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A Concise Assessment of Dutch Ecclesiastical and Theological Impacts on Jenő Sebestyén's Thinking

Abstract.

Jenő Sebestyén, professor of systematic theology from Budapest, is often portrayed as the founding father of historical Calvinism in Hungary. The theological movement exhibits clearly a Dutch impact. He is often seen as a Kuyperian scholar who disseminated the famous Dutch theologian and churchman's idea amongst Hungarian Reformed people. The current paper seeks to examine whether this statement is true in regard to his systematic theological thinking. By performing a statistical examination of the references found in his magnum opus, *Református Dogmatika* [Reformed Dogmatics], a surprising discovery was made. Herman Bavinck was cited more than Abraham Kuyper. Besides, it is also proved that other Dutch theologians, such as Jan Jacob van Oosterzee and Eschelhoff Gravemeyer, not to mention Louis Berkhof, also made an impact on the formation of idea about Reformed doctrine. Therefore, as far as his book on dogmatics is concerned, the research shows a far more nuanced picture of the impact made on him. The paper highlighted that his presentation as merely a Kuyperian scholar is a simplification.

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Jenő Sebestyén's Life and Work through Dutch Reformed Eyes

The editor-in-chief of the influential conservative *Calvin Forum*, Clarence of Bouma,³ penned a necrology about Sebestyén. He articulated his views about the Hungarian promoter of Dutch neo-Calvinism in such a manner in 1950:

The significance of Jenő *Sebestyén lies in his clear and loyal championship of Calvinism in the face of the various perverted interpretations of Christianity* [emphasis mine] as these prevailed in the Hungarian Reformed Church in the first half of the present century. At first it was Modernism; later it was Barthianism. At no time was he deceived into viewing the revived interest in Calvin and the Reformation under the inspiration of the Dialectic Theology as a revival of genuine Calvinism, that is, of the true Gospel according to the Word of God. The ridicule which Barth heaped upon Kuyperian Calvinism, Sebestyén shared in his own Hungary. He was deeply grieved to see the progress of Barthianism in the theological faculties of his native country.⁴

³ Bouma was born Klaas Bouma in the Netherlands in 1891 and had come to the United States in 1905. "He studied at Calvin College and Seminary, then at Princeton Seminary, Princeton University, and Harvard Divinity School, where he obtained the Doctorate of Theology in 1921. His thesis was entitled, *Theism and Personalism*. On a graduate fellowship, he travelled to Berlin and Amsterdam to carry post-graduate work. After a brief pastorate in the Summer Street Christian Reformed Church at Passaic, New Jersey, he accepted in 1924 a call to the Chair of Dogmatics at Calvin Theological Seminary. Soon thereafter, he opted to teach in the area of Apologetics and Ethics, a new chair at Calvin, and thus opened the door for Professor Berkhof to move from New Testament to Dogmatics. For almost thirty years, he taught at Calvin until March, 1951, when his ministry was interrupted by ill health. Professor Bouma was highly appreciated for the breadth of his scholarship, for the incisiveness of his mind, and for the stalwart character of his Evangelical faith. He was much in demand as a lecturer and as a preacher. From 1935 to 1951, he was the editor of *The Calvin Forum*, a review which did much to contribute to closer relationships among Calvinists of various denominations the world over." Memorial: BOUMA, Clarence (1962): 1891–1962. *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society*. 6. 69.

⁴ BOUMA, Clarence (1950): Jenő Sebestyén called home. *Calvin Forum*. 16, 1–2. 4–5.

Then he continued in this manner:

When just before the outbreak of World War II I met him at Cambridge, England, where both of us were speakers at the International Christian Student Conference under the auspices of the I. V. F., he unburdened his heart to me on this score and expressed the hope that his Hungarian students might have the opportunity to be sent for advanced study to Calvinistic institutions of learning where Barthianism had not corrupted the faith of the Scriptures and the theology of Calvin. He rejoiced to see the revival of genuine Calvinism. For him, Kuyper—not Barth—is the true modern interpreter of the Reformed Faith. He promoted ties between Dutch Calvinism and the Reformed Church of Hungary.⁵

This picture, presented by a Dutch theologian, leaves a lot of room for comment. It is not the aim of this paper to give a thorough critique of the former thoughts quoted. Rather, the reader is invited to engage in self-critical reflection. What is clear from the necrology is that Sebestyén was perceived as a precious “trader” of a particular form of Dutch theology. Secondly, regarding his activity to convey Dutch Calvinism, only Kuyperianism is mentioned. Nonetheless, as will be demonstrated, he transferred Dutch Calvinism on a much broader scale. Thirdly, although every theological statement bears a witness to its own era, and mirrors, reflects, and proclaims the assumed recognized biblical-theological thought of that age, Bouma’s fierce antagonism against Barth bears the time-stamp of a sad development when two very precious, confessional yet different but biblical stances were set as enemies.⁶ Finally, rejection of modernism, that is, liberal theology should have joined

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ It requires further research to explore to what degree Sebestyén imported this anti-Barthianism from the Netherlands to Hungary. To see that not all scholars influenced by Old Princetonian views were against Barth, it is worth paying attention to J. Englington’s observation on James Macleod: “In 1978, Donald Macleod was appointed professor of systematic theology at the Free Church College, a position he held until 2011 (Macleod 2011: 15–54). Macleod stands out as twentieth-century Scotland’s foremost challenger to Torrance’s continuation of McLeod Campbell’s revised Calvinism (Macleod 2000: 57–72). Profoundly influenced by the Old Princeton school and the Dutch neo-Calvinism of Bavinck and Kuyper (Macleod 2006: 261–82), and an appreciative critic of Barth (Macleod 2008: 323–45), Macleod’s work represents the high point of the twentieth-century Free Church’s constructive appropriation of its own federal

their forces together rather than allowing them to fight for the status of hero, of who is the best interpreter of the Bible or Calvin's theology.⁷ Such a theological stance is scary and often happens with theological geniuses. Finally, it is rather strange and conspicuous that very little reference is made, if any, to the Hungarian predecessors of the new orthodoxy from Debrecen (Ferenc Balogh, Sen. Imre Révész, József Heiszler, Lajos Csiky, Lajos Eröss, József Erdős, and the like)⁸ by the conveyors of Western European theological ideas like Jenő Sebestyén (Kuyperianism) or István Török (Barthianism).⁹ Having made such observation which really intrigues us to do further research, the present paper seeks to explore how Jenő Sebestyén, a systematic theologian, saw the Kuyperian theological model as an example to follow in Hungary. First, this study will give a short survey of the influence exerted by Dutch Calvinism that made an indelible imprint on his life and work. Second, it will be argued that Sebestyén was not entirely a Kuyperian scholar in his theology, as his *magnum opus*, *Református Dogmatika* [Reformed Dogmatics], contains more citations from Herman Bavinck. Through a meticulous statistical analysis of his massive work, it will be argued that Bavinck, not to mention others, was at least as important a source for the formation of his theology as Kuyper. This discovery greatly changes the picture scholars traditionally maintain about Sebestyén. The paper does not seek to offer a full-

tradition (Macleod 1974: 21–8; 1975: 22–8; 1993: 214–18)". See: EGLINTON, James (2020): Reformed Theology in Modern Europe (Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries). In: Allen, Michael – Swain, Scott R. (eds.): *The Oxford Handbook of Reformed Theology*. Oxford, Oxford University Press. 137.

