

**HERMAN BAVINCK'S ESCHATOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING
OF REDEMPTION**

by

Syd Hielema

**A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for a degree of Th. D.**

Wycliffe College

(Toronto School of Theology)

1998



**National Library
of Canada**

**Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services**

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

**Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada**

**Acquisitions et
services bibliographiques**

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-35452-0

Preface

In the Spring of 1994 Dr. George Vandervelde suggested to me that the work of neo-Calvinist theologian Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) provided excellent material for a doctoral dissertation. He pointed out that a project was underway to translate Bavinck's entire (four volume) dogmatics into English for the first time, and essays investigating his work were appearing in theological journals. At the time I was more preoccupied with the writings of later neo-Calvinism and was not inclined to accept his suggestion. However, I had read one of Bavinck's books and several of his essays with great appreciation, so I resolved to investigate further before dismissing the thought.

It did not take long for this further reading to lead to a change of heart. In the works of Bavinck I encountered a theologian who is thoroughly Reformed and graciously ecumenical, one who seeks to give a clearly organized account of the Christian faith without diminishing the full breadth of Scripture, one who addresses his own context while engaging the important voices of the tradition, one who articulates sound theological insight with the heart of a pastor. I am grateful to Dr. Vandervelde for his suggestion, not primarily because it solved the problem of establishing a topic, but because I became immersed in the writings of a theologian whom I have come to perceive as a model and mentor.

Once the project was underway, Dr. John Webster provided

invaluable advice and encouragement. Dr. Webster's careful reading of various drafts and suggestions for improvement invariably proved to be helpful and insightful. Many others were helpful along the way. Conversations with George Vandervelde, John Bolt, Albert Wolters, and Hendrik Hart served to clarify various aspects of the argument presented here. My colleague at Dordt College, Dr. John VanDyk, carefully read chapters 5, 6, and 7 and provided numerous suggestions for improvement. My wife Evelyn's parents, Jacob and Maria Kuntz, went over the translations of the Dutch material and also suggested numerous improvements. Discovering such communion of the saints in the midst of such an intensely personal endeavor is truly a wondrous gift of grace. While I am extremely thankful for all those who contributed to this work, in no way do I wish to suggest that the shortcomings which remain are their responsibility.

As one might expect, the writings of Herman Bavinck are quoted extensively in this work. What may be unexpected is that the original Dutch is cited in the body of this text, with English translations provided in the accompanying footnotes. Because this study is heavily rooted in the Bavinck material, it seemed most appropriate to place his own words directly in the body. I trust that the reader unfamiliar with the Dutch language will not be seriously inconvenienced in referring to the footnotes for the English translations.

Syd Hielema
Sioux Center
May, 1998

ABBREVIATIONS USED

The works of Herman Bavinck

AG	<i>De Algemeene Genade</i>
CCC	"The Catholicity of Christianity and Church"
CCG	"Calvin and Common Grace"
CF	<i>The Certainty of Faith</i>
CG	"Common Grace"
CW	<i>Christelijke Wereldbeschouwing</i>
GD	<i>Gereformeerde Dogmatiek</i>
KCK	<i>De Katholiciteit van Christendom en Kerk</i>
KL	<i>Kennis en Leven</i>
LT	<i>The Last Things, Hope for this World and the Next</i>
MD	<i>Magnalia Dei</i>
PR	<i>The Philosophy of Revelation</i>
RF	<i>Our Reasonable Faith, A Survey of Christian Doctrine</i>
WO	<i>Wijsbegeerte der Openbaring, Stone Lezingen</i>
ZG	<i>De Zekerheid des Geloofs</i>

Other works

CR	<i>Creation Regained, Reformational Basics for a Biblical Worldview, Albert M. Wolters</i>
ICT	<i>The Imitation of Christ Theme in the Cultural-ethical Ideal of Herman Bavinck, John Bolt</i>
RI	<i>Revelatie en Inspiratie, De Openbarings- en Schriftbeschouwing van Herman Bavinck in vergelijking met die der ethische theologie, Jan Veenhof</i>
RRR	<i>The Relation of Revelation and Reason in E. Brunner and H. Bavinck, Eugene Heideman</i>
RT	<i>Reformational Theology, A New Paradigm for doing Dogmatics, Gordon J. Spykman</i>

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE		i
ABBREVIATIONS		iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS		iv
I. INTRODUCTION		1
Herman Bavinck and Dutch neo-Calvinism		1
The goal of redemption		7
Bavinck the dogmatician		11
II. AN OVERVIEW OF BAVINCK'S THEOLOGY		30
How does God reveal himself?		30
The necessity of revelation		37
The character of revelation		41
The forms of revelation		51
Summary		61
How does God relate to his creatures?		63
The notion of duality		74
The Organic		83
Summary		100
III. BAVINCK'S DOCTRINE OF GOD AND CHRISTOLOGY		103
Bavinck's doctrine of God		104
Christology		132
The person and work of Jesus Christ		137
Jesus Christ and the history of redemption		149
Summary		166
IV. BAVINCK'S DOCTRINE OF CREATION AND HIS ESCHATOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF REDEMPTION		172
Creation is a relative good		173
Creation in the context of the history of redemption		194
Common grace in Bavinck's theology		235
The role of creation in Bavinck's eschatological understanding of redemption: a critique		246
Summary		286
V. HERMAN BAVINCK AND CONTEMPORARY NEO-CALVINISM, PART I: THE CHARACTER OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD AND THE CREATION		289
Revelation		295
The doctrine of creation for Spykman and Wolters		305
A comparison of Wolters and Spykman with Bavinck		313
The solution of later neo-Calvinism		342

Conclusion	363
VI. HERMAN BAVINCK AND CONTEMPORARY NEO-CALVINISM, PART II: THE GOAL OF CREATION	365
The goal of creation in later neo-Calvinism	366
Wolters and Spykman on Bavinck	386
Begbie's critique	395
Bavinck and later neo-Calvinism	406
Conclusion	440
VII. THESES TOWARDS CONFIGURING THE GOAL OF REDEMPTION	444
Thesis one	444
Thesis two	455
Thesis three	463
Thesis four	469
Conclusion	475
BIBLIOGRAPHY	478

Chapter One - Introduction

Herman Bavinck and Dutch neo-Calvinism

This study will develop the claim that the understanding of redemption described by Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) is primarily eschatological in character, and this appropriately describes the heart of his theological endeavor. The significance of this claim becomes clear when Bavinck is perceived within the context of the specific scholarly and ecclesial community within which he held a unique place: Dutch neo-Calvinism. Bavinck's uniqueness lies precisely in his eschatological focus. One of the purposes of this study is to compare Bavinck's understanding of redemption with that of two members of the contemporary Dutch neo-Calvinist community, the late Gordon J. Spykman and Albert M. Wolters. They articulate a creational understanding of redemption, and this divergence between their views and Bavinck's serves to clarify the latter's place within this community and the contribution his work continues to make to the development of Dutch neo-Calvinism.

Herman Bavinck is commonly regarded today as the leading theologian among the founders of Dutch neo-Calvinism.¹ The son of a pastor in the conservative Gereformeerde Kerk which split from the state-supported Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk in 1834, he took the unusual step of studying theology at the University of Leiden, an

¹ Cf. G. C. Berkouwer, *A Half Century of Theology, Movements and Motives*, Tr. L. Smedes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), pp. 11-13; Gordon J. Spykman, *Reformational Theology, A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), p. 6.

institution judged to be too liberal by his ecclesial community. Though he sympathized with this judgment, Bavinck wished to study under the leading Dutch theologians of his day, Jannes Henricus Scholten, Abraham Kuenen, and Cornelis Petrus Tiele. This move illustrates two significant facets of his theological principles: he sought to remain faithful to the Reformed tradition of which he was a part while also being thoroughly conversant in the contemporary issues that lived in the wider community. After his studies were completed he briefly served in the pastorate, and spent most of his working life teaching and writing, first at the denominational seminary in Kampen (1883-1902), and subsequently at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam (1902-1921).

Dutch neo-Calvinism originated in the Netherlands during the 1870's and 80's under the primary leadership of theologian/politician/activist Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920), but with considerable support from a community of scholars and activists which included Bavinck. The two most visible achievements of this group are the founding of the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam in 1880 and the establishment of the Antirevolutionaire Partij, which became the governing political party in the Netherlands in 1901 with Kuyper serving as prime minister of the country. Since then the VU in particular has served as an institution of continuity, providing a haven in which the neo-Calvinist vision has been revised and expanded into every area of the curriculum, and exported to several countries, especially the United States,

Canada, South Africa and Australia.

As it matured the vision of Dutch neo-Calvinism was developed more in philosophical terms rather than theological ones. Its second generation of scholars were led by philosophers Herman Dooyeweerd and Th. Vollenhoven and the theologian G. C. Berkouwer. Berkouwer names Bavinck as his mentor, and perceives the philosophical stream more as an outworking of Kuyper's thought.² Analysis of the complexities involved in the relationship between these two streams within Dutch neo-Calvinism lies beyond the scope of this study.³ What is significant is that the work of Bavinck was clearly overshadowed by that of Kuyper during the first and second generations of this community's existence, but now, almost a century after their prime, Bavinck's work is slowly edging into the foreground, superceding that of Kuyper. Under the leadership of its editor, John Bolt, the *Calvin Theological Journal* has, during the past ten years, published translations of several shorter Bavinck writings and descriptive/critical essays which deal with his work. Currently the Dutch Reformed Translation Society is endeavoring to translate and publish Bavinck's entire *Gereformeerde*

² *A Half Century of Theology*, p. 13.

³ For such analysis see R. H. Bremmer, *Bavinck en Zijn Tijdgenoten* (Kampen: Kok, 1966) and *Bavinck als Dogmaticus* (Kampen: Kok, 1961), John Bolt, *The Imitation of Christ Theme in the Cultural-Ethical Ideal of Herman Bavinck* (Toronto: unpublished dissertation, University of St. Michael's College, 1982), as well as Berkouwer's *A Half Century of Theology*. While each of these works begins such analysis, comprehensive analysis remains to be done.

Dogmatiek,⁴ and has recently released the first installment of that project.⁵

These developments reinforce Berkouwer's observation that, in comparison with Kuyper, "Bavinck raised theological questions that continued to play a crucial role in mainstream theology after he had gone."⁶ As a small player on a large stage, Dutch neo-Calvinism has always wrestled with the tension between maintaining its own unique identity while engaging in conversation within the larger contexts of scholarly discourse. This tension is exacerbated by this tradition's desire to be humbly faithful to traditional orthodoxy in a manner that celebrates the communion of the saints in which the scholar and the layperson share. Dutch neo-Calvinism defies conventional stereotypes in that it is a conservative, grassroots tradition which highly values intellectual endeavor. In his person and his work Bavinck represents the figure in early neo-Calvinism who succeeded in embodying these various tensions par excellence. The title of his major work, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, is true to its name: it is a thoroughly reformed exposition of the Christian faith. At the same time, it engages in conversation with hundreds of theological and

⁴ Herman Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, 4 vols., 4th. edition (Kampen: Kok, 1929).

⁵ Bavinck, *The Last Things, Hope for this World and the Next*, Tr. John Vriend, Ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996). This work translates *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* IV, pp. 564-713.

⁶ *A Half Century of Theology*, p. 13.

philosophical voices from the past and contemporaneous with Bavinck, criticizing these voices from a reformed perspective while also allowing them to inform his own reformed understanding. Bavinck's successful attempt to be both reformed and conversant with his wider context came with a price. In somewhat pensive reflections upon completing twenty-five years of teaching in 1907, Bavinck named preserving his faith as his most significant 'accomplishment!'⁷ Biographer H. R. Bremmer concludes, "Wat was er een aanvechting voor hem geweest in de moderne cultuur en de moderne wetenschap. Hoe streden die beiden: het geloof, waarin hij opgevoed was en de cultuur, die hij in Leiden ingedronken had, nog altijd in zijn hart om de voorrang."⁸

Bavinck's irenic character manifested itself in another area as well. Dutch neo-Calvinism combined two streams within the reformed community in the Netherlands: the *Afscheiding*, which split off from the state church in 1834, and the *Doleantie*, which did the same in 1886. The former group, of which Bavinck was a part, had a more pietistic character whereas the latter, which included Kuyper, was more activistic by nature. Bavinck worked closely with Kuyper in bringing about the union of these two groups

⁷ Cf. Bremmer, *Bavinck en zijn Tijdgenoten*, p. 214. In many ways G. C. Berkouwer followed Bavinck in modeling such an approach to his theological work.

⁸ *Ibid.* "What a temptation modern culture and modern scholarship had been for him. The wrestling between the faith in which he was reared and the culture which he imbibed in Leiden always took priority in his heart."

in 1892, but these two strains never intermingled with complete ease. This tension particularly erupted during Bavinck's failed attempt to have the seminary in Kampen combined with the Vrije Universiteit. As a result of this failure Bavinck left Kampen for the VU, leaving behind strained relations with his former colleagues in Kampen, on the one hand, and Kuyper, on the other.

While this inner wrestling occasioned by his theological method caused Bavinck great difficulty, it also accounts for the ongoing value of his theology and its return to the foreground within Dutch neo-Calvinism a century after much of it was written. Dutch neo-Calvinism in North America is undergoing an identity crisis of sorts. For much of the twentieth century its identity has been rooted in its ethnicity, but this glue is holding less and less firm as a new century approaches. This socio-ecclesiological factor is exacerbated by the contemporary *Zeitgeist*, described by some as postmodern and others as the last gasps of modernity. No matter how it is construed, this *Zeitgeist* impacts Dutch neo-Calvinism because its dominant stream which flows from Kuyper through Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven is more closely aligned with the claims of modernity than the work of Bavinck. If Dutch neo-Calvinism is to survive as a distinct community, it cannot seek its identity in its ethnicity, nor in its particular interpretation of modernist epistemological claims. Rather, its identity must lie in its unique Biblical vision. As a fellow Dutch neo-Calvinist who is convinced that this community continues to have an important and

unique contribution to make to the one, holy, catholic church, I believe that the theology of Herman Bavinck constitutes a prime source for rediscovering this identity.

The goal of redemption

This work will explore the claim that Bavinck's theology is fundamentally characterized by an eschatological understanding of redemption. It will examine the meaning and implications of Bavinck's assertion that redemption and revelation constitute a divine project oriented towards an eschatological goal. Revelation "heeft haar einddoel immers niet in zichzelf, niet in Christus, die middelaar is, maar in de nieuwe menscheid, in het wonen Gods bij zijn volk."⁹ Bavinck articulates a description of the Christian faith as redemption history on the way to the new creation. Such an account requires a framework which correlates creation, history, Jesus Christ and eschaton in a manner that is both biblically faithful and systematically coherent.

A consistent strength of Dutch neo-Calvinism has been its insistence upon the close relation between creation and redemption. Throughout its history it has battled creation-denying dualisms in whatever form they appeared, and asserted that God's work of redemption is good news for the entire creation. God made the cosmos as a reality that was very good, and his work of redemption

⁹ *GD I*, p. 355. "The ultimate goal (of revelation) does not lie in itself, nor in Christ who is the mediator, but in the new humanity, in God dwelling with his people."

constitutes the restoration of that goodness. Because creation is universal, redemption must be as well, and the Christian life consists of living *pro Rege* in all that one does and is. Kuyper expresses this conviction clearly in his *Lectures on Calvinism*:

The whole creation must give glory to God. And although sin had deadened a large part of creation to the glory of God, the demand - the ideal, remains unchangeable, that every creature must be immersed in the stream of religion. Everything that has been created was, in its creation, furnished by God with an unchangeable law of its existence. And because God has fully ordained such laws and ordinances for all life, therefore the Calvinist demands that all life be consecrated to his service in strict obedience.¹⁰

Kuyper's description is consistent with a creational understanding of redemption, which Gordon Spykman will later refer to as rooting redemption in the "ontic order of created reality."¹¹ This (dominant) stream of Dutch neo-Calvinism constructs an ontology of creation, within which it describes redemption history, Jesus Christ, and the eschaton.

Bavinck holds a different view. However, his eschatological understanding of redemption is not rooted in an eschatological ontology. Rather, he affirms the priority of the person and work of Jesus Christ and construes the significance of creation, history and eschaton on the foundation of this Christological priority. His view of redemption is rightly termed 'eschatological' precisely because Jesus Christ points to and embodies the eschaton. "De

¹⁰ *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931), pp. 52f.

¹¹ *Reformational Theology*, p. 76.

eschatologie wortelt in de Christologie en is zelve Christologie."¹² Jesus Christ occupies the center, not the end, of redemption history, but from that central position he establishes the end and is lord of history as it anticipates its promised and achieved end.

This divergence between Bavinck and the dominant stream of Dutch neo-Calvinism raises the question, 'how does Bavinck construe the doctrine of creation?' Dealing with this question constitutes an important part of this study. At the outset we can say that Bavinck certainly shares the view that creation and redemption require a close correlation. Redemption inherently describes the work of God in saving his creatures, and thus requires some description of the reality that is being redeemed. John's wondrous proclamation that "God so loved the world (cosmos) that he gave his one and only Son" (John 3: 16) not only celebrates redemption but also assumes an understanding of the cosmos, of creation. Even Karl Barth, who passionately fought against natural theology and argued vehemently for a minimalist doctrine of creation, agrees that redemption and creation are intimately related.¹³ Bavinck also shares his tradition's fervour for undermining all dualist accounts of creation and redemption. Yet Bavinck demonstrates that one can articulate the significance of the creation in a manner

¹² Bavinck, *GD* IV, p. 667. "Eschatology is rooted in Christology, and is itself Christology." (*LT*, p. 122)

¹³ Barth's two theses concerning the covenant/creation relation, which are developed in *Kirchliche Dogmatik* III/1, illustrate his affirmation of this correlation.

that meets these goals by constructing it upon the foundation of the ontological priority of Jesus Christ and the eschatological understanding of redemption required by this priority.

This work will describe the shape of Bavinck's eschatological understanding of redemption by taking the following steps: first, it will provide an overview of his theology, focusing on his view of revelation and the manner in which he construes the relation between God and creation (chapter two). This overview leads to his doctrine of God and his Christology (chapter three), which will demonstrate how his eschatological understanding of redemption takes on a fundamentally Christological shape. Chapter four begins with a description of Bavinck's doctrine of creation, and describes the correlation between creation, Christ and eschaton in his thought. This chapter also includes an extensive discussion with other Bavinck scholars concerning these correlations. The thesis continues by comparing Bavinck's articulations with those of the contemporary neo-Calvinists Gordon Spykman and Albert Wolters, looking first at their construals of the relationship between God and creation (chapter five), and then the goal of redemption (chapter six). The concluding chapter suggests four theses aimed at re-configuring the goal of redemption with guidance from Bavinck. However, before proceeding to the issue at hand, I will describe Bavinck's methodology. His unique position within Dutch neo-Calvinism is closely tied to his theological method, and it would be remiss to bypass this important aspect of his work.

Bavinck the dogmatician

This chapter will continue with a brief sketch of Bavinck the dogmatician. It will look at his understanding of the place of dogmatics in the Christian life, summarize his criteria for the doing of dogmatic work, and describe his dogmatic method. Finally, this section will suggest guidelines for the Bavinck reader.

Bavinck sought to articulate a theology which was faithful to the Scriptures, respectful of the orthodox Christian tradition, and relevant to his context. He perceived theology as a fluid science which could at best approximate the truth. His method, which can be described as systematic minimalism coupled with a great deal of supporting description, helped him to honour the Reformed emphasis upon *sola scriptura* while balancing this with appropriate roles for the tradition and his context. His theology is characterized by decisiveness on fundamentals and a cautious balance on secondary issues. Bavinck boldly affirmed the priority of divine agency, the necessity of revelation, and the Christocentric character of revelation and redemption. These affirmations provide the foundation for his eschatological understanding of redemption and its emphases upon reconciliation and teleology. Issues which reveal his concern for balance include the value of general revelation, the significance of humanity and the church, the relation between the transcendence and immanence of God, duality, the organic, and the inspiration of the Scriptures.

Bavinck's systematic minimalism and its balance of decisiveness and caution served to achieve his goals. The heartbeat of the living Scriptures can be heard on almost every page of his dogmatics. A critically loving respect for the tradition shines through his writings. His context is attacked head-on when he sees fundamentals being undermined, while it is cautiously engaged when less critical issues are discussed. The concepts of duality and the organic serve to reinforce his fundamentals and express the balance he wishes to achieve.

Bavinck's four volume *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* constitutes a massive testimony to his concern for a thorough and clear description of the truths of the Christian faith, but he insisted without fail that dogmatics has a limited servant role in the Christian life. These limits are necessary for two reasons. First, the Christian faith is not in essence concerned with theories and concepts, but with the deeds of God, with concrete historical facts that have fundamental implications for everyday life. For example, theologians have articulated many theories concerning the significance of the death of Christ, but ultimately what counts is simply the fact that Christ died. "De kracht van den dood van Christus is onafhankelijk van de min of meer duidelijke uitlegging, welke wij er van geven kunnen; ze wordt genoten ook door hen, die van de leer der waarheid zeer geringe kennis bezitten. Het is inderdaad niet de leer over den dood van Christus, maar deze dood zelf, die onze zonden verzoent en aan onze

conscientien vrede schenkt."¹⁴ In response to the wonderful works of God, God does not ask us first of all to comprehend but to believe and to adore.¹⁵ Theology functions as a servant of that belief and adoration, it does not hold the prior place. The head is a servant of the heart.¹⁶

A second limit to the role of theology is that it can never

¹⁴ GD III, p. 369. "The power of the death of Christ is independent from the more or less clear explanations which we are able to give to it. It also benefits those who possess a very small knowledge of this doctrine of truth. Indeed, it is not the doctrine of the death of Christ, but the death itself, that reconciles us from our sins and gives peace to our consciences."

¹⁵ cf. "Calvin on Common Grace" in *Calvin and the Reformation*, ed. Wm. Armstrong (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1909), p. 114.

¹⁶ Berkouwer alludes to this when he observes, Bavinck "had gezegd dat hij het essentiële in de moderne theologie miste: niet de grootheid van God, maar wel Zijn Vaderliefde." (*Zoeken en Vinden*, p. 61. Bavinck "said that he missed what was essential in modern theology: not the greatness of God, but his Fatherlove.") Bavinck wrestled to keep theology in this servant role, noting in a speech on the occasion of his twenty-fifth anniversary of teaching that his major accomplishment had been to continue to have faith under the pressures of modern scholarship and modern culture. (R. H. Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck en zijn Tijdgenoten* [Kampen: Kok, 1966], p. 213f.) Berkouwer echoes this humble confession, recalling how "Bavinck reeds lang geleden schreef, toen hij aan de woorden van Paulus in Romeinen 8 (dat ons geen ding van de liefde van Christus kan scheiden) toevoegde: 'ook niet de wetenschap.' Dat was voor hem geen ondoordacht triomfalisme, maar een stellig vertrouwen in de gemeenschap, waarvan hij vertrouwde dat het niet beschaamd zou worden." (*Zoeken en Vinden*, p. 428. "Already long ago Bavinck wrote, as an addition to the words of Paul in Romans 8 [that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ]: 'also not scholarship.' That was not a thoughtless triumphalism, but a positive trust in the communion (with Christ), of which he trusted that it would not be put to shame.")

grasp the reality which it seeks to describe.¹⁷ "Het mysterie is het levenselement der dogmatiek."¹⁸ The scholar works in childlike humility; "hij schrijft aan God niet voor, of Hij en hoe Hij zich mag openbaren, maar hij luistert naar hetgeen God hem dienaangaande zelf te zeggen heeft."¹⁹ The more concretely one seeks to describe this reality, the less accurate one becomes, for "het denken is rijker dan het spreken, en het spreken rijker dan het schrijven."²⁰ Even so, words are important "om de waarheid der Schrift te handhaven tegenover hare bestrijders en voor alle misverstand en dwaling in veiligheid te stellen."²¹

Maar toch zullen wij, bij het gebruiken van deze namen, steeds

¹⁷ Berkouwer provides a helpful description of how these two limits interact, noting that what matters most is not an exact description of reality, but a lived response to the reality. He writes, "When Bavinck wrote that theology, at least for the time being, can do no better than to maintain the two-natures doctrine (GD III, p. 288), he was suggesting that the coagulation of the church's speech in historical formulations has no real meaning unless it is taken up into a living confession that later believers can carry with them into a still deeper understanding of it. The perspective of Thomas' confession -- 'My Lord and My God' -- must prevail through all our thinking and all our reinterpetations. Indeed, all reinterpetations should be tested by whether it can participate in this confession." (*A Half-Century of Theology*, tr. Lewis B. Smedes [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977], p. 243)

¹⁸ GD II, p. 1. "Mystery is the life's blood of Dogmatics."

¹⁹ GD I, p. 272. The theologian "does not prescribe to God, if and how he may reveal himself, but the theologian listens to that which God himself has to say about this."

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 349. "Thought is richer than speech, and speech richer than that which is written."

²¹ *Magnalia Dei* (Kampen: Kok, 1909), p. 141. Words are important "to maintain the truth of Scripture over against its opponents and to secure it against misunderstanding and error." (*Our Reasonable Faith, A Survey of Christian Doctrine*, tr. Henry Zylstra [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977], p. 158)

bedenken, dat zij van menschelijken oorsprong, beperkt, gebrekkig, feilbaar zijn. De kerkvaders hebben dit altijd erkend; zij zeiden bijvoorbeeld van het woord *personen*, waarmede de drie bestaanswijzen in het Goddelijk Wezen worden aangeduid, dat dit woord de zaak niet op eene gelijkwaardige wijze uitdrukte maar dienst deed als een hulpmiddel, om de waarheid to handhaven en de dwaling af te snijden. Men verkoos dit woord, niet, omdat het in alle opzichten juist, maar omdat er geen ander en beter te vinden was. Ook hier blijft dus het woord ver achter de gedachte, en de gedachte wederom ver achter de zaak terug. Hoewel wij de zaak niet anders dan in dien gebrekkigen vorm bewaren kunnen, zoo mogen wij toch nooit vergeten, dat het niet in de eerste plaats om het woord, maar om de zaak te doen is. In de bedeeeling der heerlijkheid zullen ons zeker andere en betere namen op de lippen worden gelegd.²²

Bavinck's closing words from his *Wijsbegeerte der Openbaring* summarize this situation with poetic conciseness: "Voor den Christen wordt deze donkere wereld nog altijd van omhoog dor den glans der Goddelijke openbaring bestraald en gaat zij onder hare leiding het rijk des leven en des lichts tegemoet. Rondom de openbaring zijn wolken en donkerheid, desniettemin zijn gerechtigheid en gericht de vastigheid van Gods troon."²³

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 141f. "We should, in the use of these terms, always remember that they are of human origin and therefore limited, defective, fallible. The church fathers always acknowledged this. For example, they held that the term *persons* which was used to designate the three ways of existence in the Divine Being did not adequately express the reality in the matter but served as an aid towards maintaining the truth and cutting off error. The word was chosen, not because it was accurate in every respect, but because no other and better could be found. Here again the word is far behind the thought, and the thought far behind the reality. Although we cannot preserve the actuality in any but this inadequate form, we may never forget that it is the reality itself and not the word that counts. In the dispensation of glory other and better expressions will certainly be laid upon our lips." (RF, p. 158, alt.)

²³ *Wijsbegeerte der Openbaring, Stone Lezingen* (Kampen: Kok, 1908), p. 272. "For the Christian this dark world is always irradiated from above by the splendor of divine revelation, and under its guidance it moves onward towards the kingdom of light and

While acknowledging these limits to dogmatics, Bavinck certainly sees an important role for theology in the life of the believing community. He summarizes this role as follows: "1. Het handhaaft het Christendom als waarheid voor ons verstand en toont ons de redelijkheid van ons geloof. 2. Het brengt het leven der gemeente tot helder bewustzijn. 3. Het dogmatische systeem (zal) ons een recht inzicht verschaffen in het organisme der Heilige Schrift."²⁴ With the first role he situates his theologizing in the 'faith seeking understanding' mode; the truth of the Christian religion is accepted in faith. This truth cannot be proved, but, because it is reasonable, the believing theologian is called to articulate these truths in a manner that opens up their reasonable character. The second and third roles acknowledge the interaction of church and Scripture in the doing of theology. Theology is a servant of the church, providing clarifying descriptions of the faith for the benefit of the community. Finally, the church needs help to read the Scriptures properly, help which is appropriately provided by the theologian.

Bavinck expands upon this interaction between truth, Scripture

life. Round about revelation are clouds and darkness; nevertheless righteousness and judgment are the foundation of God's throne." (*The Philosophy of Revelation*, tr. Geerhardus Vos, Nicholas Steffens, Henry Dosker [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979], pp. 314f.)

²⁴ "Het Voor en Tegen van een Dogmatisch Systeem" in *Kennis en Leven* (Kampen: Kok, 1922), pp. 66f.. "1. It maintains Christianity as truth for our reason and shows the reasonableness of faith. 2. It brings the life of the church to clearer consciousness. 3. A dogmatic system will provide true insight into the organism of Holy Scripture."

and church in his descriptions of the requirements of dogmatics.

De eischen, aan het principe en systeem der dogmatiek gesteld, zijn drielerlei: dat het zij Schriftuurlijk, in oorsprong goddelijk;

dat het zij Kerkelijk, een kerkelijk karakter dragend, de lessen der historie niet versmadend, met een conservatief en tegelijk anti-revolutinair element, in zijn wezen vrucht der tijden;

dat het zij actueel, rekening houdend met en beantwoordend ook aan de behoeften van dezen tijd, progressief dus en naar volmaking strevend.²⁵

For Bavinck, these three requirements function as concentric circles moving out from Scripture to the church to the contemporary context. If any of these three are overlooked, or if the sequence of the progression from the inner to the outer circles is changed in any way, dogmatics suffers. Thus, a pious attempt to limit dogmatics entirely to the Scriptures tends to result in an abstract legalism, cut off from the lifeblood of church and context.²⁶ Roman Catholicism has suffered from its elevation of the church

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 63f. "The requirements which are placed on the principles and system of dogmatics are threefold: that they are Scriptural, from Godly origin;

that they are ecclesial, having an ecclesial character, not disdainning the lessons of history, with both a conservative and an anti-revolutionary element, in its essence the fruit of the times;

that they are current, taking into account and responding to the needs of these times, progressive and striving to perfection."

In early Dutch neo-Calvinism the adjective 'anti-revolutionary' refers to its respect for due historical process, i.e., change occurs through reformation, not revolution. For this reason, the political party associated with this movement is called 'The Anti-revolutionary Party.'

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 64f.

above the Scripture.²⁷ While Protestantism experiences temptations to follow the opposite imbalance, this is also inappropriate. Scripture comes to us through the church. The church

heeft wat die Schriftuur verhaalt in zich opgenomen, doorleefd als't ware, en reproduceert het nu in hare belijdenis. Wat in dien Bijbel vervat is, is zoo rijk en zoo wijd van begrip, dat het niet door een mensch, niet door een geslacht van menschen in zich opgenomen en weergegeven kan worden. Daar zijn eeuwen voor nodig. De kennis van de lengte en breedte en diepte en hoogte der liefde van Christus is alleen in gemeenschap met alle heiligen te bereiken.²⁸

Beide (de kerk en de Schrift) staan daarbij in het allernauwste verband tot elkander. De Schrift is het licht der kerk, de kerk is het leven der Schrift. Buiten de kerk is de Schrift een raadsel, eene ergernis. Zonder wedergeboorte kan niemand haar kennen. Wie haar leven niet deelachtig is, kan haar zin en meening niet verstaan. En omgekeerd is het leven der kerk een verborgenheid, als de Schrift er haar licht niet over schijnen laat. De Schrift verklaart de kerk, de kerk verstaat de Schrift. In de kerk bevestigt en verzegelt de Schrift hare openbaring, en in de Schrift leert de Christen, leert de kerk zichzelf verstaan, in hare verhouding tot God en de wereld, in haar verleden en heden en toekomst.²⁹

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

²⁸ "Het Christelijke Geloof" in *KL*, pp. 94f. The church "has taken into itself what the Scripture narrates, lived through it, so to speak, and now reproduces it in her confession. All that is contained in the Bible is so rich and so wide in what it comprehends, that it can never be taken in and rendered through one person or even one generation. Eternity is needed. The knowledge of the length and breadth and depth and height of the love of Christ can only be attained in fellowship with all the saints."

²⁹ *GD I*, p. 356. "Both (the church and the Scripture) are intimately related. The Scripture is the light of the church, the church is the life of the Scripture. Outside of the church the Scripture is a riddle and an offence. No one can truly know it who is not born again. Those who do not participate in its life cannot understand its meaning. On the other hand, the life of the church is hidden if the Scriptures do not shed her light over it. Scripture clarifies the church, the church understands Scripture. The Scripture affirms and seals her revelation in the church, and in the Scripture both the Christian and the church learn to understand themselves in their relationship to God and the world in her past, present and future."

Bavinck's understanding of the relationship between Scripture and church in dogmatics also has an eschatological thrust. Just as the church is the body of Christ on earth, awaiting the fulfillment of its redemption, so dogmatics is our attempt to describe realities which we now know in part but will someday know fully. Therefore, dogmatics is always church dogmatics.

Een dogma is toch geen private meening of particulier gevoelen, maar eene door de Christelijke Kerk in haar geheel, of door eene harer afdeelingen uitgesproken en beleden geloofswaarheid. Dogmatiek is dus altijd kerkelijk. Eene Bijbelsche is er niet, en eene Christelijke is er nog niet. Zij is niets anders dan de wetenschappelijke beschrijving van de belijdenis der gemeente.³⁰

Thus, while Scripture is clearly the first circle, the primary source of truth for dogmatics, Scripture can never be isolated from its context in the church of Jesus Christ. Bavinck's life reflects this conviction. He practised as a church theologian, not an ivory tower scholar. He turned down several invitations to teach at the independent Vrije Universiteit, preferring to be part of the denominationally linked theological school in Kampen. When he did finally leave for the VU in 1902 as the result of a bitter conflict, his farewell address affirmed his commitment to his

³⁰ "Het Voor en Tegen van een Dogmatisch Systeem" in *KL*, p. 60. "A dogma is not a private meaning or particular feeling, but a truth of faith, stated and confessed by the Christian church as a whole or by one of its parts. Dogmatics is therefore always ecclesial. There is not a Biblical dogmatics, and there is not yet a Christian dogmatics. It is nothing else than the scholarly articulation of the confession of the church."

Translation note: *Wetenschap*, synonymous with the German *Wissenschaft*, is difficult to translate into English. It refers to the activity of careful scholarly, scientific investigation of that which is capable of standing up to such investigation.

ecclesial tradition: "Ik ben een kind der scheiding en dat hoop ik te blijven."³¹

Bavinck's third and outer circle, the contemporary context, testifies to the fact that the Christian faith declares that Jesus Christ is alive and present in this world through the work of the Holy Spirit. "Het derde was de getuigenis des Heiligen Geestes in't hart van den dogmaticus zelve en van de gemeente, waaruit hij leeft."³² Bavinck notes that Schleiermacher can be thanked for rehabilitating the role of the contemporary context in theology, but he has gone so far that "het systeem wordt dan alzo subjectief, individualistisch, modern in den modernen zin van dat woord."³³ Once again Bavinck walks the fine line between two extremes, determined to avoid the imbalances of decontextualization and accommodationism.

Bavinck's three requirements for dogmatics flow directly from his understanding of revelation. A Christocentric understanding of special revelation is his starting point; because the Scriptures provide us with the only reliable witness to Jesus Christ,

³¹ Quoted by Bremmer in *Bavinck en zijn Tijdgenoten*, p. 192. "I am a child of the Afscheiding, and I hope to remain one."

³² *Ibid.*, p. 65. "The third was the witness of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the dogmatician himself and of the church in which he lives."

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 66. He has gone so far that "now the system becomes subjective, individualistic and modern in the modern sense of that word."

dogmatics must begin with the Scriptures. The church is the body of Christ, the place where one can continue to discern his presence. Thus one moves from the Scriptures to the church. Finally, Bavinck's understanding of general revelation asserts that the child of God who has been reconciled through Jesus Christ can discern the hand of God in many places in the creation, history and human experience. The Christian cannot be afraid of new discoveries and new theories, but must test them by the light of the Scriptures in the context of the church.

Wetende, dat alle goede gave en volmaakte gift nederdaalt van den Vader der lichten, zouden wij aan grove ondankbaarheid jegens God en aan miskennis zijner zegeningen ons schuldig maken, indien wij ook maar in eenig opzicht te kort deden aan wat de Koning der eeuwen aan deze eeuw boven andere geschonken heeft. Veeleer erkennen wij dankbaar elke lichtstraal, die er valt in het gebied van het onbekende en begroeten wij met blijdschap elke verovering, die er door den menschelijken geest gemaakt wordt in het rijk der natuur. Een Christenmensch heeft bij geen stilstand maar alleen bij vooruitgang baat, want de aarde is des Heeren mitsgaders hare volheid en de toekomst is Zijne.³⁴

Bavinck's confidence in the power of God overruled his fears of accommodationism. He did struggle at times, concerned that he was too accepting of 'modern' theories and ideas,³⁵ but for the most

³⁴ "Kennis en Leven" in *KL*, p. 204. "Knowing that all good and perfect gifts come down from the Father of lights, we would be guilty of gross ingratitude towards God and neglect of his blessings if in any respect we belittle what the King of the ages has given to this age above other ages. Rather, we acknowledge with thanks every beam of light that falls in unfamiliar territory and we greet with joy every conquest that the human spirit makes in the realm of nature. The Christian is not interested in standing still but in progress, because the earth and all its fulness is the Lord's, and the future is his."

³⁵ His older colleague Abraham Kuyper was also concerned that Bavinck was too much influenced by the theology of Schleiermacher and his followers in the Netherlands, the 'ethical.' (cf.

part one can discern in his work a keenly analytical and critical mind carefully evaluating the works of others.

Bavinck's method of doing theology can be called an 'inductive/historical/Scriptural' one. This method follows a fairly typical pattern which can be schematized as follows:³⁶

1. He begins with the assertion that the subject under discussion is characterized by mystery, and that one cannot search the Scriptures for a simple formula or a clear, black-and-white description of it.
2. He continues by claiming that this issue is important because we can see that every culture and civilization has struggled to come to terms with it.
3. Bavinck then surveys the history of theology on this topic, including the Church Fathers, theologians from the Middle Ages, the Reformers, any others whose voices are relevant, concluding with contemporary theologians and philosophers. The survey strives to (a) emphasize the problems involved with the issue, (b) point out the inconsistencies and imbalances in various voices, and (c) point in the direction he wishes to go.
4. Bavinck then surveys the Scriptures on this topic, often listing a dozen or more Scripture references in one

Bremmer, *Bavinck en zijn Tijdgenoten*, p. 47)

³⁶ This is a pattern and not a formula. While certain discussions include every element of the pattern, others use only certain parts, depending on what is most appropriate for each.

paragraph.

5. Finally, he gives his own thoughts on the topic, thoughts which combine the Scriptures with (in his opinion) the best of the tradition and which address the issues raised by the contemporary context.

Bavinck's discussion of eschatology serves as a clear example of this pattern at work. His opening statement asserts the mystery: "gelijk oorsprong en wezen, zoo is ook het einde der dingen ons onbekend."³⁷ Even so, we must deal with it, he continues, for "alle volken hebben daarover dan ook eene of andere gedachte en alle godsdiensten bevatten eene soort van eschatologie."³⁸ He then conducts an extensive survey of thought on the immortality of the soul, covering Plato and other Greek thinkers, the Old and New Testaments, the early Church, the Medieval church, and the Reformation, concluding that

de geschiedenis van den tusschentoestand bewijst, dat het den theoloog en den mensch in het algemeen moeite kost, om zich te houden binnen de grenzen der Heilige Schrift en niet wijs te zijn boven hetgeen men behoort wijs te zijn. De gegevens, welke de Heilige Schrift over den tusschentoestand bevat, zijn genoegzaam voor het leven, maar laten vele vragen, die er kunnen oprijzen in het nieuwsgierig verstand, onbeantwoord.³⁹

³⁷ *GD IV*, p. 565. "The end of things, like their origin and essence, is unknown to us." (*LT*, p. 21)

³⁸ *Ibid.* "All peoples of the world have some idea of it, and all religions include some kind of eschatology." (*LT*, p. 21)

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 589f. "The history of the doctrine of the intermediate state shows that it is hard for theologians and for people in general to stay within the limits of Scripture, and not to be wiser than they ought to be. The scriptural data about the intermediate state are sufficient for our needs in this life, but

Having established these parameters, he concludes by surveying the Scriptures to describe his own guidelines on the topic at hand.⁴⁰

Bavinck's method of doing theology indicates that he values comprehensiveness more than systematic precision.⁴¹ It is not his priority to define his terms carefully and to use them each time with utter consistency. This is not to say that he is sloppy or careless; rather he believes that most theological realities defy precise definition, so that the challenge is to describe as many sides of the reality as one can.⁴² Theology has to do with approximations; one cannot replicate the reality, but one can penetrate more closely to the central essence of what is being described by finding different ways of describing the one reality.

leave unanswered many questions that may arise in the inquisitive mind." (LT, p. 44)

⁴⁰ On this particular topic Bavinck has less to say about the contemporary context, though he does very briefly refer to Kant, Schleiermacher, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel and others when he introduces the discussion (*Ibid.*, p. 568) and again at its conclusion (p. 600).

⁴¹ All Bavinck analysts are agreed on this point. "Although Bavinck sets forth the ideal of a unified system of thought very clearly and forcefully, there is little doubt that he subordinates system to the relativity of knowledge." (Bolt, *The Imitation of Christ Theme in the Cultural-Ethical Ideal of Herman Bavinck*, p. 201) Bavinck's "onderwijs in de dogmatiek was veel meer historisch dan systematisch georiënteerd." (Bremmer, *Bavinck en zijn Tijdgenoten*, p. 206. Bavinck's "dogmatic method was much more historically than systematically oriented.")

⁴² His common complaint concerning imbalanced views are that they are "eenzijdig." (one-sided)

This approach has a number of implications for the student of Bavinck's theology. First, one must read his works thoroughly, cross-referencing his thoughts on certain topics. In one work he may be responding to one perspective, while in the next he responds to a very different perspective, resulting in differences in shading while the underlying perspective is basically identical.

Second, one must remember that Bavinck is not claiming that his writings represent reality, but that they are approximations of reality. In some areas one can come closer to describing reality than in others. At times Bavinck will consider it sufficient to lay out broad parameters on a certain theme, or to rely on metaphorical language to focus on an important point. One must seek to discern when Bavinck is struggling to describe something that is virtually indescribable, and in such contexts apply a 'hermeneutic of charity' which is concerned not so much to destroy his argument but rather to point out the inherent difficulties of the task at hand and to accept the 'that's the best one can do for now' character of his work.⁴³

Third, the analyst of Bavinck is compelled to describe his theology in more precise terms than he himself does. Bavinck has the liberty to present as many sides of an issue as he pleases,

⁴³ A hermeneutic of charity is of course vulnerable to abuse. This is not to say that inconsistencies and lack of clarity is to be excused. It is to say that one must be aware of the gap between reality and attempts to describe reality.

regardless of length. The analyst must work with summary descriptions. Such description is possible, but the analyst must (1) take care to note that Bavinck himself is less precise, (2) be as thorough in the description as space permits, and (3) note areas in which the proposed descriptions are contradicted by Bavinck himself.

Fourth, the fact that Bavinck himself practised a hermeneutic of charity must be taken into account. Bavinck often found at least one point to laud in every viewpoint which he discussed, creating a tension in his work between eclecticism and clearly Reformed theology. Henry Dosker and G. C. Berkouwer rightly conclude that this method strengthens his theology,⁴⁴ even though at times his articulations do wander from the track.⁴⁵ Upon occasion when he describes someone else's viewpoint it is not clear whether he is agreeing, disagreeing or simply describing in a disinterested manner. Theologians with divergent and even opposing

⁴⁴ Dosker writes, "His absolute fairness to an opponent sometimes created the impression of indecision, but those who accused him of this weakness were utterly mistaken. Read his *Reformed Dogmatics* and you stand amazed at the wealth of information here displayed and at the breadth of horizon of the author." ("Herman Bavinck," p. 461) Berkouwer's tribute is similar to Dosker's: "Bavinck became a model of how theology could be done with commitment to the truth combined with openness to problems, and carefulness in judgments against others. And we understood that this posture had nothing to do with relativism." (*A Half Century of Theology*, p. 18).

