development?” essay, among other brief references Bavinck makes to evolution in other parts of his theological thought.<sup>15</sup>

### 2.2.3 Failure of the Darwinist methodology

Once Bavinck offers his brief list of the characteristics of the new theory of development, he moves on to discuss some methodological aspects of Darwin’s theory of evolution. Bavinck criticizes the lack of purpose or guidance in the new theory of development, as well as its inability to “provide norms by which to measure progress or decline.” While evolutionists speak of “a continuing improvement of the human race,” such a naïve notion of improvement is used by some to manipulate people and their “expectations to the other side

<sup>15</sup> In this respect Bavinck writes, “So many and such weighty objections exist against this theory that it is impossible to consider it seriously as a solution to the problems of this world. The short space available for this controversy permits only a few comments, but these may already be sufficient to justify any counterargument that mechanical monism experiences in many circles, both within and outside the realm of scholarship” (“Christianity and Natural Science,” in *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, ed. John Bolt. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2008: 81-104, p. 100).

of the grave” (BAVINCK, 2008, p. 109). Bavinck ironically writes, “...[I]f a monkey can evolve gradually into a human being, there is a good possibility than in the next life humans will gradually change into angels (BAVINCK, 2008, p. 110). He offers this example as a way of noticing the absurd “mechanical, non-teleological” characteristic of the new theories of development and descent.

As Flipse notices, Bavinck argues that the mechanical worldview is deficient. It is not enough to claim that “the world is a machine,” because believing such an idea requires a lot of faith from us: “[W]hen natural science limits itself to its own realm, it does not have to concern” about the “origin of things,” Bavinck asserts (BAVINCK, 2008, p. 110). The issue arises when the limits of science are transgressed into the metaphysical or philosophical realm: “The mechanical idea, which is fully justified in some areas of nature, is then expanded into a mechanical worldview and proclaims the dogma of the eternity of the matter.” For Bavinck, in the moment such a situation happens, the scientist becomes a philosopher (BAVINCK, 2008, p. 110).

Bavinck’s point opens the door to evaluating Darwinism in light of its metaphysical claims. It is not a surprise that Bavinck claims a “perpetual motion machine is self-contradiction” as a critique to Darwinism’s mechanical worldview, a view that lacks mystery. This goes in contradiction to “the mystery of being” (BAVINCK, 2008, p. 110). Bavinck concedes, however, that the only mystery that this newer theory of development and its mechanical worldview has is about “the origin of things” (BAVINCK, 2008, p. 111). One should note that this concession does not necessarily mean that Bavinck would include such elements in an eventual Christian account of ‘evolution,’ as Flipse seems to understand.

Bavinck also argues that believing in the concept of a rational human being assumes that there is a difference between human beings and animals. Such a difference is made evident not only in body structure, but also in body organs and embryonic development (BAVINCK, 2008, p. 113). This claim is significant, especially if one tries to contend that Bavinck seems to be open with some elements of the evolutionary theory. Bavinck’s critique is clear: the embrace of the theory of descent is a product of leaving the faith and neglecting scientific data (BAVINCK, 2008, p. 113). Therefore, arguments from the theory of descent are not based on pure facts but on hypotheses. As seen, Bavinck does not criticize Darwinism only from the claims it makes, but also for the methods it uses.

For instance, Bavinck becomes critical of the comparison method that Darwin uses for the theory of descent. He argues that the theory of descent relies too much on comparison (e.g. comparative anatomy, physiology, and psychology). Darwinism’s method fails because, despite all similarities between man and animal, humankind is separate from all creatures (BAVINCK, 2008, p. 114). Such differentiation is not merely physiologically, but also of

the metaphysical dimension of man. In this respect, Bavinck relies on this fact to assert that other areas of study, such as religion, philosophy, and psychology, have important insights to provide when the theory of descent is assessed (BAVINCK, 2008, p. 115). As he has done in other parts, Bavinck rejects the notion that there is a gradual transition which supports the theory of descent.

In sum, Bavinck rejects not only the content of Darwinism and how it has interpreted the theory of evolution, but its own flawed methodology.

#### 2.2.4 Development can be accepted but only in the Aristotelian sense

After offering arguments to what extent evolution and biblical revelation may not contradict each other, Bavinck argues that there is room for development in the “true sense of the word,” but such development assumes “plan and law, direction and goal...beginning and end” (BAVINCK, 2008, p. 118). It is not a coincidence that Bavinck’s last sentences refer to Aristotle: “[He] already understood that becoming exists for the sake of being, not the reverse. There is *becoming* only if and because there is being” (BAVINCK, 2008, p. 118). Here Bavinck claims there is space for ‘development’ in biblical revelation. However, he restricts such possibility significantly: one should understand ‘development’ in the real meaning or true sense of the term. As it was shown previously in this paper, Darwinist or non-teleological theories of evolution do not give such real meaning to the term, but the ‘Christian-Aristotelian’ framework does.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

Bavinck’s engagement with the theory of evolution is noteworthy. Unlike his general criticism to Darwinism in his discussion of human origins in *RD* §279-83, the essays studied here analyze the theory of evolution in a further in-depth fashion. While in “Creation or Development?” Bavinck approaches Darwinism as an interpretative system of scientific data, in his essay “Evolution,” Bavinck reclaims the notion of ‘development’ and ‘evolution’ under a modified Aristotelian-Christian account of ‘evolution.’ It is a framework that seems to be compatible with Scripture but rejects Darwinism as a whole and not only a particular feature of it. Current scholarship is partially right.

What this paper departs from modern scholarship is that Bavinck’s notion of ‘development’ is not merely a kind of Christianized Darwinism or theistic evolution. It is true that Bavinck might allow certain changes in organisms, but only within their kinds without any notion of metaphysical change, improvement or retrogression such as the change of an organism of a kind evolving into another kind. When Bavinck speaks of ‘development,’ his use of the term is strictly in accordance to the Aristotelian metaphysics: *being as becoming*.

Modern readers must take into consideration that this Aristotelian position has traditionally been understood as opposed to evolution in the modern sense. Bavinck has modified the Aristotelian notion of development to allow certain changes in the material constitution of organisms but not in their essence. With this understanding of 'development,' Bavinck indeed overcomes the challenges on the intersection of evolution and biblical revelation but does not leave much room to appropriate evolutionary thinking.

### **RESUMO**

Em sua análise da evolução, Bavinck oferece uma teoria modificada de desenvolvimento, radicada não em uma cosmovisão mecanicista e naturalista, como Darwin faz, mas em uma estrutura "amistosa ao teísmo". Este artigo sugere que a discussão de Bavinck acerca da evolução como um todo endossa uma estrutura modificada aristotélica-tomista a fim de compreender a teoria do desenvolvimento e, assim, supera os desafios levantados pela cosmovisão naturalista de Darwin para a revelação bíblica.

### **PALAVRAS-CHAVE**

Darwinismo; Evolução; Cosmologia evolutiva; Diálogo teologia-ciência; Teoria do desenvolvimento.