⁷ KOVÁCS, Ábrahám (2014): Die Antwort der Debrecener neuen Orthodoxie auf den theologischen Liberalismus im neunzehnten Jahrhundert in Ungarn. In: *Zeitschrift für Neuere Theologiegeschichte / Journal for the History of Modern Theology*. 21, 1. 51–71. It is really surprising that Sebestyén hardly makes any reference to the new orthodoxy movement of Debrecen, which was his predecessor in fighting against liberal theology and out of which school arose József Erdős, who was a student of Ferenc Balogh. Erdős, together with his mentor, Balogh, pressed for confessionalism and proclaimed the *ad fontes* principle, which led to the new translation of the *Heidelberg Catechism* by Erdős in 1882.

⁸ KOVÁCS, Ábrahám (2015): A debreceni újortodoxia második generációjának vezéregyénisége: Csiky Lajos szerepe az ébredésben és az ő misszióteológiai felfogása. In: Kovács, Ábrahám (ed.): *Protestáns teológiatörténet Magyarországon a hosszú 19. században és a totalitáriánus rendszerek alatt* (Magyar Protestáns Teológiatörténeti Könyvtár). Budapest, L'Harmattan. 170–201.

⁹ HOTORÁN, Gábor (2019): *Török István az Ige teológusa*. Doctoral dissertation. Debrecen.

scale analysis of transplanted theological ideas. Rather, it intends to set the signposts for further research by offering a statistical analysis of the occurrence of some selected theologians beside Abraham Kuyper¹⁰ such as Herman Bavinck,¹¹ Louis Berkhof,¹² Jan Jacob van Osterzee,¹³ and Henricus Eskelhoff Gravemeyer. His intention to mould these differing Dutch theologians into one of Sebestyén's kind of conservative theology was a great and unique effort by a fine Hungarian theologian. Sebestyén did attract international attention and also had a great impact on his students, to which a late Festschrift bears a beautiful testimony. To understand his own theological stance, it is best to pay some attention to his own definition of how he perceived Calvinism.

Dutch Calvinism as a Model of True and Best Calvinism – A Flattering Confession

Jenő Sebestyén was awarded an honorary doctorate by the Free University of Amsterdam in 1937. There he recalled what he had said thirty years earlier to his theological superior before commencing his studies in the Netherlands (1907): "I am looking for Calvinism... A Calvinism, about which I do not know yet what it contains in fact, what its real essence is. Yet, I am searching for it because I feel that my soul can find rest only in that. I am searching because I am not able to find it in Hungary... And in the Netherlands, I sense it instinctively that I shall find it there."¹⁴ These words were certainly

¹⁰ BRATT, James D. – KUYPER, Abraham (2013): *Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat. Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans.*

¹¹ EGLINTON, James (2020): *Bavinck. A Critical Biography.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Publishing Group.

¹² KLOOSTER, F. (1993): Loius Berkhof. In: Elwell, W. (ed.): *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians.* 254–294.

¹³ VAN VEEN, Sietze Douwes (1953): *Jan Jakob Van Osterzee.* In: Philip, Schaff (ed.): *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge. VIII.* Grand Rapids (MI, USA), Baker Book House. [reprint]. 242–243.

¹⁴ Dr. Sebestyén Jenő díszdoktorrá avatása az amszterdami református Szabadegyetemen (Vrije Universiteit). In: Ladányi, Sándor (ed.): *Sebestyén Jenő emlékkönyv.* Budapest, Református Egyház Zsinati Irodájának Sajtóosztálya. 1986. 237.

sweet as honey to the ears of the Dutch divine fathers and the heroic proponents of neo-Calvinism both in the Netherlands and in Hungary. While flattering his supporters, it may well be assumed that Sebestyén was genuinely frank and honest.

Despite that, some interesting questions pose themselves here immediately. To what degree was he informed by the various theological stances of the nineteenth-century Hungarian Calvinism? From his statement, one might infer that he fell into the mistake of a young theological student who discovered a new thing abroad but forget to look around his very own household and talk to his father or mother. The ideas of the West were always appealing, more attractive. Or do we encounter here a person who had really never heard anything of his own country's theological heritage? Or the discovery of a precious theological idea, like a pearl from Jesus's parable, filled his heart with so much joy that he forgot to look around? Whatever the case, Sebestyén certainly did his best to convey theological ideas that were thought best for Hungarian Reformed people.

Another set of questions also arise here and leave some room for further reflection. Sebestyén spoke of Calvinism, but from 1881 Hungarians officially called themselves as the Hungarian Christian Church Reformed according to the Gospel.¹⁵ This leads one to raise the question: were Hungarians Calvinist or Reformed? It is rather interesting to make an inquiry into how much a student had heard about Calvin in theological lectures at the Reformed colleges of Hungary, and whether students read anything from Calvin himself.

A number of leading scholars, such as Imre Révész, Senior (1860s), Bishop Károly Nagy, and Bishop László Ravasz, who were significant persons at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, to name just a few, admitted that they did not really know much about Calvin's institutes and his teachings except some slogans they had heard from the professors during lectures.¹⁶ In fact, Hungarian Reformed people were always reminded at anniversaries how little Calvin's original works were consulted, read, and taught at theological faculties. This realization prompted Imre Révész to publish a book on the life of Calvin in 1864.¹⁷

¹⁵ <https://mek.oszk.hu/02100/02185/html/241.html> (downloaded on: 27 May 2019). Its Hungarian name was *Evangelium Szerint Reformált Magyarországi Keresztény Egyház*.

¹⁶ KULCSÁR, Árpád (2020): *Az értékek átértékelése. (Ravasz László erdélyi évei, különös tekintettel gyakorlati teológiai és homiletikai elveire.* Doctoral dissertation. Debrecen. 91. This is the first version of the not yet submitted Ph.D.

¹⁷ KOVÁCS, Ábrahám (2010): *Hitvédelem és egyháziasság. A debreceni új orthodoxia vitája a liberális teológiával.* Budapest, L'Harmattan. 41.

The anniversary of Calvin's birth in 1909 also created a revived interest in a very much neglected theological area.¹⁸ These considerations may urge us to ask once more: in what sense were Hungarian Reformed people Calvinist? We do not intend to answer this question, but our aim is to throw some light on the context in which Sebestyén was exposed to Calvinism. The rise of his theology under Dutch influence should be viewed in this context.

First of all, it has to be stated that Sebestyén's political, social, and ecclesiastical activities were deeply imbued by Abraham Kuyper's vision of the neo-Calvinism that would transform Dutch society.¹⁹ Some observations need to be made here. Hungarian scholars are divided as to how successfully Sebestyén managed to transplant Dutch Calvinism and transform that into Hungarian context. Bishop Kálmán Tóth and Professor Sándor Ladányi wrote highly appreciatively about him and his successful educational and teaching career, whereas Barna Nagy, a Barthian scholar, was far more critical of him regarding the ability to mould Dutch ecclesiastical and social ideas into the Hungarian Calvinist soul. He also pointed out that Sebestyén himself had not done too much first-hand study of Calvin. Rather, he was an "interpreter" of how Calvin was understood by Dutch neo-Calvinists. Perhaps there is an element of truth in this observation regardless of the fact that Nagy belonged to the Barthian school of which Sebestyén was suspicious. As for the researcher, at first sight, it looks like both theologians were quite biased by their theological background when they evaluated the other person's work.