⁴⁵ G. C. Berkouwer (*A Half Century of Theology*, p. 171) observes that especially certain of Bavinck's thoughts on the doctrine of creation sacrificed orthodoxy to modernity. This problem will be discussed in chapter five.

viewpoints have found support for their own views in Bavinck. Thus, it is important for the reader of Bavinck to keep sight of the forest while studying the trees; the broad parameters of his thought must serve as the backdrop of each specific area.⁴⁶

Fifth, the reader of Bavinck must remember that he was a theologian and not a philosopher. This caution is necessary particularly because the neo-Calvinist tradition perceives philosophy as more fundamental than theology, and has at times read Bavinck through a philosophical lens.⁴⁷ His goal is to articulate the acts of the living God as they are recorded in the Scriptures. At times he may employ philosophical tools as an explicative aid, but for the most part he takes care that such tools do not force the Scriptures into an alien system.⁴⁸ Philosophical

⁴⁶ As Berkouwer observed, "Het gevaar van een beschrijving en beoordeling van Bavincks levenswerk is, dat men hem annexeert voor eigen inzichten. Het is echter niet onmogelijk boven dat annexatie-gevaar uit te komen, doordat in het werk van Bavinck allerlei onweersprekelijke motieven zichtbaar worden." (*Zoeken en Vinden*, p. 55. "The danger in a description and judgment of Bavinck's life's-work is, that one may annex him to one's own point-of-view. It is actually not impossible to rise above this danger of annexation, for in Bavinck's work several unassailable motifs become visible.")

⁴⁷ In chapters five and six I will argue that misreadings of Bavinck have occurred through the use of philosophical lenses.

⁴⁸ In his discussion of the distinction between special and common grace in Bavinck, Eugene Heideman makes the interesting observation that "Bavinck was too biblical in his thought to develop these distinctions to their logical conclusions." (*The Relation of Revelation and Reason in E Brunner and H Bavinck* [Assen: Van Gorcum, 1959], p. 183) John Bolt makes a similar observation: "Although Bavinck sets forth the ideal of a unified system of thought very clearly and forcefully, there is little doubt that he subordinates system to the relativity of knowledge."

interpretations simplify Bavinck's theology and provide clear frameworks for understanding, but they do not provide accurate readings. "His theology is not one that solves problems; it is simply one that confesses what God is doing in the world. His confession, instead of solving problems, causes the tension of the problems to become the greatest."⁴⁹

Finally, while his style is more *ad hoc* rather than tightly systematic, the reader of Bavinck's thought is able to keep the broader parameters in view because Bavinck perceived the writing of theology as an organic whole. The reality which lies behind the theology is a unified, coherent reality, and one's descriptions of it do not form discrete statements but parts of an interrelated whole.

Nu is het de moeilijke, maar toch heerlijke taak der dogmatiek, om de belijdenis der gemeente ook aan het verstand als redelijk in den hoogsten zin des woords te bewijzen. Maar dan is ook allereerste eisch van ons denkend verstand, dat de dogma's niet los naast elkander staan, maar in elkaar vervat moeten wezen; dat zij samen een onverbreekelijk geheel, eene organische eenheid, een waar en volkomen systeem vormen. Indien de belijdenis der gemeente niet maar eene vrucht der verbeelding en eene mythologische „Spielerei" is, maar beschrijving van werkelijke daden Gods, van een eigen leven; en indien de dogmatiek dus nog den naam van wetenschap verdient, dan kan aan dien strengen eisch niet worden ontkomen. Een dogmatisch systeem is de eisch, door de wetenschap aan de theologie gesteld, en het bewijs van de redelijkheid, van de echte wetenschappelijkheid van het

(*The Imitation of Christ Theme in the Cultural-Ethical Ideal of Herman Bavinck*, p. 201)

⁴⁹ Heideman, *Relation between Revelation and Reason*, pp. 239f.

Christendom.⁵⁰

The tension between joy and difficulty underlines Bavinck's work as a theologian. His task was joyful because he believed in a God who reveals himself and who enacts redemption in ways that are meant to be understood by his children. But his task was also difficult because the human mind desires to understand more than it is given to understand, and one must continually strive to articulate the truth amid a cacophony of loud voices which are, at best, only partially in harmony with the truth.

⁵⁰ "Het Voor en Tegen van een Dogmatisch Systeem" in *KL*, pp. 61f. "Now it is the difficult, although definitely joyful, task of dogmatics to establish the reasonableness of the confession of the church in the highest sense of the word. But then it is also the highest requirement of our thought that the dogmas do not stand loosely next to each other, but are interconnected. They form together an unbreakable whole, an organic unity, a true and perfect system. If the confession of the church is not a fruit of the imagination or of a mythological game, but the articulation of the true deeds of God, of a life in itself, and if dogmatics still deserves the name of scholarship, then it cannot free itself from this severe requirement. A dogmatic system is what scholarship requires of theology; it is proof of the reasonableness, the true scholarly character of Christianity."

Chapter Two - An Overview of Bavinck's Theology

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the broad contours of Bavinck's theology so that its details can be more clearly understood in the subsequent chapters. The chapter's challenge is to present a brief overview of the thought of a theologian whose methodology does not favour brevity. I will seek to meet this purpose and challenge by focusing primarily on two particular questions which take one to the heart of his theology: how does God reveal himself and how does God relate to his creatures? Both questions are derived from the doctrine of God, and serve to establish a framework for a more detailed discussion of his doctrine of God in the next chapter.

How does God reveal himself?

The root issues which Bavinck felt forced to grapple with concerned revelation. In this respect, Bavinck was very much a child of his time. The theological questions which he felt the times compelling him to address focused on the knowability of God and the authority of Scripture within the framework of the relationship between empirical and non-empirical reality. Immanuel Kant set the stage for the debates which pressed upon him most powerfully. In particular, Kant's distinction between the noumenal and phenomenal realms constituted for Bavinck an unbridgeable dualism which cut the Christian faith off at the roots from its source of power and authority. On Kant's account, the noumenal,

non-empirical realm is subjective and therefore objectively unknowable; objective, universal, certain truths cannot be declared in this realm. The phenomenal, empirical realm is objective; here certain, universal truth can be proven and firmly established. Issues of faith, religion, theology and ethics all belong to the noumenal realm. Therefore, "of er een God is, of wij eene ziel hebben en deze onsterfelijk is, of de wereld eindig is of oneindig, enz., wij weten het niet. Het bovennatuurlijke is onkenbaar, wijl onwaarneembaar. De wetenschap kan op dit terrein slechts een 'non liquet' uitspreken; zij kan hier noch bevestigen noch ontkennen."¹

Bavinck's response to this epistemological skepticism involved two primary affirmations: (1) there is a distinction between faith and knowledge, but this distinction is best understood as a duality and not a dualism. More important than the distinction is the relationship between faith and knowledge. What Kant termed the noumenal and phenomenal Bavinck called the invisible and visible, and he claimed that the meaning of visible realities is determined by invisible realities.² All human knowledge is a response to the

¹ "Het Dualisme in de Theologie" in *Kennis en Leven* (Kampen: Kok, 1922), p. 148. "We don't know whether or not there is a God, whether we have an immortal soul, whether the world is finite or infinite, etc. The supernatural is unknowable because it is imperceptible. In this area scholarship is able merely to express a 'non liquet;' it can neither confirm nor deny these things." Bavinck is here describing his understanding of a Kantian account.

² The relationship between invisible and visible realities, which is central in Bavinck's theology, will be described in detail later. There is not a strict correlation between Kant's

deeds of God, and therefore all knowledge is rooted in faith. (2) Understanding invisible realities requires divine revelation. Therefore, epistemological questions require one to come to terms with the reality of a revelation which is not simply immanent in the visible reality, but is a gift of God which comes from 'the outside,' from the realm of invisible realities. These claims concerning revelation form the foundation for Bavinck's dogmatic method.

Bavinck agrees with Kant that faith and knowledge come into conflict with each other. "Het is een overoude strijd, de strijd tusschen gelooven en weten. In een wetenschappelijk systeem te beredeneeren, dat hij niet bestaat en niet behoeft te bestaan, baat niet, die strijd wordt er niet te minder om gestreden en laat zijn schokken gevoelen in ieder menschenhart."³ Kant undermined attempts within the Christian tradition to prove the existence of God by positing an unbridgeable gap between empirical, certain knowledge and subjective faith. Bavinck rejected Kant's move, but also refused to reassert scholastic claims for an objective, scientific proof for the existence of God. Instead, Bavinck moved in the opposite direction: no one can claim that any knowledge is

noumenal/phenomenal and Bavinck's invisible/visible, but there are many close parallels.

³ "Geloofswetenschap" in *KL*, p. 1. "It is an age old battle, the battle between belief and knowledge. To argue in a scholarly system that it doesn't exist and doesn't need to exist does not help; the battle does not become less and its shocks are felt in every human heart."

completely certain and purely objective. All knowing flows from a prior starting point: faith.

Er is geen weten zonder gelooven. Elk weten heeft gelooven tot grondslag en rust er op. Men onderzoekt nooit zuiver empirisch, zonder eenig interesse. Altijd heeft men op grond van eenige gegevens eene hypothese gebouwd, die ons bij het onderzoek leidt en bestuurt, en juist den drang ons in't hart geeft om altijd verder te onderzoeken en zoo tot weten te komen. Ik geloof en daarom zoek ik te weten, en als ik dan weet, dan geloof ik dat ik weet. Een absoluut weten, dat weten tot begin en tot einde heeft, in het weten rust en in het weten zich afsluit, is er voor den mensch niet.⁴

One can make distinctions between empirical and non-empirical sciences, but these distinctions belie a deeper commonality. In the former one must move from sensory data to theory formation, and that move signals the fundamental similarity between both types of sciences. "Als de menschelijke geest uit de voorstellingen begripen en uit deze weer oordeelen en besluiten gaat vormen, heeft het al den schijn, alsof hij den bodem der werkelijkheid verlaat en kasteelen in de lucht gaat bouwen."⁵ Empirical science can seek to describe laws which it observes, but it cannot explain reality. "Elk chemisch element is in zijn wezen, eigenschappen en

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5. "There is no knowing without belief. All knowing has belief as its foundation, and rests upon that. One never investigates in a purely empirical manner without any self-interest. People have always built a hypothesis on the basis of some data that lead and guide us in the investigation, and compel us to continue investigating and so to arrive at knowledge. I believe, and therefore I seek to know, and when I then know, I believe that I know. An absolute knowledge, that has knowing as its beginning and its end, that rests in knowing and is self-contained, is not available to humankind."

⁵ *Christelijke Wereldbeschouwing* (Kampen: Kok, 1913), p. 22. "When the human mind forms concepts from the data and then from these forms opinions and conclusions, it has every appearance of abandoning the firm ground of reality and building castles in the air."

werkingen in volstrekten zin een mysterie; het kleinste lichaampje, dat wij zichtbaar kunnen maken, is weer eene wereld op zichzelf; atomen en moleculen, dynamiden en energieën blijven in hun natuur ons volkomen onbekend."⁶ When one is confronted with this mystery one is compelled to cross the line from empirical knowledge to faith knowledge. One has no choice but to posit hypotheses to make sense of what one observes, and, as one continues to probe more deeply behind each new hypothesis one comes to the ultimate hypothesis, that God "is de Hypothese aller Hypothesen."⁷

In Bavinck's account, all knowledge is faith knowledge because human knowing is always a response to a reality which is prior.

Een wetenschappelijk systeem mag dus niets anders wezen dan weergeving in woorden, omzetting in taal, beschrijving, afspiegeling in ons bewustzijn van het systeem in de dingen zelve. De wetenschap heeft niet te scheppen en te phantaseeren, maar alleen te beschrijven wat bestaat. Wij denken na, wat God ons eeuwig voor gedacht heeft en in de schepping belichaamd een gestalte heeft gegeven.⁸

Because human knowing is a response it cannot control or grasp

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 63. "In an absolute sense every chemical element is in its essence, qualities and operations a mystery; the smallest body which we can make visible is a world in itself; the nature of atoms and molecules, dynamids and energies remain completely unknown to us."

⁷ "Geloofswetenschap" in *KL*, p. 12. God "is the Hypothesis of all hypotheses."

⁸ "Het Voor en Tegen van een Dogmatisch Systeem" in *KL*, p. 60. "A scholarly system may be nothing else than a rendering in words, a transposing into language, description, reflecting in our consciousness the system in the things themselves. The task of scholarship is not to create or to fantasize, but only to describe what exists. We follow in our thinking what God has eternally thought before us and given body and form to in the creation."

reality, but rather it is grasped by reality. Human knowing continually seeks to do justice to reality, but because of the unavoidable relationship between faith and knowledge, it can never grasp reality with absolute objective certainty. "Ook de dogmaticus mag niet wijs zijn, boven hetgeen men behoort wijs te zijn. Zwijgen past hem, waar de H. Schrift niet spreekt. Het dualisme (between faith and knowledge), hetwelk de dogmatiek van alle zijden beperken wil, kan ons bescheidenheid leeren."⁹

The reality which human knowing responds to is the reality of the deeds of a God who is both reasonable and personal. Human reason is not an autonomous faculty apart from faith, but is rather a response-enabling gift from a reasonable God whose cosmos is arranged purposefully and meaningfully.¹⁰ "Zonder de Rede buiten ons is de Rede in ons een doellooze ongerijmdheid. Wetenschap beoefenen, is zoeken naar het Woord, dat alle dingen heeft gemaakt en zonder hetwelk geen ding gemaakt is."¹¹ This God is not some sort of an abstract spirit of reason, but is at heart a personal

⁹ "Het Dualisme in de Theologie" in *KL*, p. 164. "The dogmatician also may not be wise beyond that which he ought to be. Silence is appropriate where the Scriptures do not speak. The dualism (between faith and knowledge), which seeks to restrain dogmatics on all sides, teaches us modesty."

¹⁰ 'Reason' in this context carries a minimalist sense, that is, realities which are reasonable are meaningful and make sense. They are not chaos.

¹¹ "Het Voor en Tegen van een Dogmatisch Systeem" in *KL*, p. 59f. "Without reason outside of us, reason in us is a purposeless absurdity. Practising scholarship is searching for the Word which has made all things and without which nothing has been made."

being living in relationship with all that he has made. As a result, knowledge also is personal, and is received in the context of a personal relation. "Kennis is door en door persoonlijk; zij rust op persoonlijke kennismaking; zij is eene geestelijke toeëigening, eene uiting van zieleverwantschap; zij is alleen te verkrijgen, wanneer men ergens, gelijk het in Spr. 27: 23 heet, zijn hart op zet."¹²

For Bavinck the duality between faith and knowledge which requires all knowledge to be faith knowledge is a creaturely reality that will pass away in the new creation. "Alle kennis is hier op aarde geloofskennis. In den hemel echter gaat het gelooven in aanschouwen over."¹³ A primary characteristic of the reality which surrounds us and grasps us is that there is an invisible and a visible sphere, and we human creatures live in the visible but orient our lives to the invisible. The tension which this creates requires that all knowledge is ultimately faith knowledge. In the new creation this tension will be resolved, for "we shall see him as he is," the invisible will be made visible, and faith will give way to sight.

¹² "Kennis en Leven" in *KL*, p. 233. "Knowledge is thoroughly personal; it rests upon a personal 'getting acquainted;' there is a spiritual appropriation, an expression of congeniality; it can only be obtained when one, as it says in Proverbs 27:23, sets his heart on it."

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 224. "Here on earth all knowing is faith-knowing. In heaven faith will give way to sight."

The necessity of revelation

Revelation is necessary because the meaning of visible, temporal, earthly realities is found in invisible, eternal, heavenly realities,¹⁴ and the latter can be understood only through the gift of divine revelation which is accepted in faith. Bavinck's understanding of the necessity of revelation assumes a distinction between invisible and visible realities. "Naar de Heilige Schrift valt de schepping uiteen in eene geestlijke en eene stoffelijke wereld, in hemel en aarde."¹⁵ Humanity belongs to both worlds. "Immers, de menschheid, in haar geheel genomen, is alle eeuwen door in hart en nieren supranaturalistisch geweest; noch in het denken noch in het leven had zij aan deze 'diesseitige' wereld genoeg; steeds nam zij boven de aarde een hemel en achter de zienlijke dingen eene hooger en heiliger orde van onzienlijke krachten en goederen aan."¹⁶ Bavinck chastises those voices of his time which sought to obliterate this distinction.¹⁷ This distinction provides a fundamental parameter in his theology, one

¹⁴ These three pairs of terms are virtually synonymous for Bavinck.

¹⁵ *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, Vol. II (Kampen: Kok, 1928-1930), p. 404. "According to the Holy Scriptures the creation is divided into a spiritual and a material world, into heaven and earth."

¹⁶ *Wijsbegeerte der Openbaring* (Kampen: Kok, 1908), pp. 1f. "Humanity as a whole has been at all times supranaturalistic to the core. Neither in thought nor in life has it been satisfied with the things of this world; it has always assumed a heaven above the earth, and behind what is visible a higher and holier order of invisible powers and goods." (*The Philosophy of Revelation* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953], pp. 1f., alt.)

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

whose impact extends far beyond his doctrine of revelation. Frequently he conveys its sense and significance by providing lists of more-or-less parallel distinctions which illustrate how fundamental the invisible/visible distinction is to his thought. For example, in the context of discussing monistic understandings of creation he claims that they

wisschen de grenzen uit tusschen hemel en aarde, stof en geest, ziel en lichaam, mensch en dier, verstand en wil, eeuwigheid en tijd, Schepper en schepsel, het zijn en het niet-zijn en lossen alles op in eene doodsche eenvormigheid. Hemel en aarde, mensch en dier, ziel en lichaam, waarheid en leven, kunst en wetenschap, godsdienst en zedelijkheid, staat en kerk, gezin en maatschappij enz., ze zijn wel onderscheiden maar ze zijn niet gescheiden. Er bestaan tusschen hen allerlei betrekkingen; een organische, of indien men wil, een ethische band houdt hen alle saam.¹⁸

The existence of such boundaries between realities which, in spite of these boundaries, are intended to be in close relation illustrates why divine revelation is necessary.

The ultimate meaning of life is found in invisible realities rather than visible ones. "In dat wereldgeheel heeft God den mensch geplaatst en heeft de eeuw in zijn hart gelegd, opdat hij niet bij de uitwendige, zienlijke verschijnselen zou blijven staan, maar in den tijdelijken gang van natuur en geschiedenis de eeuwige

¹⁸ GD II, pp. 399f. Monistic understandings of creation "obliterate the boundaries between heaven and earth, matter and spirit, soul and body, person and animal, understanding and will, eternity and time, Creator and creature, being and not-being, and dissolve everything into a dead uniformity. Heaven and earth, person and animal, soul and body, truth and life, art and scholarship, religion and morality, state and church, family and society, etc., are to be distinguished but not divorced from each other. There are relationships between them; an organic, or if you will, an ethical bond holds each of them together."

gedachten Gods opsporen en kennen zou."¹⁹ The people of God, who have come to know him through his revelation in the Scriptures and in Jesus Christ, by faith orient their lives to invisible realities and not visible ones.

Het leven der gemeente is een leven des geloofs. De gemeente, uit het onzienlijke levend, vlak het tegendeel belijdt van wat de schijn der dingen leert. Gelooven aan de waarachtigheid van den Onzienlijke is slechts bestaanbaar door de kracht van den Onzienlijke zelve. De onzienlijke, de geestelijke, de eeuwige dingen zijn voor haar de hoogste realiteit, veel reeeler dan die wij hier aanschouwen met ons lichamelijk oog. Dat er een God is, dat Jezus is de Christus, dat er een koninkrijk der hemelen is, staat voor haar nog veel vaster, dan een mathematisch axiom.²⁰

Against the appearance of visible things the church, "vol des H. Geestes," calls out loudly and clearly, "ik geloof."²¹

Bavinck's distinction between invisible and visible realities is to be perceived as a duality and not a dualism because these two

¹⁹ *Magnalia Dei* (Kampen: Kok, 1909), p. 11. "God has placed man in the midst of this world totality, and has set eternity in man's heart, in order that he should not rest in the external, visible phenomena but should instead seek out and come to know the eternal thoughts of God in the temporal course of nature and of history." (*Our Reasonable Faith*, Tr. Henry Zylstra (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), p. 19, alt.)

²⁰ "Het Christelijke Geloof" in *KL*, pp. 88-91. "The life of the church is a life of faith. The church, living out of the invisible, flatly professes her faith against what the appearance of things teaches. Belief in the truth of the Invisible One is possible only through the power of the Invisible One. The invisible, spiritual and eternal things are for her the highest reality, much more real than that which we perceive with our physical eye. That there is a God, that Jesus is the Christ, that there is a kingdom of heaven are, for her, much more certain than a mathematical axiom."

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 91. The church, "full of the Holy Spirit," calls out loudly and clearly, "I believe."

realities are both distinct and intimately related.

De openbaring, op welke het Christendom rust, is historie, zeer zeker; zij bestaat uit woorden en feiten, die in het leven en de geschiedenis der menschheid eene plaats hebben verkregen, maar zij wordt in heel hare ontwikkeling beheerscht door eene bijzondere Godsgedachte, zij is een organisme, dat door een eigen leven wordt bezielt. Er werken krachten in, die niet aardsch maar hemelsch, niet tijdelijk maar eeuwig, niet menschelijk maar Goddelijk zijn. Vleesch is zij in heel hare verschijning, maar in dat vleesch woont het Woord, dat bij God en zelf God is.²²

Revelation is the vehicle which overcomes the duality between the invisible and visible, the eternal and the temporal. Without such an account of revelation, Kant would be right: the noumenal would be unknowable. But Bavinck goes one step farther; in his view, without revelation even the visible realities would be unknowable. The significance of visible realities is rooted in invisible realities, which, in turn, are known through revelation. The fact that the Word became flesh not only describes the Incarnation. Because it describes the Incarnation, which is the epitome of revelation, it is also a principle which describes all revelation: the Word became flesh describes the relation between the invisible and the visible, for "in Christus is de onzienlijke God zichtbaar

²² *De Zekerheid des Geloofs* (Kampen: Kok, 1901), pp. 55f. "The revelation on which Christianity is founded is definitely history. It consists of words and facts that have obtained a place in the life and history of mankind. But its entire development is ruled by one special, divine thought. Revelation is an organism with a life of its own. At work in it are powers that are not earthly but heavenly, not temporal but eternal, not human but divine. It is flesh in its whole manifestation, but that flesh is inhabited by the Word, which is with God and which is God himself." (*The Certainty of Faith*, tr. H. der Nederlanden [St. Catharines: Paideia, 1980], p. 61, alt.)

geworden."²³ "De vleeswording des Woords, het albeheerschende feit, grondbeginsel aller wetenschap, is ook aanvang en blijvend principe van het Rijk van God."²⁴ The invisible and the visible must indeed be distinguished, but the latter is pregnant with life and meaning because the former is manifested and revealed through it.

The character of revelation

Bavinck's account of revelation moves from describing its necessity to articulating its character. His account (a) stresses the relationship in which revelation is given and received, (b) describes the various types of revelation and the inner relationships between these types, and (c) describes the historical dynamic of revelation, a dynamic which culminates in the eschaton.

In Bavinck's view, the character of revelation must be understood in the context of the relationship in which it is given and received. Revelation assumes, demands, and even creates and sustains the relational context within which it is given and is to be received. Revelation is not a body of abstract information given by one autonomous, reasoning party to another autonomous, reasoning party. Instead, the one who gives revelation is a

²³ *MD*, p. 299. "In Christ the invisible God has become visible." (*RF*, p. 317)

²⁴ "Het Rijk Gods, Het Hoogste Goed" in *KL*, p. 38. "The Word made flesh, that all-important fact, foundational principle of all scholarship, is also the beginning and enduring principle of the Reign of God."

personal being.

Op het standpunt van hen, die alleen aan een onpersoonlijke, onbewuste, almachtige kracht gelooven, kan men nog wel van een onbewust, onwillekeurig verschijnen dier kracht spreken, maar niet meer van eene eigenlijke openbaring, daar deze toch de volkomene bewustheid en vrijheid Gods onderstelt. Alle openbaring, welke dien naam terecht draagt, gaat uit van de gedachte, dat God persoonlijk bestaat, dat Hij zichzelf bewust is en zichzelf aan schepselen bekend maken kan.²⁵

Revelation is given by a personal God so that "de mensch God (zal) kennen en dienen, opdat hij met en aan het hoofd van alle schepselen Gode de eere brenge van alle zijne werken."²⁶ "Al deze waarheden komen den mensch van buiten af toe; zij zijn hem alleen uit de openbaring bekend, en zij worden zijn eigendom slechts, wanneer hij ze kinderlijk aanneemt door het geloof."²⁷ Because Bavinck sees revelation as much richer than mere information, perceiving it as that which reconciles the creature to God, revelation is not fundamentally an epistemological reality but rather an elaboration of his doctrine of God. Revelation becomes virtually synonymous with redemption. "De verlossing onderstelt de

²⁵ *MD*, p. 25. "From the point of view of those whose deity is only an impersonal, unconscious, almighty force, it may be possible to speak of an unconscious, involuntary manifestation of that force, but not of any real revelation, for that is an idea which assumes the perfect consciousness and freedom of God. Every revelation worthy of the name proceeds from the idea that God exists personally, that he is conscious of himself, and that he can make himself known to creatures." (*RF*, p. 34, alt.)

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 26f. "Man (will) know and serve God, in order that he, together with and at the head of all creatures, should give God the honor due him for all his works." (*RF*, p. 36)

²⁷ *ZG*, p. 61. "All the truths of the Christian faith come to man from the outside. They are known to him only through revelation, and they become his possession only when he accepts them in a childlike way by faith." (*CF*, p. 71, alt.)

openbaring en de openbaring heeft de verlossing ten doel, of liever nog de verlossing is zelve de openbaring, uit den verborgen raad Gods intredende en zich incorporeerende in de geschiedenis der menschheid."²⁸

A second characteristic of revelation which Bavinck describes affirms that revelation is both diverse and unified. Revelation is constituted by the unified deeds of the one, true, living God, seeking and establishing relationship with his creatures, but these deeds are received by his creatures in a variety of modes.²⁹ To understand revelation, one must be aware of its various modes and the relationships between these modes.

Bavinck maintains the classical Reformed distinction between general and special revelation, and identifies five modes of revelation: general revelation includes creation, history, and human experience; special revelation includes the Scriptures and Jesus Christ. Each of these can be distinguished from the others as a mode of revelation because within each one can discern the

²⁸ *CW*, pp. 88f. "Redemption presupposes revelation and redemption is the goal of revelation, or, better yet, redemption itself is revelation which has come from the hidden counsel of God and entered into and incorporated itself into the history of humanity."

²⁹ The noun 'modes' is not Bavinck's. In typical Bavinckian fashion, he simply describes various ways in which revelation is given without employing a noun to name these ways or means. Thus, the noun 'modes' simply indicates that distinctions are being discussed and carries no further meaning in terms of the character of these distinctions.

Word and deeds of God made manifest in unique ways. Each of these five must be 'read' differently, according to the manner in which God uses it to reveal himself. One must take note of all of these five because revelation is concerned with all reality and all knowledge. Because revelation assumes an intimate relation between God and his creatures revelation concerns itself with every creaturely reality.

While it is important to acknowledge the unity of all revelation, it is equally important to observe the distinctions and inner relationships between the various modes. To understand revelation one must begin with Jesus Christ.

Deze gansche openbaring, welke uit en door en tot God is, heeft in den persoon van Christus haar middelpunt, en bereikt tegelijk in Hem haar hoogtepunt. Niet het schitterende firmament noch de machtige natuur, geen vorst of groote der aarde, geen wijsgeer of kunstenaar, maar de Zoon des menschen is de hoogste openbaring Gods. In dat geloof staat de Christen; hij heeft God leeren kennen in het aangezicht van Jezus Christus, dien Hij gezonden heeft. God zelf, die gezegd heeft, dat het licht uit de duisternis zou schijnen, is degene, die in zijn hart geschenen heeft, om te geven verlichting der kennis der heerlijkheid Gods in het aangezicht van Jezus Christus, (II Cor. 4: 6).³⁰

From the starting point and foundation of God's revelation in Jesus

³⁰ MD, p. 27. "This whole revelation, which is of, through and unto God, has its mid-point and at the same time its high-point in the person of Christ. It is not the sparkling firmament, nor mighty nature, nor any prince or genius of the earth, nor any philosopher or artist, but the Son of man who is the highest revelation of God. In that faith the Christian stands. He has learned to know God in the person of Jesus Christ whom God has sent. God himself, who said that the light should shine out of the darkness, is the One who has shined in his heart in order to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (II Cor. 4: 6) (RF, pp. 36f., alt.)

Christ, one can move to the other modes of revelation.

De openbaring heeft in den persoon van Christus haar middenpunt, maar haar omtrek breidt tot de einden der schepping zich uit. Zij staat in de natuur en in de wereldgeschiedenis niet geïsoleerd; zij is niet aan een eiland in den oceaan, aan een oliedrop op de wateren gelijk. Maar zij staat met heel de natuur, met de gansche geschiedenis der menschheid, met het gezin en de maatschappij, met de wetenschap en de kunst in een innig verband. De gansche wereld rust zelve in openbaring; openbaring is de onderstelling, de grondslag, het geheim van heel de schepping en van al hare formatien.³¹

The other modes of revelation move out from Christ as concentric circles move out from a center. "In Christus is midden in de historie door God een organisch centrum geschapen; vandaar uit worden thans in steeds wijder kring de cirkels getrokken, binnen welke het licht der openbaring schijnt."³²

Revelation occurs within history, and, because history quickly passes away, some form of record or witness to what has happened within history is required. Scripture constitutes this record or witness to God's redemptive acts. This record character of Scripture requires one to make three affirmations. First, "de Schrift is niet de openbaring zelve, maar de beschrijving, de

³¹ WO, pp. 22f. "Revelation has its center in the person of Christ, but its periphery extends to the uttermost ends of creation. It does not stand isolated in nature and history, does not resemble an island in the ocean, nor a drop of oil upon water. It stands in an intimate relationship with the whole of nature, with the whole history of humanity, with family and society, with science and art. The whole world itself rests on revelation; revelation is the presupposition, the foundation, the secret of the entire creation and all its forms." (PR, p. 27, alt.)

³² GD I, p. 355. "God has created an organic center in the middle of history in Christ. From there the circles are drawn in progressively wider rings in which the light of revelation shines."

oorkonde, waaruit de openbaring gekend kan worden."³³ Second, this distinction between Scripture and revelation does not give one license to disparage the significance of the Scriptures. Scripture "is niet een menschelijk, toevallig, willekeurig, gebrekkig toevoegsel aan de openbaring, maar zij is zelve een bestanddeel in de openbaring. Zij is er de afsluiting en de voltooiing, de hoek- en de sluitsteen van."³⁴

Finally, all Scripture points to Jesus Christ. While the Scriptures and Jesus Christ are the two modes of special revelation, special revelation is thoroughly Christ-centered. "Een mensch is de voltooide openbaring Gods. Terwijl in het Oude Testament alles op Christus voorbereid werd, wordt nu alles uit Hem afgeleid. Christus is het keerpunt der tijden."³⁵ "In Christus heeft God zich ten volle geopenbaard en ten volle geschonken. Daarom is de Schrift ook voltooid, zij is het volkomene woord

³³ *MD*, p. 83. "Scripture is not the revelation itself, but the description or the record from which the revelation can be known." (*RF*, p. 95)

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 84. Scripture "is not a human, incidental, arbitrary, and defective supplement to revelation but is itself a component part of revelation. Scripture is the conclusion and the completion, the cornerstone and the capstone of revelation." (*RF*, p. 96, alt.)

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 81f. "A person is the completed revelation of God. Whereas in the Old Testament everything led up to Christ, now everything is derived from him. Christ is the turning point of the times." (*RF*, pp. 93f, alt.)

Gods."³⁶ Just as the revelation in Jesus Christ 'spreads' out from him to encompass the entire creation, "zo moet ook de Schrift niet afgetrokken, op zich zelf beschouwd en van alles geïsoleerd worden, maar zij moet juist met heel ons leven, met het leven der menscheid in verbinding gebracht en tot verklaring er van gebezigd worden."³⁷

From this Christocentric understanding of special revelation, Bavinck moves out to the modes of general revelation. In a manner typical of Bavinck's theological method, he wishes to chart a clear course without becoming imbalanced. "Bij het bepalen van de waarde, welke aan de algemeene openbaring toekomt, bestaat er groot gevaar, om of eenerzijds aan onderschatting, of ook anderzijds aan overschatting zich schuldig te maken."³⁸ Revelation is a one-way street; if one does not progress from special revelation to general revelation the latter remains an enigma. Nevertheless, general revelation also constitutes an indispensable part of the whole revelation of God and thus cannot be considered superfluous.

³⁶ *GD I*, p. 355. "In Christ God has revealed himself fully and given himself fully. Therefore the Scriptures are also completed, they are the full Word of God."

³⁷ "Het Rijk God, Het Hoogste Goed" in *KL*, p. 53. Just as the revelation in Jesus Christ spreads out from him to encompass the entire creation, "so also must the Scriptures not be detached, considered in themselves, and isolated from all else, but they must be brought into relationship with and used to elucidate all of our life, and the lives of all people."

³⁸ *MD*, p. 34. "In determining the value of general revelation, one runs the great danger either of over-estimating or of under-estimating it." (*RF*, p. 44)

General revelation serves to provide the context for the person and work of Jesus Christ, assuring that the reality of Jesus Christ does not float disconnectedly above created reality.

De openbaring, welke in Christus tot ons komt, zich aansluitende bij de openbaring, welke de natuur zelve ons kennen doet, verheft zij deze tot haar volle recht en handhaaft ze in hare wezenlijke waarde; door de leer van de schepping snijdt zij alle polytheïsme en alle dualisme bij den wortel af. Niet alleen de geest, maar ook de stof; niet alleen de mensch, maar ook de natuur is van Goddelijken oorsprong en, voor haar ontstaan, door God gedacht.³⁹

The work of redemption respects the work of creation, for they are both works of the one Trinitarian God. "Als Herschepper wandelt God in het spoor, dat Hij als Schepper, Onderhouder en Regeerder aller dingen getrokken heeft. De genade is iets anders en hoogers dan de natuur, maar zij sluit zich toch bij de natuur aan, en vernietigt ze niet doch herstelt ze."⁴⁰

In this context one can discuss the types of general revelation, beginning with creation. "De schepping zelve is de eerste, rijke openbaring Gods, grondslag en aanvang van alle

³⁹ *WO*, pp. 90f. "The revelation which comes to us in Christ and joins itself to the revelation which nature itself makes known to us, elevates this to its fullest right, and maintains it in its real value, and by the doctrine of creation cuts all polytheism and dualism off at the roots. Not only mind but also matter, not only man but also nature, is of divine origin, and has lain in the thought of God before it came into being." (*PR*, p. 107, alt.)

⁴⁰ *MD*, p. 260. "As the Re-creator, God follows the line which he drew as Creator, Sustainer and Ruler of all things. Grace is something other than and higher than nature, but it nevertheless joins up with nature, does not destroy it but restores it rather." (*RF*, p. 277, alt.)

volgende."⁴¹ Creation is an important type of revelation, but it also has clear limits around it because it is incapable of revealing the love of the Father. "In de schepping betoont God de macht van zijn geest, in de openbaring, welke de verlossing tot middelpunt heeft, doet Hij kennen de grootheid van zijn hart."⁴² Second, "en niet alleen in de natuur, maar ook in de geschiedenis volvoert God zijn raad en brengt Hij zijn werk tot stand,"⁴³ but this revelation is in many respects even more ambiguous than that in the creation. "In nog veel hogere mate dan bij de natuur, staan wij bij de geschiedenis voor een complex van oorzaken en werkingen, welke in haar wezen en verband ons onbekend zijn."⁴⁴ Finally, while "God openbaart zich buiten, Hij openbaart zich ook in den mensch; Hij laat zichzelf niet aan zijn hart en geweten

⁴¹ *De Algemeene Genade* (Kampen: Zalsman, 1894), p. 7. "Creation itself is the first, rich revelation of God, the foundation and beginning of every subsequent revelation." ("Common Grace," tr. R. Van Leeuwen [*Calvin Theological Journal* 24 (1989)], p. 39)

This statement on its own appears to contradict the Christological foundation of general revelation. This apparent contradiction will be explored in detail in the discussion of the relationship between Jesus Christ and the creation in chapter four.

⁴² WO, p. 21. "In creation God manifests the power of his mind; in revelation, which has redemption for its center, he discloses to us the greatness of his heart." (PR, pp. 25f.)

⁴³ MD, p. 30. "God carries out his counsel and establishes his work in history as well as in nature." (RF, p. 39)

⁴⁴ WO, p. 103. "In a much higher degree than is the case in nature, we stand in history before a complex of causes and operations which are unknown to us in their essence and interrelations." (PR, p. 122, alt.)

onbetuigd."⁴⁵ However, this witness is also very limited. "Nimmer kan op den grondslag der ethische ervaring de waarheid van het historische Christendom worden gebouwd."⁴⁶ The experiential method

is opgekomen, nadat Kant het kenvermogen tot de zinnelijk-waarneembare wereld beperkt en de historische critiek de waarheid der Schrift in twijfel getrokken had. Zij is een kind van het ongeloof, maar koestert daarbij de stille hoop, toch nog eenig geloof te kunnen blijven behouden. Zij wil alles, de gansche wereld, de natuur, de geschiedenis, en bijna den geheelen mensch met zijn gewaarwording en waarneming, geheugen en verbeelding, verstand en rede aan de positivistische wetenschap overlaten, mits het haar vergund zijn, om ergens diep in het hart van den mensch een kleine, bescheidene plaats voor het geloof te behouden. (Zij) houdt bij monde van haar consequentste tolken niets anders dan eenige algemeene, godsdienstige denkbeelden over.⁴⁷

Bavinck perceived his age as one which placed too much value on general revelation⁴⁸, and therefore he expends great energy in pointing out its limits, ambiguities and necessary Christocentric foundation. "God bedoelt met algemeene openbaring, den mensch op

⁴⁵ *MD*, p. 33. "God reveals himself outside of man, he reveals himself also within man. He does not leave himself without witness in the human heart and conscience." (*RF*, p. 42)

⁴⁶ "Het Dualisme in de Theologie" in *KL*, p. 162. "The truth of historical Christianity can never be built upon the foundation of ethical experience."

⁴⁷ *ZG*, p. 63. The experiential method "arose after Kant restricted man's knowing capacities to the sensible world and after historical criticism had thrown doubt on the truth of Scripture. It is a child of unbelief but harbors the secret hope of nevertheless being able to salvage some faith. It concedes everything -- the whole world, nature, history, and almost the whole man with his senses and perceptions, memory and imagination, understanding and reason -- to positivistic science, as long as it is permitted to retain a small, modest place somewhere deep in man's heart for faith. In the thought of its most consistent interpreters nothing more is left than a few universal religious concepts." (*CF*, pp. 72f., alt.)

⁴⁸ cf. *MD*, p. 34.

te wekken om Hem te zoeken. Maar in de bijzondere openbaring ontfermt Hij zich over den mensch, die ronddooft en Hem niet vinden kan. Daar zoekt Hij den mensch zelf op, en zegt tot hem, wie en wat Hij is."⁴⁹ In spite of these limits and ambiguities, Bavinck also perceived creation, history and human experience as important and essential modes of revelation when understood properly. If revelation were to be restricted to the Scriptures and Jesus Christ it would lose touch with reality, providing nothing but castles floating in the air. It would not honour the principle of all revelation, that the invisible becomes visible, that these two realms are intimately related.

The forms of revelation

In addition to distinguishing modes of revelation, Bavinck also distinguishes various forms of revelation.⁵⁰ Bavinck uses the term 'form' in the context of a distinction between essence and form in which essence refers to the perduring, unchanging goal of revelation which is distinct from its manifestations in history in a variety of temporal forms. The essence/form distinction is closely correlated with the invisible/visible distinction, for that which is of the essence is invisible and that which is manifested

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 55. "What God intends by general revelation is to provoke man to seek him. But in his special revelation God has compassion upon man who strays about and cannot find him. In it, God seeks man out and himself tells man who and what he is." (*RF*, p. 66)

⁵⁰ While the noun 'modes' is not Bavinck's, 'forms' definitely is.

in forms is visible. Various forms of revelation serve as temporal means to further the essence of God's eternal work. For example, "de wet is tijdelijk, voorbijgaand, een middel in dienst der belofte, maar de belofte is eeuwig; zij nam haar aanvang bij het paradijs, wordt door de openbaring bewaard en ontwikkeld in de dagen des Ouden Verbonds, bereikt in Christus hare vervulling en breidt dan tot de gansche menschheid en tot alle volken zich uit."⁵¹ Understanding revelation requires discerning this distinction between essence and form. Those who search for truth in the realm of the invisible are those who "achter den schijn gaan tot het wezen, achter de uitwendige vormen tot het mysterie van het groote leven, van de stille kracht, van den donkeren wil terug."⁵² Those who have placed their trust in the true God are those who know that "de gedaante dezer wereld, de schijn der dingen, die ons zoo bekoort, gaat voorbij; en eeuwig en onvergankelijk is het onzienlijke, dat zich slechts ontsluit en kennen doet aan wie gelooft."⁵³

⁵¹ *WO*, p. 163. "The law is temporal, transitory, a means in the service of the promise, but the promise is eternal. It had its beginning in paradise, was preserved and developed by revelation in the days of the Old Covenant, reached its fulfillment in Christ, and is then extended to the whole human race and all peoples." (*PR*, p. 193, alt.)

⁵² *WO*, p. 25. Those who search for truth in the realm of the invisible are those who "endeavor to penetrate behind the appearance of things to the essence, behind the outward forms to the inner mystery of infinite life, of silent power, of hidden will." (*PR*, p. 30, alt.)

⁵³ "Het Christlijk Geloof" in *KL*, p. 91. Those who trust in the true God are those who know that "the form of this world, the appearance of things that charms us so much, will not endure. The invisible world which makes itself known only to those who believe

The essence/form distinction enables one to see that revelation has a teleological character, that its forms change as the history of redemption progresses until it culminates in the goal of that history. Bavinck's friend Henry Dosker wrote in a tribute shortly after Bavinck's death that for Bavinck revelation "occupies a definitely teleological position; it reveals to us the coming of God to humanity, forever to dwell with it."⁵⁴ Dosker's observation helps one to recognize that one must first note the goal of revelation for Bavinck, and then perceive all of revelation in light of its goal.

Het doel der openbaring is niet Christus; Christus is centrum en middel. Het doel is, dat God wederom in zijn schepselen wone en in den kosmos zijne heerlijkheid openbare. En om dat doel te bereiken, gaat het woord der openbaring over in schrift. Ook de Schrift is dus middel en instrument, geen doel. Zij vloeit voort uit de menschwording Gods in Christus, zij is in zekeren zin de voortzetting ervan, de weg, waarlangs Christus woning maakt in zijne gemeente. Evenals heel de openbaring, is ook zij een *actus transiens*.⁵⁵

This goal that will be reached in the parousia of Jesus Christ.⁵⁶
Arriving at the goal requires a dramatic act of God.

is eternal and imperishable."

⁵⁴ "Herman Bavinck," *The Princeton Theological Review* XX (1922), p. 462.

⁵⁵ *GD* I, p. 352. "The goal of revelation is not Christ; Christ is the center and means. The goal is that God will live again in his creatures and reveal his glory in the cosmos. In order to reach that goal the word of revelation was inscripturated. Scripture also is a means and an instrument, not the goal. It flows from the Incarnation of God in Christ, it is in a definite sense the continuation of it, the way through which Christ dwells among his people. But just as with all revelation, Scripture is an *actus transiens*."

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 354.

The history of revelation is characterized both by the fundamental unity of the works of God preparing for the eschaton and by the distinct variety of forms in which the works of God are manifested. Thus, the distinction between essence and form serves to illustrate that revelation exhibits unity in diversity. "Onderscheid is er alleen in den vorm, en dit moest ook zoo zijn. Want God is wel een, maar de menschen verschillen en moeten daarom ook verschillend opgevoed worden. Dit onderscheid doet echter aan de wezenlijke eenheid niet te kort."⁵⁷ After affirming the unity of God's work, one can describe the variety of forms which comprise the history of redemption.

Eigenlijk zijn alle werken Gods naar buiten, hetzij in woord of in daad, bestanddeelen en elementen van de eene, groote, alles omvattende en altijd voortgaande openbaring Gods. Het scheppen, het onderhouden en het regeeren alle dingen, de roeping en leiding van Israel, de zending van den Christus, de uitstorting van den H. Geest, de teboekstelling van het Woord Gods, de instandhouding en de voortplanting der kerk enz. zijn alle te zamen wijzen en vormen, waardoor er eene openbaring van Gods wege tot ons komt.⁵⁸

Each of these forms serves as a manifestation of God's eternal promise, a revelation of the essential truth that God so loved the

⁵⁷ *GD* III, p. 187. "There is distinction only in the form, and that is how it had to be. For God is indeed one, but there is variety among humanity, and they must be taught in a variety of ways. This distinction does not harm the essential unity."