Having done some preliminary research on Sebestyén's life and work, it seems that he did have a great influence on his students of theology, and his impact was felt on a much wider scale than it has been assumed by some church historians. To prove this, it is enough to present a short timeline from the decisive year of 1920 that indicates how progressive

¹⁸ MAGYAR, Balázs Dávid (2019): Kálvin a XIX. századi magyar református értelmiség tudatában. In: Fülöp, Zoltán Ottó – Jeneiné, Hurja Bettina Valéria – Dicső, Melinda – Fazekas, István – Damásdi, Péter – Bándy, György – Harsányi, Béla – Magyar, Balázs Dávid – Danielisz, Dóra – Szabó, László – Balla, Péter – Ormóshegyi, Zoltán – Kovácsné Smatarla, Ibolya – Szűcs, Zsolt László – Adamekné Németh, Zsófia – Molnár, Ambrus – Sallai, Jakab – Fekete, Eszter – Posta, Anna – Peleskey, Miklós Péter (eds.): Teológus Tavasz Konferenciakötet: Az egyház megújulása a reformációra emlékezve. Debrecen, Kapitális Nyomda. 125–145.

¹⁹ SZABÓ, László (2013): Sebestyén Jenő politikai nézetei és azok fogadtatása. In: *Mediárium*. 3–4. 14–38.

he was in social and ecclesiastical matters. The bare fact of activities in 1920 and the coming decades bears witness to his highly engaging character. Secondly, it is conspicuous that he exerted a long-lasting impact on one of the most important student movements, the Soli Deo Gloria association. His lasting influence through historical Calvinism²⁰ (transplanted and moulded Dutch Calvinism) is acknowledged by Zoltán Töltéssy, who initiated the movement. SDG organized the very famous 1943 meeting at Balatonszárszó, where intellectuals from various walks of life and religious convictions came together to offer a critique of the feudal-capitalist society. Thirdly, he was very vocal in criticizing any sanctioning of a political party's ideological message. He rejected the far left attempt of the communist Hungarian Soviet Republic but also raised his voice against Nazi ideology. Furthermore, he dared to be critical of Horthy's rule, the governor of interbellum Hungary. That is why the researcher noticed some blank pages in his periodical *Kálvinista Szemle* [Calvinist Review], censored by the government.

Let us pay attention to the events of 1920. It is fascinating to see how swiftly he, together with many revivalist preachers or fine theologians, reacted to the traumatic collapse of the 1000-year Hungarian Kingdom after Trianon had forced an unjust peace treaty. He initiated an association to form a Calvinist political party, organized conferences, established some ecclesiastical journals, and founded a book series, to mention just a few of his impressive activities. To spell it out chronologically, first we draw attention to his endeavour to establish a society named Calvinist Political Alliance, with a view to form a political party on 2 February 1920.²¹ To spread the view of Dutch neo-Calvinism in Hungary, Sebestyén launched *Kálvinista Szemle* on 4 April 1920.²²

Between 26 and 27 May 1920 the first conference of the periodical *Kálvinista Szemle* was organized in Budapest. There, Rev. Gyula Forgács, who “was strongly related to the Presbyterian-origin Scottish Mission, delivered a lecture on “The Reformed Ministers facing new tasks”. As a result, the evangelical *Péceli Kör* [Circle of Pécel] was formed by likeminded people as an unintended outcome of Sebestyén's initiative.

²⁰ PÁL, László (1986): A történelmi kálvinizmus. In: Ladányi, Sándor (ed.): *Sebestyén emlékkönyv*. Budapest, MRE Zsinati Iroda Sajtóosztálya. 151–187.

²¹ LADÁNYI, Sándor (1986): Sebestyén Jenő (1884–1950). In: Ladányi, Sándor (ed.): *Sebestyén emlékkönyv*. Budapest, MRE Zsinati Iroda Sajtóosztálya. 17.

²² LADÁNYI 1986, 15.

However, it must be stated here that the Bethany Alliance C. E. led by his not-to-be father-in-law, Rev. Aladár Szabó, held a conference on 25 and 26 March.²³ Even before that event, Géza Takaró, strongly related to the Scottish Calvinism represented by the Church of Scotland's mission station, held a conference on revival, renewal of church life, and evangelization.²⁴ And there Calvinism was perceived as one of the most ideal forms of Christianity as a basis to begin a new world.²⁵ Therefore, it is fair to assume that people adhering to various theological schools attended each other's conferences. These ministers around Gyula Forgács and Aladár Szabó, both bursars of the Free Church of Scotland, represented the so-called "general Christian" (*általános keresztyén*), that is, the Evangelical-Pietist alliance, who were more ecumenical in their doctrine and piety and not so exclusively Reformed in their teachings and in the conduct of their lives. As a side remark, Sebestyén's critique of this group was often well founded, but assuming that they were less Reformed or Calvinists rests perhaps on shaky ground.²⁶ Gyula Forgács, or Bishop Imre Révész Junior, was just as much concerned about various aspects of Calvinism as Sebestyén was. Whereas Forgács transplanted Scottish Calvinism,²⁷ the latter was fond of French Calvinism. Hungarian theologians should have looked at these influences not as a foreign export but a natural process of taking ideas and thoughts from other nations. It is sad to see that some of the theologians mutually accused one another with non-Hungarian elements of Calvinism imported from abroad as if a true form of genuine and distinct Hungarian kind of Calvinism had ever existed in an ivory tower, isolated from any outside

²³ KOVÁCS, Ábrahám (2006): *History of the Free Church of Scotland's Mission to the Jews in Budapest and Its Impact on the Reformed Church of Hungary*. Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, 246–257. Szabó was considered the father of modern-age home mission, profoundly influenced by Scottish Presbyterian Evangelicalism and German Pietism through his father-in-law, Theodor Biberaur.

²⁴ FORGÁCS, Gyula (1925): *Belmisszió Cura pastoralis*. Pápa, Főiskolai Nyomda. 324.

²⁵ LADÁNYI 1986, 13.

²⁶ This, of course, calls for further research.

²⁷ KOOL, Anne-Marie (1993): *God Moves in a Mysterious Way. The Hungarian Protestant Foreign Mission Movement (1756–1951)*. Zoetermeer, Boekencentrum. 297–305. Here Forgács's mission conception is analysed – he followed Scottish examples. Kool analyses Sebestyén's mission vision too. See: op. cit. 311–313. There, he clearly pointed out Abraham Kuyper's impact. See also: SÍPOS, Ete Álmos (2007): "Kérjétek az aratásnak Urát". *Forgács Gyula (1879–1941) a magyar református belmisszió úttörője*. KRE–KMTI–Harmat. 37.

impact. Rather, these theological and pious trends of Calvinism should have been looked at as complementary, enriching the Hungarian theological landscape. The problem is always with the assumed exclusivist call of a given theologian who portrays himself as the best and true interpreter of what he had thought to be the most valuable treasure. This fairly human fallen state of mind led Sebestyén to think that he was able to adhere to the “uncompromised principles of pristine Calvinism”.²⁸ He also stated very confidently that Hungarian Reformed people were not able to produce a “really true Reformed Awakening” because “they tried to cure her [the Reformed church] by foreign medications that are not meant to be given to her” and “for her ideologies, theologies with theology, methods of evangelizations are continuously imported”. Ladányi is right to criticize rather sarcastically the otherwise highly appreciated life and work of Sebestyén, saying that while Sebestyén offered his acute criticism, he forgot that “neither Calvin nor Kuyper were raised in the Hungarian prairie, the *puszta*”.²⁹ Sebestyén’s contemporary, Imre Révész Junior, later Bishop of the Transbiscan Church District, pointed out in an excellent study that such “uncorrupted principles of Calvinism” in Hungary had never really existed.³⁰ In a recent study, Richárd Hörcsik even refined Révész’s comment that even though some principles did not exist, Calvin did have an impact on Hungarian Reformed theological thinking.³¹ However, what is most important to underline is that Calvin was not the only person who influenced the theological mindset of leading Hungarian figures. He is in line with Heinrich Bullinger, Theodore Béza, and many others. Therefore, one is inclined to observe that any exclusive statement to pin down an influence or overemphasize it leads to a false historical picture. And, none is better than the other. Rather, the proper attitude could and should be the appreciation of the other person’s theological conviction, belief, and piety.