⁵⁸ *MD*. p. 24. "Actually all God's external works, whether in word or deed, are constituent parts and elements of the one, great, comprehensive and always continuing revelation of God. The creation, upholding, and ruling of all things, the calling and leading of Israel, the sending of Christ, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, the inscripturation of the Word of God, the sustaining and propagation of the church, and the like, are altogether ways and forms by which the one revelation of God comes to us." (*RF*, p. 34, alt.)

world.

In addition to describing the character of revelation and redemption as unity in diversity, the essence/form distinction also serves to describe the progressive character of revelation. "God openbaart zijne genade successief rijker en voller. In de dagen des Ouden Testaments was er knechtschap, maar nu vrijheid; toen beeld, nu waarheid; toen schemer, nu licht; toen genade voor een volk, nu voor alle; toen vreeze, nu liefde; toen de Messias beloofd, nu gekomen enz."⁵⁹ Bavinck also describes the increasing richness and fullness of revelation as "een altijd nader komen van God tot zijn creatuur. De transcendentie blijft die ze is, en wordt toch steeds diepere immanentie."⁶⁰

Bavinck's use of transcendence and immanence to describe the progressive character of revelation is clarified by his distinction between internal and external revelation. One can distinguish between a Christological and a teleological account of revelation as one distinguishes two sides of the same coin. The former recognizes that all revelation leads to and flows from the person

⁵⁹ *GD* III, p. 187. "God successively reveals his grace more richly and fully. In the days of the Old Testament there was servanthood, but now freedom; then image but now truth; then twilight, now light; then grace for one people, now for all; then fear, now love; then the Messiah was promised, now he has come, and so on."

⁶⁰ *WO*, p. 23. The forms represent "God always coming nearer to his creature. The transcendence remains the same, but becomes an ever deeper immanence." (*PR*, p. 28)

and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the turning point in the history of redemption but he is not its ultimate goal. The goal of revelation (and redemption) is that God's revelation becomes thoroughly internal. "Gelijk de wijsheid Gods in Christus vleesch geworden is, zoo behoort de waarheid ook in ons in te gaan, zij moet in den weg der vrijheid ons eigen persoonlijk en geestelijk eigendom worden; door een levend en waarachtig geloof moet zij in een bestanddeel van ons eigen denken en handelen worden omgezet, en dan buiten ons worden verbreid, totdat de aarde vol is van de kennis des Heeren."⁶¹ The Word and the Spirit, as the external and internal revelation, together serve to make a dwelling for the revelation of God among his children. "Het *verbum internum* is het *verbum principale*, want dit brengt de kennis Gods in den mensch, en dat is het doel van alle theologie, van heel de zelfopenbaring Gods. Het *verbum externum*, de openbaring neergelegd in de Heilige Schrift, doet daarbij den dienst van een middel; het is *verbum instrumentale*, noodzakelijk misschien om allerlei bijkomstige redenen in deze bedeeling, maar toch naar zijn wezen tijdelijk en toevallig."⁶² The forms of revelation, which serve to further the

⁶¹ CW, p. 106. "Just as the wisdom of God was made flesh in Christ, so the truth is meant to go into us. In the way of freedom it must become our own personal and spiritual property. Through a living and true faith it must become a component of our own thinking and acting, and then it must spread out from us until the earth is full of the knowledge of the Lord."

⁶² GD I, p. 185. "The *verbum internum* is the *verbum principale*, because this brings the knowledge of God in the person, which is the goal of all theology and of the self-revelation of God. The *verbum externum*, the revelation laid down in the Holy Scriptures, serves this as a means; it is the *verbum instrumentale*, perhaps necessary for various subordinate reasons in this

goal of revelation, are instruments or means, but not the end.⁶³
"Doel is, dat de kerk, onderwezen uit de Schrift, vrij en zelfstandig de deugden verkondige Desgenen, die haar geroepen heeft uit de duisternis tot zijn wonderbaar licht. Het *verbum externum* is instrument, het *verbum internum* is doel."⁶⁴

Within this framework one can discuss the various forms of revelation in the history of redemption. General revelation in the creation is the first form and an utterly inadequate one, for those who use it alone create only gross caricatures of the Christian faith which are manifested in deception and idolatry. With the calling of Abraham and the establishment of a covenant with Israel we have the second form, the beginning of special revelation, much clearer but still a shadow of the full revelation of God. In Jesus Christ the fullness of God has been revealed, the shadows made

dispensation, but nevertheless essentially temporal and accidental."

⁶³ This is not to say that Bavinck's Christology is instrumentalist. In chapters three and four I will describe his emphasis upon the recapitulation theme and its portrayal of all reality as gathered under Jesus Christ as its Head. On Bavinck's account Jesus Christ is God's chosen instrument of redemption, but he is also the foundation of all reality.

⁶⁴ *GD I*, p. 465. "The goal is that the church, taught by the Scriptures freely and independently, proclaims the virtues of the one who has called her from darkness to his marvellous light. The *verbum externum* is the instrument, the *verbum internum* is the goal." This progression from external to internal cannot be interpreted to mean that throughout the history of redemption, objective revelation becomes less necessary, giving way to subjective revelation. Until the return of Christ the Scriptures remain the indispensable and infallible revelation of God, the ultimate source of truth. (Cf. p. 50, n. 47, re: Bavinck's cautions concerning subjective revelation)

clear.⁶⁵ In the exaltation of Christ, the sending of the Holy Spirit and the calling of the church we have the firstfruits of the goal of revelation, the beginnings of God dwelling among his people. Each of these forms of revelation is rooted in what came prior; the earlier is serviceable to the latter. "Israel de voorbereiding, Christus het centrum, de kerk de uitwerking, de parusie de kroon -- dat is het snoer, dat de openbaringsfeiten met elkander verbindt."⁶⁶

The distinctions between these forms are important (and they are further subdivided into those forms which lead up to and flow from the cross), but what is most important for Bavinck is the fact that all of these forms constitute a progressive unity leading to the goal of revelation. Revelation is a diversity within a unity.

Het kruis van Christus deelt de geschiedenis der menschheid in twee helften, in de voorbereiding tot en in de uitwerking van de verzoening; maar in beide deelen, van de schepping tot het kruis, en van het kruis tot de wederkomst is ze een geheel, een onafgebroken werk Gods. Het Christendom is als religie veel meer dan eene gevoelsaandoening en gemoedsstemming; het omvat den ganschen mensch, geheel de menschheid en de totaliteit der wereld. Het is een werk Gods, eene openbaring van het begin tot het einde der eeuwen, in woord en in daad,

⁶⁵ Bavinck frequently describes the relation between these three forms using the same formula. For example, "Het onderscheid tusschen het Christendom en de andere godsdiensten is hierin gelegen, dat alwat in het Heidendom voorkomt in caricatuur, in Israel tot schaduw en beeld, en hier tot waarachtige, geestelijke realiteit is geworden." (GD I, p. 298. "The difference between Christianity and the other religions lies herein: that what in heathenism is present in caricature comes in Israel to shadow and image, and in the Christian faith to true, spiritual reality.")

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 347. "Israel the preparation, Christ the center, the church the result, the parousia the crown -- that is the cord that binds the facts of revelation together."

voor het verstand en voor het hart, voor den enkele en voor de
gemeenschap. En het heeft zijn kern en middelpunt in den
persoon en het werk van Christus.⁶⁷

There are two important implications of Bavinck's essence/form
distinction for his doctrine of revelation. First, a significant
consequence of Bavinck's concept of progressive revelation is that
history is an important category in his thought. He rejects
ahistorical views of revelation, in which revelation "kwam los en
geisoleerd te staan, en kreeg het al den schijn, alsof ze
plotseling uit den hemel was komen vallen."⁶⁸ "Juist omdat de
openbaring historie is, is er geen andere weg om er iets van te
weten, dan de gewone weg bij alle historie, dat is het getuigenis.
Het getuigenis beslist voor ons bewustzijn over de realiteit van
een feit. Geen gemeenschap met Christus dan alleen door de
gemeenschap aan het woord der apostelen."⁶⁹ The goal of revelation

⁶⁷ *WO*, p. 266f. "The cross of Christ divides history into two
parts: the preparation for and the working out of reconciliation;
but in both parts, from the creation to the cross and from the
cross to the return of Christ, it is one whole, one uninterrupted
work of God. Christianity is as religion much more than a matter
of feeling or temperament; it embraces the whole man, all humanity,
and the totality of the world. It is a work of God, a revelation
from the beginning to the end of the ages, in word and in deed, for
mind and heart, for the individual and the community. And it has
its heart and center in the person and work of Christ." (*PR*, p.
308, alt.)

⁶⁸ *GD I*, p. 352. He rejects ahistorical views of revelation,
in which revelation "came loose and stood isolated, and took on the
appearance as if it had suddenly fallen out of the heavens."

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 353f. "It is precisely because revelation is
history, that there is no other way to know anything of it than the
ordinary way in which all history is known, which is witness. The
witness decides for our consciousness about the reality of a fact.
We have fellowship with Christ only through the word of the

is eschatological: it indicates God's purpose from before the beginning of time which will be reached at the end of time; revelation itself is an historical means of fulfilling God's purposes, and therefore revelation is received in various historical forms which are centered in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Second, he employs the hermeneutical principle that one must discern the essence 'inside' the form, as it were. A failure to do so easily results in treating a form as if it were of the essence.⁷⁰ With this hermeneutic, one can observe that the essence of grace is already present in Genesis 3,⁷¹ that a form of the Messiah is present in many Old Testament prophecies,⁷² that the Word which Christ preached is no different in essence from the Old Testament,⁷³ that law is a form and thus cannot be discussed on a par with the essence of the gospel,⁷⁴ and that "het vergeestelijkte Oude Testament, dat is, het Oude Testament van zijn tijdelijken,

apostles."

⁷⁰ Bavinck frequently warns of sacrificing the essence to the form and the kernel to the husk. (Cf., *WO*, p. 201)

⁷¹ *MD*, p. 254.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 276.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 324.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 392.

zinnelijken vorm ontgaan, is het Nieuwe Testament."⁷⁵

Summary

Bavinck's doctrine of revelation lies at the heart of his theology. In a context in which special revelation and knowledge of God were cut loose from any notions of objectivity and certainty, he boldly declared that revelation was not only the foundation of faith and religion, but the foundation of all human knowing. At the same time, he refused to consider the route which American fundamentalism charted at about this same time, removing the Scriptures from the flow of history and declaring them to be so 'supernatural' that they were above all critical investigation. The category of history is central to Bavinck's doctrine of revelation, but by distinguishing the historical forms of revelation from the eschatological goal of revelation he safeguarded the eternal truth which revelation proclaims and establishes: revelation "heeft haar einddoel immers niet in zichzelf, niet in Christus, die middelaar is, maar in de nieuwe mensheid, in het wonen Gods bij zijn volk."⁷⁶

This overview of Bavinck's doctrine of revelation introduces (albeit in incipient form) four key characteristics of his theology

⁷⁵ *GD IV*, p. 641. "The Old Testament in spiritual form, that is, the Old Testament stripped of its temporal and visible form, is the New Testament." (*LT*, p. 96, alt.)

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 355. Revelation "has its end goal not in itself, nor in Christ, who is the mediator, but in the new humanity, in God living with his people."

that will become more clear as this study progresses. First, it is Christocentric. Jesus Christ is the high point and center point in the history of redemption, the visible manifestation of the invisible God. Second, Christ's work is focused on reconciliation. Revelation and redemption are primarily concerned with restoring right relationship between God and his creatures. This emphasis upon reconciliation highlights the personal character of both revelation and redemption. Third, Christ's work is eschatological. He is the center of redemption history, but the goal is the complete establishment of the Kingdom of God in which God's law is written on every person's heart. Finally, reconciliation has a dual focus. Christ's work overcomes the brokenness of sin, but it also overcomes the created duality between the invisible and the visible. In the eschaton sin will be no more, and the invisible realities which are now known only by faith will be known by sight. These four characteristics will be fleshed out more fully in what follows, serving to illustrate the principal claim of this study: that an eschatological understanding of redemption lies at the heart of Bavinck's theology, an understanding which has profound implications for his understanding of creation, Jesus Christ and the eschaton.

How does God relate to his creatures?

The second important question to ask in formulating the fundamental parameters of Bavinck's theology is 'how does God relate to his creatures?' In part that question has already been addressed by the previous question. Divine revelation both establishes and is given and received within the context of a relationship between God and his creatures. The question asked here, however, moves beyond the previous one. This analysis of Bavinck's theology gradually enlarges in scope: in this chapter it begins with revelation and moves to relationship. In chapter three this expansion continues, surveying Bavinck's doctrine of God and his Christology. Subsequently it narrows again, focusing on his doctrine of creation in the context of his Christology and eschatology. In this section I will describe three central characteristics of Bavinck's construal of the relation between God and the creation: the three-part framework of God, humanity and world, and his concepts of duality and the organic.

Bavinck's understanding of the relationship between God and his creatures proceeds from a triadic framework comprised of the relationships between God, humanity and the world. "God, wereld en mensch zijn de drie realiteiten, waarmede alle wetenschap en filosofie zich bezig houdt; de gedachte, welke wij daarover vormen en de verhouding, waarin wij ze tot elkander plaatsen, bepaalt den aard onzer wereld- en levensbeschouwing, den inhoud van

onze 'religion, science and morality.'"⁷⁷ Throughout Bavinck's theology one can discern this claim functioning as an assumption. Bavinck's assumption can be summarized as follows: (1) God is the source of all reality, the author of life and of redemption; (2) the entire world is dependent upon its Creator; it is an ambiguous good: as created by God it is wholly good but incomplete, and as a fallen reality it is now compromised at best and oppressive at worst; (3) like the rest of creation, humanity is also a dependent creature, but the uniqueness of humanity as the *imago Dei* is sufficiently significant to require that humanity receive a place of its own in Bavinck's relational framework. Each of these three realities, God, humanity and the world, can only be perceived in the context of their relationships with each other; these relationships are interwoven, so that a brokenness in any one of the three relationships (God/humanity, God/world, humanity/world) will impact upon the other two relationships.

Bavinck's triadic framework is clearly described in a discussion of the various religions and philosophies present in the world. After noting that they appear to represent a cumulative chaos, he continues,

maar indien men tot hun kern doordringt en de aandacht vestigt

⁷⁷ *WO*, p. 70. At the end of this sentence Bavinck is quoting A. C. Fraser, *Philosophy of Theism*, pp. 24-34. "God, world and man are the three realities with which all science and all philosophy occupy themselves. The conception which we form of them, and the relation in which we place them to one another, determine the character of our view of the world and of life, the content of our religion, science and morality." (*PR*, p. 83, alt.)

op de beginselen, waarvan zij uitgaan, dan zijn ze allen tot enkele weinige typen te herleiden. En wijl elke wereldbeschouwing tusschen de drie polen van God, wereld en mensch zich beweegt en hunne onderlinge relatien zoekt vast te stellen, zijn er in den grond maar drie typen van wereldbeschouwing, de theistische (religieuze, theologische) de naturalistische (hetzij pantheistisch of materialistisch) en de humanistische. Deze drie typen volgen in de historie elkander niet op, gelijk Comte zich dat van zijne *trois etats* inbeeldde. Maar zij komen telkens in rythmische golving terug, zijn nooit ten volle onvermengd, en zetten naast elkaar haar leven voort.⁷⁸

Thus, the problems in nonChristian religions and philosophies can be most clearly perceived through the lense of this triadic framework.

Afgoderij is altijd vereering van het schepsel in plaats van den Schepper. Het onderscheid tusschen God en wereld is verloren. Ten tweede gaan met deze afgoderij vanzelf ook allerlei valsche voorstellingen over mensch en wereld gepaard. Godsdienst, als verhouding van den mensch tot God, regelt ook alle andere verhoudingen, en sluit dus vanzelf eene bepaalde beschouwing over mensch en wereld, over den oorsprong, het wezen en de bestemming aller dingen in.⁷⁹

Recognizing the roles of these three distinct realities, each with

⁷⁸ *WO*, p. 28. "When we penetrate to the center of (these religions and philosophies) and consider the principles on which they are based, all this mass reduces itself to a few types. And as every world-view moves between the three poles of God, the world, and man, and seeks to determine their reciprocal relations, it follows that in principle only three types of world-view are distinguishable: the theistic (religious, theological), the naturalistic (either in its pantheistic or materialistic form), and the humanistic. These three do not succeed one another in history as Comte imagined his *trois etats* to do. They rather recur in rhythmical waves, more or less intermingle, and exist side by side." (*PR*, p. 33, alt.)

⁷⁹ *MD*, pp. 46f. "Idolatry represents always a worship of the creature instead of the Creator. The distinction between God and the world is lost. In the second place, all kinds of false ideas about man and the world accompany such idolatry. Religion, which is the relationship of man to God, governs all other relations also, and therefore implies a certain view of man and the world, and of the origin, essence and purpose of all things." (*RF*, pp. 56f., alt.)

its own unique characteristics,⁸⁰ is the first step in answering the question, 'how does God relate to his creatures in Bavinck's theology?'

Second, Bavinck describes the character of this triadic relationship. In his view, the triad's existence and purpose is completely anchored in the love of the Triune God.⁸¹ The priority of God and the absolute contingency of all else upon God is a theme which reverberates with unerring consistency throughout Bavinck's theology.

Fontein des levens is God: fontein van alle leven, van het leven der engelen zoowel, die zweven rondom zijn troon, als van de kleinste insecten, die ontsnappen aan ons oog; van het leven van menschen en beesten; van het natuurlijk en geestlijk, van het zedelijk en godsdienstig leven, van het leven der wetenschap en der kunst, van alle leven in alle schepselen in den hemel en op en onder de aarde. En al dat leven is oorspronkelijk in God.⁸²

God is the origin, sustainer, redeemer and restorer of all life. Thus, knowledge of the world and of humanity begins with knowledge of God, which is found in the Scriptures. "De mensch is waarlijk

⁸⁰ Bavinck describes how various worldviews inappropriately impute characteristics of God to man, and of God and/or man to the world in *Wijsbegeerte der Openbaring*, pp. 87-89.

⁸¹ G. C. Berkouwer speaks of "Bavincks diepste motief, dat God de wereld heeft liefgehad." (*Zoeken en Vinden, Herinneringen en Ervaringen* [Kampen: Kok, 1989], p. 49. Berkouwer speaks of "Bavinck's deepest motif, that God so loved the world.")

⁸² "Kennis en Leven" in *KL*, p. 206. "The fountain of life is God: fountain of all life, just as much of the life of angels that hover around his throne as of the smallest insects that escape from our eyes; the life of people and animals; of the natural and the spiritual, of ethical and religious life, of the life of scholarship and art, of the life of all creatures in heaven and on and under the earth. All that has life has its origin in God."

zoo, als de Schrift hem ons teekent, en de wereld ziet er juist zoo uit, als de Schrift haar ons vertoont."⁸³

'World' has two different meanings for Bavinck, and thus is an ambiguous reality in his theology. First (as described in the previous section), it refers to the good though incomplete creation, the first, rich revelation of God. "De uitvoering van den raad Gods begint met de schepping. Er is geen rechte verhouding tot God denkbaar dan op haar grondslag. Zij plaatst ons in die relatie tot God, waarin wij behooren te staan."⁸⁴ Creation's goodness lies in its distinction from God. God is eternal and transcendent; the creation is contingent, finite and dependent.

Een godsdienst, die ons verwijst naar een louter immanenten, met de wereld identischen God, kan hoogstens voor een tijd ons aesthetisch aandoen en verwarmen, maar niet waarlijk religieus en ethisch ons bevredigen. Hij heft ons immers niet boven de werkelijkheid op en voert geen kracht ons toe, die sterker dan de wereld is; hij schenkt ons geen vrede en doet ons niet rusten aan het Vaderhart Gods.⁸⁵

Inherent in the goodness of the world is the reality that its

⁸³ *WO*, p. 269. "Man is indeed as Scripture describes him, and the world appears as Scripture shows it to us." (*PR*, p. 311, alt.)

⁸⁴ *GD II*, pp. 370f. "The execution of God's counsel begins with the creation. Right relationship with God is possible only on this foundation. It places us in that relationship with God in which we are meant to stand."

⁸⁵ *WO*, p. 14. "A religion which points to a purely immanent God, identical with the world, may for a while aesthetically satisfy and warm man; it can never satisfy man's religious and ethical needs. It fails to raise us up above the actual, and supplies no power stronger than the world; it brings no peace, and offers no rest in the Father-heart of God." (*PR*, pp. 16f., alt.)

goodness is incomplete. "De natuur, de kosmos, bevindt zich in eene voortdurende teleologische ontwikkeling, zij wordt in opeenvolgende perioden eene goddelijke bestemming te gemoet gevoerd."⁸⁶ For Bavinck, this teleological development is closely aligned with the distinction between invisible and visible realities. When God's work of reconciliation is complete and the world reaches its divine destination, the invisible will have become visible.

But reconciliation has another side as well, which points to the ambiguity of the term 'world' for Bavinck. While on the one hand religion asserts the transcendence of God as distinct from his good creation, on the other hand, "de godsdienst is, in zijn geheel genomen, eene reusachtige poging, om den mensch, door de Godheid gesteund, te handhaven in zijne bange worsteling met de ruwe, woeste natuur."⁸⁷ Nature is a fallen reality which afflicts humanity with illness, death, and the struggle to survive. Nature also tempts humanity to seek its security and well-being through creaturely means rather than through God alone. Thus, the creation must always contain an ambiguous character for humanity awaiting the full restoration of all things.

⁸⁶ *GD* I, p. 342. "Nature, the cosmos, finds itself in a continuous, teleological development; through successive periods it is brought towards a divine destination."

⁸⁷ *ZG*, p. 30. "Religion, taken as a whole is one gigantic attempt to uphold man, with the help of the Deity, in the fearsome struggle against harsh, unrelenting nature." (*CF*, p. 32, alt.)

Finally, humanity is one of the three irreducible, fundamental realities for Bavinck. This claim requires some explanation; while the Reformed tradition maintains the centrality of the Creator/creature distinction, debate exists concerning whether humanity is a unique creature in the context of that distinction or sufficiently unique to be considered a third component in one's framework.⁸⁸ While Bavinck does recognize that the humanity/world distinction is a subdivision within the Creator/creature distinction, he finds the former distinction of sufficient weight to employ a three part framework in his theology.

The basis for this triadic framework is rooted in a hierarchical understanding: humanity is 'above' the world and 'below' God. While the world seeks to 'pull humanity down,' God seeks to 'raise humanity up,' as it were. Bavinck asserts this point immediately in the opening sentences of his summary of dogmatics:

Des menschen hoogste goed, is God, en God alleen. Deze wordt bij den aanvang geschapen naar Gods beeld en gelijkenis en kan zijn Goddelijken oorsprong en zijne Goddelijke verwantschap nimmer uitwisschen en te niet doen. In al het denken en arbeiden, in het geheele leven en streven van den mensch komt het uit, dat hij aan de aarde, dat hij aan de gansche wereld niet genoeg heeft. Hij is burger van een zinlijke orde van zaken, maar uit deze heft hij zich ook tot eene bovenzinlijke

⁸⁸ For example, the philosophic tradition of neo-Calvinism best exemplified by the work of Herman Dooyeweerd emphasizes the centrality of the Creature/creature distinction, with law functioning as the boundary between the two, and humanity a creature under law, like all others. My claim that humanity constitutes a third component in Bavinck's framework will be explored here in an introductory manner and discussed in greater detail in chapter six.

orde op. Met de voeten op de aarde geplant, heft hij het hoofd omhoog en richt den blik hemelwaarts. Hij draagt kennis van dingen, die zienlijk en tijdelijk, maar heeft ook besef van dingen, die onzienlijke en eeuwig zijn. Zijn begeeren gaat naar aardsche, zinlijke, vergankelijke, maar gaat ook naar hemelsche, geestelijke, onvergankelijke goederen uit.⁸⁹

Reality is constituted of an invisible and a visible sphere, and humanity is the only one of God's creatures who consciously lives in both spheres. "Bij dieren is er van godsdienst geen sprake, omdat de Godsidee onmisbaar in den godsdienst is en deze hun ten eenenmale evenals alle abstracte begrippen ontbreekt. De mensch, ook in zijne verste afdwalingen, blijft aan den hemel gebonden; in het diepst van zijne ziel ligt hij aan eene wereld van onzienlijke, bovennatuurlijke dingen vast; in zijn hart is hij een supranatureel wezen; zijn rede en geweten, zijn denken en willen, zijne behoeften en genegenheden zijn in het eeuwige gegrond."⁹⁰

⁸⁹ MD, pp. 9f. "God, and God alone, is man's highest good. In the beginning he was created after God's image and likeness, and this Divine origin and Divine kinship he can never erase or destroy. In all his thinking and in all his work, in all his life and aspirations, it becomes apparent that he is a creature who cannot be satisfied with what the entire world has to offer. He is indeed a citizen of a physical order of affairs, but he also rises above this order to a supernatural one. With his feet planted firmly on the ground, he lifts up his head and casts his eye heavenward. He has knowledge of things that are visible and temporal, but he is also aware of things that are invisible and eternal. His desire goes out to the earthly, sensuous and transient, but it goes out also to heavenly, spiritual and everlasting goods." (RF, pp. 17f., alt.)

⁹⁰ WO, p. 120. "We cannot speak of religion in animals; the idea of God is indispensable to religion, and animals entirely lack this idea, as they lack all abstract conceptions. However far man may wander from God, he remains bound to heaven; in the depths of his soul he is linked to a world of unseen and supernatural things; in his heart he is a supernatural being; his reason and conscience, his thinking and willing, his needs and affections have their ground in that which is eternal." (PR, p. 142)

Because humanity stands in this special relation to God as the creature of the two spheres, the God/humanity relation is the most emphasized of the three relations within the triad (although this emphasis does not diminish the others, because the God/humanity relation is completely interwoven with the other two).⁹¹ Because of the priority of the God/humanity relation,

de groote vraag in den godsdienst is altijd: wat moet ik doen, om zalig te worden? Alle religieuze voorstellingen, die den inhoud der dogmatiek uitmaken, bewegen zich om drie centra; ze bevatten eene leer omtrent God; eene leer omtrent den mensch in zijne betrekking tot God, en wel in tweeerlei zin, zooals die betrekking feitelijk is en zooals zij behoort te zijn, in empirischen en in idealen zin; en eene leer omtrent de middelen tot herstel en tot onderhouding der gemeenschap met God; dus saamgenomen eene theologie, eene anthropologie en eene soteriologie. En wederom valt het licht, bij al deze drie betandeelen aan te toonen, dat zij onverbrekkelijk met het begrip der openbaring samenhangen.⁹²

⁹¹ "Niet alleen de mensch, maar ook de natuur is van Goddelijken oorsprong en, voor haar ontstaan, door God gedacht. De leer van de schepping handhaaft de Goddelijkheid, de goedheid, de heiligheid van al het geschapene. In die wereld ontvangt de mensch dan voorts eene eigene en eene zelfstandige plaats. Hij is aan de gansche wereld verwant, gevormd uit het stof, aardsch uit de aarde; niets natuurlijks is hem vreemd. Maar in een opzicht is hij van alle schepselen onderscheiden; hij is zoon, beeld, gelijkenis Gods, zijn geslacht. Daardoor is hij boven dier en engel verheven en tot heerschappij over de gansche wereld bestemd en geschikt." (WO, p. 91)

"Not only man but also nature is of divine origin, and was in the thought of God before it came into being. The doctrine of creation maintains the divinity, the goodness and sacredness of all created things. In this world man now receives his own independent place. He is of kin to all the world, formed out of matter, earthy of the earth; nothing natural is strange to him. But in one respect he is different from all creatures; he is son, image, similitude of God, his offspring. That is why he is elevated above animal and angel, and destined and fitted for dominion over all the world." (PR, pp. 107f., alt.)

⁹² GD I, p. 258. "The fundamental question in religion is always, what must I do to be saved? All the religious concepts which constitute the content of dogmatics move around three

Even though the God/humanity relation takes place in the context of the God/world relation, the former has priority in the same way that special revelation takes priority over general revelation even though the former is received in the context of the latter.

Bavinck sums up the three relations within his triadic framework as follows: "religie sluit altijd het geloof in aan eene Goddelijke macht, die van de wereld onderscheiden, boven haar verheven is en ze beheerschen en leiden kan overeenkomstig haar eigen wil. En ten andere stelt zij den mensch zelf, persoonlijk, met die Goddelijke macht in verbinding, zoodat hij in de zake Gods zijn eigen zaak ziet en, met God als bondgenoot, de macht der gansche wereld tot in den dood trotseeren kan."⁹³ By rejecting the attempt to find salvation through creaturely means, humanity turns away from the world and towards God, who elevates humanity above the world. From that redeemed posture humanity returns to the world to enjoy it as a relative good.

centers: they contain a doctrine concerning God, a doctrine concerning humanity in its relation to God (in a dual sense: as the relation actually is and as it should be, in both an empirical and an ideal sense); and a doctrine concerning the means of restoring and maintaining fellowship with God; thus taken together, a theology, an anthropology and a soteriology. And once again it is easy to prove that these three components inseparably hang together with the concept of revelation."

⁹³ *WO*, p. 265. "Religion always includes faith in a divine power, which is distinct from the world, far above it, and which can govern and guide it according to its own will; and, secondly, it puts man himself personally into connection with the divine power, so that he sees in the cause of God his own cause, and allied with God can defy the power of the whole world, even unto death." (*PR*, p. 306, alt.)

Scripture proceeds on the principle that for man God is the supreme good. Whatever material or ideal possessions the world may offer, all these taken together cannot outweigh or even be compared with this greatest of all treasures, communion with God; and hence, in case of conflict with this, they are to be unconditionally sacrificed. The recognition of this as a principle appears most clearly in its teaching that all things, the entire world with all its treasures, including matter and the body, marriage and labor, are created and ordained of God; and that Christ, although, when he assumed a true and perfect human nature, he renounced all these things in obedience to God's command, yet through his resurrection took them all back as henceforth purified of sin and consecrated through the Spirit.⁹⁴

While warning against a triumphalism of 'returning to the world' before being properly reconciled with God,⁹⁵ Bavinck stresses the positive character of the humanity/world relationship when it is rooted in reconciliation. "Het koninkrijk Gods is wel aan eene parel gelijk, tegen welke waarde de gansche wereld niet opweegt, maar het is ook gelijk aan een zuurdeesem, die het gansche deeg doorzuurt. Het geloof is de weg der zaligheid niet slechts, het is ook de overwinning der wereld.⁹⁶ Met God verzoend, is de Christen het ook met alle dingen."⁹⁷

⁹⁴ "Calvin on Common Grace" in *Calvin and the Reformation*, ed. William Park Armstrong (Princeton: Princeton Theological Review Association, 1909), pp. 100f.

⁹⁵ Cf. ZG, p. 76.

⁹⁶ Interestingly, the Biblical text of Bavinck's first student sermon, preached on July 21, 1878, was I John 5:4b: "This is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith." He preached on this text frequently, and his only published sermon, preached on June 20, 1901, (*De Wereldverwinnende Kracht des Geloofs* [Kampen: Kok, 1901]) was based on this text. This brief text summarizes the triad for Bavinck: through faith in God, humanity overcomes the world.

⁹⁷ ZG, p. 78. "The Kingdom of God is like a pearl more precious than the whole world, but it is also a leaven that leavens the entire dough. Faith isn't only the way of salvation, it is

This description of Bavinck's triadic framework of relations between God, the world and humanity is based upon three fundamental characteristics: (1) God and his creatures are radically distinct; (2) God seeks intimate relation with his creatures, and this is especially apparent in the God/humanity relation; (3) this reconciliation is eschatological. In this dispensation 'world' remains an ambiguous good, but in the eschaton this reconciliation will be total and complete, obliterating such ambiguity. Bavinck's triadic framework assumes two concepts which also serve to clarify how he construes the relation between God and his creatures: duality and the organic. In particular, these concepts highlight the fact that his understanding of redemption is fundamentally eschatological.

The notion of duality

Bavinck's use of the notion of duality is consistent with his theological method, which is one of seeking for the balanced middle ground while avoiding extremes. This manner is apparent in his clear rejection of monism and dualism in favour of duality. He rejects monisms because their framework, which denies a Creator/creature distinction, leaves no room for a transcendent, personal God. He perceives the dualisms posited by the Roman Catholic tradition and by Kant and the neo-Kantians as gospel-ennervating, and yet he also recognizes that these dualisms constitute attempts to respond to a duality evident in reality.

also the victory over the world. Reconciled with God, the Christian is also reconciled with all things." (CF, p. 96, alt.)

Bavinck's effort to counter monism and dualism and yet render a just account of reality took the route of duality, a concept which seeks to respect the dual character of reality without positing a dualism within the creation. This concept is complemented by a second, the organic, which serves to describe the unity that underlies the dualities he perceives in reality.

Monisms, whether they be a pantheistic immanentizing of the divine or a materialistic denial of the divine, cannot offer a just account of the reality of God.

Het materialisme neemt alleen kwalitatief gelijke atomen aan, die overal en altijd naar dezelfde mechanische wetten werken en door verbinding en scheiding alle dingen en verschijnselen doen worden en vergaan. Het pantheïsme erkent niets dan eene enkele substantie, die in alle schepselen dezelfde is en overal naar dezelfde logische wetten zich wijzigt en vervormt. De wereldbeschouwing der Schrift en van heel de Christelijke theologie is eene gansch andere. Zij is niet monisme maar theïsme.⁹⁸

The problem with monistic views such as those of Darwin and Marx is that "bij deze mechanische en ateleologische opvatting van de evolutie bleef er natuurlijk voor het wonder, voor eene supranatureele wereld, voor het bestaan en de werkzaamheid Gods geen plaats over."⁹⁹ A monistic understanding is one which

⁹⁸ *GD I*, pp. 337f. "Materialism accepts only qualitatively equal atoms that always and everywhere work according to the same mechanical laws, and that through joining and separating make all things come into existence and pass away. Pantheism recognizes only one substance which is the same in all creatures and always follows the same logical laws of change and adaptation. The worldview of the Scriptures and of all of Christian theology is totally different. It is not monism but theism."

⁹⁹ *WO*, p. 10. "Naturally, this mechanical and anti-teleological conception of evolution left no room for wonders, for a world of the supernatural, for the existence and activity of

perceives all of reality in terms of one fundamental element, so all that is, is in some way a manifestation of that one element.

A dualistic understanding, on the other hand, perceives two fundamental elements within created reality¹⁰⁰ which are never ultimately reconciled, so that either one ultimately triumphs over the other or both co-exist eternally in opposition. Bavinck perceived the monisms of his day as flowing logically from a Medieval dualism between the natural and supernatural worlds. In his view, there was no adequate formulation of the relation between these two poles or spheres. As a result,

onder den Christelijken vorm verbergde zich een krachtig, natuurlijk leven, dat allermintst aan de wereld en hare begeerlijkheid was gespeend. Het natuurlijke was wel onderdrukt, maar niet vernieuwd en geheiligd. Gelooven en weten, kerk en staat, natuur en genade stonden onverzoend naast elkaar. De natuurlijke mensch wierp het juk van Rome van zich af.¹⁰¹

Bavinck traces this development to the second and third centuries, in which "de kwalitatieve tegenstelling, welke aanvankelijk tussen de wereld en de gemeente bestond, (werd) in een kwantitatieve

God." (PR, p. 12, alt.)

¹⁰⁰ I.e., the distinction between the divine and creaturely realities is not in itself a dualistic distinction.

¹⁰¹ AG, p. 24. "Underneath the form of Christianity there lay hidden a powerful natural life which was certainly no stranger to the world and the lust thereof. The natural had indeed been driven underground, but it was not renewed and sanctified. Faith and reason, church and state, nature and grace stood in unreconciled opposition to one another. And the natural man cast off the yoke of Rome." (CG, p. 49, alt.) Bavinck's perception of the momentum of history resonates with Michael D. Buckley's recent study, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

omgezet."¹⁰² In this view, "de genade hervormt en herschept het bestaande niet, maar vult alleen de schepping aan. De katholiciteit van het Christelijk beginsel, dat alles reinigt en heiligt, is vervangen door het dualisme, dat het bovennatuurlijke altijd gescheiden naast, of liever transcendent boven het natuurlijke plaatst."¹⁰³ The Reformation sought to remedy this dualism, with questionable results.

De Hervorming, hoe universeel ook van opvatting, is nog veel minder in de kerstening van het leven geslaagd. Hoewel theoretisch overwonnen, bleef het dualisme in de praktijk op menig gebied bestaan. Zelfs godgeleerden en godgeleerde wetenschap leefden voor een groot deel uit de antieke wereldbeschouwing. Op die wijze is het geschied dat de katholiciteit van Christendom en kerk na een geschiedenis van achttien eeuwen is uitgelopen in de Roomse kerk op het lichtschuw jesuitisme en in de Protestantse kerken op het wereldschuw pietisme. De tegelijk met de hervorming van de kerk geemancipeerde machten hebben sindsdien aan sterkte en invloed gewonnen en zijn na een korte worsteling in de vorige eeuw tot heerschappij gekomen over bijna heel de Christenheid heen.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² *De Katholiciteit van Christendom en Kerk* (Kampen: Zalsman, 1888), p. 13. "The original qualitative distinction between the church and the world was turned into a quantitative one." ("The Catholicity of Christianity and Church," tr. John Bolt [*Calvin Theological Journal* 27, 1992], p. 229)

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* "Grace does not reform and renew that which exists, it only completes and perfects creation. The catholicity of the Christian principle that purifies and sanctifies everything is exchanged for a dualism that separates the supernatural from the natural by considering it as transcendent above the natural." ("CCC," p. 229)

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 30f. "The Reformation, no matter how universal in its conception, was even less successful in Christianizing life. Although dualism was theoretically overcome it remained a practical reality in many areas of life. Even theologians and theology remained to a large extent rooted in the worldview of antiquity. It has come about that the catholicity of Christianity and church, after a history of eighteen centuries, has ended upon the obscurantist, light-denying jesuitism of Rome and the other worldly pietism of Protestantism. The emancipatory forces that existed alongside the Reformation have since then grown in power and

Thus, Bavinck perceived the need to address this long history of dualism as one of the principal goals of his theology.

The Medieval dualism did not lead only to monisms, but also to Kant's dualism between the noumenal and phenonenal, which constitutes another enemy which Bavinck sought to subdue. He noted that in the Netherlands, which usually lagged somewhat behind developments in Germany, "vele theologen huldigen zoo in de theorie als in de practijk een dualisme, een scheiding en tegenstelling van gelooven en weten, welke wortelt in de wijsbegeerte van Kant."¹⁰⁵

In Bavinck's view, autonomous human thought has an innate tendency to pull towards monism or dualism because reality does have a dual character, but this dual character cannot be understood properly without divine revelation.

De problemen, waarover de menschelijke geest altijd weer te staan komt, zijn deze: wat is de verhouding van denken en zijn, van zijn en worden, van worden en handelen? Wat ben ik, wat is de wereld, en wat is in die wereld mijne plaats en mijn taak? Het autonome denken vindt op die vragen geen bevredigend antwoord; het oscilleert tusschen materialisme en spiritualisme, tusschen atomisme en dynamisme, tusschen nomisme en antinomisme. Maar het Christendom bewaart het evenwicht en openbaart ons eene wijsheid, welke den mensch met God, maar daarin ook met zichzelf, met de wereld en met

influence and have, after a brief struggle, gained the upper hand over virtually all of Christendom." ("CCC," pp. 243f.)

¹⁰⁵ "Het Dualisme in de Theologie" in *KL*, p. 147. "Many theologians, theoretically and practically, adhere to a dualism, a separation and opposition, between belief and knowledge, which has its roots in the philosophy of Kant." Much has been said about this dualism earlier in this chapter, and does not need to be repeated here.

leven verzoent.¹⁰⁶

While Bavinck employs many different terms to describe the polarities which he sees human thought oscillating between, the fundamental distinction which he perceives is that between the invisible and visible realms. This (as has been noted earlier) corresponds with distinctions between the eternal and temporal, the spiritual and the material, essence and form, grace and nature, and, in certain respects, special revelation and general revelation. One can discern each of these pairings functioning in Bavinck's theology with three characteristics: (1) they are derived from the radical distinction between the Creator and the creature, (2) they are intimately related to each other because of the divine work of reconciliation, (3) this work of reconciliation has a teleological character. That is, when this work is complete, the distinction will cease to exist in its present condition. These characteristics demonstrate that the concept of duality is an important one in answering the question, 'how does God relate to his creatures?' for this concept provides a framework for describing these three fundamental characteristics of this relation.

¹⁰⁶ *CW*, p. 14. "The problems which the human spirit always faces are these: what is the relation between thinking and being, between being and becoming, between becoming and doing. Who am I, what is the world, and what is my place and my role in the world? Autonomous thought finds no satisfactory answers to these questions. It oscillates between materialism and spiritualism, atomism and dynamism, nomism and antinomism. But Christianity maintains the balance and reveals to us a wisdom in which the person is reconciled to God, and therein also to himself, the world and life."

The term 'duality' is not Bavinck's. It comes from Bavinck scholar John Bolt, who observes that "in a phrase Bavinck's position is an attempt to hold to a 'duality without dualism.'"¹⁰⁷ The closest Bavinck comes to making such a formulation occurs in his discussion of what he perceives to be the Medieval dualism in *Algemeene Genade*:

Natuur en genade zijn beide van noode; ze kunnen geen van beide worden miskend of veracht. Maar toch maakt het een groot verschil of dit dualisme absoluut of relatief wordt genomen. Bij Rome is het absoluut.¹⁰⁸

By implication Bavinck is referring to his position as one of 'relative dualism.' To make the distinction between absolute and relative dualism more clearly, I propose to follow Bolt's route and refer to his view as a duality. Perceiving duality involves recognizing that reality is composed of elements which are in tension but have been reconciled through divine agency. In a world without the transcendent dualism is inevitable, but "alle dualisme is hier opgeheven in de eenheid der theocratie."¹⁰⁹

Though one can distinguish various dualities in Bavinck's theology, they are very much interrelated. The invisible/visible duality serves as a foundation, an assumption upon which all else

¹⁰⁷ John Bolt, *The Imitation of Christ Theme in the Cultural-Ethical Ideal of Herman Bavinck* (unpublished dissertation, University of St. Michael's College, 1982), p. 123.

¹⁰⁸ AG, p. 37. "Nature and grace are both necessary; neither of them can be denied or despised. And yet it makes a great difference whether one conceives of this dualism as absolute or relative. With Rome it is absolute." ("CG," p. 56)

¹⁰⁹ KCK, p. 4. "All dualism is eschewed in the unity of God's theocratic rule." ("CCC," p. 222)

is predicated. The essence/form distinction is one particular manifestation of this duality, revealing the progressive character of redemption and revelation. This progression impacts upon the invisible/visible duality: as revelation proceeds through the various forms of revelation, the visible comes to portray the invisible more clearly and more fully. The dynamic of reconciliation proceeds from 'the inside out,' i.e., reconciliation begins with invisible realities and eventually manifests itself in the realm of the visible. "Terwijl Jezus de eerste maal gekomen is, om dat koninkrijk in geestelijken zin te stichten, keert Hij aan het einde der dagen weder, om er ook eene zichtbare gestalte aan te geven. De reformatie gaat van binnen naar buiten; de wedergeboorte der menschen voltooit zich in de wedergeboorte der schepping; het Godsrijk is dan eerst ten volle gerealiseerd, als het ook zichtbaar over de aarde uitgebreid is."¹¹⁰ In the eschaton the essence and the form will be one,¹¹¹ and the

¹¹⁰ GD IV, p. 700. "Whereas Jesus came the first time to establish the kingdom in a spiritual sense, he returns at the end of history to give visible shape to it. The reformation goes from inside to outside. The rebirth of humans is completed in the rebirth of the creation. The Kingdom of God is fully realized only when it is visibly extended over the entire earth as well." (LT, p. 158)

¹¹¹ "Want de thans bestaande hemel en aarde gaan wel in hunne tegenwoordige gedaante voorbij, I Cor. 7: 31, en worden wel, evenals de oude aarde door het water van den zondvloed verging, door vuur verbrand en gereinigd, 2 Petr. 3: 6,7,10. Doch gelijk de mensch wel door Christus herschapen, maar niet vernietigd en daarna nieuw geschapen werdt, 2 Cor. 5: 17, zoo blijft ook de wereld in haar wezen bewaard, al ondergaat zij in hare gedaante eene zoo groote verandering, dat zij een nieuwe hemel en eene nieuwe aarde genoemd worden kan." (MD, pp. 568f.)