Finally, besides his social-political involvement, literary output, and theological debates, his work on informing the West about the situation of the Hungarian Reformed people cannot be underestimated. From December 1920 until February 1921, he was in

²⁸ SEBESTYÉN, Jenő (1920): Kálvin és szelleme. In: *Kálvinista Szemle* Április 4; cited by LADÁNYI 1986, 14.

²⁹ LADÁNYI 1986, 15.

³⁰ RÉVÉSZ, Imre (1934): Szempontok a magyar „kálvinizmus” eredetének vizsgálatához. In: *Századok*. 68, 7–8. 257–275.

³¹ HÖRCSIK, Richárd (2010): Kálvin 16. századi magyarországi recepciója. In: *Collegium Doctorum*. 2010. 6–25.

the Netherlands to raise funds for the Hungarian Reformed people. As an outcome, the Dutch Hungarian Calvinist Library was established, and he became the editor of the periodical *De Hongaarsche Heraut* between October 1922 and September 1927. His role in the Kindertreinen project was also decisive.³² In sum, it can be said that his intention to transplant the socio-political views of Dutch Calvinism as a worldview, piety, and articulated confession is really impressive and surely left a precious mark on the soul of the Hungarian Reformed faith together with the influence of Scottish Presbyterian Evangelicalism,³³ the German confessionalism of the Kohlbrügge circle around his brother-in-law, Professor Eduard Böhl,³⁴ German pietism conveyed through various channels,³⁵ the French Réveil,³⁶ Karl Barth's neo-Calvinism, and the further emerging trends of the New Orthodoxy in Debrecen.³⁷ Having provided a short survey of Sebestyén's attempt to discover Calvinism as it had been interpreted by Abraham Kuyper, we turn our attention to his theological contribution and try to assess the Dutch impact. The aim of this paper is to examine statistically to what extent Dutch theologians influenced Jenő Sebestyén's (1884–1950) most significant work entitled *Református dogmatika* [Reformed Dogmatics]. He was a professor in Budapest, teaching Systematic Theology between 1 September 1918 and 1 September 1946.³⁸ Sebestyén is known in Hungarian and to some degree in Dutch circles too as a prominent figure of neo-Calvinism in Hungary. Abraham Kuyper's intellectual thinking as a Christian statesman and a

³² HÖRÖMPŐ, Gergely, Sen. (1986): Sebestyén Jenő, az ember: személye, teológiája, hatása. In: Ladányi, Sándor (ed.): *Sebestyén emlékkönyv*. Budapest, MRE Zsinati Iroda. 40.

³³ KOVÁCS, Ábrahám (2005): Angolszász és német hatások az első magyarországi protestáns kórház, a Bethesda megalapításakor. In: *Egyháztörténeti Szemle*. 6, 1. 79–94.

³⁴ JUHÁSZ, Zoltán (2020): Eduárd Böhl (1836–1903) bécsi dogmatikus eszkatológiai gondolkodása. In: *Református Szemle*. 113, 3. 242–265; See also: KOVÁCS, Teofil (2021): The Defenders of Faith. The Correspondence between Ferenc Balogh, Father of the New Orthodox Movement and Eduard Böhl, Reformed Pietist Professor of Dogmatics from Vienna. In: *Perichoresis*. 19, 1. 49–73.

³⁵ KOVÁCS, Ábrahám (2006): Mária Dorottya nádorné és a modern protestáns angolszász és német eszmék terjesztése Magyarországon. *Századok*. 140, 5. 1531–1550.

³⁶ KOVÁCS, Ábrahám (2020): British Evangelicals and German Pietists Promoting Revival through the Work of the Bible and Tract Societies in Hungary. In: *Scottish Church History*. 49, 2. 100–122.

³⁷ PETROV, Anita (2018): Eröss Lajos élete (1857–1911) és munkássága. In: *Református Szemle*. 11, 3. 287–305.

³⁸ LADÁNYI 1986, 12.

theologian made a significant impression on him while he studied in the Netherlands during his student years between 1907 and 1910.³⁹ During his stay, he developed a keen interest, and then the impression left a profound imprint on the mental map of his theology. Sebestyén is known as a Kuyperian scholar who coined the term “historical theology” in Hungary in 20th century. Therefore, he pressed for a return to the original teachings of John Calvin, as we have seen it earlier. However, the current paper intends to point out that while it is true that he tried to implement ideas of neo-Calvinism into the everyday life of the Reformed people, a significant substratum of Hungarian society, it is argued that his theology is not as much Kuyperian as has been thought. His social and ecclesiastical activities may be labelled as Kuyperian, but his systematic theology and ethics exhibit a more complex picture.

The presentation shows which Dutch theologians and thinkers influenced his theology most in his *magnum opus*, *Református dogmatika*. In addition, the five persons selected as the ones most frequently cited will be analysed statistically. His works, covering the basic themes of systematic theology, such as ecclesiology, Christology, eschatology, anthropology, and the like, appeared in several separate volumes, which were then combined into a single volume. A close look at the material reveals some surprising research findings.

It is vital to state that Sebestyén has a special role in the history of the theological thinking of the Reformed Church of Hungary in the 20th century. His *Református dogmatika* is one of the most detailed and neatly written systematic theological reflections. Its structure makes it easy to teach. Its theological scope is much wider than many similar contemporary works or those that are still in use in theological education, although they are productions of later scholars such as István Török, whose work clearly exhibits a Barthian influence, Sándor Tavaszy, who developed his systematic reflections under the influence of Barth, or Elemér Kocsis, whose dogmatics is a reflection of German theology from the second part of the 20th century. In sum, Sebestyén’s *Református dogmatika* is a profound, well-detailed, clearly written systematic reflection, an embodiment of conservative theology that has been written under Dutch theological influence. This is not to say that he was not informed by other non-Dutch theologians. He belonged to the

³⁹ ZOVÁNYI, Jenő (1977): *Magyarországi protestáns egyháztörténeti lexikon*. Budapest, MRE Zsinati Iroda. 535–536.

conservative wing of theologians and vehemently opposed liberal theology. Owing to his very active involvement in church life, he found it crucial to pass on his theological ideas and personal conviction to students and the wider audience, and he diligently sought to put those ideas, faith realizations, and practised piety into practice. He exerted great influence on many students and lay people through societies, periodicals, and newspapers besides his teaching.⁴⁰ Therefore, let us underline it again, it is a surprising yet somewhat understandable finding of recent Hungarian national history (the long-term presence of communism that impeded research) that his theology has not been treated in detail to any significant extent.⁴¹ A well-researched critical theological analysis of his theology still awaits publication.