"It is true that the present heaven and earth will in their present form pass away (I Cor. 7: 31) and that these, like the ancient

invisible will be visible to the extent that we will no longer walk by faith but by sight.

Revelation is necessary because of the 'priority' of the invisible world. General and special revelation share the same essence, that God so loved the world, and they are received in a variety of forms. In the eschaton the character of revelation will change. Its primary purpose will no longer be to bridge the gap between the invisible and visible worlds. Rather, general and special revelation, which parted ways with the calling of Israel and came together again, to a certain extent, at the cross,¹¹² will finally be completely reconciled as "de Heere een nieuw verbond met zijn volk zal oprichten, Hij hun een nieuw hart zal schenken en daarin zijne wet zal schrijven, en Hij op allen zijnen Geest zal uitstorten, zoodat zij Hem liefhebben met hun gansche hart en in zijne wegen wandelen."¹¹³

earth which was destroyed by the flood, will be burned and purged by fire (II Peter 3: 6,7 and 10). But just as man himself is recreated by Christ indeed, but is not annihilated and thereupon created again (II Cor. 5: 17), so too the world in its essence will be preserved, even though in its form it undergoes so great a change that it will be called a new heaven and a new earth." (RF, p. 566)

¹¹² ""Uit al die volken wordt Israel verkoren, om drager der Godsopenbaring te zijn. Algemeene en bijzondere openbaring, tot dusver saam verbonden, scheiden zich en gaan uiteen voor een tijd, om elkander te hervinden aan den voet van het Kruis." (MD, p. 42. "Out of all these nations [after Babel], Israel is chosen to be the bearer of the revelation of God. General and special revelation, interrelated until now, are separated for a while to find each other again at the foot of the Cross." [RF, p. 52])

¹¹³ GD IV, pp. 639f. "The Lord will make a new covenant with his people. He will give them a new heart and write his law on it. He will pour out his Spirit on all so that they will love him with their whole heart and walk in his ways." (LT, p. 94)

The organic

'The organic' is a second concept that serves to describe how Bavinck answers the question, 'how does God relate to his creatures?' The concepts of duality and the organic are mutually interdependent: the organic serves to prevent Bavinck's dualities from lapsing into dualisms, and duality prevents his use of the organic from lapsing into monistic pantheism.

Bavinck does not provide a definition of the organic, but does provide ample description. The organic describes a particular character of the relationship between two (or more) distinct parties which represents the intimate but hidden connection between these parties. The organic assumes the distinctiveness of the related parties and describes their connectedness. The concept of the organic is a very fluid one for Bavinck; he employs it in very diverse contexts. Thus, this description of the concept must begin somewhat abstractly, but will gradually be fleshed out with concrete particulars. The organic includes the following characteristics: (1) it describes relations which exhibit unity in diversity; (2) it describes relations which have been broken by sin but reconciled through the cross of Jesus Christ; (3) these relations are to some measure hidden and mysterious, but they will be more clear in the future. To a certain extent the hiddenness is caused by sin, but it is also due to the duality between the invisible and the visible which requires that we walk by faith and not by sight, a duality which is overcome in the eschaton. Thus,

the organic is an inherently eschatological concept; (4) the organic describes how one reality can serve as the organ of another reality while retaining its own inherent value. Bavinck sees the organic functioning in four different types of relationships. It functions between: (1) the various members of one class of creature; (2) divine and creaturely realities; (3) realities which represent the opposing poles of one of the dualities; (4) manifestations of one reality in different periods of time. I will give examples of each of these four, showing how the characteristics described above are manifested in each.¹¹⁴

First, Bavinck perceives organic relationships between the various members of one class of creature in such a way that each member is respected as unique while also part of a larger whole. He perceives this operating in humanity, in the church, in the cosmos, in the Scriptures, in theology and in the sciences. "De menschheid is niet een aggregaat van individuen, maar een organisch geheel, waarin allen leven van elkaar."¹¹⁵ There is a different type or organic relation among those members of humanity who form the church. They constitute "het lichaam en de bruid van Christus. De verkiezing stelt zich de schepping van een organisme ten doel, dat is, de verlossing, vernieuwing en verheerlijking eener

¹¹⁴ Not every organic relationship manifests each of these four characteristics.

¹¹⁵ *GD* I, p. 351. "Humanity is not an aggregate of individuals, but an organic whole in which all live together interdependently."

herborene menschheid, die de deugden Gods verkondigt en zijn naam op haar voorhoofd draagt."¹¹⁶ The organic describes not only human creatures, but the entire cosmos. Bavinck speaks of his "organische wereldbeschouwing" in which "de schepselen bestaan niet na elkaar in een rechte lijn van ontwikkeling, maar zij bestaan naast elkaar, zetten naast elkaar hun leven voort en staan met elkander voortdurend in een levend, organisch, ingewikkeld, veelzijdig verband."¹¹⁷

One might say that all organic relationships are subsets of the great organism of the cosmos.

Het gansche heelal is naar een vast plan geschapen en ingericht. Het is geen aggregaat van stoffen en krachten, die toevallig bijeengevoegd zijn. Dan zou het geen heelal, geen eenheid kunnen vormen. Maar alle dingen zijn op elkander aangelegd, staan met elkander in een onverbreekbaar verband, vormen saam een systeem, een organisme. Het Mozaïsch scheppings-verhaal geeft ons in het systematische, in het planmatige, in het teleologische der schepping een heerlijk inzicht; en Paulus leert ons datzelfde, als hij aan de Corinthische gemeente schrijft: alles is uwe, doch gij zijt van Christus en Christus is Gods (I Cor. 3: 22,23).¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ *MD*, p. 493. They constitute "the body and bride of Christ. The purpose of the election is the creation of an organism, that is, the redemption, renewal, and glorification of a regenerated mankind which proclaims the excellences of God and bears his name upon its forehead." (*RF*, p. 515)

¹¹⁷ *WO*, p. 92. Bavinck speaks of his "organic view of the world" in which "creatures do not exist in succession to one another, in a straight line of development, but side by side; they thus live out their lives and are continually in contact with each other in a living, organic, intricate and many-sided way." (*PR*, p. 109, alt.)

¹¹⁸ "Het Voor en Tegen van een Dogmatisch Systeem" in *KL*, pp. 57f. "The whole cosmos is shaped and arranged according to a definite plan. It is not an aggregate of materials and powers that have come together by accident. Then it could not have formed a

We can see all reality as an organism or a system because "Hij, de Drieenige, toont ons in zich zelve het gansch volkomen systeem: oorsprong, type, model en beeld aller andere systemen."¹¹⁹ Thus, Bavinck goes back one step further, seeing the Trinity itself as an organism.

From this foundation in the doctrine of God Bavinck sees three different 'subsets' that apply to revelation and epistemology. First, the Scriptures as a whole are an organism; there is an essential unity amid all of its diversity.

Niet atomistisch mag de Schrift beschouwd worden, alsof elk woord en elke letter los op zich zelve en geïsoleerd, als zoodanig, door God zou zijn ingegeven, met een eigen bedoeling, met een eigen en dus goddelijken, oneindigen inhoud. Maar organisch moet de inspiratie worden opgevat, zoodat ook het geringste zijne plaats en beteekenis heeft en tegelijk toch op veel verder afstand ligt van het centrum dan andere deelen. Het is een Geest, waaruit heel de Schrift door het bewustzijn der schrijvers heen is voortgekomen. Maar wel is er verschil in de wijze, waarop hetzelfde leven in de verschillende deelen des lichaams immanent en werkzaam is. Er is verscheidenheid van gaven, ook in de Schrift, maar het is dezelfde Geest.¹²⁰

unity or a whole. But all things are geared to each other, and exist with each other in an unbreakable relation. They form together a system or an organism. The Mosaic creation account gives us a wonderful insight into the system, the plan and the teleology of the creation. Paul teaches us the same truth when he writes to the church at Corinth, "all things are yours, and you are of Christ and Christ is of God." (I Cor. 3: 22,23)

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 59. "He, the triune God, shows us in himself the completely perfect system: the origin, type, model and image of all other systems."

¹²⁰ *GD I*, pp. 409f. "The Scriptures may not be considered atomistically as if God would have inspired every word and every letter in isolation from each other, each with its own meaning, with its own divine content. Inspiration must be conceived organically, so that also the smallest part finds its place and

This organic unity amid diversity also manifests itself in all scholarly activity in general and in theology in particular. "De wetenschap nu is eigenlijk een, gelijk de schepping een is, en zoekt naar het principe en het systeem, dat alle dingen verbindt en staande houdt."¹²¹ In theology it is important that "de dogma's niet los naast elkander staan, maar in elkaar vervat moeten wezen; dat zij samen een onverbrekkelijk geheel, eene organische eenheid, een waar en volkomen systeem vormen."¹²²

In the first use of the concept of the organic its most important characteristic is that of unity in diversity. Each member of the whole is to be respected as unique and irreducible to the whole, but the uniqueness of each is also determined by its relation to the whole. Because this unity is found in God alone, every creature is freed from bondage to any other creature. In this "organische wereldbeschouwing," writes Bavinck, "de verscheidenheid der wereld is een feit, dat met hare harmonie

meaning, even if it is much further removed from the center than other parts. There is one Spirit through which the entire Scriptures have come through the minds of the writers. Certainly there is variety in the way in which the same life is immanent and active in the various parts of the body. There is a diversity of gifts, also in the scripture, but it is the same Spirit."

¹²¹ "Het Voor en Tegen van een Dogmatische Systeem" in *KL*, p. 60. "Scholarship is basically one, just as the creation is one, and it seeks what is essential, the system that holds all things together."

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 61. In theology it is important that "the dogmas do not stand loosely next to each other, but that they are seen in relation to each other; that together they form an unbreakable whole, an organic unity, a true and perfect system."

alleen transcendent in een persoonlijk God zijne verklaring vindt."¹²³ The source of the unity is outside of the creature, which allows the creature the freedom to be different from other similar creatures and yet intimately related at the same time.

The creaturely realities which exist in this type of organic relation experience disruption caused by sin. Among both humanity and the church we witness a great deal of strife and enmity in place of the unity intended by God. Human attempts to understand the Scriptures and to articulate theology too easily fail to respect the organic unity in diversity required by these tasks, and therefore impose alien understandings in these areas. Even so, the reconciling work of Christ declares that there is a fundamental organic unity which is present now in a hidden manner and will someday be fully manifest and apparent.

The third characteristic of the organic, its hidden, eschatological character, is closely related to the second. Humanity's restless search to explain reality dualistically or monistically reveals that the organic character of reality eludes its grasp. Both humanity and the church manifest so much division that their respective organic unity does not receive much respect. The challenge of respecting the organic unity of the Scriptures is

¹²³ WO, p. 92. In this "organic view of the world, the diversity of the world is a fact which, taken in connection with its harmony, can find its explanation only transcendently in a personal God." (PR, p. 109)

often not met, a failure epitomized by atomistic readings encouraged by inappropriate uses of higher criticism. These failings do not belie the reality of organic unity, but rather highlight the hidden character of the organic, a hiddenness which must remain so until the ambiguities which occasion it are overcome in the eschaton.¹²⁴

While six significant examples of this type of organic relation are briefly introduced here, there are literally hundreds of other examples because each major area contains so many subsets. The branches of each type of science form an organic whole, the members of each individual congregation form an organic whole, the members of each family, and on and on. The concept of the organic represents Bavinck's attempt to find the balanced, middle route between atomistic materialism which speaks only of diversity and a pantheism which only knows unity.

Second, Bavinck uses the organic to describe the relation between divine and creaturely realities. First, the inspiration of the Scriptures exemplifies this co-ordination of divine and creaturely agency. The Spirit inspired certain persons to write the Scriptures, but the Spirit did not override the unique character of these persons. "Het is de Schrift zelve, welke ons

¹²⁴ Bavinck's fourth characteristic, that one reality serves as an organ of another while retaining its own inherent value, does not apply to this relation because this is the only one of his four types of organic relations which involves like realities.

gebiedt, de inspiratie, evenals ook de profetie, niet mechanisch maar organisch te denken. God behandelt de mensen niet als stokken en blokken maar als verstandelijke and zedelijke wezens."¹²⁵ Bavinck also conceives of the mystery of the two natures of Jesus Christ in an organic manner. Rejecting a dualistic construal of the ideal Christ and the historical Jesus, he asserts that "tegenover deze dualistische en atomistische beschouwing plaatst nu de Schrift de organische. Daar is een Middelaar Gods en der mensen, de mensch Christus Jezus. Doch daarom komt het evengoed als op zijne Godheid, zoo op zijne waarachtige en volkomene menschelijke natuur aan."¹²⁶

Third, Bavinck perceives an organic relationship between Christ and the church, his body and bride.

Christus is immers het hoofd en de geloovigen zijn zijn lichaam, dat uit Hem zijn wasdom bekomt. Hij is de hoeksteen en zij zijn het gebouw. Hij is de eerstgeborene en zij zijn zijne broederen. De gemeente is geen toevallig willekeurig aggregaat van individuen, maar zij vormt met Christus een

¹²⁵ *GD I*, p. 402. "The Scriptures themselves direct us to think of inspiration, as well as prophecy, organically and not mechanically. God does not treat people as sticks and blocks but as reasoning and ethical beings."

¹²⁶ *GD III*, p. 281. "The Scripture places an organic view over against such a dualistic and atomistic one. There is one Mediator between God and humanity, the man Jesus Christ. That is why his true and perfect human nature is just as essential as his divinity." Bavinck perceives an analogy between the Word which became flesh and the Word inscripturated (cf. *GD I*, p. 405), which serves to highlight how this organic concept functions in each of these two ways.

organisch geheel.¹²⁷

This relationship is similar to a fourth (and wider) one: that between the Kingdom of Heaven and this earth.

Het Rijk Gods als het hoogste goed is de eenheid, het inbegrip, de totaliteit aller zedelijke goederen, van aardsche en hemelsche, geestlijke en lichamelijke, eeuwige en tijdelijke goederen. Het goede is tevens het schoone, het volkomen harmonie. Hier op aarde echter zijn al die goederen nog niet een; heiligheid en zaligheid, deugd en geluk, geestlijke en lichamelijk goed vallen hier nog neit samen. Veeleer is de gerechtigheid van het Rijk Gods hier op aarde met het kruis verbonden, em moeten wij door vele verdrukkingen ingaan in het Koninkrijk der Hemelen. Maar op zichzelf staat het Rijk Gods niet vijandig tegen al die goederen over, maar is van al dat uiterlijke onafhankelijk, staat er boven, maakt ze tot zijn orgaan and geeft ze daarin aan hunne oorspronkelijke bestemming terug.¹²⁸

While the first type of organic relation primarily expressed the importance of unity in diversity, this second type brings all four characteristics of the organic more clearly into play. (1) Unity and diversity indicates that both parties in the organic relation are respected as uniquely distinct but intimately related: the

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 462f. "For Christ is the head and believers are his body that grows out of him. He is the cornerstone and they are the building. He is the first-born and they are his brothers. The church is not an accidental, arbitrary aggregate of individuals, but she forms an organic whole with Christ."

¹²⁸ "Het Rijk Gods, Het Hoogste Goed" in *KL*, pp. 34f. "The Kingdom of God as the highest good is the unity, the inclusion, the totality of all ethical goods from earth and heaven, spiritual and bodily, eternal and temporal goods. The good is at the same time the beautiful, perfect harmony. Here on earth all the goods are not yet one. Holiness and salvation, virtue and happiness, spiritual and bodily good do not coincide here. Rather, the righteousness of the Kingdom of God is closely connected here on earth with the cross, and we enter the Kingdom of Heaven through much tribulation. But the Kingdom of God as such is not hostile towards those goods; it is, however, independent of them, rises above them, uses them as its instruments and in this way gives them back to their original destination."

authors of Scripture remained unique human beings while they penned the Word of God, Christ is both fully human and fully divine, the church is the body of Christ but is not mystically absorbed into Him, the Kingdom of Heaven is in the world like yeast is in a loaf.

(2) The relations between Christ and the church and the Kingdom of Heaven and this earth both suffer the impact of sin, yet, through the cross, have overcome the effects of sin.¹²⁹ (3) The organic relation between the divine and creaturely realities has a mysterious character; it is partially hidden, and this obscurity will not be cleared up until the eschaton. One cannot provide a clear, black and white description concerning the exact manner of any of these organic relations, yet one knows that in each relation the two parties are distinct and related. (4) Furthermore, the creaturely reality becomes an organ of the divine, but this does not empty the creature of itself so that the divine overrides it, but rather, it is as an organ of the divine that the creaturely most fully becomes itself, and is treated with respect in its own right.

Third, Bavinck describes organic relationships between the polarities of the dualities he employs. This relation is analogous to the previous one because it is the reality of a transcendent, personal God 'behind' the duality that gives it its character. The

¹²⁹ The organic inspiration of Scripture and the organic unity of the two natures of Christ are not affected by this characteristic.

pattern operative here is that the visible becomes the organ of the invisible and the form becomes the organ of the essence. Bavinck describes this pattern by comparing a 'type 2' organic relationship with a 'type 3' one:

Gelijk nu des menschen persoonlijkheid, geestlijk, onzichtbaar en eeuwig in haar wezen, toch het stoffelijk lichaam noodig heeft als orgaan van haar werking en openbaring naar buiten, zoo ook is het Rijk Gods als het hoogste goed voor den mensch, wel een rijk, dat in zijn wezen boven al het tijdelijke en aardsche uitgaat, maar daarom niet vijandig er tegenover staat, veeleer het noodig heeft als zijn orgaan, en zich de wereld bereidt tot een instrument.¹³⁰

Bavinck sees organic relationships between all the realities that were included on the long list of invisible/visible correlates given earlier in this chapter.¹³¹ Similarly, there is an organic

¹³⁰ "Het Rijk Gods, Het Hoogste Goed" in *KL*, pp. 33f. "Just like man's personality is spiritual, invisible and eternal in its essence, yet needs a material body as an organ to function and reveal itself outwardly, so also is the Kingdom of God as the highest good for man a reign that in its essence exceeds the temporal and earthly, but is not hostile towards it. Rather, it needs it as its organ, and prepares the world to be an instrument."

¹³¹ For example, "Godsdienst en zedelijkheid staan beide krachtens hunne innerlijke natuur organisch met elkaar in verband." (*WO*, p. 223. "Religion and morality are in alliance with each other organically, by reason of their inner nature." [*PR*, p. 260]) and, in a discussion of the priority of the kingdom: "Maar ten onrechte wordt uit deze prediking afgeleid, dat het Evangelie aan de cultuur zelve vijandig zou zijn. Want al bepaalt dit Evangelie zich tot de verkondiging van de eischen en wetten des koninkrijks, men mag niet losmaken uit het organisch verband, waarin het in de geschiedenis en in de Schrift voorkomt." (*Ibid.*, p. 229. "But it is wrong to educe from this proclamation that the gospel must be at enmity with culture. For although this gospel limits itself to the proclaiming of the requirements and laws of the kingdom, we cannot set it free from the organic alliance in which it always appears in history and Scripture." [*PR*, pp. 266f., alt.]) After providing a long list of polarities which are related to the invisible/visible duality, Bavinck concludes that "ze zijn wel onderscheiden maar ze zijn niet gescheiden. Er bestaan tusschen hen allerlei betrekkingen; een organische, of indien men wil, een ethische band houdt hen alle saam." (*GD II*, p. 400. "They are to be

relation between general and special revelation.

Wanneer deze onderscheiding als eene scheiding opgebat werd, wat licht geschieden kon, kwam de bijzondere openbaring geheel op zich zelve te staan, zonder verband met natuur en geschiedenis. Haar historisch en organisch karakter werd dan miskend.¹³²

It is the organic which describes the relationship within each of his dualities that allows each to function as a duality and not a dualism.

Bavinck highlights the hidden character of the organic by time and again distinguishing organic relations from mechanical ones. He perceives the latter as simple, black and white one-to-one correspondences devoid of mystery. Organic relations are more complex; there is a definite bond of unity between two realities, but this bond cannot be neatly defined, categorized or systematized. Just as "de kennis, welke God ons in natuur en Schrift van zichzelf verschaft, is beperkt, eindig, stukwerk, maar ze is toch zuiver en waar,"¹³³ so descriptions of organic relationships will always be partial and provisional, but at the

distinguished but not divorced from each other. There are different relationships between them; an organic, or rather, an ethical bond holds each of them together.")

¹³² *GD I*, p. 327. "Whenever this distinction was construed as a separation, which could easily happen, special revelation came to stand completely by itself, without any relation to nature or history. Then its historical and organic character were denied."

¹³³ *MD*, p. 119. "The knowledge which God grants us of himself in nature and in Scripture is limited, finite and fragmentary, but it is nevertheless true and pure." (*RF*, p. 134)

same time solid and sure. Bavinck expresses this most clearly in a discussion of the relation between the universal and the particular church.

Vroegere theologen maakten onderscheid tussen fundamentele en niet-fundamentele artikelen des geloofs. Dat onderscheid werd dikwijls zeer mechanisch opgevat. De beide reeksen van artikelen werden los naast elkaar gesteld. Ook werd het onderscheid geheel confessioneel bepaald; er was juist zoveel fundamenteel, als in elks belijdenis uitgesproken was. Maar organisch toegepast, heeft deze onderscheiding toch recht. Gelijk de ene algemene Christelijke waarheid in de verschillende belijdenissen des geloofs, een meer of minder zuivere uitdrukking. Er is geen algemeen Christendom *boven*, maar toch wel in de geloofsverdeeldheid aanwezig. Evenmin als een enkele kerk, hoe zuiver ook, met de algemene kerk samenvalt, mag een belijdenis, hoe ook naar Gods Woord gezuiverd, met de Christelijke waarheid zich vereenzelvigen. Elke secte, die eigen kring voor de enige kerk van Christus houdt en uitsluitend in het bezit der waarheid zich acht, kwinjt en sterft weg, als een tak, die van zijn stam is gescheurd. De ene heilige algemene Christelijke kerk, nu voorwerp van het geloof, komt eerst als het lichaam van Christus zijn volle wasdom zal hebben bereikt. En ook dan eerst zal de gemeente komen tot de enigheid des geloofs en der kennis van de Zoon Gods, en zal zij kennen gelijk zij gekend is.¹³⁴

¹³⁴ KCK, pp. 39f. "Theologians in a previous era distinguished between fundamental and nonfundamental articles of faith. That distinction was often understood in very mechanical ways with two sets of articles loosely placed next to each other. This distinction was also a strictly confessional designation: Fundamental was defined in terms of the contents of one's own confession. However, understood in an organic way, the distinction does have validity. In the same way that the one universal Christian church comes to more or less purity of expression in individual churches, in the same way the one universal Christian truth comes to more or less pure expression in the various confessions of faith. There is no universal Christianity present above the confessional divisions but only in them. No one church, no matter how pure, is identical with the universal church. In the same way, no confession, no matter how refined by the Word of God, is identical with the whole of Christian truth. Each sect that considers its own circle as the only church of Christ and makes exclusive claims to truth will wither and die like a branch severed from its vine. The one, holy, universal church that is presently

Within the particular church lies the universal church, functioning almost as a 'living fossil of the future:' we do not yet know what it will be, but its beginnings are there.¹³⁵ Because an organic relationship exists between the universal and particular church, both those realities are rooted in God. We do not yet fully know exactly how this functions, but we know that it is so and that someday we will know it fully. To a certain extent this hiddenness is caused by human sinfulness, and to a certain extent it is due to the nature of reality on this side of the eschaton in which there is a duality between invisible and visible realities.

A fourth type of organic relationship is that between the same realities in different points of time. This can be seen in the history of progressive revelation, in the process of sanctification, which applies to the life history of the believer, and ultimately, in the sanctification of the cosmos culminating in the eschaton. Progressive revelation has already been discussed at length earlier in this chapter. Here I will note only briefly that perceiving this duality in terms of organic relationships between

an object of faith, will not come into being until the body of Christ reaches full maturity. Only then will the church achieve the unity of faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, and only then will she know as she is known." ("CCC," pp. 250f.)

¹³⁵ The church "is geene idee en geen ideaal, maar eene werkelijkheid, die wordt en worden kan en worden zal, omdat zij er reeds is." (MD, p. 500. The church "is not an idea or an ideal, but a reality which is becoming something and will become something because it is already something." [RF, p. 521])

essence and form, and between various forms helps one to perceive the historical dynamic at work in Bavinck's theology. Revelation is always "een historisch and organisch geheel,"¹³⁶ which indicates that it denotes unity in diversity, the unity is hidden within the diversity but becoming progressively clearer, and the diverse forms function as organs of the inner unity, but nevertheless they also are significant in themselves. This significance is closely tied to the significance of history for Bavinck.

History also plays an important role in the sanctification of the believer.

Natuurlijk zou God, die de Almachtige is, al zijne kinderen in de wedergeboorte tegelijk volkomen heilig kunnen maken. Maar blijkbaar is dat niet zijn wil geweest; in de herschepping verloochent Hij zichzelf als Schepper niet. Alle creatuurlijk leven wordt geboren, groeit op en bereikt langzamerhand zijn hoogtepunt. Omdat het geestelijk leven werkelijk leven is, ontstaat het en ontwikkelt het zich op dezelfde wijze. God stort de gerechtigheid en heiligheid van Christus niet mechanisch in ons, als water in een vat, maar Hij werkt ze op organische wijze in ons en door ons uit.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ *GD I*, p. 311. Revelation is always "an historical and organic whole."

¹³⁷ *MD*, p. 481. "Of course God, who is the Almighty One, could, in regeneration, have perfectly sanctified all his children at the same time. But that apparently was not his will; in the recreation he does not deny himself as Creator. All the life of the creature is born, grows up, and only gradually reaches its maturity. Because the spiritual life is actually life it comes to be and it develops in this same way. God does not inject the righteousness and holiness of Christ into us mechanically, as one pours water into a vessel, but he works it out in us in an organic way." (*RF*, p. 502, alt.)

Because sanctification is an organic, historical process, God "vernietigt onze persoonlijkheid niet, maar heft ze op; Hij doodt ons verstand en onzen wil en onze genegenheden niet, maar maakt ze juist levend, daar zij dood waren, en zet ze aan den arbeid; Hij maakt ons tot zijne bondgenooten en medearbeiders."¹³⁸

Bavinck makes an analogy between personal and cosmic sanctification.

Doch gelijk de mensch wel door Christus herschapen, maar niet vernietigd en daarna nieuw geschapen werdt, 2 Cor. 5: 17, zoo blijft ook de wereld in haar wezen bewaard, al ondergaat zij in hare gedaante eene zoo groote verandering, dat zij een nieuwe hemel en eene nieuwe aarde genoemd worden kan.¹³⁹

While there is an organic relation between this world and the next, the significant difference here is that the provisional and hidden character of organic relationships will be gone.

Gelijk de nieuwe hemel en aarde gevormd wordt uit de elementen dezer wereld en de gemeente eene herschepping is van het in Adam gevallen menschelijk geslacht, zoo is ook het leven der zaligen hiernamaals te denken als in analogie met het leven der geloovigen hier op aarde. Het is een echt natuurlijk leven, maar door de genade tot zijne hoogste heerlijkheid en in zijne rijkste schoonheid ontvouwd; de material blijft, doch de forma verschilt. De religie, dat is de gemeenschap

¹³⁸ *MD*, p. 459. God "does not annihilate our personality, but lifts it up; he does not kill our reason and our will and our desires, but rather quickens them inasmuch as they were dead, and puts them to work. He makes us his allies and co-labourers." (*RF*, p. 479)

¹³⁹ *MD*, p. 569. "Just as man himself is recreated by Christ indeed, but is not annihilated and thereupon created again, so too the world in its essence will be preserved, even though in its form it undergoes so great a change that it can be called a new heaven and new earth." (*RF*, p. 566) In another context Bavinck describes this as an organic process. Cf. *CF*, p. 96.

met God, neemt er daarom de eerste, de central plaats in. Maar die gemeenschap zal rijker, dieper, zaliger zijn, dan zij hier op aarde ooit was of wezen kon, want zij zal door geen zonde verstoord, door geen afstand verbroken, door geen natuur of Schrift bemiddeld zijn. Nu zien wij in den spiegel van Gods openbaring slechts zijn beeld; dan zien wij aangezicht tot aangezicht, en kennen, gelijk wij gekend zijn.¹⁴⁰

One important characteristic of organic relationships will perdure into the new heaven and earth: unity in diversity. "Zonder twijfel wordt deze verscheidenheid in den hemel niet uitgewischt, maar integendeel van al het zondige gereinigd en op het rijkst vermenigvuldigd."¹⁴¹ Bavinck concludes his four volume *Dogmatics* with a doxological celebration of the unity in diversity with Christ in the new heaven and new earth.

Door de verscheidenheid toch neemt het leven der gemeenschap met God, met de engelen, en van de zaligen onderling in diepte en in innigheid toe. De dienst van God, de onderlinge gemeenschap en de bewoning van den nieuwen hemel en de nieuwe aarde bieden ongetwijfeld voor de uitoefening van deze ambten overvloedige gelegenheid, ook al is de vorm en wijze ervan ons

¹⁴⁰ GD IV, p. 704. "As the new heaven and earth are formed out of the elements of this world, and the church is a re-creation of the human race that fell in Adam, so the life of the redeemed in the hereafter is to be conceived as analogous with the life of believers here on earth. It is a genuinely natural life but unfolded by grace to its highest splendor and its most bountiful beauty. The matter remains but the form differs. In that life religion -- fellowship with God -- is primary and central. But that fellowship will be richer, deeper and more blessed than it ever was or could be on earth, since it will not be disturbed by any sin, or interrupted by any distance, or mediated by either Scripture or nature. Now, as we look into the mirror of God's revelation, we only see his image; then we shall see face to face and know as we are known." (LT, p. 162)

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 622. "Without doubt this diversity will not be blotted out in heaven. On the contrary, it will be purified from sin and multiplied in the richest way."

onbekend. Maar dat werken is een rusten en genieten tevens. Het onderscheid van dag en nacht, van sabbat en werkdagen heeft opgehouden; de tijd is doordrongen van de eeuwigheid Gods; de ruimte is vol van zijne tegenwoordigheid; het eeuwige worden is gehuwd met het onveranderlijke zijn. Want alwat in den hemel en op aarde is, is tot een vergaderd onder Christus als Hoofd. Alle schepselen zijn en leven en bewegen zich in God, die alles in allen is, die in den spiegel zijner werken al zijne deugden weerkaatst en daarin zichzelf verheerlijkt.¹⁴²

Thus, at the end of time, dualities between the eternal and the temporal, the invisible and visible, the essence and the form will be no more. The organic realities which hold them together now will no longer be hidden but fully revealed. The wonderful diversity of the creation will perdure into the new creation, adding to its wealth of enjoyment.

Summary

The two questions which provide the over-arching structure of this chapter, 'how does God reveal himself?' and 'how does God relate to his creatures?,' are both relational in character. The answers which Bavinck provides form a framework for his discussions

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 712f. "Through diversity the life of fellowship with God, with angels and among the blessed themselves grows in depth and intimacy. We will be presented with abundant opportunities for exercising our calling in the service of God, mutual fellowship and the inhabiting of the new heaven and new earth, though the form and means of these are unknown to us. But that work is rest and enjoyment at the same time. The distinction between day and night, Sabbath and workdays is gone; time is fully permeated with eternity of God; space is full of his presence; eternal becoming is married with unchangeable being. All that is in heaven and on earth is gathered under Christ as head. All creatures will then live and move and have their being in God who is all in all, who reflects all his attributes in the mirror of his works, and glorifies himself in them." (*LT*, p. 169, alt.)

of the character of each of the parties in relationship, and thus are formative for his doctrine of God, his Christology, and his doctrine of creation. All creaturely existence is upheld by God; the meaning of visible realities is rooted in the invisible, and is given only through divine revelation. Furthermore, creaturely existence is historical, developing through time from its beginning to its divinely appointed end. This history of redemption is appropriately described through progressive revelation, and the cross of Jesus Christ stands as the midpoint and apex of this history. God's acts of creation and redemption are described in terms of God, humanity and the world: the God who created all things and placed humanity whom he made in his image as the crown of this creation reaches out to redeem humankind en route to the renewal of the entire creation. Bavinck's answers to these questions create complex interactions as he deals with the invisible and visible, progressive revelation with an eschatological goal achieved in its midpoint (the cross), and the interrelations of God, humanity and world. These complexities are described through his notions of duality and the organic, notions which are able to express both the present character of God's relationship with his creation and the eschatological goal of this relationship.

It would appear that this discussion of these two questions belies the assertion that Bavinck's theology is Christocentric.

The descriptions given here of various types of revelation, a triadic framework, and his complementary concepts of duality and the organic make few Christological references. Even so, the issues raised here are inseparable from Bavinck's Christology. They serve to provide the context and framework for his Christological essentials which will be described in detail in the next chapter. Though God reveals himself in many different ways, all divine revelation coheres in Jesus Christ and is comprehensible from a Christological starting point. In Jesus Christ the creature is reconciled with the Creator. In Jesus Christ we are given the visible manifestation of the invisible God. The 'now and not yet' of the finished work of Jesus Christ reveals that the kingdom is established now in an organic way, hidden within the brokenness and duality of this world, waiting to be revealed fully when Jesus returns. Thus, this discussion serves to provide the framework for the four primary characteristics of Bavinck's theology: its Christocentric focus, its emphasis on reconciliation, its eschatological thrust, and its dual stress on the incompleteness of creation and creation's brokenness, which taken together serve to describe his eschatological understanding of redemption.

Chapter Three - Bavinck's doctrine of God and Christology

The purpose of this chapter is to continue describing Bavinck's theology with a telescopic eye whose range of vision becomes progressively narrower and more focused in preparation for the heart of this work: chapter four's description of the relation between creation, Christ and the eschaton in Bavinck's theology. Following the opening chapter's brief introduction to the life and times of Herman Bavinck, the previous chapter dealt with the fundamental question, how does God reveal himself?, and then built on that answer to discuss the issue of how God relates to his creatures. Both of those concerns are derived from the doctrine of God, and thus serve to lead into a more focused and systematic treatment of that doctrine. From there the narrowing continues, arriving at the center piece of Bavinck's theology, his Christology.

The goal of this gradual narrowing is to demonstrate that Bavinck's Christology is inextricably intertwined with an eschatological understanding of redemption. This eschatological understanding is best explicated through a method which follows the shape of an hourglass: a progressive narrowing to the climax point, followed again by a progressive widening through a discussion of creation, Jesus Christ and the eschaton. One can discern Bavinck's eschatological understanding of redemption operative in all of the areas that have been and will be discussed, but it is the hourglass framework with Christ at the center that

enables one to perceive this most clearly. Because this chapter is intended to function as a bridge between the overview of Bavinck's theology in chapter two and the central issue of the creation-Christ-eschaton relation in chapter four, its description of Bavinck's doctrine of God and Christology will not seek to be comprehensive, but rather will focus on those elements which are central to its bridging function.

Bavinck's doctrine of God

Bavinck's doctrine of God will be explicated here in three parts. First, I will describe the heart of his doctrine of God: that the Trinitarian God who created all things seeks reconciliation with his creatures. All else flows from this truth. Second, the chapter will describe the principal ways in which Bavinck describes God: the doctrine of the Trinity and the concepts of the eternal counsel of God, the will of God and the thoughts of God. What will be stressed is that each of these must be seen in light of the motif that "God so loved the world." Failing to take such a perspective leads one into abstract speculation concerning the nature of God (which Bavinck usually, though not always, avoids). Finally, I will note that the eschatological thrust of Bavinck's understanding of redemption is rooted in this doctrine of God.

Central to Bavinck's doctrine of God is his understanding of God's transcendence and his immanence. The transcendent God is

ultimately incomprehensible, but he is known in the context of a reconciled relationship with his creature in which God acts as the agent who initiates, establishes, maintains, and brings to culmination the relationship. God is ontologically distinct from his creatures, and therefore he is transcendent, but this ontological difference is not distance. Divine revelation and redemption point to a transcendent God who is also immanent, close to his creatures, drawing them ever closer to himself.

Ook al is God in ieder deel en in elk stuk van zijne schepping met al zijne deugden en met heel zijn wezen immanent, toch blijft Hij ook in die allerinnigste vereeniging altijd transcendent. Want Zijn zijn is een ander en hooger zijn dan de wereld. Gelijk eeuwigheid en tijd, alomtegenwoordigheid en ruimte, oneindigheid en eindigheid niet tot elkander te herleiden, niet als keerzijden van dezelfde zaak op te vatten zijn, zoo zijn God en wereld, Schepper en schepsel kwalitatief en essentieel van elkander onderscheiden.¹

The God who loves the world is the God who is utterly distinct from that world. God's immanence must always be understood in the context of his transcendence.

This theme is expressed in all of Bavinck's major works. How can we possibly speak about God? he asks.

Wij zijn menschen en Hij is de Heere onze God. Er is tusschen Hem en ons een afstand als tusschen het oneindige en het eindige, tusschen eeuwigheid en tijd, tusschen het zijn en het

¹ WO, p. 18. "Although God is immanent in every part and sphere of creation with all his perfections and all his being, nevertheless, even in that most intimate union he remains transcendent. His being is of a different and higher kind than that of the world. As little as eternity and time, omnipresence and space, infinitude and finiteness can be reduced to one or conceived as reverse sides of the same reality, can God and the world, the Creator and the creature, be identified qualitatively and essentially." (PR, p. 22, alt.)

worden, tusschen het al en het niet. De Heilige Schrift bevestigt dat zoo sterk mogelijk, maar zij draagt toch eene leer over God voor, welke zijne kenbaarheid ten volle handhaaft. De Schrift wendt n.l. nooit eenige poging aan, om het bestaan Gods te bewijzen, maar zij onderstelt dat.²

God is ontologically distinct from us, but he reveals himself as a being seeking relationship with us. "Altijd het doel der openbaring (is) dat de mensch God kennen, dienen en eeren zou."³ Therefore, "er is toch geen boek ter wereld, dat, in dezelfde mate en op dezelfde wijze als de H. Schrift, eenerzijds de volstreckte verhevenheid Gods boven alle schepsel, en aan den anderen kant tegelijk het innig verband en de nauwe verwantschap tusschen het schepsel en zijn Schepper staande houdt."⁴ Bavinck's doctrine of God is rooted in the claim that God, an ontologically distinct being, seeks intimate fellowship with his creatures.⁵

² *GD* II, pp. 2f. "We are people and he is the Lord our God. There is between him and us distance as between the infinite and the finite, between eternity and time, between being and becoming, between the all and the not. The Holy Scriptures proclaim this as strongly as possible, but still they also give us a doctrine of God, fully affirming his knowability. The Scriptures do not make any attempt to prove the existence of God but they presuppose it."

³ *GD* I, p. 313. "The goal of revelation is always that people will know, serve and honour God."

⁴ *MD*, p. 117. "There is certainly no book in the world which to the same extent and in the same way as the Holy Scripture supports the absolute transcendence of God above each and every creature on the one hand, and the intimate tie and close relationship between the creature and his Creator, on the other." (*RF*, p. 132, alt.)

⁵ A brief survey of other works supports this observation. "Religie sluit in, dat God en wereld onderscheiden zijn, dat God in de wereld inwerken, met den mensch in gemeenschap treden, en door die gemeenschap hem boven die wereld verheffen en tegen die wereld beschermen en handhaven kan." (*WO*, p. 218. "Religion implies that God and the world are distinct, and that God can influence the world, enter into fellowship with man, and by that fellowship can

This starting point for Bavinck's doctrine of God is not intended to justify an anthropologizing approach which describes God solely in relational terms, nor to deny the existence of God as a being in himself apart from his creatures. Rather, this starting point makes the claim that God is a personal being who seeks relationship with all that he has made. Articulating a doctrine concerning who he is can only be done by those who are situated within such a relationship. One cannot articulate a doctrine of God in the form of abstract theological speculation or philosophical argument. "Er is geen kennis van God, gelijk Hij in zichzelf is. Wij zijn menschen en Hij is de Heere onze God."⁶ "De Schrift geeft geen afgetrokken Godsbegrip, gelijk de wijsbegeerte dat doet, maar zij stelt den waarachtigen, levenden God voor onze oogen en doet Hem ons zien in al de werken zijner

raise him above, and maintain him against, the world." [PR, p. 254, alt.]

Concerning Old Testament Israel, Bavinck writes that "het hart en het wezen van Israels religie ontsluit zich eerst, als nu die God, die zoo machtig verheven is, in bondsrelatie tot zijn volk treedt, Elohim openbaart zich als Jahveh. Terwijl het in andere godsdiensten de mensch is, die God zoekt, is het hier God, die den mensch zoekt en altijd weer in ontfermingen tot Hem komt. Ik ben de Heere, uw God!" (AG, pp. 12f. "The heart and the essence of Israel's religion appears when the God who is so exalted approaches his people in a covenantal relation, when Elohim reveals himself as Yahweh. While in other religions we find man seeking God, here we see God seeking man and coming to him again and again with mercy, 'I am the Lord, your God!'" ["CG," p. 42, alt.]

⁶ GD II, p. 20. "There is no knowledge of God as he is in himself. We are people and he is the Lord our God."

handen."⁷ To describe God in terms of the relation between his transcendence and his immanence is not to reduce his being to theological abstractions, but to honour the fact that he is a personal being who is completely other than his creation and yet intimately present with that creation.

A tension between a more relationally-oriented doctrine of God and a more abstract, philosophical one can be discerned throughout the neo-Calvinist tradition. While Bavinck took it upon himself to guard the former, his older colleague Abraham Kuyper leaned more in the latter direction.⁸ Because the neo-Calvinist tradition as a whole listened more closely to Kuyper than to Bavinck, Bavinck has tended to be understood through Kuyperian, and therefore more philosophical, spectacles. With such spectacles it is difficult to perceive the relational heart of Bavinck's theology. A good example of such misreading is found in the comments of Hendrikus Berkhof. He writes,

Is faith submission to the authority of scriptural truths or is it the personal encounter with God through the person of Christ by which we are transformed into personalities? Bavinck opted for the priority of the scriptural principle, and in the prolegomena of his dogmatics he threw in his lot (with some Reformed corrections) with Neo-Thomism. For him faith was not in the first place a yielding up of one's life to a Person but intellectual assent and submission to

⁷ MD, p. 118. "What the Scriptures give us is not an abstract concept of God, such as the philosopher gives us, but puts the true, living God before us and shows him to us in the works of his hands." (RF, p. 133, alt.)

⁸ Cf. Bolt, *The Imitation of Christ Theme in the Cultural-Ethical Ideal of Herman Bavinck*, p. 276; Bremmer, *Bavinck en zijn Tijdgenoten*, p. 39.

Scripture. Hence Bavinck remained more strongly burdened than he wished by the legacy of the Reformed scholasticism of the seventeenth century and gave up intellectual tools he could not do without in the continuing confrontation with the modern spirit.⁹

Berkhof errs in basing his conclusion on Bavinck's prolegomena. It is true that this section of his dogmatics is more scholastic than the rest. However, a reading of the Bavinck corpus suggests that these scholastic tendencies must be perceived within a relational context. Berkouwer reads Bavinck more accurately when he concludes that "het is hem te doen om het geloof in zijn wezen en kern, dat niet is een 'toestemming' van in de Schrift en de traditie vervatte Goddelijke waarheden, maar een antwoord op een woord, een getuigenis, een weldaad, een belofte Gods, waar 'het zich aan vastklemt, waaraan het zich opbeurt, waarop het vol vertrouwen in nood en dood zich verlaat.'"¹⁰ From this relational starting point in which the transcendent God is present with his creation we can proceed to the key descriptors which Bavinck employs in articulating his doctrine of God.

At the heart of Bavinck's understanding of God stands the

⁹ *Two Hundred Years of Theology, Report of a Personal Journey*, tr. J. Vriend (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), p. 114.

¹⁰ *Zoeken en Vinden*, p. 57. "He is concerned with faith in its essence and its heart, which is not an assent to truths about God as they are couched in the Scripture and tradition, but a response to a word, a witness, a benefit, God's promise, which 'grasps, comforts, and leaves one with full trust in need and in death.'" Berkouwer quotes here from "Philosophie des Geloofs" in *Verzamelde Opstellen*. Berkouwer makes a similar observation in *A Half Century of Theology*, stating that for Bavinck "a sum of truths could not be what faith was centered on, for faith was a personal relation of trust between a man and God." (p. 155)

doctrine of the Trinity. The Trinity is the most important means of understanding God, says Bavinck, and is much more than a theological concept or even a doctrine.