In order to move in that direction and begin to unveil the characteristics, sources, and form of his theology, it is crucial to map out what kind of influences were exerted on the young Sebestyén in the Netherlands and later when he was a professor in Budapest. It is a commonly known truth that the main source of impact for Sebestyén was the orthodox Calvinism of the Netherlands. Just like in the case of Ferenc Balogh of Debrecen, it was Scottish evangelical theology with a traditionally orthodox stance.⁴² Although Sebestyén is seen by many as a scholar of neo-Calvinism, he named his theological trend differently in the Hungarian language. It was labelled as Historical Calvinism. In so doing, Sebestyén

⁴⁰ It is vital to underline that the assessment of the impact of Jenő Sebestyén's theology has not been done. Nonetheless, he did have a significant role in contemporaneous theology even if some people portray him as not so influential. I am on a different opinion. He had students who followed his theological ideas. Also, he exerted influence through the periodicals he had established, such as *Kálvinista Szemle* or *Magyar Kálvinizmus*, and societies such as *Kálvin János Társaság* or *Kálvinista Politikai Szövetség*. In addition to all of these, it is believed that he also influenced people through the conferences he organized. Finally, as a professor of systematic theology for 30 years, he must have held sway on many students' academic and pastoral life, which, of course, also awaits research.

⁴¹ The *Festschrift* edited by Ladányi is also an appreciation of Sebestyén's work, being rather a collective of descriptive papers than a critical study produced by various scholars.

⁴² KOVÁCS, Ábrahám (2021): *Revivalism, Bible Societies and Tract Societies in the Kingdom of Hungary. A Multi-ethnic and Multi-cultural Work for Spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ*. In: *Perichiresis*. 19, 1. 17–37. See also: KOVÁCS, Ábrahám (2019): *Dogma and Creed: ecclesia semper reformari or transformari debet? A Response from the New Orthodoxy of Debrecen to Hungarian Liberal Theology*. In: *Zeitschrift für Neuere Theologiegeschichte*. 26, 1. 1–19.

intended to underline that the roots of Calvinism are the same as those of the great Reformer. And he wished to separate his movement from the more ecumenically minded, inter-confessional evangelicalism and pietism that took root in Hungary due to Scottish influence from the mid-19th century.⁴³

The Presence of Dutch Theology in Jenő Sebestyén's Református dogmatika

To proceed further with the analysis, one has to scrutinize the data obtainable from his work *Református dogmatika* and see how many times he cited Dutch and non-Dutch theologians. As already stated, Sebestyén's *magnum opus* is his *Református dogmatika*, where his personal theology is best seen. Therefore, it naturally offers itself for various forms of theological and statistical analysis. A statistical approach to his work unveiled some surprising and unexpected results, as will be demonstrated. Therefore, the current paper focuses only on the references that he made to other theologians, and so an index of references has been established.⁴⁴ This approach deliberately disregards the examination of the nature of the content of his dogmatics (theological thoughts, ideas, worldviews, and methodological approaches employed by those scholars), which will be studied separately. Out of the many quite interesting results of the statistical analysis, it is really vital to spell out two observations for the wider theological audience. The first claim is that the average number of citations per person regarding Dutch theologians is twice as many as that of the non-Dutch thinkers when the number of total citations is taken into account. Moreover, if one excludes John Calvin, who was not a contemporary thinker, then three times as many citations can be detected from Dutch theologians.

⁴³ Sebestyén wished to marry the daughter of his professor, Aladár Szabó, who was a staunch evangelical, deeply influenced by the Scottish Mission in Budapest. It is rather interesting to entertain the idea what if he sided with him because of family bonds. Would this have influenced his theology? I suspect so. Yet, it is a hypothesis at this point. Unveiling his life story and comparing it to the stages of his theological thinking may reveal some interesting surprises.

⁴⁴ This reference is made by László Szabó and can be downloaded from the webpage of Dr. Botond Gaál: http://bgaal.drk.hu/sebestyen_idezesi_mutato.htm.

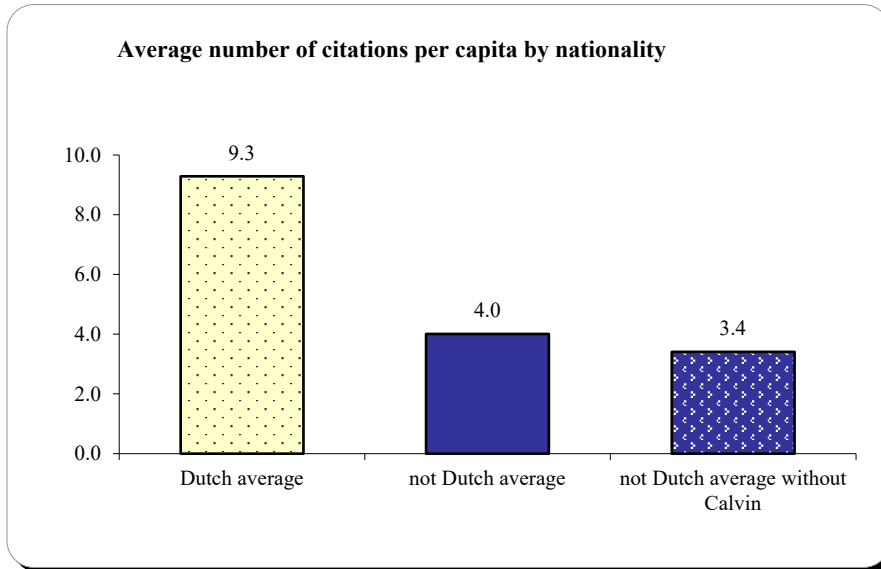


Figure 1. Average number of citations per capita by nationality

The second observation that can be made is that out of the ten most cited theological thinkers, Sebestyén relies on four or five Dutch or Dutch-speaking scholars. This certainly demonstrates the measure of influence that was exerted on Sebestyén's thinking. It must be underlined that what is termed as "Dutch thinkers" includes not only those who were born in the Netherlands and worked there but also those who were of Dutch origin such as Louis Berkhof. Moreover, scholars who were ethnically not Dutch also bear an influence on his thought such as the Princetonian Charles Hodge or, to the surprise of many scholars, Karl Barth.

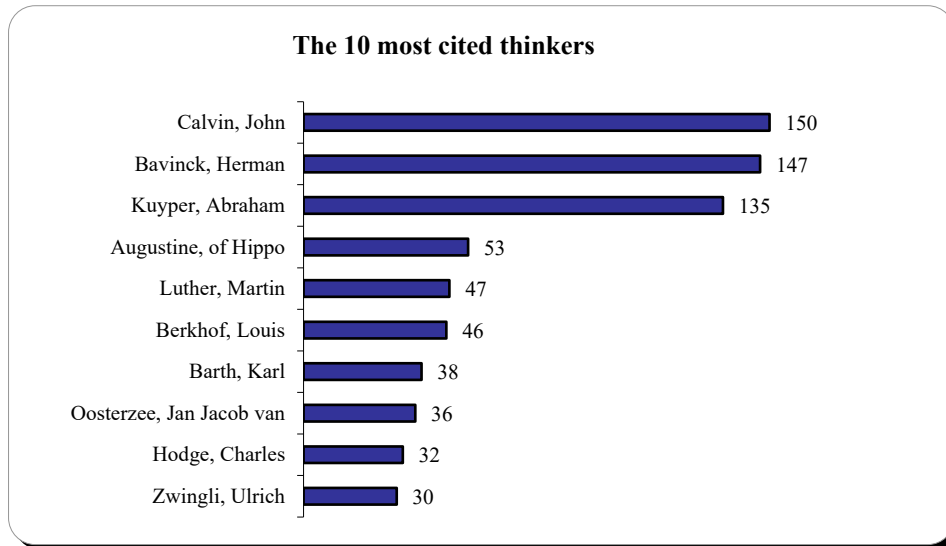


Figure 2. The ten most cited thinkers

As can be noticed, both results allow us to state that the impact of Dutch thinkers on the formation of Sebestyén's theology is above average. Needless to say, a citation itself does not necessarily mean that Sebestyén agreed with all the content he referred to, but it shows that he was heavily engaged with the Reformed Theology of the Dutch people and other conservative scholars like Hodge and Barth.⁴⁵ At the preliminary stage of the research, it may be inferred from the data studied so far that the citations are often used to make a point with which the Hungarian Systematic Theologian agreed, disagreed, or that he developed further. This allows us to say that Sebestyén approved of the theological reflections expressed by those Dutch scholars that he cited in almost 81%. Taking all the remarks and observations made so far into consideration, it may be stated that Dutch conservative theology held an extraordinary sway on how Sebestyén developed and shaped his theological system.

⁴⁵ One of the best examples is Karl Barth. Although Sebestyén cited him 38 times, he agreed with Barth only on five occasions.

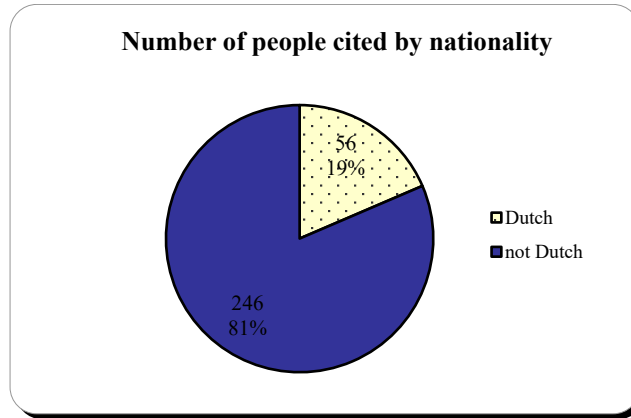


Figure 3. Number of people cited by nationality

As we proceed towards the more particular issues, two further questions could be raised. First, which one of the Dutch theologians most influenced Sebestyén's thinking? Secondly, what was the nature and content of their impact? The diagram below indicates the five most cited Dutch theologians, whose works were most referenced by Sebestyén. It is a further research plan to examine their theologies pertaining to subjects like ecclesiology, Christology, or eschatology and that of Sebestyén to compare similar themes in order to see the similarities and differences of his theological stance. This would enable the researcher to find answers to the questions posed above.

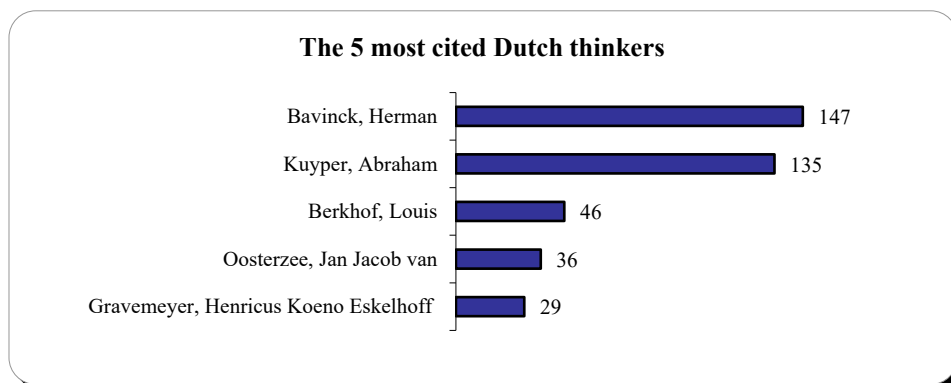


Figure 4. The five most cited Dutch theologians

Abraham Kuyper's neo-Calvinism and His Impact on Sebestyén

Although the diagram clearly shows, to the surprise of many, that Bavinck was cited by Sebestyén more than Kuyper, this paper starts with a brief reflection on the impact of Kuyper since he was the founder of Dutch neo-Calvinism. As for Kuyper's theology, he initially was not sympathetic to Calvinism. This can be seen in his doctoral dissertation, where he compared the ecclesiology of Calvin and Jan Łaski, often siding with the latter's theological point of view. On his previous theological stance prior to his conversion, he reminisced in the following vein:

Having received his training in a conservative-supernaturalistic spirit, he broke with faith in every form when a student at Leyden, and then cast himself into the arms of the barest radicalism. At a later period, perceiving the poverty of this radicalism, and shivering with the chilling atmosphere which it created in his heart, he felt attracted first to the Determinism of Professor Scholten, and then to the warmth of the *Vermittelungs-theologie*, as presented by Martensen and his followers.⁴⁶

By 1866, Kuyper, in the very same year as the father of the Debrecen New Orthodoxy movement, Ferenc Balogh, began to exhibit an interest in orthodoxy due to the piety of Pietje Balthus, who was member of his congregation and whose simple but deeply rooted faith gripped Kuyper's attention. When he received an invitation from the States from two bastions of conservative theology, Warfield and Vos, who insisted on the orthodoxy of faith, he became one of the most prominent speakers on Calvinism. Owing to the invitation, he delivered the "Stone Lectures" at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1898.

Kuyper's Calvinism was not entirely new in certain respects. His theology was rooted in the Calvinist tradition that had been crystallized throughout centuries. What he did contribute was his vast erudition and knowledge of Calvin's writing, which he had been thoroughly studying. Kuyper did not create and form a new teaching. His chief theological work, entitled *Encyclopaedie der Heilige Godgeleerdheid*,⁴⁷ remoulds and presents the old biblical and doctrinal truth. Therefore, his contribution is in making the

⁴⁶ KUYPER, Abraham (1898): *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology*. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons. viii.

⁴⁷ Kuyper's book was translated into English too.

old faith comprehensible for his age rather than in discovering a theological novelty by writing a new dogmatics. However, his Calvinism may well be perceived as new. Some scholars perceive him as the charismatic person who was able to apply Calvinism as faith and worldview at the same time to the relevant issues of contemporary society. Therefore, his merit lay in the fact that he freed Calvinism from the prison of theology, which was an ivory tower of self-assuring and self-referencing theological reflection. Kuyper related the biblical truth as realized in the doctrine of Calvinism to the everyday life of the people.

Pertaining to his methodology, Kuyper favours deductive thinking. He always starts with the entirety of an issue and core teaching and works himself to the parts, meticulously detailing every single little step. In so doing, he examines the doctrines and presents ethical obligations that are significant parts or components of the fullness of an entity. This methodology is typical of the late Calvinist and is not the approach that Calvin followed, though Calvin himself examined everything in the light of the complexity of the Scriptures. Kuyper did not create a new method. Rather, he only applied the methods of the modern scientific research of his age to theology. In sum, it could be stated that Kuyper's Calvinism is a special symbiosis of Calvin's approach and that of Late Calvinism as understood in the Netherlands.