Wij hebben het toch altijd wel te bedenken, dat wij het daarin niet met eene leer over God, met een afgetrokken Godsbegrip, met een of ander wijsgeerig stelsel over God te doen hebben. Wij nemen niet eene menschelijke voorstelling over God onder handen, die wijzelf of die anderen hebben uitgevonden, en die wij nu haarfijn trachten te ontleden en logisch trachten te verstaan. Maar wij hebben het, handelend over de Drieenheid, met God zelve te doen, met den eenigen en waarachtigen God, die zich alzoo in zijn Woord heeft geopenbaard.¹¹

Bavinck's use of the doctrine of the Trinity is constitutive of the relational core of his doctrine of God. The Trinity is not for him a concept to be explored through abstract speculation, but a reality describing the personal, living God. "De praktische beteekenis, welke de leer der drieenheid voor het leven van den Christen bezit, stelt het buiten allen twijfel, dat de H. Schrift ons geen afgetrokken Godsbegrip wil geven, maar dat zij ons alleen persoonlijk met den levenden en waarachtigen God zelve in aanraking en gemeenschap wil brengen."¹² It is not surprising, therefore, that John Bolt, G. C. Berkouwer and Eugene Heideman each

¹¹ *MD*, p. 128. "We must always remember that we are not dealing with a doctrine about God, with an abstract concept, nor with a philosophical construction about God. We are not dealing with a human proposition about God which we ourselves or which others have invented and which we now try to analyze and logically understand. Rather, in dealing with the Trinity, we are dealing with God himself, with the one, true God, who in this way has revealed himself in his Word." (*RF*, p. 143, alt.)

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 145. "The practical significance of the doctrine of the Trinity for the life of the Christian is evidence enough that the Holy Scripture does not want to give us an abstract concept of deity, but rather wants to put us into contact and fellowship, all of us personally, with the living and true God." (*RF*, p. 162, alt.)

perceive the the doctrine of the Trinity to function as the heart and essence of the Christian faith in Bavinck's theology.¹³

Bavinck concludes his short essay "Het Christelijk Geloof" with a meditation based on four articles of the Apostles' Creed, one for each member of the Trinity and one for the church.¹⁴ This brief meditation is helpful because in it Bavinck provides in very concentrated form his understanding of the Trinity, an understanding which permeates his entire theology. He sees these three articles of the creed as "de wortel, die straks opwast tot den stam der 12 geloofsartikelen."¹⁵ He describes the work of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as they pour out their power and love on behalf of their creatures through specific acts of redemption. God is the almighty creator, and also "den Vader, Vader van den Zoon, door Hem Vader ook Zijner kinderen op aarde."¹⁶ The heart of the Christian confession concerns Jesus Christ, the crucified one. Bavinck stresses two points: all things are reconciled through the cross, and the cross stands at the center of history.¹⁷ The believer receives the benefits of the wondrous deeds of the

¹³ Bolt, *The Imitation of Christ Theme*, p. 205; Berkouwer, *A Half Century of Theology*, p. 262; Heideman, *Revelation and Reason*, p. 237.

¹⁴ "Het Christelijk Geloof" in *KL*, pp. 95-97.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 95. He sees the first three as "the root, which later grew into the stem of the 12 articles of faith."

¹⁶ *Ibid.* God is "the Father, the Father of the Son, and through him also the Father of his children on earth."

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

Father and the Son through the work of the Holy Spirit.¹⁸ The doctrine of the Trinity clarifies for the church the 'pro nobis' character of God.

Bavinck's understanding of the Trinity is certainly not remarkable or unusual in any way. What is noteworthy is the tone of devotion and awe which imbues his theological writing when describing the Trinitarian character of God. The task of describing God is carried out in a posture of worship seeking understanding, a posture evident in his summary of this discussion.

Neem een dezer drie weg en der zielen zaligheid wankelt, en de verzeekerheid des geloofs is onmogelijk. Maar nu God boven, God voor, God in ons; door God van alle zijden omgeven, verzorgd, bewaard; nu is er ruste, nu vrede, nu de zaligheid zeker; zoo God voor ons is, wie zal dan tegen ons zijn? Uit Hem en door Hem en tot Hem zijn alle dingen, Hem zij de heerlijkheid!¹⁹

This devotional tone illustrates the relational character of Bavinck's understanding of the Trinity, which is further highlighted by his inclusion with these three articles of faith a fourth article concerning the church: "ik geloof eene heilige algemeene Christelijk Kerk. Daarheen zijn al de werken der drie Goddelijke Personen gericht. Een in wezen, zijn ze een ook in doel. Dat is de tempel, dien zij samen bouwen, en tot woning

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 96f.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 97. "Take one of these three away and our salvation becomes shaky, and the assurance of faith is impossible. But now God is above, God is for, God is in us; we are surrounded by God on all sides, provided for and taken care of; now there is rest, peace and sure salvation. If God is for us, who can be against us? From him and through him and to him are all things, to him be the Glory!"

begeeren."²⁰ Bavinck's meditation on these four articles epitomizes the use of the Trinity in his theology: the three persons of the Godhead working together to bring about reconciliation with God's creatures until that day when the dwelling of God is fully with his creatures.

At times Bavinck draws upon a traditional, Reformed doctrine of the Trinity called the *pactum salutis*. While he acknowledges from the outset that "de ontwikkeling van de leer van het *pactum salutis* bij de Gereformeerden was van scholastieke spitsvondigheid niet vrij,"²¹ he concludes that "toch rust deze leer van het *pactum salutis*, trots haar gebrekkigen vorm, op eene Schriftuurlijke gedachte."²² The doctrine helps one to emphasize the following Scriptural truths: first, "het is God drieëenig alleen, Vader, Zoon en Geest, die samen het gansche werk der zaligheid uitdenken, vaststellen, uitvoeren en ten einde brengen."²³ Redemption (just

²⁰ *Ibid.* "I believe one holy, catholic, Christian church. That is the direction of all the works of the three divine persons. One in essence, they are also one in goal. That is the temple which they are building together, and desire to dwell in."

²¹ *GD III*, p. 193. "The development of the doctrine of the *pactum salutis* by Reformed theologians was not free from Scholastic hair-splitting."

²² *Ibid.*, p. 194. "Nevertheless this doctrine of the *pactum salutis*, in spite of its defective form, rests on Scriptural concepts." One can see here how Bavinck's tendency towards eclecticism is furthered by his application of the essence/form duality: the form of the doctrine may be defective, but one can nevertheless discern the essence of truth within it.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 195. "It is the triune God alone, Father, Son and Spirit, who together have devised, established, executed and brought to completion the entire work of salvation."

as creation) is an utterly divine act; "geen mensch is zijn raadsman geweest."²⁴

Second, the *pactum salutis* helps one to see the connection between God's eternal plans and the execution of these plans in time. While the execution exhibits diversity, these diverse acts are all rooted in the one *pactum salutis*, for God does not change.

Het verbond der genade, dat in den tijd wordt geopenbaard, hangt niet in de lucht maar rust op een eeuwigen, onveranderlijken grondslag. Christus begint niet eerst te werken met en na zijne vleeschwording, en de Heilige Geest vangt zijn arbeid niet eerst aan met zijne uitstorting op den Pinksterdag. De vader is eeuwig Vader, en de Zoon eeuwig Middelaar, en de Heilige Geest eeuwig Trooster. Schoon God zijne openbaring successief en historisch meedeelt en rijker en voller maakt, en de menschheid dus in kennis, in bezit en genot der openbaring vooruitgaat, God is dezelfde en blijft dat. Er is een geloof, een Middelaar, een weg des heils, een verbond der genade.²⁵

The doctrine of the *pactum salutis* serves to help Bavinck hold together the historical diversity and the eternal unity of redemption. Thus, this doctrine also serves to reinforce the relational heart of Bavinck's theology. If a living, personal God is to be in relationship with his creatures throughout the ages of

²⁴ *Ibid.* "No one has been his counsellor."

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 195f. "The covenant of grace, which was revealed in time, does not hang in the air but rests on an eternal, unchangeable foundation. Christ does not first begin to work with and after his Incarnation, and the Holy Spirit does not begin his work with the outpouring on Pentecost. The Father is eternal Father, and the Son eternal Mediator, and the Holy Spirit eternal Comforter. Although God shares his revelation historically and successively, making it richer and fuller, so that humanity progresses in the knowledge, possession and joy of revelation, God is the same and remains the same. There is one faith, one Mediator, one way of salvation, one covenant of grace."

history, this relationship must manifest itself in a diversity of divine works. Yet this diversity must also have an underlying harmony as they originate from the true God who is one and as these works look forward to one goal: God living with his creatures.

In addition to his insistent reliance on Trinitarian language in describing God, Bavinck also speaks of the will of God, the thoughts of God and the eternal counsel of God. E. P. Heideman correctly observes that such terms are used almost interchangeably by Bavinck,²⁶ though, because each has its own nuances, each is used to emphasize particular truths concerning God.²⁷ Each of these concepts serves both to reinforce the distinction between the Creator and the creature and to describe how this distinct God acts on behalf of his creatures.²⁸ The eternal counsel of God is the

²⁶ Heideman, *Revelation and Reason*, p. 134.

²⁷ On occasion one finds all three alluded to at once. For example, "eenheid echter, waarachtige eenheid, die de verscheidenheid niet vernietigt maar insluit en ontvouwt, komt er ook dan, en komt er dan eerst, als de gansche wereld product is van den, wijsheid en macht tegelijk openbarenden, Raad Gods. Een persoonlijk God alleen, die verstand en wil beide is, kan eene wereld in het leven roepen, die een is en toch verscheiden." (*WO*, p. 80. "Unity, true unity, a unity which does not destroy differentiation, but rather includes and enfolds it, may come, and can come, only when the entire world is the product of God's counsel, revealing both wisdom and power. Only a personal God, who is both will and intelligence, can call a world into existence which is one yet differentiated." [*PR*, pp. 94f., alt.]

²⁸ A short passage from *Magnalia Dei* illustrates Bavinck's concern to ground these concepts in the Scriptures and therefore not move to systematization too quickly: "Daar gaat, menschelijk gesproken, aan alle werk Gods naar buiten eene overlegging des verstands en ook een besluit van den wil vooraf. Daarom wisselt de naam van raad des Heeren, zooals deze bijv. Ps. 33: 11, Spr. 19: 21, Jes. 46: 10, Hand. 2: 23 voorkomt, elders met dien van besluit,

most general of the three, and so functions in many different contexts.²⁹ The eternal counsel indicates that what God does is distinct from creaturely agency because it is eternal, his acts are not random and changeable but rather purposive and coherent because they are rooted in counsel, and that God is Trinitarian because the three persons of the Trinity take counsel together.

The will of God emphasizes that a personal intentionality distinct from the creation lies behind reality. "De wil Gods is voor ons de laatste grond van al wat bestaat en geschiedt."³⁰ Because it is distinct from the creation, it cannot be known naturally but only through revelation. "Wat geen natuur en geen geschiedenis, geen verstand of hart, geen wetenschap of kunst ons leeren kunnen, dat doet (de openbaring) ons kennen, den vasten,

Gen. 41: 32, 2 Cor. 25: 16 (sic), Ps. 2: 7, Jes. 10: 23, 14: 27, voornemen, Jer. 51: 12, Rom. 8: 28, 9: 11, Ef. 1: 11, 3: 11, 2 Tim. 1: 9, verordineering, Hand. 10: 42, 13: 48, 17: 26, 31, Rom. 8: 29, 30, Ef. 1: 5, 9 af, en spreekt Paulus van den raad en het welbehagen van Gods wil, Ef. 1: 5, 11." ("Humanly speaking, we can say that every work of God is preceded by a deliberation of the mind and a decision of the will. In some passages of Scripture the word used is counsel, in some it is decree, in some it is plan, in some ordination, and in some Paul speaks of the good pleasure of God." [RF, p. 163, alt.]

²⁹ For example, Bavinck notes that creation, providence and the entire work of redemption are rooted in the eternal counsel of God. (MD, p. 249) The eternal counsel functions as a bridge between Bavinck's use of the Trinity and more specific descriptions of God's agency such as his will and his thoughts. This description will focus on the will and the thoughts. Because the eternal counsel has a more general character, its function in Bavinck's theology is in many ways the sum of the others.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 250. "The will of God is for us the final ground of all that is and all that happens." (RF, p. 267)

onveranderlijken, schier met allen schijn der dingen strijdenden wil Gods, om de wereld te behouden en om zondaren zalig te maken. Deze wil is de geheim der openbaring."³¹ One cannot climb a ladder from the natural realm to the supernatural to discern the will of God.

The more we reflect upon the world the more we are forced to fall back upon the hidden will of God and find in it the ultimate ground for both the existence of the world and its being what it is. All the standards of goodness and justice and righteous recompense and retribution for evil which we are accustomed to apply, prove wholly inadequate to measure the world. The will of God is, and from the nature of the case must be, the deepest cause of the entire world and of all the *varietas* and *diversitas* found in it. The unfathomable mystery of the world compels the intellect and the heart, theology and philosophy alike to fall back upon the will of God and seek rest in it.³²

The knowledge which revelation imparts concerning God's will is partial, but it is sufficient for us to understand that that which we do not understand remains rooted in God's wisdom, love and righteousness.³³ "De Christen vindt de zekerheid voor den triumf van het goede in de belijdenis van Gods soevereinen en almachtigen wil, die van de wereld onderscheiden en boven haar verheven, toch door haar heen zijn heiligen raad volvoert en overeenkomstig dien

³¹ *WO*, p. 21. "What neither nature nor history, neither mind nor heart, neither science nor art can teach us, (revelation) makes known to us: the fixed, unalterable will of God to rescue the world and save sinners, a will that often seems to conflict with the whole appearance of things. This will is the secret of revelation." (*PR*, p. 25, alt.)

³² "CCG," p. 113.

³³ *GD* III, p. 356.

raad menschheid en wereld ter zaligheid leidt."³⁴ God's will is not to be construed legalistically or fatalistically; "in de openbaring zelve ontvouwt die wil Gods zich altijd klaarder als liefde des Vaders, genade des Zoons en gemeenschap des Heiligen Geestes."³⁵

Bavinck also uses the doctrine of the will of God to reinforce his emphasis upon the unity of all things. The will of God represents a personal intentionality which is the ultimate source of the tremendous variety and diversity manifested in reality.

Alleen wanneer de eenheid aller schepselen niet in de dingen zelve ligt, maar transcendent (niet in ruimtelijken, doch in kwalitatieven, essentielen zin) in een Goddelijk wezen, in zijn wijsheid en macht, in zijn wil en raad wordt gezocht, kan in het wereldgeheel en in dat wereldgeheel ieder schepsel tot zijn recht komen. Een persoon alleen kan de wortel van eenheid in verscheidenheid, van verscheidenheid in eenheid zijn. Hij alleen kan in een systeem eene veelheid van gedachten tot eenheid verbinden en ze door zijn wil realiseeren naar buiten.³⁶

³⁴ WO, p. 250. "The Christian finds his assurance about the triumph of good in his confession of God's sovereign and almighty will, which, though distinct from the world and exalted above it, still accomplishes its holy plan, and, in accordance with this plan, leads humanity and the world to salvation." (PR, p. 290, alt.)

³⁵ WO, p. 170. "In this revelation this will of God always unfolds itself more clearly as the love of the Father, the grace of the Son, and the communion of the Holy Spirit." (PR, p. 202, alt.)

³⁶ WO, p. 115. "Only when the unity of all creatures is not sought in the things themselves, but transcendently (not in a spacial, but in a qualitative, essential sense) in a divine being, in his wisdom and power, in his will and counsel, can the world as a whole, and in it every creature, fully attain its rights. A person alone can be the root of unity in diversity, of diversity in unity. He alone can combine in a system a diversity of ideas into unity, and he alone can realize them by his will *ad extra*." (PR, p. 136, alt.)

The unity behind diversity motif is crucial for Bavinck's doctrine of God, and this motif is rooted in the personal character of God. Will can be described as intentionality, and blind fate or abstract being does not exercise intentionality. Bavinck's God is a personal God, and only a personal God can hold together in a coherent unity the great diversity of his works. Thus, the will of God, along with the Trinity and the eternal counsel, serves to support Bavinck's unity behind diversity motif.

Finally, Bavinck speaks of the importance of the thoughts of God. His concern here is to emphasize that the cosmos is a rational, and therefore knowable, reality. It is not the product of random and blind chance, but has been created with purpose and meaning. "Alle dingen zijn kenbaar, omdat zij eerst gedacht zijn. En omdat zij eerst gedacht zijn, kunnen zij onderling verscheiden en toch een zijn. Het is de idee, die in het organisme de onderscheidene deelen bezielt en beheerscht."³⁷ The will of God is that which has concretized the thoughts of God.³⁸ Thus, "heel de wereld (is) een organisch geheel, door een gedachte gedragen, door een wil geleid, voor een doel bestemd."³⁹ God's will is not just an arbitrary exercise of power, but the realization of a

³⁷ *CW*, p. 52. "All things are knowable, because they have first been thought. And because they have first been thought, they can be both distinguished and yet be one. In organisms it is the idea which animates and governs distinct parts."

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 68. "The entire world is an organic whole, borne by one thought, guided by one will, destined for one goal."

thoughtful plan, the creation of a meaningful and purposeful reality. "Deze wereld is goed, omdat zij beantwoord aan het doel, door (God) bepaald. Zij is goed, omdat zij dienstbaar is, niet aan den individueelen mensch, maar aan de openbaring van Gods deugden."⁴⁰

Bavinck is aware that pagan philosophers have used the doctrine of the ideas to develop a dualism which disparages material realities. Yet, he notes, "de Christelijke leer van creatie, incarnatie en resurrectie heeft dit dualisme principieel onmogelijk gemaakt. Ook de stof heeft haar oorsprong in God."⁴¹ The thoughts of God do not serve to distinguish these good and perfect thoughts from evil and imperfect created realities, but rather to emphasize that the entire creation is a good reality fashioned in an orderly manner with a spiritual purpose and goal. "De wereld wordt en kan alleen ons geestlijk eigendom worden, omdat zij zelve geestlijk, logisch bestaat en in gedachte rust. Daarmede winnen wij nu nog dit groote en rijke voordeel, dat de waarheid objectief voor ons ligt uitgestald in al de werken van Gods handen,

⁴⁰ *GD II*, p. 403. "This world is good because it responds to the purpose determined by God. It is good because it serves, not the individual person, but the revelation of God's virtues."

⁴¹ *CW*, p. 52. "The Christian doctrines of creation, incarnation and resurrection have made this dualism impossible in principle. Matter also has its origin in God." Later neo-Calvinists have pointed out that Bavinck's appropriation of the doctrine of the ideas and his correlation of this with the thoughts of God has led to biblically inappropriate neo-Platonic tendencies in his theology. In chapter five I will describe and evaluate this concern.

in natuur en geschiedenis, in schepping en herschepping."⁴² For Bavinck objectivity is not an epistemological category (i.e., focused on the cognitive subject) but one derived from the doctrine of God: this cosmos has a 'definiteness' about it which can be called objective truth because its source lies in the thoughts and will of God. Bavinck is not referring to epistemological objectivity because this objective truth can only be perceived by those who come with the eyes of faith (and then, only partially).

Bavinck's use of the Trinity, the eternal counsel, the will of God and the thoughts of God is clarified by observing how analogy functions in his doctrine of God. Bavinck makes many analogical statements in explicating his doctrine of God, and these statements function in two particular ways: (1) the analogy precedes from God to the creature. Bavinck does not allow for an *analogia entis* by which one comes to know God by extrapolating from the creature to God; (2) his analogical statements are *ad hoc* in character, and, when taken together, do not form a tightly interwoven, deductively logical system. Rather, they are discrete statements made possible because the diversity of reality finds its unity in God. To weave them into a coherent system would be to seek unity in the system

⁴² *CW*, pp. 28f. "The world becomes -- and is able to become - - our spiritual property because it itself exists spiritually and logically, and rests in thought. From this we receive the large and rich benefit, that the truth is displayed for us objectively in all the works of God's hands, in nature and history, in creation and re-creation."

rather than in God.

Bavinck's principle of analogy is stated most clearly in his claim that God, "de Drieeenige, toont ons in zich zelve het gansch volkomen systeem: oorsprong, type, model en beeld aller andere systemen."⁴³ This principle is manifested in various ways in Bavinck's theology. He describes the creation of the universe as a weak analogy of the generation of the Son from the Father.⁴⁴ One can discern an analogy between the Holy Spirit as the agent of conception for Mary, the mother of Jesus and the Holy Spirit as the author of all created life.⁴⁵ The creation of humanity in the *imago Dei* was a preparation for the Incarnation, so that Adam was created with Jesus in mind.⁴⁶ There is an analogy between the place of humanity in the world and the role of the reign of God in human life.⁴⁷ Just as the word became flesh, so God's will needs to be written on our hearts and lived out.⁴⁸ The goodness in this world is a reflection of an original goodness, and this goodness is most clearly displayed in Jesus Christ.

⁴³ "Het Voor en Tegen van een Dogmatisch Systeem" in *KL*, p. 59. God, "the three in one, shows us in himself the completely perfect system: origin, type, model and image of all other systems."

⁴⁴ *GD II*, p. 383. Bavinck repeatedly refers to this analogy in his theology, and we will examine it more carefully in the next section.

⁴⁵ *GD III*, p. 276.

⁴⁶ *GD III*, p. 258.

⁴⁷ "Het Rijk Gods, het Hoogste Goed" in *KL*, p. 37.

⁴⁸ *CW*, p. 106.

De wereld met hare zienlijke dingen (is) een beeld, een schaduw en eene gelijkenis van de hemelsche en onzienlijke goederen. De wind is een beeld des Geestes; de geboorte een gelijkenis van de wedergeboorte; het water en brood, het licht en het leven, de herder en de landman, het tarwegraan en de wijnstok een schaduw van Christus. Maar Christus is dat alles in der waarheid, terwijl al die zienlijke dingen het slechts zijn in beeld. Christus is het ware brood, het levende water, de echte wijnstok, de wezenlijke herder, enz.⁴⁹

All that is earthly must be seen in the light of what is heavenly; "al het aardsche is ons gegeven, om daaraan onze persoonlijkheid 'aus zu bilden,' om het te maken tot instrument van het Godsrijk."⁵⁰

Bavinck's analogical applications of his doctrine of God are clearly in line with the broad contours of his thought. The Creator is clearly distinct from the creature, but the intimate relationship between the two can be expressed through many different analogous statements. In each, divine initiative determines the character of the relationship. The analogous statements have an *ad hoc* character because they are not systematic

⁴⁹ "Kennnis en Leven" in *KL*, p. 211. "The world with its visible things is an image, a shadow and a likeness of the heavenly and invisible goods. The wind is an image of the Spirit; birth a likeness of re-birth; water and bread, light and life, the shepherd and the farmer, the grain and the grapevine a shadow of Christ. But Christ is all these things truly, and visible things are merely the image. Christ is the true bread, the living water, the real grapevine, the essential shepherd, etc."

⁵⁰ "Het Rijk Gods, het Hoogste Goed" in *KL*, p. 44. "All that is earthly is given to us in order to 'build up' our personality, to make it an instrument of the reign of God." One could conclude that such statements serve to devalue created realities by asserting in a somewhat Platonic manner that divine realities constitute true reality. This issue will be explored in detail in the next section, concluding that, for Bavinck, created realities have significant but relative value.

but organic. That is to say this: 'organism' and 'system' are synonymous for Bavinck. Reality as it has been constituted by God is a coherent, unified system which God is distinct from but intimately related with. Humanity gains partial access to pieces of the system or organism; thus humanity does not replicate the system. Therefore, analogous statements express something of the truth of the system, but they are *ad hoc* because the one making the statement does not have access to the comprehensive framework within which these statements exist.

This brief overview of Bavinck's doctrine of God reveals glimpses of a tension within his theology, a tension that will become more apparent as this work progresses. On the one hand, Bavinck's deepest desire was to explicate the Scriptures faithfully, allowing their heart to come to clear expression in his theology. On the other hand, he wished to articulate a coherent and well-reasoned account of the Christian faith, clearly Reformed but also situated within the broad tradition of Christian orthodoxy. These two goals are not always mutually reinforcing. Concepts such as the *pactum salutis*, the thoughts of God, the eternal counsel of God and the generation of the Son from the Father too easily (as Bavinck himself acknowledges) degenerate into scholastic abstractions that serve more to reinforce the reasoned inner coherence of a theology than to bring clarity to the scriptural accounts. At its heart Bavinck's theology resonates deeply with the Scriptures, but it is not immune to scholastic

detours. As we continue to explore the import of his eschatological understanding of redemption, we will also remain attuned to this inner tension in his theology.

Bavinck's doctrine of God leads logically to his eschatological understanding of redemption. The reality of who God is constitutes the prime determinant in characterizing redemption. The other two partners in Bavinck's relational triad, the world and humanity, are crucial to the story of redemption, but neither the world nor humanity ultimately determine the character of redemption. The world and humanity were created for a purpose, and thus their significance is teleological. The priority of God over against the world and humanity requires one to perceive the world and humanity in terms of their divinely appointed goal. Bavinck's doctrine of God includes as one of its constituents an eschatological understanding of redemption.

For this reason, the distinction between the creature and the Creator carries a critical function in Bavinck's eschatology. It is only through divine agency, made known to humanity through special revelation, that the creation is able to be redeemed and achieve its destiny.

Het geloof aan de bijzondere openbaring (is) ten slotte eigenlijk een met het geloof aan eene andere en betere wereld dan deze. Uit deze wereld wordt geen paradijs. Wat er niet in ligt, kan er niet uit voortkomen. Als er geen *Jenseits* is, geen God, die boven de natuur staat, geen *ordo supernaturalis*, dan is aan de zonde, aan de duisternis, aan den dood het laatste woord. De openbaring der Schrift doet ons eene andere wereld kennen van heiligheid en heerlijkheid, welke in deze

gevallen wereld indaalt, niet als leer alleen maar ook als goddelijke *dunamis*, als geschiedenis, als realiteit, als een harmonisch systeem van woorden en daden te zamen, als een, als het werk Gods, waardoor Hij deze wereld opheft uit haar val en haar uit den *status peccati* door den *status gratiae* heen in den *status gloriae* henenleidt. De openbaring is het komen Gods tot de menschheid, om eeuwiglijk bij haar te wonen.⁵¹

Bavinck reinforces the priority of God in his eschatological understanding of redemption with the claim that the resurrection of the dead upon Christ's return "is niet het resultaat van eene ontwikkeling der lichamen in het algemeen, of in het bijzonder van het in de geloovigen door wedergeboorte en sacrament ingeplante opstandingslichaam, maar de uitwerking van een almachtige, scheppende daad Gods."⁵² Redemption is neither natural nor the result of human agency or will, but through and through an act of God.

Bavinck's eschatological understanding of redemption is thoroughly interwoven with his use of the Trinity, and the eternal

⁵¹ GD I, pp. 347f. "Ultimately the belief in special revelation includes belief in another and better world than this one. This world will not become paradise. What is not in it can not come forth from it. If there is no *Jenseits*, no God who stands above nature, no *ordo supernaturalis*, then sin, darkness and death have the last word. The Scriptures make known to us another world of holiness and glory, which enters into this fallen world, not only as a doctrine but as godly *dunamis*, as history, as reality, as a harmonious system of word and deed together, as one, as the work of God, through which he elevates this world from its fall and leads it from the *status peccati* through the *status gratiae* to the *status gloriae*. Revelation is the coming of God to humanity, to live with her eternally."

⁵² GD IV, p. 674. The resurrection of the dead upon Christ's return "is not the result of an evolution of bodies in general, or of the resurrection body implanted in believers by regeneration and sacrament in particular, but the effect of an omnipotent, creative act of God." (LT, p. 133)

counsel, will and thoughts of God. Just as the world (and humanity) find their origin in God, the fact that they were created with a purpose or teleology indicates that they find their end in God as well. "Saamgevat in den Zoon, onder Hem als Hoofd vergaderd, komen alle schepselen weer tot den Vader, uit wien alle dingen zijn. En zoo heeft de wereld haar eeuwige idee, haar arche en haar telos in het drieenig wezen Gods. Daarom gaat de schepping uit van den Vader door den Zoon in den Geest, opdat zij in den Geest door den Zoon weder tot den Vader terugkeere."⁵³ Not only must Bavinck's talk of God be perceived within a relational framework, but each concept that he employs also bears eschatological import. The relationship between God and his creatures is teleological. The significance of the relation lies in its ordained and promised goal.

Locating his eschatological understanding of redemption within the framework of the priority of God leads Bavinck to a circular view of redemption in which all things come from and return to the Trinitarian God, but this is not simply a return to the beginning. Rather, "het eindpunt keert tot het uitgangspunt terug en is tegelijk een toppunt, dat boven het punt van aanvang hoog verheven is. De werken Gods vormen een cirkel, die in spiraalvorm naar

⁵³ *GD II*, p. 389. "Brought together in the Son, gathered under him as Head, all creatures come again to the Father from whom all things are. Thus the world has its eternal idea, her arche and her telos in the Trinitarian being of God. Therefore the creation goes out from the Father through the Son in the Spirit, so that it returns again in the Spirit through the Son to the Father."

boven streeft; ze zijn een verbinding van de horizontale en de verticale lijn; ze bewegen zich tegelijk voorwaarts en opwaarts."⁵⁴ Thus, this circularity cannot be construed in such a way that it 'flattens' the work of redemption by reducing it to a simple going out and coming back. He often speaks of redemption as elevating the creature.⁵⁵ Bavinck's concepts of unity in diversity and progressive revelation (with its distinction between essence and form) are used to emphasize the richness of God's work of redemption.

Al die werken zijn vele in aantal en kenmerken zich door grote verscheidenheid. Maar zij vormen toch ook een strenge eenheid. De eenheid en de verscheidenheid in de werken Gods gaat uit van en wijst terug op de eenheid en de verscheidenheid, die er in het Goddelijk Wezen bestaan. Een is dat Wezen en eenig en eenvoudig; en toch is het tegelijk drievuldig in zijne personen, in zijne openbaring, in zijne werkingen. Het gansche werk Gods is een ongebroken geheel, en sluit toch de rijkste afwisseling in.⁵⁶

A purely circular understanding of redemption diminishes both one's doctrine of God and one's understanding of redemption. Bavinck's

⁵⁴ *MD*, p. 129. "The end returns to the beginning and yet is at the same time the apex which is elevated high above the point of origin. The deeds of God form a circle which mounts upward in the form of a spiral; they represent a harmony of the horizontal and vertical line; they move forwards and upwards at the same time." (*RF*, p. 144, alt.)

⁵⁵ His descriptions of elevation will be discussed in the next chapter.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 128f. "Those deeds are numerous and characterized by great diversity. But they also constitute a strict unity. The unity and diversity in the works of God proceed from and return to the unity and diversity which exist in the Divine Being. That Being is one, single and simple. At the same time that being is threefold in his persons, in his revelation, and in his activities. The entire work of God is an unbroken whole, and nevertheless comprises the richest variety and change." (*RF*, p. 144, alt.)

ascending spiral seeks to honour both the greatness of God and the eschatological import of redemption.

The fact that redemption originates from and returns to the Trinity does not render God's creatures inconsequential. The world and humanity are not simply inert realities through which and upon which the Trinitarian God enacts redemption. They are important players in the drama of redemption precisely because God works out redemption in and through them. However, these players can be construed neither as ends in themselves nor as initiating agents in the drama. Because the circle of redemption does not simply return to the beginning, but returns to a higher point, and because the redemptive acts of God are so rich in character, the world and humanity have a rich significance in God's redemptive work.

Bavinck's doctrine of God is clearly in harmony with the issues described in the previous chapter. The concepts which Bavinck uses to describe his doctrine of God must be perceived as tools which seek to express the relational heart of his theology and its emphasis upon a personal God who enacts reconciliation. Categories such as the thoughts of God, the will of God and his eternal counsel are not first of all independent entities which can be conceived apart from the person of the living God. Rather, they are aids to understanding how the creating, redeeming and reconciling God carries out his work with personal intentionality, coherence and a breadth that encompasses all creatures great and

small.

The concepts which Bavinck uses also serve to articulate his eschatological understanding of redemption. The Trinity, the thoughts, will and eternal counsel of God each reinforce the fact that the cosmos is purposive, is inherently teleological and cannot be understood apart from its divinely ordained goal.

Aan den triumpf van het goede, dat is, aan de heerlijkheid van Gods naam is alles ondergeschikt. Bij de organisch-teleologische wereldbeschouwing van heel het universum is het de Goddelijke energie, die alle krachten der schepping aan zichzelf subordineert. Langs den weg van algemeene of bijzondere openbaring dringt zij in al de geledingen van het scheppingsorganisme in, onderhoudt en regeert het, en leidt het heen tot het vastgestelde einde. Al laat de geschiedenis ons nog zooveel wanorde en teruggang zien, zij beweegt zich toch voort naar de toekomst van Christus heen. God voert zijn raad uit, en naar Zijne belofte verwachten wij een nieuwen hemel en eene nieuwe aarde, in dewelke gerechtigheid woont.⁵⁷

This emphasis upon eschatological reconciliation is Christocentric. Indeed, Bavinck's entire doctrine of God crystallizes in the person and work of Christ; therefore the next half of this chapter will deal with his Christology, describing how the issues of the previous chapter and his doctrine of God culminate in his Christology.

⁵⁷ CW pp. 99f. "Everything is subordinate to the triumph of good, that is, to the glorification of God's name. According to the organic-teleological worldview of the entire universe, it is the divine energy that subordinates under itself all the powers of creation. It penetrates all the joints of the creation organism along the paths of general or special revelation, maintains and rules it, and leads it to its appointed end. Even though we see in history so much disorder and decline, it nevertheless moves forward to the return of Christ. God executes his counsel, and according to his promise we await a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwell."

Bavinck's doctrine of God and his eschatological understanding of redemption also provide the vantage point for understanding his concepts of duality and the organic. The cosmos is an organism in which everything is coherent, but this coherence has been broken by sin. Furthermore, even pre-fall humanity could not perceive this invisible coherence. The duality between invisible and visible realities becomes a dualism when one seeks to understand the invisible from the vantage point of the visible, and a monism when the distinction is denied. The one who begins with God knows by faith that reality is an organism imbued with meaning and purpose, awaiting its full redemption. Similarly, the duality between essence and form becomes reductionist when one mistakes the form for the essence, but when one knows by faith the reconciling heart of the Trinitarian God and the goal to which God's love is calling, one perceives that heart beating within the various forms in which revelation and redemption are received. The duality between general and special revelation becomes a dualism when one divides reality into separate portions for each, but when one understands that Christocentric special revelation makes known to us the essence of who God is and what he is doing, one understands that general revelation has meaning only within the context of special revelation.

Christology

Bavinck's trinitarian doctrine of God, centered on the cross of Jesus Christ, inevitably points to the centrality of Christology in his theology. The God revealed in the Scriptures is primarily the God who redeems his creatures, and redemption is found in Jesus Christ. "De heilsorde der Christelijke religie bepaalt de methode der Christelijke theologie. Wie gemeenschap met God zoekt, buiten alle historie, buiten alle openbaring in natuur en geschiedenis om, dat is centraal genomen buiten Christus om, die komt tot eene religieuze gevoelsstemming, waaraan de objectieve realiteit ontbreekt. Het eigenaardige der Christelijke religie ligt in den persoon van Christus."⁵⁸ At the heart of theology lies soteriology, salvation is entirely the work of the Trinitarian God, and this work is focused on the person of Jesus Christ.

This section will focus on Christology as it impacts upon Bavinck's eschatological understanding of redemption by summarizing it in three parts. First, it will provide a brief overview of his Christology. Second, it will focus on the heart of Bavinck's Christology, which highlights the significance of the concrete particularity of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Third, it will trace the 'preparation' motif in Bavinck's Christology.

⁵⁸ WO, pp. 192f. "The plan of salvation in the Christian religion determines the method of Christian theology. Whoever seeks fellowship with God outside of history and revelation in nature and history -- that is to say, without Christ -- experiences a religious feeling which misses the objective reality. The peculiarity of the Christian religion lies in the person of Christ." (PR, p. 227, alt.)

Because his theology focuses on the goal of redemption, Bavinck perceives the history of redemption as a series of preparatory events which culminate in that goal. These three aspects serve both to provide a summary of Bavinck's Christology and to explain how his Christology plays a determinative role in his eschatological understanding of redemption.

In his typical method of holding statements together in tension, Bavinck stresses both the inadequacy and necessity of Christological formulations. In a statement which is worth quoting in its entirety he affirms that theological statements are by nature incapable of giving a just account of the reality of Jesus Christ.

Nu spreekt het vanzelf, dat deze belijdenis van Nicea en Chalcedon op geene onfeilbaarheid aanspraak mag maken. De termen, waarvan de kerk en de theologie zich bedient, zooals persoon, naturen, eenswezensheid, enz. worden niet in de Schrift gevonden, maar zijn eene vrucht van het nadenken, dat de Christenheid langzamerhand aan deze verborgenheid der godzaligheid wijden moest; zij werd er toe gedwongen door de dwalingen, die van alle kanten zoowel binnen als buiten de kerk het hoofd opstaken. Al die uitdrukkingen en omschrijvingen, welke in de belijdenis der kerk en de taal der theologie gebezigd worden, hebben dan ook niet ten doel, om het mysterie, dat hier voorligt, te verklaren, maar om het zuiver en ongeschonden te handhaven tegenover allen, die het verzwakken of ontkennen. De vleeschwording des Words is geen probleem, dat wij moeten of kunnen oplossen, maar het is een wonderbaar feit, dat wij dankend belijden, zooals God zelf het in zijn Woord voor onze oogen plaatst.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ MD, pp. 303f. "It is of course self-evident that this confession of Nicea and Chalcedon may not lay claim to infallibility. The terms of which the church and its theology make use, such as person, nature, unity of substance, and the like, are not found in Scripture, but are the product of reflection which Christianity gradually had to devote to this mystery of salvation. The church was compelled to do this reflecting by the heresies

The inadequacy of such terms testifies to the majesty of Jesus Christ. "Dit apostolisch getuigenis aangaande Jezus den Christus was te rijk en te diep, dan dat het terstond in het Christlijke bewustzijn kon opgenomen en in eene alle dwaling afsnijdende, duidelijke formule kon wergegeven worden."⁶⁰ This inadequacy must be acknowledged but need not be lamented. Even though "geen twee theologen zijn het er misschien over eens, hoe Christus onze zaligheid is, en wat die zaligheid eigenlijk is, zij belijden toch beiden, dat Christus onze zaligheid is."⁶¹ Recognizing that Jesus is Lord is a matter of worship; while understanding is important, it is secondary. The theologian at worship is simply called to respect the "veelzijdigheid" (many-sidedness) of the Scriptural descriptions and affirmations concerning Jesus Christ and seek to give as full an account of them as possible.⁶²

which loomed up on all sides, both within the church and outside of it. All those expressions and statements which are employed in the confession of the church and in the language of theology are not designed to explain the mystery that presents itself here, but rather to maintain it pure and unviolated over against those who would weaken or deny it. The incarnation of the Word is not a problem which we must solve, or can solve, but a wonderful fact, rather, which we gratefully confess in such a way as God himself presents it to us in his Word." (RF, pp. 321f., alt.)

⁶⁰ GD III, p. 232. "This apostolic witness concerning Jesus the Christ was too rich and too deep to be immediately taken into the Christian consciousness as a clear formula which could cut off all errors."

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 369. Even though "there are no two theologians who agree completely concerning *how* Christ is our salvation and *what* this salvation actually is, they both confess that Christ is our salvation." (emphasis his)

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 371.

While Christological statements are inadequate, they are also utterly necessary. "Indien wij gelooven, dat wij Christus bezitten, dat wij gemeenschap met Hem hebben, dat wij zijn eigendom zijn, dan moet dat geloof ook spreken, en tot woorden, termen, uitdrukkingen, omschrijvingen de toevlucht nemen."⁶³ Having said that, Bavinck painstakingly defends the Chalcedonian formulation of two natures in one person, describing how various heresies overemphasize either the divine or human nature of Jesus Christ and/or violate the integrity of his personhood.⁶⁴ He concludes that "om all de gegevens der Schrift over den persoon van Christus te handhaven, kwam de theologie allengs tot de leer der twee naturen," and "de Schrift kent slechts een persoon, een subject, een Christus, maar schrijft daaraan toch een dubbele soort van eigenschappen toe, Goddelijke en menschelijke."⁶⁵ Because Christ is both human and divine, he "is geen individu naast anderen, maar Hoofd en Vertegenwoordiger der menschheid, de tweede en laatste Adam, de Middelaar Gods en der menschen."⁶⁶ This formulation

⁶³ *MD*, p. 304. "If we believe that we possess Christ, that we have communion with him, that we are his own, then such belief must be confessed with the mouth and thus must resort to words, terms, expressions, and definitions." (*RF*, p. 322, alt.)

⁶⁴ Cf. *GD* III, pp. 232-306.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 285, 287. "In order to do justice to all the Scriptural descriptions concerning the person of Christ, theology came to the two natures doctrine," and "Scripture speaks only of one person, one subject, one Christ, but ascribes to him a double set of qualities, divine and human."

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 289. "He is not an individual next to others, but the head and representative of humanity, the second and last Adam, the Mediator between God and humanity."

preserves the truth that ultimately Jesus Christ is a person whom we are called to worship, and not an enigma that we strive to understand. "Daarmede wordt dan ten slotte weer de band der dogmatiek aan de belijdenis der gemeente hersteld, want deze heeft alle eeuwen door den gekruisten en opgestanen Christus beleden als haar Heer en haar God."⁶⁷ Bavinck embraces the Chalcedonian formulation because it effectively counters heretical constructs. "Het is echter juist deze onderscheiding van natuur en persoon, welke en bij de triniteit en bij de leer van Christus het grootste bezwaar ontmoet en daarom ook in beide leerstukken de oorzaak der meeste dwalingen is. In God was er eene natuur en drie personen; in Christus een persoon en twee naturen."⁶⁸

Bavinck's emphatic endorsement of the Chalcedonian formulation serves to reinforce the relational heart of his theology with its emphasis upon reconciliation. The ultimate Christological truth is that "het kruis staat in het middelpunt van hun Evangelie" and "vrede is er alleen in het bloed des kruises."⁶⁹ We may (and must!) articulate our formulas, but the benefits of Christ are

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 254. "In this way the relation between dogmatics and the confession of the church is restored, for the latter has throughout the ages confessed the crucified and risen Christ as her Lord and her God."

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 290f. "In both the doctrine of the Trinity and in Christology this distinction between nature and person meets the greatest objections and thus in both doctrines is also the origin of most errors. In God there is one nature and three persons; in Christ one person and two natures."

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 379, 382. "The cross stands at the center of the gospel," and "peace is only found through the blood of the cross."

beyond full articulation. "De gemeenschap, in welke Christus blijkens deze getuigenissen der Schrift met ons is ingegaan, is zoo innig en diep, dat wij er ons geene voorstelling en geen begrip van kunnen vormen. Zij wordt door het woord plaatsvervangend lijden nog maar op zwakke en gebrekkige wijze uitgedrukt, en gaat al onze verbeelding en gedachte zeer verre te boven."⁷⁰ In affirming Chalcedon Bavinck both aligns himself with the traditions of Christian orthodoxy and reinforces the unique emphases of his own theology.

The Person and Work of Jesus Christ

"Het doel der openbaring is niet Christus; Christus is centrum en middel; het doel is, dat God wederom in zijn schepselen wone en in den kosmos zijn heerlijkheid openbare."⁷¹ "Christus (is) waarlijk het keerpunt der tijden, het kruis het middelpunt der wereldgeschiedenis."⁷² Statements such as these recur often throughout Bavinck's corpus.⁷³ As is so typical of his thought,

⁷⁰ *MD*, p. 337. "The communion into which Christ, according to the Scriptures, has entered with us is so intimate and deep that we cannot form an idea or picture of it. The term substitutionary suffering expresses in only a weak and defective way what it means. It far transcends our imagination and our thought." (*RF*, p. 355, alt.)

⁷¹ *GD I*, p. 352. "The goal of revelation is not Christ; Christ is the center and means. The goal is that God will once again dwell in his creatures and reveal his glory in the cosmos."

⁷² *GD III*, p. 203. "Christ is truly the turning-point of the times, the cross the middle point of world history."

⁷³ Cf. *GD I*, pp. 292, 319, 330, 347, 354, *GD III*, p. 254, *MD*, pp. 27, 35, *WO*, pp. 144, 266, *KL*, p. 236.

these affirmations require one to hold together two statements which are, to some degree at least, in tension. First, they affirm the particular, unrepeatable and irreplaceable significance of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Second, they place Christ's person and work within a larger context and a larger goal. "De eene komst van den Messias splitst zich in eene dubbele, ter voorbereiding en ter voltooiing, der Eschatologie und die Soteriologie."⁷⁴ This summary of Bavinck's Christology will respect this distinction, first describing the person and work of Jesus Christ, and then placing this in the larger context of the history of redemption.