Attention has been paid to the fact that Sebestyén sought to introduce Dutch neo-Calvinism into the everyday life of the Reformed Church of Hungary through societies, parties, journals, conferences, lectures, and youth associations. Naturally, the question arises as to what Sebestyén took from Kuyper. Before attempting to give an answer, we need to underline that it is not the intention of this paper to give a full-scale research answer. To receive some orientation, however, it is better to ask which one of the theological tenets was most integrated into Sebestyén's thinking. The answer is: the Kuyperian teaching about God's sovereignty. This deep conviction drove him to formulate a bold criticism of the communists, the Nazis, and even the contemporary Horthy government. His biblical and sound Christian voice deserves more attention. Not only in his social-ecclesiastical and political activity did he uphold the banner of God's sovereignty but also in his systematic theological writings. Owing to Kuyper, he also laid a great emphasis on God's sovereignty, a typical Calvinist realization, and claimed: „...this is the doctrine which differentiates Reformed Christian thinking from other kinds of Christianity and lends itself a character”.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ SEBESTYÉN, Jenő (1994): *Református dogmatika*. Budapest–Gödöllő, Iránytű Kiadó. 84.

The doctrine of sovereignty permeated all areas of Sebestyén's theology: cosmology, anthropology, soteriology, ecclesiology, eschatology, and the like.

What may be considered on a theological, or, better to say, doctrinal level is the divine sovereignty, that is, the idea of *Soli Deo Gloria* on an ethical level. The famous Hungarian systematic theologian consistently applied it in his systematic theological writings and was committed to using the concept of SDG in his *Református etika* [Reformed Ethics], in which he claimed that every area of human life is subject to service (work for) to God's glory.⁴⁹ In his *Református etika*, *Soli Deo Gloria* is the subtitle of each chapter, that is, how a Reformed person seeks God's glory in his family life, cultural work, and area of civil life regulated by the state and the like. Regarding his working methodology, Sebestyén was not entirely Kuyper's follower. In his works, two kinds of approach, deductive and inductive methods, were used interchangeably. When Kuyper's theory and theology are compared to Sebestyén, it could be claimed that his "Hungarian disciple" laid far greater emphasis on exegesis and biblical theological foundations. His Dogmatics are full of references to the *ad fontes* principle. Nonetheless, Kuyper's influence on his thought is, of course, inevitable. Sebestyén translated Kuyper's "Stone Lectures" into Hungarian,⁵⁰ just as hundreds of further articles regarding Kuyper's life and work were translated. These publications bear testimony to his influence.

Herman Bavinck's Theology and His Influence on Sebestyén's Dogmatics

Bavinck's main work is his four-volume *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, which was translated into English as well.⁵¹ Regarding its structure, this systematic theological reflection belongs to the regular kind of dogmatics. As for its content, it represents the main stream of Calvinism. It maintains a good balance throughout, avoiding both the Arminian and the hyper-Calvinist trends. Its particular strength lies in its methodology.

⁴⁹ SEBESTYÉN, Jenő (1993): *Református etika*. Budapest–Gödöllő, Iránytű Kiadó. 240, 453–455.

⁵⁰ Kuyper's "Stone Lectures" were delivered at the Princeton Theological Seminary in 1898. These six lectures were translated into Hungarian. Its title (*Calvinism and Modernity*) in the Hungarian language is *Kálvinizmus és modernitás*. Cluj-Napoca, Koinónia. 2001.

⁵¹ BAVINCK, Herman (2002–2008): *Reformed Dogmatics*. Vols 1–4. Grand Rapids, Baker Academic.

As already said, Kuyper cultivated a deductive theology. He began with general principles and emphasized the conclusion he drew from them. He often alluded to the fact that his inferences, as he called them, were supported by biblical revelation. Bavinck was a theologian who preferred the inductive approach. He meticulously examined the biblical revelation, which in turn guided his conclusions and allowed him to formulate his doctrines. Owing to this method, the often-felt tension between biblical theology and systematic theology is hardly tangible. Bavinck moved closer to Calvin since he had reformed the method too, which was deemed unnecessary by Kuyper. They differed from each other very sharply regarding the relation of universal grace and antithesis. Bavinck stressed universal grace, alluding to his conviction that there is common ground between Christians and non-Christians on which one may build. Kuyper favoured antithesis and argued that such a ground is non-existent. Universal grace makes a person open towards outsiders, whereas antithesis makes him suspicious. Kuyper's conception about two forms of scientific approaches, which was unfolded in the fourth chapter of the "Stone Lectures", bears a mark of this suspicion.

It may be a surprise for many scholars that in Hungary any Reformed dogmatics, that is, book written on the topic of Christian doctrines in a systematic manner, was rarely entitled as *Református dogmatika* [Reformed Dogmatics].⁵² However, just like Bavinck, Sebestyén also found it necessary and vital to name his systematic theological reflections in such a manner. Although Sebestyén never made a public statement about this, the similarity of their *magnum opus* may possibly shed light on the similarity of content of the two works. We may infer this from the fact that Bavinck was cited the most, and Sebestyén agreed with his theological ideas almost all the time. Another crucial observation can be made regarding the impact of Bavinck – rather than of Kuyper – on Sebestyén's main work, *Református dogmatika*. Both of them used inductive philosophical-theological reflection to arrive at faith statements in their works. When a particular example is looked at more closely, for instance, universal grace and antithesis, Sebestyén did not find it necessary to state his opinion on the matter. Regarding scientific issues, he proclaims that he accepts them but cannot fully identify with them.⁵³ This perhaps indicates that he may have favoured the antithesis but gave some space to common grace too.

⁵² Let us underline that Turretin gave the title *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae* for his main work. Theodore Béza's *magnum opus* was called *Summa totius Christianismi*, Charles Hodge is famous for his *Systematic Theology* and Kuyper for *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology*.

⁵³ SEBESTYÉN 1993, 309–310.

Louis Berkhof's Impact on Sebestyén's Theology

Berkhof's best-known book is his *Systematic Theology*.⁵⁴ According to Wayne Grudem: „This book is a great treasure-house of information and analysis, and is probably the most useful one-volume systematic theology available from any theological perspective.”⁵⁵ What are the benefits of *Systematic Theology*? Above all, its vast amount of information. In explaining Reformed teaching, Berkhof presented almost all the major theologians and theological positions in the history of theology, presumably with the intention of presenting the process of the formation of Reformed doctrine and proving its superiority. Using this method, his theology expands into a theological history presented from a Reformed point of view, the amount of information of which far exceeds the amount of information of the average regular theologies. *Systematic Theology* also benefits from its myriad in-depth analyses. Berkhof not only listed the various positions but at the same time analysed them: he presented the arguments for and against them, assessed them, and finally drew a conclusion. While reading his analyses, the reader gains insight into the methodology of regular theology, thus becoming able to practise theology on his/her own. A third reason for the usefulness of *Systematic Theology* is its clear presentation. As his predecessors, Berkhof preferred to use theological terms mainly in Latin, but he also sought clarity. His logic and presentation can be easily followed even by a reader less versed in theology. In terms of content, his *Systematic Theology* says nothing new. Its significance lies in the systematization and professional presentation of the theological values that had already been brought to light. What is relatively new to it, however, is the strong emphasis on the idea of a covenant of action and grace. This thought weaves through its theology from beginning to end and makes independent dogmas part of a coherent system.