Descriptions of the person and work of Christ form the centerpiece of Bavinck's theology. While he situates this discussion within the overall framework of redemption history, he makes clear that this historical context is not the primary factor in formulating Christology. "Ofschoon Christus zich bij zijne vleeschwording aan de voorafgaande openbaring aansluit en door natuur en geschiedenis zijn eigen komst heeft voorbereid, Hij is geen product van het verleden, geen vrucht van Israel of de menschheid."⁷⁵ One does not understand the significance of Jesus

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 226. "The one coming of the Messiah is split into two, the preparation and the completion, Eschatology and Soteriology." (Bavinck quotes here from Baldensperger, *Das Selbstbewusstsein Jesu*, p. 114)

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 263. "Even though Christ, through his Incarnation, linked himself with preceding revelation and through nature and history prepared his own coming, he is not a product of the past, not the fruit of Israel or humanity."

Christ in the context of a frame of reference provided by redemption history, but rather one understands this history in the context of a frame of reference formed by the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The structure of Bavinck's treatment of Christology provides the first clue concerning his emphases. In keeping with classical Reformed expositions of Christology, a major section of his dogmatics entitled "Over Den Persoon en Het Werk van Christus" is subdivided into "Het Verbond der Genade," "De Persoon van Christus," "Het Werk van Christus in zijne vernedering," and "Het werk van Christus in zijne verhooging."⁷⁶ Bavinck's discussion of the covenant of grace serves to place the significance of Jesus Christ in its larger redemptive context. The subsequent headings suggest two distinctions that Bavinck works with in his Christology: that between the person and work of Christ, and that between the humiliation and the exaltation of Christ.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ *GD* III, pp. 174-481. A major section entitled "Concerning the person and the work of Christ" is subdivided into "The Covenant of Grace," "The Person of Christ," "The work of Christ in his humiliation," and "The work of Christ in his exaltation." The corresponding section in *Magnalia Dei* is slightly different: "De Persoon van Christus" is replaced by "De Middelaar des Verbonds" and "De Goddelijke en Menschelijke Natuur van Christus." ("The Mediator of the Covenants" and "The Divine and Human Nature of Christ") This divergence aside, *MD*'s chapter titles are identical to those in *GD*.

⁷⁷ The difference in structure between the *GD* and the *MD* suggests that the former highlights the "one person" affirmation from the Chalcedonian formulation, while the latter highlights the "two natures." The actual discussion in both works, however, emphasizes both aspects of the formulation. I do not believe that the difference in headings carries great significance.

The distinction between person and work functions less as a distinction and more as a vehicle for comprehensiveness by providing two avenues for discussing the one issue of the significance of Jesus Christ. Bremmer correctly observes that, for Bavinck, "het werk van Christus niet van zijn persoon kan worden losgemaakt. We hebben niet met een abstract 'werk' te maken alleen, maar met de levende Christus, die zijn werk in zijn persoon als middelaar voor ons volbracht. Vooral in de soteriologie hebben we niet te maken met van Christus geïsoleerde weldaden, maar met de levende Christus zelf, die concreet, in zijn persoon, een verzoening is voor onze zonden."⁷⁸ This inseparability is apparent in Bavinck's application of the Chalcedonian formulation to the person and work of Christ. He perceives the claim that Christ is "one person" as an affirmation of the concrete particularity of Jesus which cannot be reduced to abstractions or isolated aspects of who Jesus is. "Een mensch is de voltooide openbaring Gods."⁷⁹ Similarly, while he embraces the Calvinist doctrine of the prophetic, priestly and kingly offices of Christ, he warns against understanding these atomistically. Christ "verricht maar niet profetische, priesterlijke en koninklijke

⁷⁸ Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck als Dogmaticus* (Kampen: Kok, 1961) p. 255. "The work of Christ cannot be separated from his person. We are not dealing only with an abstract 'work,' but with the living Christ who accomplished his work for us as mediator in his person. Especially in soteriology we are not dealing with benefits which have been separated from Christ, but with the living Christ himself, who, in his concrete person, is the reconciliation for our sins."

⁷⁹ *MD*, p. 81. "A person is the completed revelation of God." (*RF*, p. 93)

werkzaamheden, doch is zelf in heel zijn persoon profeet, priester en koning."⁸⁰ Furthermore, one cannot attribute differing aspects of Christ's being to either his divine or human nature, for "de Schrift kent slechts een persoon, een subject, een Christus, maar schrijft daaraan toch een dubbele sort van eigenschappen toe, Goddelijke en menschelijke."⁸¹ Jesus Christ is first of all a person, and cannot be defined in terms of abstract roles or qualities.

The two natures doctrine seeks to circumvent teachings which do not take proper account of either the divine or human nature of Christ. "Tegenover deze dualistische en atomistische beshouwing plaatst nu de Schrift de organische. In eenen komt God tot allen, niet in schijn, maar in waarheid. Daar is een Middelaar Gods en der menschen, de mensch Christus Jezus."⁸² To proclaim that Jesus Christ has two natures in one person is not to proclaim abstract theological dogma, but rather is to understand his concrete significance: he is the mediator and reconciler between God and his creatures.

⁸⁰ *GD* III, p. 351. Christ "does not perform prophetic, priestly and kingly activities, but is himself in his entire person prophet, priest and king."

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 287. "The Scriptures know only one person, one subject, one Christ, but attribute to him both divine and human qualities."

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 281. "The Scripture posits an organic view over against this dualistic and atomistic way of thinking. God comes to all in one, not just in semblance but in truth. There is one mediator between God and humanity, the person Jesus Christ."

Hij is niet een derde, die van buiten af tusschen God en ons intreedt, maar Hij is de Zoon van God zelve, afschijnsel zijner eigenschappen der Goddelijke natuur deelachtig, en tegelijk de zoon des menschen, Hoofd der menschheid, Heer der gemeente. Hij staat niet tusschen twee partijen in, maar Hij is beide partijen in eigen persoon.⁸³

Jesus revealed the Father, but he did so as a human being. He walked on earth "door geloof en hope en niet door aanschouwen."⁸⁴ "Er (is) in Christus een menschelijk weten, een intellectueele ontwikkeling, eene toeneming in wijsheid en kennis geweest."⁸⁵ Jesus Christ is fully human and fully divine. Therefore he is the person who is able to fulfill the work of the mediator between God and the creation.

Bavinck introduces his discussion of the work of Christ by observing that historically the church has not battled heresies in this area as it has concerning the person of Christ, and as a result has not been compelled to develop a clear formula to describe the work of Christ.⁸⁶ Bavinck hears the Scripture to be saying that the primary work of Christ was to be obedient to his

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 347. "He is not a third party who comes between God and us from the outside, but he is the Son of God himself, the reflection of his virtues, participating in the divine nature. Simultaneously he is the Son of man, Head of humanity, Lord of the church. He does not stand between two parties, but he is both parties in his own person."

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 297. He walked on earth "through faith and hope and not through sight."

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* "There was in Christ a human knowing, an intellectual development, an increase in wisdom and in knowledge."

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 322. Bavinck does, however, observe the significant role that Anselm's satisfaction teaching has played in this area (p. 325).

Father's will. He clarifies the necessity of obedience through his teaching of the two covenants.

Er zijn in de Schrift slechts twee verbonden, twee wegen voor den mensch ten hemel, n.l. het werk- en het genadeverbond. Het werkverbond is de weg ten hemel voor den ongevallen, het genadeverbond die voor den gevallen mensch. Het werkverbond werd met de menschheid gesloten in Adam, het genadeverbond in Christus.⁸⁷

The requirement of the covenant of works is obedience. Because Christ was obedient, even to death on the cross, the covenant of grace is available to all. "Het werk van Christus bestaat dus niet zoozeer in zijne *humilitas*, noch ook alleen in zijn dood, maar in zijne gansche, zoowel actieve als passieve gehoorzaamheid."⁸⁸ "De Heilige Schrift beschouwt heel het werk van Christus als eene vervulling van Gods wet en eene voldoening aan zijn eisch."⁸⁹ This work culminated in his death on the cross. Therefore, "het vormt in het leven van Christus niet een toevallig, alleen door de omstandigheden noodzakelijk geworden, maar een wezenlijk, onmisbaar bestanddeel; daardoor voornamelijk, als voleindiging zijner gehoorzaamheid, is de verzoening der zonden, de gerechtigheid en de

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 209. "There are only two covenants in Scripture, two routes for the person to heaven, the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. The covenant of works is the way to heaven for the unfallen, the covenant of grace for the fallen person. The covenant of works was made with humanity in Adam, the covenant of grace in Christ."

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 327. "The work of Christ does not consist so much in his *humilitas*, nor only in his death, but in the entirety of his active as well as his passive obedience."

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 383. "The Holy Scripture considers the entire work of Christ as a fulfilling of God's law and the satisfaction of his requirement."

eeuwige zaligheid verworven."⁹⁰ For this reason the cross stands as the turning point of history.

The cross is also the turning point because it marks the end of Christ's humiliation and leads into his exaltation. The division of Christ's work into his humiliation and his exaltation further illustrates the complete intertwining of his person and work, for this division focuses on the concrete narrative history of events involving a person at work. Furthermore, this emphasis upon narrative history illustrates the Trinitarian character of Bavinck's Christology, for in the humiliation of Christ we see the obedience of the Son to the Father, and in the exaltation we see both the response of the Father to the Son's obedience and the Father with the exalted Son sending the Spirit to communicate the benefits of reconciliation.

All aspects of Bavinck's Christology (and indeed, his theology) meet at the cross. Here we see God's deepest self-revelation, for "bij (Jezus) kruis ontvouwt zich de volle inhoud van het geloof des Ouden Verbonds: Genadig en barmhartig is de Heere, lankmoedig en groot van goedertierenheid."⁹¹ All of history

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 379. "It is not an accidental part of Christ's life, necessitated by circumstances, but it is an essential, indispensable element. Through this primarily, as the completion of his obedience, is the propitiation of sins, righteousness and eternal blessedness attained."

⁹¹ *MD*, p. 19. "At (Jesus') cross the full content of the faith of the Old Testament is unfolded: Gracious and merciful is the Lord God, longsuffering and abundant in goodness." (*RF*, p. 28)

flows to and from the cross, for "het kruis van Christus deelt de geschiedenis der menschheid in twee helften, in de voorbereiding tot en in de uitwerking van de verzoening; maar in beide deelen, van de schepping tot het kruis, en van het kruis tot de wederkomst is ze een geheel, een onafgebroken werk Gods. Het Christendom heeft zijn kern en middelpunt in de persoon en het werk van Christus."⁹² In the cross we see both the humiliation and the exaltation of Jesus held together. "Zijne verhooging vangt dus niet eerst bij zijne opstanding en hemelvaart aan, maar begint reeds bij zijn kruis. Kruis en kroon, dood en opstanding, vernedering en verhooging liggen in dezelfde lijn."⁹³ Thus the cross, planted at the center of history, is an eschatological phenomenon, culminating in the return of Christ, "de laatste en hoogste trap in den staat zijner verhooging."⁹⁴ Ultimately, all reality is held together through the cross. "Christus heeft (alle

⁹² *WO*, pp. 266f. "The cross of Christ divides history into two parts, -- the preparation for and the accomplishment of reconciliation; but in both parts, from the creation to the cross and from the cross to the return of Christ, it is one whole, one uninterrupted work of God. Christianity has its heart and center in the person and work of Christ." (*PR*, p. 308, alt.)

⁹³ *GD III*, p. 413. "His exaltation does not begin first at his resurrection and ascension, but begins already at his cross. The events of cross and crown, death and resurrection, humiliation and exaltation are part of the same path."

⁹⁴ *GD IV*, p. 667. The return of Christ is "the last and highest step in the state of his exaltation." Therefore, Bavinck continues, "de eschatologie wortelt in de Christologie en is zelve Christologie, leer van den eindelijken, volkomen triumpf van Christus en van zijn rijk over al zijne vijanden." ("Eschatology is rooted in and is itself Christology, the teaching of the final, complete triumph of Christ and his kingdom over all his enemies." *LT*, p. 122)

dingen) door het bloed des kruises tot zich zelve en dus ook onderling verzoend. Het is alles onder Hem als het Hoofd vergaderd tot een, in Hem gerecapituleerd."⁹⁵ Therefore, Bavinck repeatedly refers to the cross as the only weapon employed by Jesus in establishing his kingdom.⁹⁶

Bavinck follows Calvin's emphasis upon stressing the benefits which the believer receives from the person and work of Jesus Christ. Christ primarily functions as the mediator (*middelaar*) who achieves reconciliation (*verzoening*). The terms '*middelaar*' and '*verzoening*' are completely intertwined (thereby further illustrating the inseparability of the person and work of Christ). As mediator he is both God and creature; he reveals the heart of the Father,⁹⁷ and in him the invisible God becomes visible.⁹⁸ Through his humiliation and exaltation he both reveals the pattern in which the believer lives in right relationship with God and establishes right relationship once again.⁹⁹ Christ is God's representative to humanity and humanity's representative before the

⁹⁵ "Het Rijk Gods, Het Hoogste Goed" in *KL*, p. 56. "Through the blood of the cross Christ has reconciled all things to himself, and therefore also to each other. All is gathered under him as Head into one, and recapitulated in him."

⁹⁶ Cf., *GD III*, p. 423; *KL*, p. 96; *MD*, p. 367.

⁹⁷ *MD*, p. 19.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 299.

⁹⁹ *GD III*, pp. 372, 412f.

face of God.¹⁰⁰ His work is primarily "eene verzoening voor onze zonden,"¹⁰¹ the forgiveness of sins and the overcoming of the curse upon the creation. But, as all things are gathered under him as Head, we also see in Christ a reconciliation of the dualities of this creation. "Het koninkrijk, dat Hij prediken en stichten kwam, (is) tegelijk inwendig en uitwendig, onzichtbaar en zichtbaar, geestelijk en lichamelijk, tegenwoordig en toekomstig, particulier en universeel, van boven en toch beneden, uit den hemel en toch op aarde."¹⁰² Reconciliation goes deeper than the restoration of right relationship between God and humanity. When Jesus returns, "dan is het wonder geworden tot natuur. *Ethos* en *physis* zijn verzoend. Het koninkrijk Gods en het koninkrijk der wereld zijn een."¹⁰³ Because Christ's work of reconciliation is all-encompassing, Bavinck provides long lists of its benefits with appropriate Scriptural references.¹⁰⁴ The very character of reconciliation requires such a "veelzijdig" (many-sided) approach.

Uit deze eene weldaad der verzoening, door Christus verworven, vloeien allerlei weldaden voort. Dat kan ook niet anders. Als de verhouding tusschen God en de wereld in het reine is,

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 372.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *MD*, p. 287. "The kingdom which he came to preach and establish is at the same time internal and external, invisible and visible, spiritual and physical, present and future, particular and universal, from above and yet below, coming down from heaven and yet existing on the earth." (*RF*, p. 304, alt.)

¹⁰³ *GD I*, p. 311. When Jesus returns, "then the miracle has become nature. *Ethos* and *physis* are reconciled. The kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world are one."

¹⁰⁴ Cf. *GD III*, pp. 319-321, 445f.

dan komt te zijner tijd alles in orde, ook de verhouding tusschen hemel en aarde, engelen en menschen, menschen onderling, en ook de verhouding der menschen tot zonde, dood wereld, Satan enz.¹⁰⁵

In such ways Bavinck describes aspects of the concrete content of the fact that all things are reconciled through the blood of Jesus Christ shed on the cross.

The cosmic significance of the cross indicates that Christ as mediator is not only the mediator of redemption but also of creation. Though one can distinguish these two functions of his mediatorial work, one must perceive this distinction also as two aspects of one larger accomplishment. Beginning once again with the recapitulation text in Eph. 1:10, Bavinck concludes, "Christus heeft niet slechts eene soteriologische, maar ook eene kosmologische beteekenis Hij is middelaar der herschepping niet. alleen, maar ook der schepping."¹⁰⁶ The fundamental unity between these two mediatorial roles is found in the cross. Bavinck begins with the cross and proceeds from that central historical point in both directions, as it were, to the proton and the eschaton, concluding, "daarom gaat de schepping uit van den Vader door den

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 445. "All sorts of benefits flow forth from this one benefit of reconciliation which has been attained through Christ. It can't be any other way. When the relationship between God and the world is right again, then everything will be restored in time, also the relationship between heaven and earth, angels and people, among people, and also the relationship of people to sin, death, the world, Satan, etc."

¹⁰⁶ *GD II*, p. 387. "Christ has not only a soteriological, but also a cosmological significance. He is not only the mediator of re-creation, but also of creation."

Zoon in den Geest, opdat zij in den Geest door den Zoon weder tot den Vader terugkeere."¹⁰⁷

Much more can be said concerning Bavinck's account of the person and work of Jesus Christ. His desire to give a just account of the Scriptural witness results in multitudinous references to passages, listing many different names and metaphors that have been applied to Christ and references to many Christological theories. Though this brief summary describes the heart of his Christology, it is by no means comprehensive. To understand the relation between creation, Christ and eschaton in Bavinck's theology, one must also give an account of the relation between Christ and redemption history in Bavinck.

Jesus Christ and the History of Redemption

Bavinck's Christology illustrates most clearly the import of his eschatological understanding of redemption. The cross stands at the center of history as the redemptive event of God. Yet, the cross does not stand there in isolation; all that precedes the cross serves as preparation and all that follows functions as consequence. The preparation begins in the eternal counsel of God, and the consequences culminate in the eschaton. Thus, in Jesus Christ we see the link between the invisible and the visible and between the eternal and the temporal. In Jesus Christ we see the

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 389. "Therefore the creation goes out from the Father through the Son in the Spirit, so that in the Spirit through the Son it returns again to the Father."

link between God and all his creatures.

I will describe the impact of Bavinck's Christology upon his eschatological understanding of redemption by following his method. He narrates chronologically the link between the eternal and the temporal, describing in turn its eternal origins, the creation, the preparation culminating in the Incarnation, the life, death, resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ, the gathering of the church and the Parousia. Throughout his description Bavinck takes care to emphasize that it is the person of Jesus Christ and his death on the cross that stand at the center of this history of redemption. In other words, he is not formulating a system to explain the relationship between eternity and time (or any other theological/philosophical problem) into which Jesus Christ must somehow be inserted as the concrete manifestation of an abstraction. "De Christus-figuur is geen idee en geen ideaal van het menschelijk brein, zooals velen in vroegere eeuwen en ook sommigen thans nog ervan willen maken, maar zij is eene reele gestalte, welke in een bepaalden tijd en in een bepaald persoon, in den mensch Jezus, ons tegemoet is getreden...Het kruis staat in het middelpunt der apostolische prediking."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ MD, pp. 291f. "The Christ-figure is not an idea nor an ideal of the human mind, as many in past ages maintain, and as some in our time also assert, but is a real figure who met us in a particular period and in a particular person in the man Jesus...The cross stands at the center of the apostolic preaching." (RF, pp. 309f., alt.)

Bavinck's employs a preparation motif throughout his descriptions of the history of redemption. He uses the motif indiscriminately, but in order to summarize it properly here, one must distinguish three uses. First, he names three specific preparations for the Incarnation of Jesus Christ which are not events in the history of redemption but prior conditions which allowed for the possibility of the Incarnation. Second, he isolates the Incarnation as a central point in the history of redemption, and discusses those events which were preparatory to the Incarnation.¹⁰⁹ Finally, he treats every stage in the history of redemption both as preparation for the subsequent stages and as that which was prepared by the previous stages.

The three prior conditions begin with the Trinitarian being of God.

De leer van Christus is het middelpunt der gansche dogmatiek. Indien echter Christus het vleeschgeworden Woord is, dan is de vleeschwording ook het centrale feit der gansche wereldgeschiedenis, dan moet ze voorbereid zijn van de tijden der eeuwen en na- en door-werken tot in alle eeuwigheid toe. Ten eerste heeft de vleeschwording haar onderstelling en grondslag in het trinitarisch wezen Gods. Hier toch blijft God die Hij is en kan Hij toch aan anderen zich mededeelen. De triniteit maakt in een woord mogelijk, dat er een middelaar zij, die zelf beide de Goddelijke en de menschelijke natuur

¹⁰⁹ This isolating of the Incarnation is somewhat ambiguous, for when Bavinck's description of the history of redemption comes to the Incarnation, he emphasizes that it is not the Incarnation itself but the cross which stands at the center. ("Niet door de geboorte, maar door den dood zijns Zoons zijn wij met God verzoend." [MD, p. 313. "It is not by the birth but by the death of his Son that we are reconciled to God." RF, p. 331]).

deelachtig is en alzo God en mensch met elkander verbindt.¹¹⁰

Bavinck parallels this connection between the Incarnation and the Trinity by also describing connections between the Incarnation and the *pactum salutis*,¹¹¹ the eternal counsel of God,¹¹² the will of God¹¹³ and the thoughts of God.¹¹⁴ These links between the Incarnation and these various aspects of Bavinck's doctrine of God serve to highlight the correlation between his Christology and his doctrine of God. The point of these links is that (a) the Incarnation was an historical event which was planned from eternity, and (b) God is a being who can share himself with his creatures. The Trinity helps us to see that God is sharable from eternity, and this quality of being sharable has characterized the acts of God throughout the history of redemption and are epitomized in the Incarnation.

One way in which Bavinck frequently describes the sharability

¹¹⁰ *GD* III, pp. 254f. "Christology is the central point of all dogmatics. If Christ is actually the Word made flesh, then the Incarnation is also the central fact of all world history, and then it must be prepared from eternity and worked through towards eternity. In the first place, the Incarnation has its presupposition and foundation in the Trinitarian being of God. Here God remains as he is and yet can also share himself with others. The Trinity makes it possible that there is a mediator who shares both the divine and human nature and who also links God and person together."

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 257, 349.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 260.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 356.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

of God within the Trinity is by speaking of the generation of the Son from the Father. He uses this notion of generation to introduce, by means of comparison, a second necessary prior condition for the Incarnation, the creation of the universe. While both point to divine sharability, there are significant differences between them.

De Schrift en dienovereenkomstig de Christelijke theologie kent emanatie en creatie; een tweevoudige mededeeling Gods, eene binnen, eene buiten het Goddelijk wezen; eene aan den Zoon, die in den beginne bij God en zelf God was, en eene aan de schepselen, die in den tijd ontstaan; eene van eeuwigheid en eene in den tijd; een uit het wezen en eene door den wil Gods. De eerste heet generatie, de tweede creatie. Door de generatie wordt eeuwiglijk het adaequate beeld Gods medegedeeld aan den Zoon; door de creatie wordt slechts eene zwakke, flauwe gelijkenis Gods medegedeeld aan het schepsel. Maar toch staan beide in verband. Zonder de generatie zou de creatie niet mogelijk zijn. Indien God zich niet absoluut kon mededeelen aan den Zoon, kon Hij veelmin in relatieven zin zich mededeelen aan zijn schepsel.¹¹⁵

Thus Bavinck stresses both the distinction between the Creator and the creature while also stressing that they are also similar to the extent that both reveal divine sharability.¹¹⁶ The entire

¹¹⁵ *CD* II, p. 383. "The Scripture and, accordingly, Christian theology, speak of emanation and creation, a two-fold sharing of God, one inside and one outside the divine Being. One to the Son, who in the beginning was with God and was God, and one to the creature, who originated in time; one from eternity and one in time, one out of God's being and one out of God's will. The first is called generation, the second, creation. Through generation the image of God is shared eternally with the Son; through the creation merely a weak, dim likeness of God is shared with the creature. But both are connected. Without the generation creation would not be possible. If God could not absolutely share himself with the Son, then much less could he in a relative sense share himself with his creature."

¹¹⁶ Once again we see Bavinck walking that fine line of seeking to hold together two statements that are difficult to reconcile. The verb 'mededelen,' which I have translated as 'share oneself with,' also has connotations of communicating oneself or imparting

creation reveals this about God, but the creation of humanity in the imago Dei particularly functions in this manner. "Bepaaldelijk is de schepping der menschen naar Gods beeld eene onderstelling en voorbereiding van de menschwording Gods. Bij de schepping van Adam heeft God al op den Christus gerekend."¹¹⁷

Bavinck names one more prior condition for the Incarnation: "Eene derde en laatste voorbereiding van de vleeschwording is de geschiedenis der openbaring van het paradijs af aan. Revelatie berust toch op dezelfde gedachte als de incarnatie, d.i. op de mededeelbaarheid Gods, zoowel in het wezen Gods aan den Zoon (generatie) als buiten het wezen Gods aan de schepselen (creatie)."¹¹⁸ With this third preparation Bavinck has described the framework for the Incarnation: the sharability of God and the

oneself. Bavinck does not wish to blur the Creator/creature distinction, but he does wish to describe how the creation was made for intimate relation between Creator and creature, that this intimacy is epitomized in the Incarnation, and that the creation itself was one of the essential preparations for the Incarnation. "Met en in de schepping is de mogelijkheid van de menschwording gegeven. Wie de vleeschwording onmogelijk acht, moet bij nadenken ook komen tot de loochening der schepping." (*Ibid.*, p. 258. "With and in the creation is given the possibility of the Incarnation. One who considers the Incarnation impossible must also necessarily deny the creation.")

¹¹⁷ *GD* III, pp. 257f. "The creation of humanity in the image of God is particularly a presupposition and preparation for the Incarnation of God. In the creation of Adam God already had counted on Christ."

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 260f. "A third and last preparation for the Incarnation is the history of revelation from paradise on. Revelation is grounded in the same thought as the Incarnation, that is, the sharability of God, in both the being of God with the Son (generation) and outside the being of God to the creature (creation)."

fact that both the creation and history have been created by him in such a way that they are capable of functioning as vehicles of his sharability.

These three preparations for the Incarnation not only describe a theological framework of prior conditions for the Incarnation. They also describe a framework in which the Son is Lord over all the creation. "Alle dingen zijn tegelijk uit den Vader door den Zoon in den Geest. De Zoon is de persoonlijke wijsheid, de Logos, door welken alles geschapen wordt; alles rust en heeft systeem in Hem."¹¹⁹ Therefore, "Christus heeft niet slechts eene soteriologische, maar ook eene kosmologische beteekenis. Hij is middelaar der herschepping niet alleen, maar ook der schepping."¹²⁰ Christ's works as the mediator of re-creation and of creation are not divorced from each other, but stand in intimate relation. All things have been made through him, and through him all things have been redeemed. "Daarom gaat de schepping uit van den Vader door den Zoon in den Geest, opdat zij in den Geest door den Zoon weder tot den Vader terugkeere."¹²¹

¹¹⁹ *GD II*, p. 386. "All things are at the same time from the Father through the Son in the Spirit. The Son is the personal wisdom, the Logos, through which all was created; everything is rooted and has order in him."

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 387. "Christ has not only a soteriological, but also a cosmological significance. He is not only the mediator of re-creation, but also of creation."

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 389. "Therefore the creation goes out from the Father through the Son in the Spirit, so that in the Spirit through the Son it returns again to the Father."

Bavinck's preparation motif does not end with these three prior conditions for the Incarnation; he employs preparation language throughout his description of the history of redemption. The ultimate goal of redemption is God living with his people, the establishment of the perfected Kingdom of God, and everything that precedes that goal functions in a preparatory manner. The three preparations described in the previous section provide the framework for the possibility of the Incarnation, a framework in which the Creator creates the possibility for intimate relation with the creature. The history of redemption which takes place within this framework also functions as a preparation, both for the Incarnation and, ultimately, for the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

Therefore, Bavinck reads the Old Testament with a hermeneutic which perceives it as pointing to Jesus Christ. "Er zijn in het Oude Testament niet enkele, op zichzelf staande Messiaansche teksten, maar heel de Oudtestamentische bedeeling met haar personen en gebeurtenissen, haar ambten en instellingen, haar wetten en ceremonien is eene heenwijzing en heenbeweging naar de vervulling in het Nieuwe Testament."¹²² The phrase "fulfillment in the New

¹²² GD III, p. 221. "There are not in the Old Testament a few individual Messianic texts which stand alone, but the entire Old Testament dispensation with its persons and events, its offices and institutions, its laws and ceremonies points the way and moves toward its fulfillment in the New Testament." Bavinck clearly demonstrates his approach of perceiving the entire Old Testament in this manner by providing, in the brief section which elaborates this point (pp. 220-223), almost one hundred references from the Old Testament.

Testament" suggests Christological import which Bavinck later confirms by declaring that "volgens het Nieuwe Testament loopen al deze verschillende getuigenissen van wet en profetie op Christus uit; het gansche Oude Testament wordt principieel in Hem vervuld; in Hem zijn alle beloften Gods ja en amen."¹²³ In his short essay dealing with common grace Bavinck goes so far as to suggest that "het is alsof de menschwording Gods reeds onder Israel een aanvang neemt."¹²⁴ While the "alsof" is crucial here (Bavinck does not wish to undermine the uniqueness of the Incarnation), this statement does make clear the strong connection he sees between the Incarnation and its preparation in the history of revelation as recorded in the Old Testament. Bavinck emphasizes this distinction by comparing Jesus Christ as the true reality with the Old Testament as the shadow: "Hij is de ware Messias...Hij doet niet alleen wonderen, maar Hij is zelf in zijn persoon het absolute wonder; Hij is het ware bondsoffer...het ware brood, de ware wijnstok."¹²⁵ These are contrasted with the "rechtstreeksche en opzettelijke voorbereiding en afschaduwing" in the Old Testament which function as "voorbeelden en schaduwen van eene hoogere,

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 317. "According to the New Testament all these various witnesses of law and prophecy culminate in Christ; the entire Old Testament is, in principle, fulfilled in him; in him all God's promises are yes and amen."

¹²⁴ AG, p. 12. "It is as if in Israel the incarnation has already commenced." ("CG," p. 42)

¹²⁵ GD III, pp. 317, 319, 320. "He is the true Messiah...He not only performs wonders, but is himself in his person the absolute wonder; he is the true covenant offering...the true bread, the true vine."

geestelijke, waarachtige werkelijkheid."¹²⁶ "De schaduw is het lichaam niet, maar wijst toch heen naar het lichaam, en valt weg, als dit zelf gekomen is. Het Nieuwe Testament is de waarheid, het wezen, de kern, de eigenlijke inhoud van het Oude Testament."¹²⁷ Bavinck employs the essence/form distinction to illustrate how the earlier forms prepare the way for the later, in which the essence is most clearly seen.

The preparation motif in Bavinck's Christology begins and ends in eternity, is important throughout the entire history of redemption, and is also operative during the life of Jesus on earth, progressing from the Incarnation to the Ascension. The narrative history of the events beginning with the birth of the babe in the Bethlehem manger and culminating with the exalted Christ seated at the Father's right hand in glory also illustrates a series of developments in which each one was prepared by what came earlier and served to prepare the next.

While many other realities functioned as preparations for the Incarnation, the Incarnation was not an end in itself. "De vleeschwording van den Zone Gods, zonder meer, kan niet de

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 221. These are contrasted with the "direct and intentional preparation and foreshadowing" in the Old Testament which function as "patterns and shadows of a higher, spiritual, true reality."

¹²⁷ *GD IV*, p. 642. "The shadow, while itself not the body, does point to the body, but vanishes when the body itself appears. The New Testament is the truth, the essence, the core, the actual content of the Old Testament." (*LT*, p. 96f.)

verzoenende en verlossende daad zijn geweest; zij is er het begin, de voorbereiding en de inleiding van, maar zij is deze zelve niet."¹²⁸ The Incarnation was a preparation for Christ's work of obedience, which culminated in his death. The death on the cross was both an end and a beginning, for "de dood van Christus was het einde van zijne vernedering, en tegelijk de weg tot zijne verhooging."¹²⁹ The resurrection proclaimed this exaltation. "Christus (is) door zijne opstanding ingetreden in een nieuwen stand; Hij is als middelaar boven alle schepselen aan Gods rechterhand verhoogd."¹³⁰ This new state signals an important change. "Na zijne opstanding behoort Christus niet meer tot de aarde, maar tot den hemel. En daarom is zijne gedaante veranderd, al heeft Hij ook hetzelfde lichaam aangenomen, dat Hij in het graf had gelegd."¹³¹ The resurrection is both the affirmation of the completion of the work of Christ in its concrete particularity and the next stage in the history of redemption in which each event

¹²⁸ *MD*, p. 312. "The mere Incarnation of the Son of God cannot have been the reconciling and redeeming deed. It is the beginning of it, the preparation for it, and the introduction to it, but it is not that deed itself." (*RF*, p. 331, alt.)

¹²⁹ *GD III*, p. 410. "The death of Christ was the end of his humiliation, and simultaneously the way to his exaltation."

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 427. "Through his resurrection Christ entered into a new state. As Mediator he is exalted above all creatures to God's right hand."

¹³¹ *MD*, p. 349. "After the resurrection Christ belongs to the earth no longer, but to heaven. And that is why his form is changed, even though he assumed the same body that he had laid in the grave." (*RF*, p. 367, alt.)

serves as a preparation for the next.¹³²

This new, post-resurrection state impacted upon subsequent events. "De veertig dagen, die Christus na zijne opstanding nog op aarde doorbracht, waren reeds eene voorbereiding en een overgang tot zijne hemelvaart. Zijn leven behoorde niet meer aan de aarde, maar aan den hemel toe."¹³³ These forty days prepared the disciples for Jesus' Ascension and for their own upcoming role in the proclamation of the gospel.¹³⁴

Zijne hemelvaart is een triomftocht, in nog sterker zin dan de opstanding. Want hij triumfeert erin over de gansche aarde, over al de wetten der natuur, over de geheele zwaartekracht der stof. Ja meer nog, zijne hemelvaart is een triomf over alle vijandige, duivelsche en menschelijke machten, die door God in het kruis van Christus van hunne wapenrusting beroofd, in hunne onmacht tentoongesteld, aan den zegewagen van Christus gebonden zijn. Gelijk de opstanding de hemelvaart voorbereidt, zoo leidt deze weer tot de zitting ter rechterhand Gods.¹³⁵

¹³² "In zijne lichamelijke verrijzenis kwam eerst uit, dat Hij, door de gehoorzaamheid tot het kruis en het graf toe, de zonde met al hare gevolgen, dus ook den dood, volkomen overwonnen... (maar) zij is voor Hem ook de ingang tot een gansch nieuwen staat van leven, de aanvang van zijne steeds voortschrijdende verhooging." (*MD*, pp. 350f. "In his physical resurrection it was first proved that he, by his obedience even unto the cross and the grave, had perfectly conquered sin and all its consequences, including death, (but) it was for him also the entrance to an entirely new state of life, the beginning of an ever progressive exaltation." [*RF*, pp. 368f., alt.]

¹³³ *MD*, p. 354. "The forty days which Christ spent on earth after his resurrection were already a preparation for his ascension and a transition to it. His life no longer belonged to the earth, but to heaven." (*RF*, p. 372, alt.)

¹³⁴ *GD III*, p. 437.

¹³⁵ *MD*, p. 355. "His ascension is a victory march in an even stronger sense than the resurrection. In it he triumphs over the whole earth, over all the laws of nature, over the gravity of

In these few weeks from the crucifixion to Pentecost a major transition takes place in the history of redemption. Jesus Christ is exalted as Lord, and he exercises his Lordship from the Father's right hand. "Lichamelijk verlaat Hij hen, geestlijk blijft Hij bij hen, zoodat zij het niet zijn, maar Hij het is, die door hun woord zijne gemeente vergadert, regeert en beschermt...Het gansche aardse leven van Christus is eene voorbereiding geweest, opdat Hij thans in den hemel als eeuwig hooge priester te onzen behoeve zou kunnen werkzaam zijn."¹³⁶

This preparation theme in the life of Jesus Christ illustrates Bavinck's claim that Jesus is the center and turning point of redemption history, but not its final goal. The person and work of Jesus Christ are to be perceived as the heart of redemption history, the concrete particularity from which all redemption history receives its meaning and clarity; all redemption history flows to and flows from the events of Jesus' life on earth. And yet, because these events do not constitute an end in themselves, these events too serve as preparation for the ultimate goal of

matter. What is more, his ascension is a triumph over all the hostile diabolical and human forces which are robbed by God of their armour in the cross of Christ, are exhibited in their helplessness, and bound to Christ's chariot of victory. Just as the resurrection is a preparation for the ascension, so the ascension leads to the sitting at the right hand of God." (RF, pp. 372f., alt.)

¹³⁶ MD, pp. 359, 362. "Bodily he leaves them, spiritually he stays with them, so that it is not they but he who gathers his church and who rules and protects it...Christ's entire life on earth was a preparation, so that now in heaven as eternal high priest he could be busy on our behalf." (RF, pp. 377, 379, alt.)

redemption history, when the Son shall turn the Kingdom over to the Father.¹³⁷

After the Ascension, the history of redemption continues through the gathering of the church under its head, Jesus Christ. The events prior to this gathering have made this gathering possible, and this gathering itself is a preparation for Christ's return. "Koning is Christus in de eerste plaats over zijn volk, en Hij betoont dit koningschap daarin, dat Hij zijne gemeente vergadert, beschermt, regeert, en tot de eeuwige zaligheid leidt."¹³⁸ Just as redemption history prior to the Incarnation contained shadows of Christ coming to his people, so "de wereldgeschiedenis, die inligt tusschen Jezus' hemelvaart en wederkomst, is een voortdurend komen van Christus, eene steeds voortgaande vergadering van zijne gemeente, eene altijd zich voortzettende onderwerping van zijne vijanden."¹³⁹ Jesus is Lord, but between his two comings both the believers on earth and those who have died both cry out for the Lord to return quickly, recognizing that until he does the grace in which they live is

¹³⁷ *GD* III, p. 480.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 478. "Christ is King in the first place over his people, and he demonstrates this kingship in the gathering, protection and ruling of his church, leading it to eternal salvation."

¹³⁹ *MD*, p. 561. "The history of the world which lies in between Jesus' ascension and return is a continuous coming of Christ, a progressive gathering of his church on earth, a continuing subjection of his enemies." (*RF*, p. 559, alt.)

characterized by incompleteness and provisionality.¹⁴⁰

As is by now apparent, Bavinck's emphasis upon the person and work of Jesus Christ in the context of redemption history is decidedly eschatological. "De eschatologie wortelt in de Christologie en is zelve Christologie."¹⁴¹ On the cross the work of Christ was truly finished, but this work also requires his return in the final victory over the powers of evil and the completion of the Kingdom of God. His return "brengt dat werk tot zijne voltooiing en zet er de kroon op; zij is de laatste en hoogste trap in den staat zijner verhooging."¹⁴² The return of Christ illustrates that Christ's work began in eternity, reached its climax in time, and extends into eternity.¹⁴³ It is this eternity-time-eternity relation that requires Bavinck to develop two emphases in his Christology: Christ's work was prepared from eternity and this preparation motif continued and continues through time until it reaches its goal in eternity. Even so, the history

¹⁴⁰ *GD IV*, p. 620.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 667. "Eschatology is rooted in Christology and is itself Christology." (*LT*, p. 122)

¹⁴² *Ibid.* His return "brings his work to its completion and sets a crown upon it; it is the last and highest step in the state of his exaltation." (*LT*, p. 122, alt.)

¹⁴³ This description of the relation between time and eternity in Christ's work functions as an important theme in Bavinck's Christology. "Het is een werk, dat in den tijd op deze aarde zijn middelpunt heeft, maar dat uit de eeuwigheid opkomt, in de eeuwigheid wortelt en tot in de eeuwigheid zich uitstrekt." (*MD*, p. 313. "It is a work which has its central point in time on this earth, but which comes up out of eternity, roots in eternity, and extends into eternity." [*RF*, p. 332]).

of redemption reached its climax in time, in the concrete particularity of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

As the creation was made through the Son as a preparation for the Incarnation, so the Son gathers up the creation under himself as Head in the eschaton. Therefore, the effects of his work extend to every corner of the cosmos.

De wereld heeft in den Zoon haar grondslag en voorbeeld en daarom heeft zij in Hem ook haar doel. Omdat de schepping zijn werk is, kan en mag zij geen buit van Satan blijven. Saamgevat in den Zoon, onder Hem als Hoofd vergaderd, keeren de schepselen weer tot den Vader, de fontein aller goeden, terug. De tweede komst van Christus wordt dus door zijn eerste geeischt.¹⁴⁴

Bavinck frequently employs such Irenaeian recapitulation terminology to describe his eschatological Christology.¹⁴⁵ This terminology also supports his eternity/time/eternity relation. The work of Christ began in eternity, the entire cosmos was created through him, and all is gathered up under him as Head and returned to the Father. "Daarom gaat de schepping uit van den Vader door den Zoon in den Geest, opdat zij in den Geest door den Zoon weder tot den

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.* "In the Son the world has its foundation and pattern, and therefore also has in him its goal. Because the creation is his work, it cannot and may not remain Satan's booty. Brought together in the Son, gathered under him as head, all creatures return again to the Father, the fountain of all good. Thus, the second coming of Christ is required by his first."

¹⁴⁵ Cf. *GD* II, p. 389, *GD* III, p. 213, *GD* IV, p. 709, *MD*, p. 341, *KL*, p. 56. In most of these references Bavinck quotes Paul's recapitulation text, Eph. 1: 10.

Vader terug keere."¹⁴⁶

Bavinck also highlights the eschatological orientation of his Christology by frequently referring to the 'everything' that is gathered up under Christ as Head as "the Kingdom of God." The phrase reinforces Bavinck's understandings concerning the all-embracing character of Christ's work as he is given authority over every last particle of the cosmos, and the fact that Christ's work occurred in time, is effective in time, and culminates in eternity. "De openbaring leert, dat God de Heer der tijden is en dat Christus van die tijden het keerpunt is. Doel is de volheid van het Godsrijk, de alzijdige, hemel en aarde, engelen en menschen, geest en stof, cultus en cultuur, de zoowel het bijzondere als het algemeene, de alles omvattende Godsheerschappij."¹⁴⁷ At the end of days Christ "zal het koningschap aan den Vader overgeven."¹⁴⁸ "Het middelaarschap der verzoening" (the work as mediator of reconciliation) is finished, but "het middelaarschap der vereeniging" (the work as mediator of unification) continues. Jesus Christ continues to have two natures in one person, and as

¹⁴⁶ GD III, p. 389. "Therefore the creation goes out from the Father through the Son in the Spirit, so that it returns again in the Spirit through the Son to the Father."

¹⁴⁷ WO, p. 119. "Revelation teaches that God is the Lord of the ages and that Christ is the turning point of these ages. (The goal) is the fulness of the Kingdom of God, the all-sided, all-containing dominion of God, which embraces heaven and earth, angels and men, mind and matter, cultus and culture, the specific and the generic; in a word, all in all." (PR, p. 141)

¹⁴⁸ GD III, p. 480. Christ "will give the kingship to the Father."

such "Christus is en blijft het hoofd der gemeente, uit wien alle leven en zaligheid eeuwiglijk haar toevloeit."¹⁴⁹

Summary

This summary of Bavinck's Christology has focused on two primary themes: the person and work of Jesus Christ which is centered upon the cross and the relation between Jesus Christ and the cosmic sweep of redemption history. This overview is not complete without noting the relation between these two primary themes. The first describes Jesus in his concrete particularity; the second in his cosmic universality. Does one of these two have priority over the other, or are both emphasized equally? Is it possible to emphasize one of these without reducing the significance of the other?

Bavinck's response to such questions is twofold: one begins with the concrete particularity of Jesus Christ and his death on the cross, but this starting point requires one to see in the Savior's body on the cross the cosmic sweep of redemption history in the fulness of its universal implications. The significance of the person and work of Jesus Christ is universal. His work, though carried out in time, began in eternity and culminates in eternity. On the one hand, the person and work of Jesus Christ is understood within the context of a larger historical and cosmic framework,

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 481. "Christ is and remains the Head of the church, the one from whom all life and blessedness flows to her eternally."

but, on the other hand, this framework itself is Christological and can only be understood through the fullest and clearest self-revelation of God: Jesus on the cross.

The difficulty of describing the relation between these two primary themes is illustrated in Bavinck's notion of the three preparations for the Incarnation. On the one hand, his lengthy account of these preparations is contrary to his theological method. The Scriptures do not employ such terminology and its writers do not sense the need to provide a coherent and systematic account to explain the eternal necessity and possibility of the Incarnation. In particular, the analogy which Bavinck develops between the generation of the Son from the Father and the creation of the world is rooted in theological abstractions and primarily serves the purpose of undermining various theological and philosophical heresies. It is not surprising that this particular section in Bavinck's *Dogmatics* (in contrast with his typical style) contains no Scriptural references whatsoever.¹⁵⁰

On the other hand, his account of these three preparations does contain helpful moments. First, the doctrine of the Trinity helps one to see that the three-personed God prepared from eternity the cosmos as a reconciliable entity which he would reconcile to himself. Second, the creation was made as a reality through which God is able to share himself with his creatures and therefore carry

¹⁵⁰ Cf. *GD II*, pp. 381-383.

out the work of reconciliation. This reconciling work has two foci: first, the creation was made as a reality which was capable of falling into sin, but also capable of being redeemed; second, the creation was made as a home in which humanity finds its true source of life in the invisible realm, and therefore must live by faith and not by sight. When the work of reconciliation is complete, humanity will live by sight. This dual character of reconciliation indicates that redemption does not simply signify a restoration of the pre-fall creation as it existed in time, but rather redemption culminates in the transformation of the creation in eternity. "*Gratia reparat et perficit naturam.*"¹⁵¹

Third, creation is time-bound, existing within a history in which God carries out his work of redemption. In this work the transcendence of God remains as it is while his immanence becomes progressively clearer. This progression is not to be construed as a natural evolutionary process, but rather as preparations for the coming of Christ, a coming which climaxes in the Incarnation and the subsequent events of Christ's life, but whose ultimate culmination is reserved for the Parousia. The person and work of Jesus Christ is not only the apex of the history of redemption, but also the only vantage point from which one can perceive the whole. From this vantage point alone can one begin to understand the Trinity, the purpose of the creation (and thus the dual character of reconciliation) and the meaning of the history of redemption.

¹⁵¹ GD III, p. 207.

From this vantage point Bavinck describes the three preparations for the Incarnation, but his account lacks the tentativeness appropriate to his understanding of progressive revelation. God's clearest self-revelation is given in the person of Jesus Christ. As one moves back from that center in time, seeking to describe the preparations for the Incarnation in eternity, one must acknowledge that one has entered the realm of theological speculation. While such speculation may be of limited value in reinforcing the coherence of one's account of the Scriptures, it must be acknowledged as such.

Finally, Bavinck's account of the notions of duality and the organic help us to recognize the interrelation between the concrete particularity of Jesus Christ and his universal, cosmic significance. Here one can discern a stance of tentativeness in his descriptions. The term 'organic' is used throughout his writings in a wide variety of contexts, but at no point does he provide a systematic description of its meaning. The term 'duality' is used so rarely that one cannot even name it as his term, but the notion that the term describes is assumed on almost every page of his theology. Duality and the organic are abstract, universal concepts which seek to describe both the character of the cosmos and the manner in which reconciliation is enacted. Yet, Bavinck's silence concerning systematic description and even naming of these concepts is fully in harmony with his theological method. It is as if this methodology states, "One can see Jesus clearly. The character of

the cosmic framework is not as clear, but this is the best that I can do. I believe this provides a just account of the Scriptural witness to Jesus Christ." In Jesus Christ the invisible God is made visible, and when he returns we shall see him face to face and the barrier between the invisible and visible will be finally and fully overcome. In Jesus Christ we see the essence of God's way with his cosmos, the culmination of the various forms of revelation. Even so, we do not yet see this fully. After his death Jesus himself was transformed from a human being like us into a human being with a resurrected, spiritual body that belonged to heaven and not to the earth, the first fruits of the new creation. His work of reconciliation will be complete when he returns, at which point the distinction between the essence and the form will cease. On the one hand grace is inherently eschatological. "Doordat het genadeverbond op deze wijze historisch en organisch ingaat in het menschelijk geslacht, kan het hier op aarde niet in eene gedaante verschijnen, die ten volle aan zijn wezen beantwoordt."¹⁵² On the other hand, Jesus Christ is the full and complete revelation of God.

Hij is de volkomen vervulling van de gansche Oudtestamentische wet en profetie, van al het lijden en al de heerlijkheid, die voorbereidend en voorafschaduwend het deel van Israel waren. Daarom is het koninkrijk, dat Hij prediken en stichten kwam, tegelijk inwendig en uitwendig, onzichtbaar en zichtbaar, geestlijk en lichamelijk, tegenwoordig en toekomstig, particulier en universeel, van boven en toch beneden, uit den hemel en toch op aarde. En Jezus komt nog eenmaal weer; Hij

¹⁵² MD, p. 261. "Because the covenant of grace enters into the human race in this historical and organic manner, it cannot here on earth appear in a form which fully answers to its essence." (RF, p. 278, alt.)

kwam, om de wereld te behouden, Hij komt terug, om ze te oordeelen.¹⁵³

Jesus Christ is the heart of God's special revelation, and the center in which all divine revelation, special and general, coheres. In Jesus Christ we see the relation between God's transcendence and immanence, or, better, the manner in which the God who is radically distinct from his creatures identifies with them. The way of this God, which is distinct from ours yet one with us, is a way which Bavinck terms 'organic,' a hidden presence which is powerful and real yet hidden and ungraspable, awaiting its full revelation when Christ returns.

¹⁵³ *MD*, p. 287. "He is the perfect fulfillment of the whole Old Testament law and prophecy, of all the suffering and glory which were Israel's in a preparatory and foreshadowing way. Hence the kingdom which he came to preach and establish is at the same time internal and external, invisible and visible, spiritual and physical, present and future, particular and universal, from above and from below, coming down from heaven and yet existing on the earth. And Jesus will return. He came to preserve the world, to save it; he will return to judge it." (*RF*, p. 304, alt.)

Chapter Four - Bavinck's Doctrine of Creation and his Eschatological Understanding of Redemption

The preceding two chapters have sketched the theological framework of Bavinck's eschatological understanding of redemption by progressing from his doctrine of revelation to his Christology. This sketch demonstrates that an integral component of Bavinck's view of redemption is its dual focus: redemption overcomes sin and the effects of the fall, and therefore it restores the creation, and redemption transforms the creation by overcoming certain of its limitations, and in so doing it perfects the creation. His Christology, which perceives the person and work of Jesus Christ as the turning point and mid point of redemption history, and his concepts of duality and the organic together serve to highlight the teleological focus of redemption in his theology. Redemption is not simply a returning to an original state of innocence, but the culmination of history in the Kingdom of God. Redemption's dual work of restoration and perfecting therefore raises the question, what is the relation between the creation and the Kingdom of God, or, phrased differently, what is the place of the doctrine of creation within Bavinck's eschatological understanding of redemption?

Similar questions recur frequently in analyses of Bavinck's theology, and the suggested answers do not point to consensus in this area. In this chapter I will describe Bavinck's doctrine of

creation, asserting that he perceives creation as a relative good¹ which establishes the parameters for God's work of redemption.² Then, I will survey his understanding of common grace, a doctrine closely linked to the doctrine of creation which functions as an important albeit controversial doctrine in Dutch neo-Calvinism. Finally, I will describe my understanding of the relation between Bavinck's doctrine of creation and his eschatological understanding of redemption, responding as I do so to the analyses of three leading Bavinck interpreters: Eugene Heideman, Jan Veenhof and John Bolt.

Creation is a relative good

Bavinck's doctrine of creation can be summarized in the statement that creation is a 'relative good.' Both terms -- 'relative' and 'good' -- are equally important and true; in fact, they are mutually interdependent. Creation is good, created so by the Trinitarian God, serviceable to the purpose for which it was made. And yet this goodness is relative, not because it is deficient in any way but because it is serviceable to a greater good. Its goodness stands in the context of its relationship to

¹ This phrase is my own.

² Bavinck employs three primary terms at various times that describe, in some measure, the creation: 'schepping,' 'natuur,' and 'wereld.' Though he does not define these or describe their distinctions, one can note that, for the most part, 'schepping' (creation) refers to the original (pre-fall) creation, 'natuur' (nature) refers to the creation as it is now, God's good creation polluted by sin, emphasizing particularly the natural world apart from human culture, and 'wereld' (world) refers to the combination of nature and human culture with an emphasis upon the latter.

the goodness of God and the better end for which he has ordained the creation.

Because the creation is a relative good, its goodness is perceived in the context of its relations. This description of Bavinck's doctrine of creation will first look at his understanding of the creation itself, and then place this understanding in the context of its relations, that is, its relation to the Trinitarian God, to the history of redemption, to Jesus Christ, to the church, and to the Kingdom of God.

The creation functions in Bavinck's theology as a good reality in which God establishes the parameters for the way in which he performs the work of redemption. Four fundamental parameters describe the relative goodness of the creation. Creation is good because it is a *revelation* of God. This goodness is relative because as a revelation it does not point to itself but rather to the *glory of God*. Creation is good because God has ordered it in such a way that it is characterized by *stability* and a creaturely *hierarchy*. This goodness is relative because this stability and hierarchical order function to serve the *teleology* of the creation, the end which God has ordained for the work of his hands. The latter two are especially significant because construals of the relation between creation's stability and its teleology lie at the heart of Bavinck's theology in particular and that of Dutch neo-Calvinism in general.

First, the creation holds a special place in the history of redemption because it is the first revelation of God. "De schepping zelve is de eerste, rijke openbaring Gods, grondslag en aanvang van alle volgende."³ That creation is, chronologically speaking, the first revelation means two things for Bavinck. On the one hand, his use of the concepts of progressive revelation and of the relation between general and special revelation indicate that in his account creation is a very unclear and opaque revelation that can only be understood with the help of subsequent revelation which reaches its climax in Jesus Christ. "Deze Zoon is tot ons gekomen en heeft ons den Vader verklaard. Wel is er eene openbaring van Gods eeuwige kracht en goddelijkheid ook in de werken der natuur. Maar de kennis Gods, daaruit verkregen, is gering, verduisterd, met dwaling vermengd en wordt bovendien niet in waarde gehouden."⁴ The creation has revelatory value for the one who has been reconciled with God through Jesus Christ. "Alles in de natuur spreekt den vrome van God,"⁵ the one who has come to know God as the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.

³ AG, p. 7. "Creation itself is the first, rich revelation of God, the foundation and beginning of every subsequent revelation." ("CG," p. 39)

⁴ MD, p. 18. "This Son has come to us and has declared the Father to us. There is a revelation of God's eternal power and divine nature in the works of nature also. But the knowledge of God which is derived from that source is slight, obscured, mingled with error, and besides is not valued highly." (RF, p. 27, alt.)

⁵ GD I, p. 278. "To the pious person everything in nature speaks of God."

On the other hand, that creation is first means that it establishes certain parameters which all subsequent revelation respects because the God who is revealed is always the same Trinitarian God. "Als God de wereld scheidt door zijn Woord en levend maakt door zijn Geest, dan liggen daarin reeds de grondlijnen van alle volgende openbaringen geteekend."⁶ The diversity of God's revelation is held together by the unity of God. "De genade deed de natuur niet teniet, maar heeft ze vernieuwd en geheiligd."⁷ Similarly,

Als Herschepper wandelt (God) in het spoor, dat Hij als Schepper, Onderhouder en Regeerder aller dingen getrokken heeft. De genade is iets anders en hoogers dan de natuur, maar zij sluit zich toch bij de natuur aan, en vernietigt ze niet doch herstelt ze. Zij is geen erfgoed, dat krachtens natuurlijke geboorte overgaat, maar ze stroomt toch voort in de bedding, welke in de natuurlijke verhoudingen van het menschelijk geslacht is uitgegraven. Het verbond der genade springt niet van den hak op den tak, maar zet in de familien, geslachten en volken op eene historische en organische wijze zich voort.⁸

⁶ *Ibid.* "When God creates the world through his Word and makes it alive through his Spirit, then all the parameters of subsequent revelations lie drawn within it."

⁷ *GD IV*, p. 574. "Grace did not undo nature, but renewed and consecrated it." (*LT*, p. 29) Bavinck frequently employs the terms 'genade' and 'natuur,' terms which have a long history in the Christian tradition, but his use of these terms assumes his own definitions of them, which will be described later in this chapter.

⁸ *MD*, p. 260. "As the Re-Creator, God follows the line which he drew as Creator, Sustainer, and Ruler of all things. Grace is something other and higher than nature, but it nevertheless joins up with nature, does not destroy it but restores it rather. Grace is not a legacy which is transferred by natural birth, but it does flow on in the river-bed which has been dug out in the natural relationships of the human race. The covenant of grace does not ramble about at random, but perpetuates itself, historically and organically, in families, generations, nations." (*RF*, p. 277, alt.)

The character of the relation between grace and nature in Bavinck's theology (and indeed, the characters of grace and nature themselves) provokes considerable disagreement among readers of Bavinck (which will be described later), but the main point here is simply that the work of grace respects the reality of nature and works within its parameters.

Grace does not destroy nature because the creation also is a revelation of God. Bavinck rejects construals of the nature/grace relation which characterize their distinction in terms of the natural and the supernatural. "De Schrift kent wel het begrip van eene vaste natuurorde maar maakt toch bij de openbaring tusschen natuurlijke en bovennatuurlijke geen onderscheid. Eigenlijk is op het standpunt der Schrift alle openbaring, ook die in de natuur, bovennatuurlijk."⁹ The creation of the cosmos is as thoroughly a work of God as is the history of redemption. "Openbaring en religie, profetie en wonder zijn op zichzelf geen *dona superaddita*. Zij zijn volkomen natuurlijk, in zoover als zij behooren tot de wereldidee Gods en tot het wereldplan, dat Hij in weerwil van allen tegenstand in den tijd tot uitvoering brengt."¹⁰ Therefore,

⁹ *GD I*, p. 278. "The Scripture does recognize the notion of a fixed natural order, but nevertheless makes no distinction between natural and supernatural revelation. As a matter of fact, from the viewpoint of Scripture, all revelation, including that in nature, is supernatural."

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 344. "Revelation and religion, prophecy and wonder are in themselves no *dona superaddita*. They are completely natural, inasmuch as they belong to God's world-idea and to the world-plan which God brings to execution in time in spite of all opposition."

"scheppen is geen lager en minder Goddelijk werk dan het herscheppen; de natuur staat niet beneden de genade; de wereld is niet profaan in zich zelve. Alle dingen zijn uit God."¹¹

Bavinck's understanding of the relation between nature and grace and of the relative goodness of the creation leads him to insist that the believer must seek the glory of God in all of the creation without inappropriately glorifying the creation. The works of creation and redemption are distinct, but both cover all that God has made. "De Vader bereidt met zijne schepping het werk der herschepping voor en leidt naar haar heen; de Zoon gaat met zijn arbeid diep, zoover als de zonde reikt, tot in het werk der schepping terug. Maar toch zijn beide werken onderscheiden en niet te vermengen."¹² That creation and redemption are distinct and that creation is a relative good mean that the believer's first task is to be reconciled with God, and from the vantage point of such reconciliation seek reconciliation with all created things. "De bekende predikant J. Chr. Blumhardt zeide eens, dat de mensch

¹¹ *GD* II, p. 388. "Creating is not a lower and less divine work than re-creating. Nature does not stand beneath grace; the world is not profane in itself. All things are from God." This statement contradicts an earlier statement (cf. p. 176, n. 8) in which Bavinck declared that "de genade is iets anders en hoogers dan de natuur." This contradiction points to a tension in Bavinck's doctrine of creation which will be explored later in this chapter. (This quotation is unusual in that the three terms 'schepping,' 'natuur' and 'wereld' are all used in one thought.)

¹² *GD* III, p. 467. "With the creation the Father prepares and leads up to the work of redemption. The work of the Son goes back deep, as far as sin reaches, to the work of creation. But both works must be distinguished and must not be confused."

tweemaal bekeerd moest worden, eerst van het natuurlijk tot het geestlijk leven en daarna van het geestlijk tot het natuurlijk leven."¹³ Bavinck describes this two-part conversion by comparing the Kingdom of Heaven to both a pearl and a leaven. One seeks the Lord by seeing his kingdom as a pearl for which one abandons all else. And then, reconciled with him, one sees his kingdom as a leaven whose glory and power extends to every corner of the creation.¹⁴

¹³ *WO*, p. 207. "The well-known preacher, J. Chr. Blumhardt, once said that man must be twice converted, first from the natural to the spiritual life, and then from the spiritual to the natural." (*PR*, p. 242)

¹⁴ Cf. *WO*, p. 231; *ZG*, p. 46. In this context, Bavinck lauds the Moravian and Wesleyan revival movements for rediscovering the 'pearl' aspect of the Christian faith, but faults them for not also emphasizing how the kingdom is a leaven. "Zij rekenen geen van beide genoegzaam met het eerste artikel van ons algemeen, ongetwijfeld, Christelijk geloof, dat God, de Almachtige, Schepper is van hemel en aarde. De mundate terreinen van kunst en wetenschap, van literatuur en politiek, van huisgezin en maatschappij worden door haar in hunne waarde en beteekenis miskend, en dientengevolge ook niet van uit het Christelijk beginsel hervormd en vernieuwd." (*ZG*, p. 45. "Neither paid sufficient attention to the first article of the Apostle's Creed, namely, that God is the Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. The earthly terrains of art and science, literature and politics, family and society were not recognized in their full meaning and significance and were therefore also not reformed and renewed on the basis of Christian principles." [*CF*, p. 48])

Conversely, Bavinck also criticizes those who emphasize the leaven and neglect the pearl. In a passage which many believe refers to the triumphalism apparent in his neo-Calvinist contemporaries he writes, "Wij zijn er heden ten dage op uit, om de gansche wereld te bekeeren, om alle levensterrein, gelijk het heet, voor Christus te veroveren; maar wij laten menigmaal na, te vragen, of wij zelve in waarheid tot God zijn bekeerd en in leven en sterven het eigendom van Christus zijn." (*ZG*, p. 76. "Nowadays we are out to convert the whole world, to conquer all areas of life for Christ. But we often neglect to ask whether we ourselves are truly converted and whether we belong to Christ in life and in death." [*CF*, p. 94])

Second, Bavinck reiterates the Reformed theme that the creation exists for the glory of God. "God heeft alles geschapen om Zijns zelfs wil. Hij maakt alles dienstbaar aan de eere van Zijn naam. Uit Hem en door Hem en tot Hem zijn alle dingen."¹⁵ Creation is not an autonomous but a contingent reality, one whose meaning, purpose and goal can only be understood in relation to the Creator. "Het schepsel heeft geene zelfstandigheid buiten en tegenover God, gelijk de schepping van een kunstenaar. (God) zoekt het schepsel niet, maar door het schepsel heen zoekt Hij zichzelf. Hij gebruikt alle schepsel tot zijne eigene verheerlijking en maakt het dienstbaar aan de verkondiging zijner deugden."¹⁶ This emphasis upon the priority of the glory of God serves as an assumption and pre-condition for the remaining two parameters, and reinforces his claim that the creation is good not in itself but in its dependence upon its Creator.

Third, Bavinck perceives an order within the creation, an

¹⁵ *CW*, p. 60. "God has created all things because of himself. He makes all things serviceable to the honour of his name. From him and through him and to him are all things."

¹⁶ *GD II*, p. 399. "The creature has no independence outside of and over against God, just as the creation of an artist. God does seek his creature, but through the creature he seeks himself. He uses every creature for his own glory, and makes them serviceable to the proclamation of his virtues." Such a statement appears to deny the creature any significance at all, a complaint voiced by Eugene Heideman (*Relation of Revelation and Reason*, p. 176f.). However, Bavinck makes many other statements which serve to moderate the apparent annihilation of the creature here.

order characterized by hierarchy and stability.¹⁷ While all creation is united in its dependence on God and in its purpose to glorify its Creator, there is also a diversity within this unity that manifests itself hierarchically. "God is het middelpunt en alle schepselen groepeeren in concentrische kringen en in eene hierarchische orde zich om Hem henen."¹⁸ Bavinck describes this hierarchy poetically: "voor den steen is het een wonder, dat de plant groeit, voor de plant, dat het dier zich beweegt, voor het dier, dat de mensch denkt, en voor den mensch, dat God dooden opwekt."¹⁹ One can discern natural laws which serve to establish boundaries between creatures, to describe the stable character of the diversity within this hierarchical order, and to reinforce concretely the creature's dependence upon the Creator.

De mensch kan zich wel inbeelden, dat hij alles door zichzelf geworden en door niets gebonden is. Maar hij blijft in alle opzichten een afhankelijk schepsel; hij kan niet doen wat hij wil. In zijn lichamelijk leven blijft hij gebonden aan de wetten, die voor ademhaling en bloedsomloop, voor spijsvertering en voortplanting zijn gesteld. En ditzelfde is met zijn ziele- en geestesleven het geval. De mensch kan niet

¹⁷ Describing the stability of the creation is one of the most crucial issues in neo-Calvinism (and thus one of the most controversial), and is often discussed under the rubric of 'common grace.' This discussion with its attendant controversies will be engaged later in this chapter.

Bavinck uses the concept of creational stability to refute the relativism which he sees emerging from the thought of Kant and Darwin (cf. *CW*, pp. 72-85).

¹⁸ *GD II*, p. 401. "God is the midpoint, and all creatures are grouped in concentric circles and in an hierarchical order around him."

¹⁹ *GD I*, p. 339. "For the stone it is a miracle that the plant grows, for the plant that the animal moves, for the animal that the person thinks, and for the person that God raises the dead."

denken zooals hij wil, maar is daarbij aan wetten gebonden, die hij zelf niet uitgedacht en zichzelf niet gegeven heeft, maar die in zijn denken liggen opgesloten en tot openbaring komen.²⁰

While these laws help to maintain and describe the diversity within the creation, they must not be construed so that they become autonomous entities which override the contingency of all creatures upon their Creator and their unity in him. "De wetten der natuur, d.i. van den ganschen kosmos, van alle creatuur zijn geen cordon om de dingen, zoodat er niets indringen of uitkomen kan, maar slechts eene formule voor de wijze, waarop naar onze waarneming iedere kracht werkt naar haar aard. God staat niet buiten de natuur en is niet door eene omheining van wetten van haar afgesloten, maar is in haar tegenwoordig en draagt haar door het woord zijner kracht."²¹ In his concept of a stable, hierarchical order, Bavinck seeks to walk a fine line between establishing boundaries between different types of creatures without establishing an inappropriate boundary

²⁰ *MD*, pp. 180f. "Man can make himself believe, if he wants to, that he has become everything that he is by himself and is bound by nothing. But in every respect he remains a dependent creature. He cannot do as he pleases. In his physical existence, he remains bound to the laws laid down for respiration, the circulation of the blood, digestion and procreation. The same is true of the life of the soul and spirit. Man cannot think as he pleases, but is bound by the laws which he has not himself thought out and laid down, but which are implied in the very act of his thinking and come to expression in it." (*RF*, p. 198, alt.)

²¹ *GD I*, pp. 340f. "The laws of nature, i.e., of the entire cosmos, of all creatures, are not a wall around things, so that nothing can penetrate them or come out of them, but merely a formula for the way in which, according to our perception, each force works according to its own nature. God does not stand outside of nature and is not shut off from it by a fence of laws, but is currently present in it, and carries it through the Word of his might."

between the Creator and all creatures.

This lawful stability is to be seen in the context of the teleology in Bavinck's doctrine of creation, which is highlighted in his description of the significance of the covenant God made with Noah after the flood. Before the flood the creation was characterized by an evil and unrestrained anarchy. The Noachic covenant brought in a significant change.

Natuur en menschenwereld zijn door het verbond aan banden gelegd. Overal zijn wetten en ordeningen. Allerwege zijn dammen en dijken gelegd, om den stroom der ongerechtigheden te beteugelen. Orde, maat en getal zijn het kenmerk der schepping geworden. God breidelt het wilde dier in den mensch, stelt hem in de gelegenheid om zijne gaven en krachten in kunst en wetenschap, in maatschappij en staat, in beroep en bedrijf tot ontwikkeling te brengen, en vervult daarmede de voorwaarden, welke geschiedenis mogelijk maken.²²

To a certain extent this stability is not imbedded in the original ordering of the good creation, but is God's gracious gift to a creation anarchized by sin. This stability is not an end in itself, but, by serving to make history possible, also serves as a precondition for the continuation of the history of redemption. "Door deze genade is de menschheid voor Christus geleid en voor zijne komst voorbereid. De vatbaarheid voor verlossing is

²² *MD*, p. 40. "By this covenant nature and man are restrained. Laws and ordinances appeared everywhere. There were dams and dikes now to hold back the stream of iniquities. Order, measure, and number came to be the characterizing earmarks of creation. God curbs the wild animal in man and gives him the opportunity to develop his gifts and energies in art and science, in state and society, in work and calling. Thus God fulfills the conditions which make history possible." (*RF*, p. 50, alt.)

gehandhaafd, de behoefte aan verlossing is gewekt."²³ The stability of the creation does not undermine its teleology, but rather supports it.²⁴

A crucial component of Bavinck's concept of hierarchical order is the unique position that humanity occupies within the creation. Humanity is more than simply the highest category on the ascending ladder of creatureliness. "De mensch (is) het einde en doel, het hoofd en de kroon van heel het scheppingswerk."²⁵ Thus, the hierarchical ordering of the creation is described by three characteristics: all creatures are dependent upon God and exist to glorify his name, the existence of all creatures can be described by laws which establish hierarchical boundaries between creatures, and there is a fundamental difference between humanity and all other creatures, for "de mensch staat boven de natuur."²⁶

This unique place of humanity in the creation is best described in the Biblical teaching of the *imago Dei*. It is the image of God in humanity that creates in humanity the capability to

²³ *GD III*, p. 199. "Through this grace humanity before Christ is led and prepared for his coming. The capacity for redemption is maintained, the need for redemption is aroused."

²⁴ Bavinck's concern to hold together creation's stability and its teleology is evidenced by the fact that the two times he discusses these themes in his *Dogmatics*, he treats them as two sides of the same coin. (Cf. *GD I*, pp. 339-343 and *GD II*, 399-403)

²⁵ *MD*, p. 166. "Man is the end and purpose, the head and crown of the whole work of creation." (*RF*, p. 184, alt.)

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 22. "Man stands above nature." (*RF*, p. 34)

enjoy personal fellowship with God. "De mensch is beeld Gods en Gode verwant, en door de religie staat hij tot God in een rechtstreeksche verhouding."²⁷ Only humanity has the freedom to rebel against its Maker. "Wij kunnen (God) onteeren, want wij zijn Zijn geslacht, naar Zijn beeld geschapen, naar Zijn naam genoemd."²⁸ This special relationship with God gives humanity a unique position in relation to all other creatures.

In die wereld ontvangt de mensch dan voorts eene eigene en eene zelfstandige plaats. Hij is aan de gansche wereld verwant, gevormd uit het stof, aardisch uit de aarde; niets natuurlijks is hem vreemd. Maar in een opzicht is hij van alle schepselen onderscheiden; hij is zoon, beeld, gelijkenis Gods, zijn geslacht. Daardoor is hij boven dier en engel verheven en tot heerschappij over de gansche wereld bestemd en geschikt.²⁹

The image of God, however, contains the possibility for relationship and does not in itself place humanity in right relationship with God. Those who respond in obedience to God's love are the ones who "staan vrij tegenover de natuur, omdat zij

²⁷ *GD I*, p. 279. "The person is God's image and related to God, and through religion he stands before God in direct relationship."

²⁸ "De Eere Gods" in *KL*, p. 114. "We are able to dishonour God, because we are his family, created after his image, named after his name."

²⁹ *WO*, p. 91. "In this world man now receives his own independent place. He is of kin to all the world, formed out of matter, earthy of the earth; nothing natural is strange to him. But in one respect he is different from all creatures; he is the son, the image, the similitude of God, his offspring. That is why he is elevated above animal and angel, and destined and fitted for dominion over all the world." (*PR*, pp. 107f., alt.)

boven haar verheven zijn door de gemeenschap met God."³⁰ Though all humanity is blessed with the imago Dei, only those who live in communion with God are truly living in their rightful place at the top of the hierarchical order of God's creatures.

Bavinck also describes the imago Dei in terms of duality, for humanity is by nature a creature of duality. "De schepping loopt uit op den mensch. In hem sluiten geestelijke en stoffelijke wereld zich saam."³¹ "Het hoogste schepsel is de mensch; krachtens zijne schepping staat hij met natuur en menschenwereld, zienlijke en onzienlijke dingen, hemel en aarde, God en engelen in verband. En hij leeft, indien hij en naarmate hij tot deze gansche omgeving in de rechte, door God gewilde verhouding staat."³² At the same time Bavinck insists that the imago Dei cannot be construed dualistically, for "het beeld Gods is geen bovennatuurlijk toevoegsel, dat bij den reeds geschapen mensch bijkomt. Maar het behoort tot zijne natuur."³³

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 89. They are those who "are free over against nature, because, through communion with God, they are elevated above nature." (*PR*, p. 106)

³¹ *GD II*, p. 471. "The creation leads up to humanity. In him the spiritual and material world come together."

³² *GD IV*, p. 590. "The highest creature is the human being. In virtue of their creation humans are linked with nature and the human world, visible and invisible things, heaven and earth, God and angels. And they live in and to the degree as they stand in the right, that is, the God-willed relation to the whole of their surroundings." (*LT*, p. 45)

³³ "Kennnis en Leven" in *KL*, p. 230. "The image of God is not a supernatural addition that comes to the already created person. Rather, it belongs to his nature."

As the lawful character of the creation provides a stability which is serviceable to creation's teleology, so the imago Dei is to be seen not only in the context of creation's hierarchical order but also in the context of its teleology. From the latter perspective the imago Dei is important because it serves as a preparation or a precondition for the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. Though the three preconditions described in the previous chapter include the Trinity, the creation, and the history of redemption, in the second Bavinck focuses especially on the creation of humanity. "Bepaaldelijk is de schepping des menschen naar Gods beeld eene onderstelling en voorbereiding van de menswording Gods. Bij de schepping van Adam heeft God al op den Christus gerekend."³⁴ The imago Dei plays a crucial role in the history of redemption, and thus also in the teleology of the creation.

The creation of humanity also serves to highlight the importance of the 'personal' in both anthropology and the doctrine of God/Christology. "Een mensch is de voltooide openbaring Gods."³⁵ "Gelijk in de leer van de triniteit, van den mensch als beeld Gods en van de verbonden, zoo treedt in de leer van Christus de Gereformeerde gedachte van het persoonlijke, bewuste leven als

³⁴ *GD* III, pp. 257f. "Especially the creation of humanity in God's image is a presupposition and preparation for the Incarnation of God. In the creation of Adam God already has Christ in mind."

³⁵ *MD*, p. 81. "A person is the completed revelation of God." (*RF*, p. 93)

het rijkste en hoogste leven, zeer duidelijk op den voorgrond."³⁶ While Bavinck at no point offers a systematic treatment of the significance of the term 'personal' in his theology, his many *ad hoc* uses of the term indicate that God seeks intimate relation with humanity as a personal God seeking fellowship with persons.³⁷ For example, he asserts that "een persoonlijk God alleen, die verstand en wil beide is, kan eene wereld in het leven roepen, die een is en toch verscheiden, zooals de mensch alleen, naar zijn beeld geschapen, een kennend en een willend wezen is."³⁸ In a discussion of creation's hierarchical order he notes that "de mensch gaat weer ver uit boven het dier en toont ons het heerlijkst en volkomenst systeem hier op aarde. Want hij is eene persoonlijkheid, en deze is het hoogste en rijkste en heerlijkste systeem."³⁹ The personal

³⁶ *GD* III, p. 238. "Just as in the doctrine of the Trinity, of man as the image of God and of the covenants, so in Reformed Christology the understanding of the personal, conscious life as the richest and highest life comes very clearly into the foreground."

³⁷ Cornelius Jaarsma claims that in Bavinck's theology "personality is the fundamental category of all reality." (*The Educational Philosophy of Herman Bavinck* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1935], p. 195) While this statement inappropriately compresses Bavinck's theology into a philosophical grid (his subsequent assertion that "In the personal God all reality finds its prototype" comes closer to the truth [*Ibid.*]), it does indicate how important the 'personal' is for Bavinck.

³⁸ *WO*, p. 80. "Only a personal God, who is both intellect and will, can call a world into existence, which is one and yet differentiated; just as man alone, who has been created in his image, is a knowing and willing being." (*PR*, pp. 94f., alt.)

³⁹ "Het Voor en Tegen van een Dogmatisch Systeem" in *KL*, p. 59. "The person is far above the animal and shows us the most glorious and perfect system here on earth. For he is a personality, and this is the highest and richest and most glorious system."

does not exist as an end in itself, but highlights the importance of communion between God and humanity. For this reason, "de verhouding van God en mensch in den *status integratis* wordt als een persoonlijke omgang geteekend."⁴⁰

Bavinck's stress on humanity as the highest creature in a hierarchical order and on personal communion between God and humanity raises questions concerning the significance of the remainder of the creation. This issue requires one to comprehend the complementary interaction between the hierarchy and the teleology of the creation. Humanity functions as the head of the creation, but when the creation reaches its goal every creature will be filled with the glory of God. Bavinck describes this complementary relationship in a passage which requires a fairly lengthy quotation in order to capture the flow of the discussion.

Het Rijk Gods (is) de hoogste, de volkomenste gemeenschap, wyl het aan ieders persoonlijkheid de alzijdigste en rijkste ontplooiing van haar inhoud waarborgt. Want de eenheid van een organisme wordt te harmonischer, te rijker en te heerlijker, naarmate de veelheid der deelen toeneemt. Het rijkst en het heerlijkst (is) bij den mensch. In hem zien we een onoverzienbare verscheidenheid; heel de wereld recapituleert zich in hem, hij is een mikrococosmos. En toch is al die rijkdom van verschijnselen harmonisch verbonden en organisch gesystematiseerd in de persoonlijkheid, die zelve eeuwig en boven al dien rijkdom nog verre uitgaande, heel dat wondervolle organisme door haar bewustzijn kent en beheerscht door haar wil.

Welnu, wat de mensch is voor de wereld, is het Rijk Gods voor den mensch. Elk lid in dat organisme van het Rijk Gods is zelf eene persoonlijkheid, met een volheid van leven, ten volle naar alle zijden ontwikkeld. En zelf is dat Rijk in

⁴⁰ GD I, p. 279. "The relation of God and humanity in the *status integratis* is portrayed as personal intercourse."

zijn geheel weer eene persoonlijkheid, naar deze gevormd; want de persoonlijkheid is het oorspronkelijkste aller systemen. Het is zelf weer eene organische persoonlijkheid, waarvan Christus het hoofd en de onderdanen het lichaam vormen. Gelijk elke persoonlijkheid een organisme heeft en hebben moet in het lichaam, zoo is de gemeente het lichaam, het zuiver organisme van Christus' Godmenschlijke persoonlijkheid, het pleroma, naar Paulus' diepzinnige uitdrukking (Efeze 1: 23) van Hem, die alles in allen vervult.⁴¹

The hierarchy of the creation demonstrates that the creation was complete with the creation of humanity. Teleologically, the creation is complete as Jesus Christ, the true imago Dei, calls humanity into fellowship with God, forms the church as his body, and leads the church to the culmination in the redemption of the entire creation. For this reason, the Scripture declares that Jesus "Heer van allen en alles is, Hand. 10: 36, in de eerste plaats van de gemeente, die Hij kocht met zijn bloed, Hand. 20; 28,

⁴¹ "Het Rijk Gods, het Hoogste Goed" in *KL*, p. 37. "The Kingdom of God is the highest, the most perfect fellowship, for it guarantees the most comprehensive and richest development of each personality. For the unity of an organism becomes more harmonious, richer and more glorious as the number of its parts increases. The person is the richest and most glorious. In him we see incalculable diversity; the entire world is recapitulated in him, he is a microcosm. And yet all these rich phenomena are harmoniously connected and organically systematized in the personality which, being eternal itself and far exceeding all these riches, knows that wonderful organism consciously and rules it by its will.

"What the person is for the world, the Kingdom of God is for the person. Every member of the organism of the Kingdom of God is itself a personality, with a fulness of life, fully developed in every way. And that kingdom itself is in its totality again a personality, formed after this; for personality is the most original of all systems. It again is an organic personality, of which Christ is the head and the subjects form the body. Just as each personality has and must have an organism in the body, so is the church the body, the pure organism of Christ's divine and human personality, the fullness, according to Paul's profound expression (Eph. 1: 23), of him who fills everything in every way."

maar dan voorts van heel de schepping, welke Hij eenmaal als de Rechter van levenden en dooden oordeelen zal, Hand. 10: 42, 17: 31."⁴² The church, comprised of those who have been born again, is the forerunner of the new creation. "De wedergeboorte uit water en Geest voltooit zich in de wedergeboorte aller dingen, Matth. 19: 28. De geestelijke verlossing van den zonde wordt eerst voleindigd in de lichamelijke verlossing aan het einde der dagen. Christus is een volkomen Zaligmaker; gelijk Hij eerst verscheen, om het koninkrijk der hemelen op te richten in de harten der geloovigen, zoo komt Hij eenmaal weer, om het eene zichtbare gedaante te geven."⁴³ The redemption of the creation proceeds from the less visible to the more visible, culminating in the complete visibility of the presence of God with his creation.

These four parameters⁴⁴ establish that the creation is good

⁴² *MD*, p. 297. Jesus "is Lord of all and everything (Acts 10: 36): first of all the church which he has purchased with his blood (Acts 20: 28), and further of all creation which he will sometime judge as the judge of the living and the dead (Acts 10: 42, 17: 32)." (*RF*, p. 315, alt.)

⁴³ *GD IV*, p. 676. "The rebirth by water and Spirit finds its completion in the rebirth of all things (Matt. 19: 28). Spiritual redemption from sin is only fully completed in bodily redemption at the end of time. Christ is a complete Saviour: just as he first appeared to establish the Kingdom of Heaven in the hearts of believers so he will come again to give it visible shape." (*LT*, p. 135)

⁴⁴ The fourth parameter, the teleological character of the creation, has been discussed here only in the context of its complementarity to the hierarchy of the creation. This parameter is the most significant one in Bavinck's doctrine of creation, and thus will be described in greater detail in the following section, "the creation in the context of the history of redemption."

because it is a place in which God and his creatures enjoy fellowship together. They are parameters for right relationship between God and his creatures. Jesus reveals that the Creator is our Father, enriching the Old Testament theme that "Elohim, de God der schepping en der natuur, maakt zich aan Israel kenbaar als Jahveh, den God des verbonds."⁴⁵ That is the most fundamental significance of the doctrine of creation.

De uitvoering van den raad Gods begint met de schepping. Deze is de aanvang en grondslag van alle openbaring Gods en daarom ook het fundament van alle religieuze en ethische leven. Deze leer der schepping, die in de Schrift zulk eene alles beheerschende plaats bekleedt, wordt niet voorgedragen als eene wijsgeerige verklaring van het wereldprobleem. Zij geeft zeker ook een antwoord op de vraag naar den oorsprong aller dingen; maar zij heeft toch bovenal eene religieuze-ethische beteekenis. Er is geen rechte verhouding tot God denkbaar dan op haar grondslag. Zij plaatst ons in die relatie tot God, waarin wij behooren te staan.⁴⁶

This discussion of Bavinck's doctrine of creation has described it as setting the *parameters* for relationship, which must be distinguished from the *means* of relationship. God has formed the creation in such a way that it sets the parameters, but it does not in itself bring creatures into relationship with God.

⁴⁵ AG, p. 11. "Elohim, the God of creation and of nature, makes himself known to Israel as Yahweh, the God of the covenant." ("CG," p. 41)

⁴⁶ GD II, pp. 370f. "The execution of God's counsel begins with the creation. This is the beginning and foundation of all God's revelation, and therefore also the foundation of all religious and ethical life. This doctrine of creation, which holds such an important place in the Scriptures, is not presented as a philosophical clarification of the world-problem. It certainly gives an answer to the question concerning the origin of all things, but, above all, it has a religious-ethical significance. There is no right relationship to God conceivable apart from its foundation. It places us in the relationship to God in which we are meant to stand."

Time and again Bavinck refers to the religious-ethical character of the Christian faith, a phrase which indicates that at the heart of this faith lies the relationship between the Trinitarian God and his creatures. The means of relationship are achieved and made known only through special revelation centered in Jesus Christ, but these means occur within the parameters placed within the creation. The goodness of the creation can be (partially) described by the laws of nature, but this goodness is relative to the law of God's atoning love. "Gelijk God van de natuur, zoo is zijn zedelijke wil van de natuurwet onderscheiden...Dat God de zonde vergeeft uit genade, om zijns wil, de kennis van dit mysterie danken wij alleen aan de bijzondere openbaring. Want de vergevende liefde Gods spreekt niet vanzelf; zij is ons niet uit de natuur, niet uit de geschiedenis, niet uit ons eigen verstand en geweten bekend."⁴⁷

⁴⁷ WO, pp. 166f. "As God is distinct from nature, so also is his moral will distinct from the law of nature...That God forgives sin by grace, for his name's sake -- the knowledge of this mystery we owe wholly to special revelation. For the forgiving love of God is not a matter of course; it is not known to us from nature, nor from history, nor from our own intellect and conscience." [PR, pp. 196, 198])

Bavinck makes a similar comment in "De Eere Gods" (KL, p. 108): "Die gansche schepping is een spiegel gelijk, waarin (God) zijn deugden en volmaaktheden schijnen en weerkaatsen laat. Heel de schepping, alle creaturen te zamen prediken Gods eere, beide zijne eeuwige kracht en Goddelijkheid. Niet krachtens eene natuurwet, volgens welke de spiegel niet anders kan dan het beeld weerkaatsen van het voorwerp, dat ervoor geplaatst wordt, maar krachtens de hoogere wet des vrijen persoonlijken levens." ("The entire creation is a mirror in which God shines and reflects his qualities and perfections. The whole creation, all creatures together proclaim the glory of God, both his eternal power and divinity. Not according to a law of nature, according to which the mirror cannot help but reflect what it sees, what is placed in front of it, but according to the higher law of the free, personal life.")

Creation in the context of the history of redemption

The fourth parameter of Bavinck's doctrine of creation, its teleological character, concerns the role of the creation in the work of redemption. The central motif in Bavinck's theology is his eschatological understanding of redemption, and thus his understanding of creation will be illuminated most clearly in that context. Indeed, though this parameter is the most clearly eschatological in character of the four, each of the four parameters points to the eschaton. That creation establishes the parameters for all subsequent revelation indicates that the creation prepares the way for God's eschatological work of redemption. As God seeks his own glory in the work of his hands, that glory will be revealed fully in the eschaton. The hierarchy and stability of the creation form a perduring order serviceable to the teleology of the creation. Thus, this description of creation in the context of the history of redemption is not so much an addition to the discussion of the parameters of Bavinck's doctrine of creation as a deepening of the eschatological theme already evident in that previous discussion.

Bavinck discusses five specific relationships in analyzing the role of the creation in the history of redemption. First, creation is to be seen as a manifestation of the eternal counsel of God. Second, creation establishes the framework within which history takes place. Third, creation is the context for the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. Fourth, creation is the home in which the church

lives, the body which is called to be apart from the world because its pearl is Jesus Christ, yet also called to be in the world as a leavening agent. Finally, the entire creation is the reality which is transformed in the eschaton, purified and re-created as the new heavens and the new earth. There is a cumulative dynamic to these five relationships: each one is prepared by and builds upon the previous ones, climaxing in the re-birth of the creation when Jesus returns.

Bavinck emphasizes the distinction between the Creator and the creature and the contingent character of the creation by describing the creation as a reality which originated in the eternal counsel of God. The point is not that one must grasp an abstract concept labelled 'eternal counsel' to understand the doctrine of creation;⁴⁸ rather, eternal counsel enables one to see that the creation is not an end in itself but rather the first among the works of God, the totality of which is to be understood in light of their origin. Nature is "een middel tot openbaring van Gods gedachten en deugden; zij is eene tentoonspreiding van Zijne wijsheid en eene afspiegeling van Zijne heerlijkheid."⁴⁹ As the

⁴⁸ Bavinck uses eternal counsel as the most general term to express what the Scriptures refer to variously as God's thoughts, will, counsel, establishment, decree, purpose, ordination, favor, and good pleasure. (cf. *MD*, p. 146. Bavinck refers to thirty-five Scripture passages in this brief survey of Scriptural terms.)

⁴⁹ *CW*, p. 84. Nature is "a means for revealing God's thoughts and virtues; it is a display of his wisdom and a reflection of his glory."

creation points not to itself but beyond itself to the One who created it, it also points to a larger context, for the One who created it is also the Redeemer; "dezelfde Goddelijke wijsheid, die de wereld schiep, herschept haar ook, en leidt ze ook heen tot het vastgestelde einde. In het scheppingsplan ligt het heilsplan opgesloten."⁵⁰ Thus, recognizing the link between the creation and the eternal counsel of God leads to perceiving the creation's role in the history of redemption.