At the current state of research, there is only a single issue that we may confidently proclaim with full assurance that Sebestyén indeed owes to Berkhof, which is the historical theological approach. It is easily noticeable in Sebestyén's *Református dogmatika*, just like in that of Berkhof, that he is keen on informing his readers about the various viewpoints of theological trends and that at the same time he explicates and defends the Reformed faith statements. Besides, one cannot help noticing that the concept of covenant appears

⁵⁴ BERKHOF, Louis (2003): *Systematic Theology*. Edinburgh, The Banner of Truth Trust.

⁵⁵ GRUDEM, Wayne (2020): *Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids (IN), Zondervan. 1089.

with a great emphasis in the work of both scholars. Nevertheless, their relation to each other is not so unambiguous. Pertaining to the idea of covenant, Sebestyén cited Coccejus, the originator of covenant theology. It is suspected that both of them borrowed their ideas from this great theologian.

Jan Jacob van Oosterzee and His Impact on Sebestyén

Although he taught at the University of Utrecht, he did not share the modernist views of his colleagues. He considered himself an Orthodox Christian. His main works include *Mozes*, *De Heidelbergische Catechismus*, *Christologie*, *Christelijke Dogmatiek*, and *Praktische Theologie*. His works relate to almost all areas of theology. He professed premillennialist views about the end times, a phenomenon extremely rare within Dutch Calvinism. Regarding the final days, the eschaton, he subscribed to premillennialist views, which is a rather rare stance amongst Calvinists in the Netherlands.⁵⁶ Philip Schaff's monumental work states the following about him: "His avowed aim as a preacher was rather to edify than instruct. Holding himself aloof from the radical, naturalistic, and purely ethical tendencies, remaining neutral toward negative criticism, and in Christology maintaining a distinctly supernaturalistic position, he was pleased to call himself 'Evangelical, or Christian Orthodox.'"⁵⁷ Having received his professorial appointment to the University of Utrecht in 1863, van Oosterzee produced his brief *Theologie des Nieuwen Verbonds* (Utrecht, 1867).⁵⁸ This fine work was followed by the larger *Christelijke Dogmatiek* (2 parts, 1870–72).⁵⁹ The finest of his academic accomplishments was his *Praktische Theologie* (2 parts, Utrecht, 1877–78), in which he considered homiletics, liturgics, catechetics, pastoral theology, missions, and

⁵⁶ It may not be a true statement for other trends of Calvinism or secessionism. One of the most prominent theologians and popular writers, Keith Alexander, was a historical premillennialist to be distinguished from Darby's dispensational premillennialism. English Baptists also see themselves, like many other Puritan groups, as heirs of Calvin's teaching, and many of them became premillennialists such as the Scottish revivalist Andrew Bonar.

⁵⁷ VAN VEEN 1953, 241.

⁵⁸ VAN OOSTERZEE, Jan Jacob (1893): *Theology of the New Testament*. New York.

⁵⁹ VAN OOSTERZEE, Jan Jacob (1876): *Christian Dogmatics*. 2 vols. New York.

even apologetics.⁶⁰ It is less known that Oosterzee had Hungarian connections and impact too. To point this out briefly, his *Praktische Theologie* was used by Albert Kovács, professor of practical theology in Budapest.⁶¹

Oosterzee's impact on Sebestyén is rather marginal but worth mentioning. A more in-depth research could bring to light the many points they agreed upon regarding the various theological issues, but there were also quite a few of them in which they sharply differed from each another. One of the visible differences between them was how they related to modern biblical criticism, or, to say, higher critical approaches. Oosterzee did not spend too much time on opposing modern critical theology. On the contrary, Sebestyén fought a fierce battle against liberal theology.⁶² Another point of departure was the difference in their eschatology: while Oosterzee was premillennialist, Sebestyén preferred a truly amillennialist stance. A third point could also be made, according to which Sebestyén perceived Oosterzee's thinking as being too speculative.⁶³

Henricus Koeno Eskelhoff Gravemeyer's Contribution to Sebestyén's Dogmatics

Henricus Koeno Eskelhoff Gravemeyer was born in Oosthem on 25 February 1883. His father, Eskelhoff Carsjen Gravemeijer, was a Reformed pastor. He studied theology in Utrecht. Gravemeyer served as a pastor after completing his studies in theology. At one time, he was Secretary of the General Council of the Dutch Reformed Church (Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk). During World War II, he became one of the leaders of the church resistance, for which he was imprisoned in 1941. He was inaugurated as an honorary doctor of both the University of Utrecht (1946) and the University of Pretoria (1952). He died in 1970. Gravemeyer became famous as a preacher, his preaching captivating his students.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ VAN OSTERZEE, Jan Jacob (1879): *Practical Theology*. New York.

⁶¹ BODNÁR, Lajos (2021): *Kovács Albert liberális teológus és politikus élete és munkássága*. Doctoral dissertation. Debrecen. 21, 45.

⁶² SEBESTYÉN, Jenő (1934): Liberalizmus és kálvinizmus. In: *Dunamelléki Református Egyházkerület Budapesti Teológiai Akadémiájának Értesítője 1933–34 tanévről*. Budapest. 3–15.

⁶³ SEBESTYÉN 1994, 30.

⁶⁴ <http://www.inghist.nl/Onderzoek/Projecten/BWN/lemmata/bwn3/+gravemeijer> (downloaded: 26 May 2019).

He did not obtain a degree in theology, nor did he write works of a specifically theological nature. What we know about his theology we know mainly from his sermons and statements. His theology was fully in line with the theology of Dutch neo-Calvinism.

Gravemeyer was a preacher who explicated and interpreted biblical truth with the aid of powerful pictures. Upon studying the quotations borrowed from Gravemeyer by Sebestyén, one has the feeling that they function as if they intend to achieve a similar aim. These pictures often follow the faith statements, the theological conclusions Sebestyén arrived at. It seems as if Sebestyén had wished to offer practical help to his students, who were supposed to preach rather than explicate doctrinal statements. Nonetheless, they were required to preach biblical truth articulated by systematic reflection as faith statements, doctrines, as the living word of God.

Concluding Thoughts

In sum, it may be stated that only three out of the five Dutch theologians made a special, truly visible impact on the formation of Sebestyén's Reformed theology: Kuyper, Bavinck, and Berkhof. The theology of Oosterzee and Gravemeyer showed some similarities to that of Sebestyén. However, their theology was treated with reservation and used to achieve certain ends, or their reflections provided creative ideas and topics to make a point more understandable for Sebestyén's readers.

A research question still poses itself: what could be the cause of the fact that Sebestyén, apart from Calvin, found Kuyper's, Bavinck's, and Berkhof's ideas and theology sufficient to develop his own *Systematic Theology*? One of the answers might be in the very existence/substance and nature of Calvinism. Calvinist theology is a relatively concise and narrow system: it has its discernible *and clearly visible* borderlines and values. However, these values do not fall far away from one another. If that statement is true, then such a system requires clearly articulated basic principles, a clear hermeneutics, a well-wrought method that results in a profound, easy-to-comprehend and review system of doctrinal theology that Sebestyén successfully intended to carry out in his *Református Dogmatika*.

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