The relation between creation and the eternal counsel of God has two important implications for understanding the place of creation in the context of the history of redemption. First, it highlights the fact that God is eternal and the creation is temporal. This fundamental distinction lies behind the teaching of the *creatio ex nihilo*. God always is; the creation had a beginning, and it came into being by the Word of God.⁵¹ God's counsel is eternal, but the creation is not. This fundamental distinction is more than simply a distinction; it is also a tension that requires resolution. The eternal God is intimately related to his temporal creation. The creature to which he has imparted his image, humanity, experiences a tension or a duality between the eternal and the temporal, a duality that will somehow be

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 88. "The same divine wisdom which created the world redeems it as well, and leads it towards its appointed goal. The plan of redemption is contained within the plan of creation."

⁵¹ *MD*, pp. 149f.

transformed in the new creation so that God's creatures will share in eternity. A fundamental distinction between this present creation and the new creation is that in some manner the relation between the eternal and the temporal will change. Thus, the temporality of the creation points to the history of redemption, for through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ this temporality will be transformed.

A second implication of the relation between creation and the eternal counsel is that the teleology of the creation is not inherent within the creation but is enacted from the outside through divine agency. Though Bavinck's claim that "in het scheppingsplan ligt het heilsplan opgesloten" can be understood to suggest that redemption is a natural outworking of the potential of creation, this interpretation is countered by Bavinck's assertion that "uit deze wereld wordt geen paradijs. Wat er niet in ligt, kan er niet uit voortkomen. Als er geen *Jenseits* is, geen God, die boven de natuur staat, geen *ordo supernaturalis*, dan is aan de zonde, aan de duisternis, aan den dood het laatste woord."⁵² These two statements are not contradictory. Rather, the first asserts that in the creation God establishes the parameters for his work of redemption, and this latter work is thoroughly a product of divine

⁵² *GD I*, p. 347. "This world will not become a paradise. What is not within it cannot come out of it. If there is no *Jenseits*, no God who is above nature, no *ordo supernaturalis*, then sin, darkness and death have the last word." Bavinck is not contradicting the earlier claim here. These two statements are both possible because the creation establishes the parameters for redemption, but not the means.

agency working through these creational parameters. Creation will culminate in its divinely ordained goal because it is so led by a God who is utterly distinct from the work of his hands. "Als er geen almachtig en heilig God is, die boven de wereld staat en voor haar het einddoel en het rustpunt van haar streven is, dan is er geen einddoel, komt er aan het wereldproces geen slot, en blijft er geen ruste over voor het menschelijk hart."⁵³ Seen in its place in relation to the eternal counsel of God, the creation is a temporal reality upheld by the hands of the omnipotent God whose redemptive and transforming acts lead it to its fore-ordained end.

A second relationship involves that between creation and history, both of which are to be seen in the context of their relations in the eternal counsel of God (because of the cumulative character of these relationships). Both creation and history serve to reveal God. The "macht en vrijheid Gods wordt gepredikt door de natuur, maar komt vooral uit in de geschiedenis van zijn volk."⁵⁴ While the creation establishes the *parameters* in which God's grace is poured, history provides the *medium* through which God's grace

⁵³ *WO*, p. 255. "If there is no omnipotent and holy God who stands above the world, and is for it the goal and resting-place of its strife, then there is no final goal, no end of the process of the world, and no rest for the human heart." (*PR*, p. 296, alt.)

⁵⁴ *GD I*, p. 308. "The power and freedom of God are proclaimed through nature, but appear especially in the history of his people."

comes to his creatures.⁵⁵ Both creation and history are ambiguous. God's good creation is also an enemy which condemns humanity to suffering and death. History is ambiguous because its character is always bound to subjective interpretation, and divine revelation is hidden organically within the ebb and flow of the times, discernible only to those who have been reconciled with God.⁵⁶ Creation establishes the parameters for God's work of redemption in the same manner that a riverbed sets the parameters for the river. History provides the means for that work just as polluted water flows through a riverbed. Though the water is polluted, hidden within it (organically) is pure, life-giving water, God's redemptive acts. Though creation and history are both ambiguous

⁵⁵ Bavinck points to this distinction between parameters and medium in a discussion of the nature/grace relation: "Als Herschepper wandelt (God) in het spoor, dat Hij als Schepper, Onderhouder en Regeerder aller dingen getrokken heeft. De genade is iets anders en hoogers dan de natuur, maar zij sluit zich toch bij de natuur aan, en vernietigt ze niet doch herstelt ze. Zij is geen erfgoed, dat krachtens natuurlijke geboorte overgaat, maar ze stroomt toch voort in de bedding, welke in de natuurlijke verhoudingen van het menschelijk geslacht is uitgegraven. Het verbond der genade springt niet van den hak op den tak, maar zet in de familien, geslachten en volken op eene historische en organische wijze zich voort." (*MD*, p. 260. "As the Re-creator, God follows the line which he drew as Creator, Sustainer and Ruler of all things. Grace is something other and higher than nature, but it nevertheless joins up with nature, does not destroy it but rather restores it. Grace is not a legacy which is transferred by natural birth, but it does flow on in the river-bed which has been dug out in the natural relationships of the human race. The covenant of grace does not ramble about at random, but perpetuates itself, historically and organically, in families, generations, nations." [*RF*, p. 277, alt.]

⁵⁶ Cf. *WO*, pp. 95-119.

God does work out his good purposes through these parameters and means because of their rootage in the eternal counsel of God.

That is why, in spite of these ambiguities, the Christian declares that "indien de geschiedenis zal blijven wat zij is en wezen moet, onderstelt zij het bestaan en de werkzaamheid van een alwijs en almachtig God, die in het wereldverloop zijn raad volvoert."⁵⁷ According to God's counsel, history flows in the riverbed of the creation, but is not to be understood in terms of that riverbed but in terms of its end which is reached through Jesus Christ. In the history of redemption we can distinguish between parameters, means, Christ, and the goal. Therefore, "de bijzondere openbaring, welke in Christus tot ons komt, geeft ons zelve geschiedenis, de kern, en den eigenlijken inhoud der gansche geschiedenis. Zij is zelve geschiedenis, en is het zelve, die de geschiedenis hoog boven de natuur en het natuurproces verheft."⁵⁸ Jesus Christ reveals the essence of history: "Christus kwam tot eene crisis op aarde; het wezen der geschiedenis gelegen is in een machtigen strijd tusschen duisternis en licht, tusschen zonde en

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 114. "If history is to remain what it is and must be, it presupposes the existence and activity of an all-wise and omnipotent God, who works out his own counsels in the course of the world." (PR, p. 135, alt.)

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 118. "The special revelation which comes to us in Christ itself gives us history, the kernel and the true content of all history. It is itself history, and is itself precisely what lifts history high above nature and natural processes." (PR, p. 140)

genade, tusschen hemel en hel."⁵⁹ Christ reveals not only the heart of history but also its certain goal. "De openbaring leert, dat God de Heer der tijden is en dat Christus van die tijden het keerpunt is. Dat doel is de volheid van het Godsrijk, de alles omvattende Godsheerschappij."⁶⁰

History points to the next relationship in the history of redemption, that between the creation and Jesus Christ. Because Jesus Christ is both the origin and the turning point in the history of redemption, the relation between the creation and Jesus Christ occurs in three moments: the creation was made through him, the creation prepares for and leads to his Incarnation, and the resurrected Christ leads the entire creation to the fulness of the Kingdom of God. Each of these moments highlights or emphasizes different aspects of that relation.

First, the creation was made through Jesus Christ. This fact situates the creation squarely within the history of redemption, describing it as a reality with an eschatological goal. "De wereld heeft in den Zoon haar grondslag en voorbeeld en daarom heeft zij

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 118f. "Christ came to the earth for a crisis; the essence of history lies in a mighty conflict between darkness and light, sin and grace, heaven and hell." (PR, p. 140f.)

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 119. "Revelation teaches that God is the Lord of the ages and that Christ is the turning point of these ages. The aim is the fulness of the Kingdom of God, the all-encompassing dominion of God." (PR, p. 141)

in Hem ook haar doel; zij is door Hem en ook tot Hem geschapen."⁶¹
This first moment establishes the foundation of the relation between Christ and the creation, and asserts the dynamic character of the relation; i.e., the relation is structured teleologically, its dynamic requires that it moves towards a specific, predetermined goal. The creation is formed Christologically, and will not be complete until all things are gathered up under Christ as Head and returned to the Father.⁶²

This foundation leads to the second moment, in which the creation prepares for and leads to the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. This theme has already been described in detail in the previous chapter. In this context it is important to add that in this relation the stability of the creation cannot be construed in such a manner that the creation is perceived as a closed or finished product. While in the creation God sets stable parameters for the history of redemption, parameters which God respects as he leads it to the Incarnation on the way to the fulness of the Kingdom of heaven, these parameters are neither determinist nor static in character. Instead, the stability of the creation serves to open

⁶¹ *GD IV*, p. 667. "In the Son the world has its foundation and example and therefore it has in him its goal as well. It is created through him and for him as well." (*LT*, p. 122)

⁶² "De Zoon is Hoofd, Heer en Erfgenaam aller dingen. Saamgevat in den Zoon, onder Hem als Hoofd vergaderd, keeren de schepselen weer tot den Vader, de fontein aller goeden, terug." (*GD IV*, p. 667. "The Son is Head, Lord and Heir of all things. United in the Son, gathered under him as their Head, all creatures return to the Father, the fountain of all good." *LT*, p. 122)

up the way for the new works of God in the history of redemption. "De openbaring, welke in Christus tot ons komt, zich aansluitende bij de openbaring, welke de natuur zelve ons kennen doet, verheft zij deze tot haar volle recht en handhaaft ze in hare wezenlijke waarde."⁶³ Christ's work of both maintaining and elevating God's revelation in nature indicates that the creation is respected but that Christ is not to be defined nor his significance understood in terms of 'pre-Christologically' construed creational stability.⁶⁴

This claim is both very important and extremely difficult to articulate clearly because the history of redemption is a history which requires chronological description and a teleology which is fully comprehensible only from the vantage point of its (necessarily mysterious) end. The meaning of this claim becomes somewhat clearer in the third moment of the relation between Christ and the creation, after the turning point has been reached and the resurrected and exalted Christ leads all creatures to the fulness of the Kingdom of God. All those who are in Christ are a new creation, and he gathers them together as his body, the church.

⁶³ WO, pp. 90f. "The revelation which comes to us in Christ joins itself to the revelation which nature itself makes known to us; it elevates this to its fullest capacity and maintains it in its real value." (PR, p. 107, alt.)

⁶⁴ The verb 'verheven' (elevated) plays a crucial role in describing the result of Christ's work upon the creation. Bavinck's use of this verb will be analyzed in the last relation to be discussed here, that between the creation and the new creation.

De schepping was de eerste openbaring, beginsel en grondslag van alle openbaring; maar omgekeerd is iedere openbaring ook eene schepping, een Goddelijke arbeid, om iets nieuws tot stand te brengen, om een nieuwen aanvang te maken en de mogelijkheid voor eene nieuwe ontwikkeling te ontsluiten. De gansche bijzondere openbaring, welke in Christus haar middelpunt heeft, heeft geen anderen inhoud en geen andere bedoeling, dan om dien vasten grondslag te leggen, waarop de nieuwe menschheid kan worden opgebouwd; Christus is het hoofd en de gemeente is zijn lichaam; Christus is de hoeksteen en de gemeente zijn de levende steenen van het Godsgebouw. Aan dien grondslag valt dan ook niets te veranderen, hij is en blijft voor altijd gelegd.⁶⁵

In this quotation one can discern several important inter-relations in the history of redemption. The creation prepares for and leads to Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ there is a new creation, which begins with the formation of the new humanity. Bavinck's terminology here requires careful scrutiny. Both the creation and Jesus Christ are called a "grondslag" (foundation); creation is the 'grondslag' for all revelation, Christ the 'grondslag' for the new humanity. Thus, creation is the foundation for the history of redemption, Christ the foundation for the goal of that history, the formation of the new humanity. This formulation helps to clarify the questions concerning the difference between creational stability and teleology. To the extent that creation is the

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 228. "Creation was the first revelation, the principle and foundation of all revelation; but, on the other hand, every revelation is also a creation, a divine work, in order to accomplish something new, to make a new commencement, and to unlock the possibility of a new development. The whole special revelation which has its center in Christ has no other content and no other meaning than to lay this firm foundation whereon the new humanity can be built. Christ is the head, and the church is his body; Christ is the cornerstone, and believers are the living stones of the divine building. Nothing can be changed in this foundation; it is laid, and remains for all time." (PR, p. 265)

foundation for revelation and Christ the foundation for the new humanity, one can say that creation's significance is, in a sense, historical and Christ's eternal, that creation prepares the way for Christ, and Christ prepares the way for the new creation. And yet Bavinck would not be prepared to make so bald a statement paralleling the creation/Christ relation with that of historicity and eternity. The significance of the creation does not end with the coming of Christ, nor with the establishment of the new creation. Rather, the creation is taken up into Christ as its Head. Therefore, Bavinck would wish to nuance these distinctions between the foundational character of both the creation and of Christ very carefully, exploring two significant questions concerning the role of the creation in the history of redemption: (1) what is the relation between the creation and the beginnings of the new creation, the church? and (2) what is the relation between the creation and the culmination of the new creation in the return of Jesus Christ?

Because the church is the first fruit of the new creation, Bavinck elevates the church over the creation in a certain sense. This elevation is expressed through his metaphors of the pearl and the leaven. The church is the body of those who belong to Jesus Christ, those who have acknowledged that he is the ultimate pearl. In acknowledging him thus, they have renounced all else to follow

him.⁶⁶ In following him, they now return to the creation, seeking to live as leaven, seeking to impart the first fruits of the new creation in the context of the present creation. This leavening describes the organic relationship between the church and the new creation, organic because it is somewhat hidden and teleological. The church is intimately connected with its head, Jesus Christ, and because Jesus Christ is the Lord of the creation, because there is an elevation of Jesus Christ over the creation, this elevation extends to the relation between the church and the creation as well.

This relation is expressed most clearly in Bavinck's essay on Common Grace. After describing the glory of Jesus Christ, he continues, "zoo volkomen is de genade de inhoud der Nieuw-Testamentische religie, dat de eigenschappen Gods, uit de schepping en uit de natuur kenbaar, terugwijken. God relatie tot de natuur treedt terug voor die tot zijne gemeente."⁶⁷ Similarly, he

⁶⁶ Jesus said "dat niets, wat een mensch in deze wereld bezit, in vergelijk kan treden met dien parel van groote waarde, dien Hij alleen kan schenken. De winst der geheele wereld baat den mensch niets, als hij zichzelf, zijn eigen ziel heeft verloren; daar is in de gansche schepping geen prijs, dien hij geven kan tot lossing zijner ziel." (WO, pp. 220f. Jesus said "that nothing a person possesses in this world can be compared with that pearl of great price which he alone can present. The gaining of the whole world avails a man nothing if he has lost his own soul; there is nothing in creation which he can give in exchange for his soul." [PR, p. 257, alt.]

⁶⁷ AG, p. 14. "So perfectly is grace the content of New Testament religion that the attributes of God seen in nature and the creation recede. God's relation to nature retreats to make room for the relationship between God and his church." ("CG," p. 43, alt.)

declares that Jesus is Lord of all, "in de eerste plaats van zij gemeente, die Hij kocht met zijn bloed, maar dan voorts van heel de schepping, welke Hij eenmaal als de Rechter van levenden en dooden oordeelen zal."⁶⁸ It is true that Christ was in the first place the mediator of creation, "maar veel nauwer dan de band aan de schepping in het algemeen, is die, welke het Woord aan de menschen verbindt."⁶⁹ Through him all creatures receive life, but to those who believe in him "moet het leven zich verheffen tot licht."⁷⁰ Each of these statements points to an intimacy between Christ and his church which, in some way that is virtually undefineable, is deeper than the bond between Christ and the creation.

What concretely does this 'deeper bond' or 'elevation' signify? Answering this question requires recalling the teleological import of Bavinck's understanding of redemption. The goal of Christ's work is that God's Word will live fully within his body, his people, that realities which have an external but increasingly internal character during the course of the history of redemption become thoroughly internal. As the church seeks to hear and obey this word, it does not first of all look to the creation

⁶⁸ *MD*, p. 297. Jesus is Lord of all, "first of all the church which he has purchased with his blood, and further of all creation which he will at one time judge as the Judge of the living and dead." (*RF*, p. 315, alt.)

⁶⁹ "Kennis en Leven" in *KL*, p. 209. "But the bond which connects the Word to humanity is much closer than the bond to the creation in general."

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* To those who believe in him, "this life must be elevated to light."

but to Jesus Christ. "Gelijk de wijsheid Gods in Christus vleesch geworden is, zoo behoort de waarheid ook in ons in te gaan, zij moet in den weg der vrijheid ons eigen persoonlijk en geestelijk eigendom worden; door een levend en waarachtig geloof moet zij in een bestanddeel van ons eigen denken en handelen worden omgezet, en dan buiten ons worden verbreid, totdat de aarde vol is van de kennis des Heeren."⁷¹ The goal of redemption is to become like Christ, but the creation, which reveals divine thoughts, laws and norms, serves to guide the believer as she follows Jesus. "De Goddelijke gedachten en wetten zijn de fundamenten en normen, de goederen en schatten, de verbindingen en organisaties van alle schepselen. Daarnaar ons to conformeeren, in verstand en hart, in denken en handelen, dat is in den diepsten grond den beelde van Gods Zoon gelijkvormig te worden; en dit is het ideaal en de bestemming van den mensch."⁷² The laws which point to the stability of the creation also point the believer to Jesus Christ and help her to grow in Christlikeness. The laws do not point to themselves but to Jesus. Their stability is both Christological

⁷¹ *CW*, p. 106. "Just as the wisdom of God became flesh in Christ, so must the truth become part of us. In the way of freedom it must become our own personal and spiritual possession; through a living and real faith it must become transposed into a constituent part of our own thinking and acting, and then spread beyond us until the earth is full of the knowledge of the Lord."

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 102f. "The divine thoughts and laws are the foundations and norms, the goods and treasures, the connections and organizations of all creatures. To be conformed to them in mind and heart, in thinking and acting is, in the deepest sense, what it means to be conformed to the image of God's Son, which is the ideal and the destination of the person."

and teleological (and indeed, each of these characteristics assumes the other).

Justification and sanctification are the first fruits of glorification. While the believer eagerly awaits the full communion with God and his creatures in the new creation, "reeds op aarde is deze gemeenschap eene heerlijke weldaad des geloofs."⁷³ This fellowship is Christological in character, for "de eenheid, die alle geloovigen, zoowel de gestorvenen als de levenden, saam verbindt, ligt in Christus, en door Hem in de gemeenschap met denzelfden Vader, in het bezit van denzelfden Geest."⁷⁴ Bavinck sees the role of the church in the history of redemption as so significant that in a brief overview of the Christian faith, he limits his discussion to the three persons of the Trinity and the church, summarizing his thoughts with this striking claim:

Door de vergeving der zonden en de wederopstanding des vleesch es komt (het kerk) gewisselijk tot het eeuwige leven. Daarheen zijn al de werken der drie Goddelijke Personen gericht. Een in wezen, zijn ze een ook in doel. Dat is de tempel, dien zij samen bouwen, en tot woning begeeren. En als straks dan de elementen brandende zullen versmelten en de aarde en hare werken zullen vergaan, dan zal deze tempel, waaraan eeuwen lang is gearbeid, luisterrijk op den ruinen der zonde verrijzen en tot in eeuwigheid blijven bestaan.⁷⁵

⁷³ *GD IV*, p. 705. "On earth already this communion is a wonderful benefit of faith." (*LT*, p. 163)

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 618. "The unity that binds all believers together, the dead as well as the living, is anchored in Christ, and through him in fellowship with the same Father, in the possession of the same Spirit." (*LT*, p. 71)

⁷⁵ "Het Christelijk Geloof" in *KL*, p. 97. "Through the forgiveness of sins and the resurrection of the body the church comes with certainty to eternal life. All the works of the three

Bavinck describes the intimate and eternal union between the church and the Trinity as that which endures as the present creation is transformed through fire into the new creation. Here again the church is, in a sense, elevated over the creation because it anticipates the new creation.

This leads to the final issue in this discussion of the relation between creation and redemption history: the creation-new creation relation. The description of Bavinck's understanding of the relation between the creation and the new creation represents the culmination and climax of this analysis of his eschatological understanding of redemption. Even so, this climactic moment presents a paradox: Bavinck emphasizes the goal of redemption over and over again. He believes that the creation and the entire history of redemption cohere from the perspective of their common goal, that the present is comprehensible in the light of its promised future, and yet to a great extent that future is a mystery. When Bavinck describes that future and the relation between the present and the future he grapples with his language, wrestling to find the words and phrases which will both do justice to the Scriptures and make a coherent contribution to his theology. The challenge of this summary of Bavinck's grappling will be to

divine persons are focused on that. One in essence, they are also one in goal. That is the temple which they are building together and long to dwell in. And when later the elements shall burn and melt and the earth and its works shall pass away, then shall this temple, worked on for ages long, rise gloriously above the ruins of sin to remain for eternity."

describe his thoughts succinctly without rendering them more systematic than he does. This summary will first set the stage by describing the link between the church and the new creation, then outline five very general guidelines which one can discern in Bavinck's theology concerning the relation between the creation and the new creation, and finally provide a list of specific observations he makes concerning this relation.

This church is, for Bavinck, the invisible and organic first-fruits of the new creation present in this creation through the (re-)creating work of Jesus Christ. The relation between the church and the new creation is characterized by the realities of sin and of creational dualities, both of which will be overcome in the new creation. There is continuity between the church and the new creation; "de wedergeboorte uit water en Geest voltooit zich in de wedergeboorte aller dingen."⁷⁶ But the latter cannot happen in this creation.

Wijl Jezus' komst in eene eerste en tweede uiteenvalt, wordt eerst het koninkrijk Gods in geestlijken zin in het hart geplant; en de goederen van dat rijk zijn alle inwendig en onzienlijk, vergeving, vrede, gerechtigheid, eeuwig leven. Volgens haar bestaat de wereld uit hemel en aarde, de mensch uit ziel en lichaam, en heeft dienovereenkomstig ook het koninkrijk Gods eene geestlijke, verborgene en eene uitwendige, zienlijke zijde. Terwijl Jezus de eerste maal gekomen is, om dat koninkrijk in geestlijken zin te stichten, keert Hij aan het einde der dagen weder, om er ook eene zichtbare gestalte aan te geven. De reformatie gaat van binnen naar buiten; de wedergeboorte der menschen voltooit zich in de wedergeboorte der schepping; het Godsrijk is dan

⁷⁶ *GD IV*, p. 676. "The rebirth by water and Spirit finds its completion in the rebirth of all things." (*LT*, p. 135)

eerst ten volle gerealiseerd, als het ook zichtbaar over de aarde uitgebreid is.⁷⁷

Thus the continuity and discontinuity between the church and the new creation can be described only in the context of the relation of both continuity and discontinuity between this creation and the new creation.

This relation can first be described by discerning five general guidelines which Bavinck employs. The first states that the history of redemption is teleological in character. History has a specific goal, God is leading history to that goal, and, even though all appearances may belie the reality of that goal and process, in faith the believer knows with certainty that this is so, and this certain knowledge thoroughly shapes one's understanding of not only the future but also the present.

Langs den weg van algemeene of bijzondere openbaring dringt zij (de Goddelijke energie) in al de geledingen van het scheppingsorganisme in, onderhoudt en regeert het, en leidt het heen tot het vastgestelde einde. Daarom gelooven wij en vertwijfelen niet. De zonde breekt Gods macht niet, maar brengt haar tot rijker openbaring. Het wereldplan zet zich in een verlossingsplan voort. Al laat de geschiedenis ons nog

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 700. "Since Jesus' advent breaks up into a first and a second coming, the Kingdom of God is first planted in human hearts spiritually, and the benefits of that kingdom are all internal and invisible: forgiveness, peace, righteousness, eternal life. According (to the Scripture) the world consists of heaven and earth; humans consist of soul and body; and the kingdom of God accordingly has a hidden spiritual dimension and an external, visible side. Whereas Jesus came the first time to establish that kingdom in a spiritual sense, he returns at the end of history to give visible shape to it. Reformation proceeds from the inside to the outside. The rebirth of humans is completed in the rebirth of creation. The Kingdom of God is fully realized only when it is visible over the entire earth as well." (*LT*, p. 158)

zooveel wanorde en teruggang zien, zij beweegt zich toch voort naar de toekomst van Christus heen. God voert zijn raad uit, en naar Zijne belofte verwachten wij een nieuwen hemel en eene nieuwe aarde, in dewelke gerechtigheid woont.⁷⁸

Bavinck never tires of reminding his readers that the goal of history is not immanent in the processes of nature, neither is it the culmination of human effort, but constitutes in its entirety a work of God.⁷⁹

Second, while the goal of history is in many ways mysterious, one can describe it with some measure of certainty. Bavinck employs many Biblical images in his *ad hoc* descriptions of the goal of history and provides lengthy lists of Scripture passages. On the strength of these Bavinck describes, for the most part, the new creation in a manner congruent with his hermeneutical principle that one must take care to say no more and no less than the Scriptures. "Daar komt een rijk van gerechtigheid en vrede, van geestlijke en stoffelijke welvaart. Dan is de aarde vol van de kennis des Heeren en bereikt de belofte des verbonds hare volkomene vervulling: Ik zal uw God zijn, en gij zult mij tot zonen en

⁷⁸ *CW*, pp. 99f. "Along the route of general or special revelation (the divine powers) penetrate all the joints of the organism of creation, maintaining and ruling it, and leading it towards its appointed end. Therefore we believe and do not doubt. Sin does not break God's power, but brings it to a richer revelation. The 'worldplan' proceeds as 'reconciliation-plan.' Even though history shows disorder and decline, it moves forward to the return of Christ. God executes his counsel, and according to his promise we await a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells."

⁷⁹ E.g., cf. *GD* IV, p. 627.

dochteren zijn."⁸⁰ "Het geloof aan de bijzondere openbaring (is) ten slotte eigenlijk een met het geloof aan eene andere en betere wereld dan deze. De openbaring is het komen Gods tot de menschheid, om eeuwiglijk bij haar te wonen."⁸¹ "Het wezen van de bedeeeling der toekomst bestaat daarin, dat de Heere een nieuw verbond met zijn volk zal oprichten, dat Hij hun een nieuw hart zal schenken en daarin zijne wet zal schrijven en dat Hij op allen zijnen Geest zal uitstorten, zoodat zij Hem liefhebben met hun gansche hart en in zijne wegen wandelen."⁸² What is certain is an eternity of intimate fellowship between God and his people, fellowship characterized by a righteousness, peace, and love which flows from God's law written on his people's hearts. Bavinck supplements this very general descriptive framework with many more specific Scriptural descriptions of the continuities and discontinuities between the present creation and the new creation (which we will survey later in the chapter).

⁸⁰ *MD*, p. 270. "A kingdom of righteousness and peace is coming, of spiritual and material well-being. Then the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord and then the promise of the covenant reaches the perfect fulfillment: I will be a God unto thee, and ye shall be my sons and daughters." (*RF*, p. 287)

⁸¹ *GD I*, pp. 347f. "The belief in special revelation is actually identical with belief in another and better world than this one. Revelation is the coming of God to humanity, to dwell with her eternally."

⁸² *GD IV*, pp. 639f. "The essence of the future dispensation is that the Lord will make a new covenant with his people. He will give them a new heart and write his law on it. He will pour out his Spirit on all so that they will love him with their whole heart and walk in his ways." (*LT*, p. 94)

Third, in Bavinck's view the new creation represents both a restoration of the original creation and a reality that is something greater than the original. "Het endpoint keert tot het uitgangspunt terug en is tegelijk een toppunt, dat boven het punt van aanvang hoog verheven is. De werken Gods vormen een cirkel, die in spiraalvorm naar boven streeft; ze zijn eene verbinding van de horizontale en de verticale lijn: ze bewegen zich tegelijk voorwaarts en opwaarts."⁸³ Bavinck most frequently employs the verb 'verheffen' (or 'verheven') to describe the 'greater than' character of the new creation in relation to the present creation. Other formulations he uses to describe the two-fold effect of God's work of reconciliation include that "het schepsel hersteld and verheerlijkt wordt,"⁸⁴ and "*gratia reparat et perficit naturam*."⁸⁵

The act of 'elevation' plays a crucial role in Bavinck's understanding of redemption, and he perceives it in various ways. In this chapter we have seen that humanity created in the *imago Dei* is elevated above animals and angels,⁸⁶ and humanity in communion

⁸³ *MD*, p. 129. "The end returns to the starting point and is at the same time the apex which is elevated high above the point of origin. The deeds of God form a circle which mounts upward in the form of a spiral; they connect the horizontal and the vertical line; they move upwards and forwards at the same time." (*RF*, p. 144, alt.)

⁸⁴ *WO*, p. 266. "The creature is restored and glorified."

⁸⁵ *GD III*, p. 207.

⁸⁶ *WO*, p. 91. Cf. p. 185, n. 29.

with God is elevated above nature,⁸⁷ Christ elevates history above nature,⁸⁸ and grace is higher than nature.⁸⁹ Yet Bavinck also declares that "scheppen is geen lager en minder Goddelijk werk dan het herscheppen; de natuur staat niet beneden de genade; de wereld is niet profaan in zich zelve. Alle dingen zijn uit God."⁹⁰ These apparently contradictory emphases cohere when one perceives the new creation as both a restoration and an elevation of the present creation. Both the creation and its redemption are good works of God, not 'natural' but 'supernatural.' Redemption both affirms the goodness of the creation and transforms that goodness so that it becomes 'better,' it becomes perfected.⁹¹

This third guideline leads to a fourth guideline, namely that the new creation is both continuous and discontinuous with the present creation. To a certain extent the restoration theme describes continuity and the elevation/glorification theme discontinuity. Bavinck does not debate which of these themes is the more important. What is significant for him is that both are inherently part of the process of redemption so that they are

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 89. Cf. p. 186, n. 30.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 118. Cf. p. 200, n. 58.

⁸⁹ *MD*, p. 260. Cf. p. 176, n. 8.

⁹⁰ *GD II*, p. 388. "Creating is not a lower or less divine work than redeeming (re-creating). Nature does not stand beneath grace; the world is not profane in itself. All things are from God."

⁹¹ Later in the chapter we will examine the coherence of these claims.

inseparable. "Daarin bestaat juist Gods eer, dat Hij dezelfde menschheid, dezelfde wereld, denzelfden hemel en dezelfde aarde verlost en vernieuwt, welke door de zonden verdorven en verontreinigd waren."⁹² And yet, something significantly different happens to this 'same world,' it is purified by fire so that "de gedaante van deze wereld voorbijgaat."⁹³ The best Bavinck can do to describe this continuity/discontinuity relation is to apply to it the metaphor of the person being born again: "Gelijk bij den enkelen mensch, zoo heeft er aan het einde der dagen ook bij de wereld eene wedergeboorte plaats, die geene physische schepping, maar een geestlijke vernieuwing is."⁹⁴

A final guideline operative in Bavinck's theology posits that the relation between the present creation and the new creation is Christological in character. All that is was created through him, he became a part of this creation, and through his death and resurrection he has become both the Lord and the first-fruit of the new creation. Therefore, "het verbond des genade is de aan de scheppingsordening zich aansluitende, in deze als teruggrijpende,

⁹² *GD IV*, p. 699. "God's honour consists precisely in the fact that he redeems and renews the same humanity, the same world, the same heaven and the same earth that have been corrupted and polluted by sin." (*LT*, p. 157)

⁹³ *Ibid.* "The form of this world passes away." (*LT*, p. 157)

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* "Just as in the case of an individual human being, so at the end of time a rebirth of the world will take place as well. This constitutes a spiritual renewal, not a physical creation." (*LT*, p. 157)

en heel de schepping kwalitatief en intensief in zich opnemende organisatie der nieuwe menschheid onder Christus als haar Hoofd."⁹⁵
As Christ is a first-fruit of the new creation, so the benefits which the believer receives in Christ now are a first-fruit of the benefit which the entire creation will receive through him.
"Zooals een mensch in Christus een nieuw schepsel is, bij wien het oude voorbijgegaan en alles nieuw is geworden, zoo gaat ook deze wereld in haar tegenwoordige gedaante voorbij, om op het machtwoord Gods uit haar schoot aan eene nieuwe wereld het aanzijn te geven."⁹⁶

On the basis of these guidelines, we can now summarize various statements and descriptions Bavinck makes concerning the continuities and discontinuities between the creation and the new creation. He is not concerned with positing an either/or relation between continuities and discontinuities; rather, Bavinck acknowledges that both are present and his concern is to describe the relation between these two realities.

Alwat waarachtig is, alwat edel is, alwat rechtvaardig is, alwat rein is, alwat liefelijk is, alwat welluidt, in de gansche schepping, in hemel en aarde, wordt in de toekomstige

⁹⁵ GD III, p. 213. "The covenant of grace is the organization of the new humanity under Christ as its head. It joins up with the creation order, reverts back to it and takes into itself both qualitatively and intensively the entire creation."

⁹⁶ GD IV, p. 699. "Just as anyone in Christ is a new creation in whom the old has passed away and everything has become new, so this world passes away in its present form as well, in order out of its womb, at God's word of power, to give birth and being to a new world." (LT, p. 157)

Godsstad saamgebracht, maar vernieuwd, herschapen tot zijne hoogste heerlijkheid opgevoerd. De substantie ervoor is in deze schepping aanwezig. Gelijk de rups zich ontwikkelt tot vlinder, gelijk koolstof zich omzet tot diamant, gelijk het tarwegraan, stervend in de aarde, een ander voortbrengt, gelijk de gansche natuur in de lente herleeft en in feestdos zich tooit, gelijk de gemeente gevormd wordt uit Adams gevallen geslacht, gelijk het opstandingslichaam opgewekt wordt uit het lichaam, dat gestorven en in de aarde begraven is; zoo komt ook eenmaal door de herscheppende macht van Christus uit de door vuur gelouterde elementen van deze wereld de nieuwe hemel en aarde te voorschijn, stralend in onvergankelijke heerlijkheid en van de 'douleia tes phoras' voor eeuwig bevrijd. De *status gloriae* zal geen loutere restauratie zijn van den oorspronkelijken *status naturae*, maar eene reformatie, die, dank zij de macht van Christus, alle *potentia* tot *actus* doet overgaan en heel de schepping voor Gods aangezicht zal stellen, stralend in overwelkelijke pracht en bloeiend in de lente eener eeuwige jeugd.⁹⁷

Bavinck seeks to hold together the two claims that the new creation comes out of the old and yet is, in significant ways, new.

Bavinck describes the relation between continuity and discontinuity in two ways. First, he provides general statements

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 702. "All that is true, all that is noble, all that is righteous, all that is pure, all that is lovely, all harmony in the entire creation, in heaven and earth, is brought together in the future city of God, but it is renewed, transformed, raised to its highest glory. The substance of this is present in this creation. Just as a caterpillar develops into a butterfly, carbon develops into diamonds, as the grain of wheat dies in the earth to bring forth another, as all of nature revives in Spring and is arrayed in festive attire, as the church is formed out of Adam's fallen race, as the resurrection body is raised from the body that is dead and buried in the earth, so the new heaven and earth will appear through the recreating might of Christ out of the elements of this world which have been purified through fire, shining in imperishable glory and eternally freed from the *douleia des phoras*. The *status gloriae* will be no mere restoration of the original *status naturae*, but a reformation, which, thanks to the power of Christ, brings all *potentia* to *actus*, places all creation before the face of God, shining with unfading splendor and blossoming in a springtime of eternal youth." (*LT*, p. 160, alt.)

which use conceptual abstractions or metaphors (as his uses of caterpillar/butterfly and coal/diamond in the preceding quotation). These general statements serve to reinforce his claim that both continuity and discontinuity are present in the creation/new creation relation, but such statements remain fairly ambiguous and indeterminate. His abstractions are all derivative from the essence/form distinction wherein the essence of the creation is continuous while the form discontinuous. In keeping with Bavinck's method of describing a concept in various ways in an attempt to avoid moving to systematic conclusions too soon, I will list various descriptions which he provides. For example, he speaks of the "substantieele eenheid" and "qualitatieve onderscheid" between our present bodies and the resurrected body.⁹⁸ He refers to the Apostle Paul's claims that "de gedaante van deze wereld voorbijgaat," but this is "geen van alle eene vernietiging der substantie in."⁹⁹ He also says that "de materia blijft, doch de forma verschilt."¹⁰⁰ In one of his most confusing articulations, he contrasts the "new song" with the "original order:"

Het is een nieuw lied, dat er gezongen wordt in den hemel. Maar in zoover keert toch de oorspronkelijke ordening der schepping terug, als alle onderscheid van natuur en genade ten eenenmale vervallen zal. De liefde van gezin en familie, het maatschappelijk en het staatkundig leven, kunst en wetenschap,

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 677. "Substantial unity" and "qualitative distinction." (*LT*, p. 136)

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 699. "The form of this world will pass away," but "this is not an annihilation of its substance." (*LT*, p. 157, alt.)

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 704. "The matter remains but the form differs." (*LT*, p. 162)

zij zijn op zichzelf een voorwerp van zijn goddelijk welbehagen. Zij alle vormen te zamen, niet in hun wijze van zijn, maar in hun wezen, die oorspronkelijke ordening, welke God bij de schepping in het aanzijn geroepen heeft en nog, niettegenstaande de zonde, in stand houdt en bewaart.¹⁰¹

Bavinck perceives an analogy between human and creational renewal:

"Doch gelijk de mensch wel door Christus herschapen, maar niet vernietigd en daarna nieuw geschapen wordt, zoo blijft ook de wereld in haar wezen bewaard, al ondergaat zij in hare gedaante eene zoo groote verandering, dat zij een nieuwe hemel en eene nieuwe aarde genoemd worden kan."¹⁰² Together these metaphors and conceptual abstractions remain ambiguous. They reflect Bavinck's hesitancy to speculate beyond the sketchy details provided in the Scriptures. They clearly point to the importance of both continuity and discontinuity between the creation and the new

¹⁰¹ AG, pp. 43, 45. "A new song will be sung in heaven, but the original order of creation will return, at least to the extent that all distinctions of nature and grace will once and for all be done away with. The love of family and kin, societal and political life, art and science are all in themselves objects of his divine good pleasure. They all together constitute, not in their mode of being but in their essence, that original order that God called into being at creation and that he still preserves and maintains, sin notwithstanding." ("CG," pp. 59f., alt.) This description is even more ambiguous than the others, because it in effect compares three rather than two 'time' periods: the original creation, the present creation and the new creation. In the subsequent section's study of Bavinck's understanding of common grace, this ambiguity will be dealt with.

¹⁰² MD, p. 569. "Just as man himself is recreated by Christ indeed, but is not annihilated and thereupon created again, so too the world in its essence will be preserved, even though in its form it undergoes so great a change that it can be called a new heaven and a new earth." (RF, p. 566)

creation, but they do not concretely describe what these entail.¹⁰³

A further ambiguity in describing the creation/new creation relation is that Bavinck does not make a distinction between continuities which are creational and those which are Christological. His theology requires a great deal of overlap between these two categories while also allowing some distinction. Bavinck does clearly declare that it is only through the power of Christ that the new creation will be established. Without Christ there is no continuity because without him there is no new creation. He also makes clear that the power of Christ is already working in the present creation. Thus, there are continuities between the original creation and the new creation and there are continuities between the power of Christ in this creation and the power of Christ establishing the new creation, but Bavinck does not distinguish these. It is in keeping with his method that in dealing with realities characterized by a greater degree of mystery he is loathe to make too many distinctions, especially when Scripture provides simple descriptions but does not find it necessary to make such distinctions. However, the reader of Bavinck can cautiously discern in his thought elements within the

¹⁰³ This careful balance between continuity and discontinuity is not reflected in another ambiguous statement which Bavinck makes upon two occasions: that in the new creation "alle toestanden en verhoudingen in natuur en menschenwereld gansch en al veranderen zouden." (*GD IV*, p. 673. Cf. also p. 614. In the new creation "all situations and relationships in nature and humanity shall completely change.")

creation that are affirmed by the work of Christ and continuous with the new creation and other elements which are part of the "new thing" that God has done in Christ.

On a number of occasions Bavinck gives concrete examples of such continuities. Those realities which are continuous are not characterized by 'pure' continuity, but rather are continuous as a shadow has continuity with the reality which it shadows. Bavinck describes the believer's fellowship with God and with other believers as embodying this type of continuity.

De zaligheid der gemeenschap met God wordt genoten in en verhoogd door de gemeenschap der heiligen. De geloovigen komen door den Middelaar des Nieuwen Testaments in gemeenschap, niet alleen met de strijdende kerk op aarde, maar ook met de triumfeerende kerk in den hemel. Maar deze gemeenschap, ofschoon in beginsel reeds op aarde bestaande, zal toch onvergelykelijk veel rijker en heerlijker zijn, wanneer alle scheidsmuren van afstamming en taal, van tijd en ruimte geslecht, alle zonde en dwaling uitgebannen en alle uitverkorenen in het nieuwe Jeruzalem saamgebracht zullen zijn.¹⁰⁴

This theme of fellowship with God and other believers speaks of continuity but it hardly emphasizes the continuity between the present creation and the new creation. This fellowship is rooted in Christ, and therefore the creation is involved to the extent

¹⁰⁴ GD IV, p. 705. "The blessedness of communion with God is enjoyed in and enriched by the communion of the saints. Through the Mediator of the New Testament believers enter into fellowship, not only with the church militant on earth, but also with the church triumphant in heaven. But this fellowship, though in principle it already exists on earth, will be incomparably richer and more glorious when all barriers of descent and language, of time and space, have been leveled, all sin and error have been banished and all the elect have been assembled in the New Jerusalem." (LT, p. 163, alt.)

that it sets the parameters for this fellowship. Furthermore, the claim that the fellowship in the new creation is incomparably richer than that experienced in the present is, to a large extent, due to the fact that these creational parameters (especially time and space) will be transformed in the new creation.

This type of 'shadow to reality' continuity is paralleled by descriptions of shadow to reality discontinuity. In the latter descriptions the same dynamic is at work, but the distinction between the shadow and the reality is more clearly highlighted. Bavinck describes the differences between the 'already and the not yet' of the Kingdom of God. "In zoover de heerschappij Gods hier op aarde in de geloovigen niet aanstonds ten volle gerealiseerd wordt en zij van hunne zijde de goederen van dat koninkrijk, het eeuwige leven, de aanschouwing Gods, de volkomene zaligheid, hier nog niet ten volle ontvangen en genieten, is het koninkrijk dus wel toekomstig. Maar inzoover het door den persoon en door de werken van Christus hier op aarde gesticht, en door wedergeboorte, geloof en bekeering in de harten geplant wordt, is het tegenwoordig."¹⁰⁵ These descriptions of the 'already and the not yet' are to be understood in terms of the larger dynamic of interrelations between

¹⁰⁵ GD III, pp. 224f. "Inasmuch as God's rule here on earth in believers is not directly realized in full, and they, on their part, do not fully receive and enjoy the benefits of that kingdom (e.g., eternal life, seeing God, perfect blessedness), the kingdom is still future. But inasmuch as it is established here on earth through the person and work of Christ and is planted in the heart through rebirth, belief and conversion, it is present."

the creation, Christ, the church and the new creation. Bavinck succinctly summarizes this dynamic as follows:

Het leven voor den hemel vormt geen tegenstelling met het leven in het midden der wereld; juist in die wereld bewaart Christus zijne discipelen van den Booze. De nieuwe hemel en aarde wordt immers opgebouwd uit de elementen der wereld, die thans bestaat, en de gemeente is de herstelde menschheid onder Christus als Hoofd. Hoezeer echter de zaligheid in zekeren zin reeds het deel is van de geloovigen op aarde, zij is dat toch maar in beginsel en niet in volle werkelijkheid.¹⁰⁶

Christ is the true continuity between the present and the future, and his church begins to share in the blessings of the new creation now. In some way the 'elements' of the world are also continuous, but this remains very ambiguous and undefined (as it is in Scripture).

Bavinck's descriptions of the resurrection of the body provide a focal point for these themes, for in the resurrection we see a confluence of creational, Christological and new creational issues. The Scriptural teaching of the resurrection of Jesus Christ as the first-fruit of those who shall arise from the dead provides the most concrete example of the relation between the present and the future, and Bavinck draws a number of significant conclusions from this event. First, he perceives a continuity of personality that

¹⁰⁶ GD IV, p. 704. "Life in preparation for heaven does not compete with life in the midst of the world. It is precisely in the world that Christ protects his disciples from the evil one. The new heaven and earth is composed of the elements of this world that exist now, and the church is the humanity restored under Christ as head. However much believers on earth in a sense already enjoy salvation, that is the case only in principle and not in full." (LT, p. 161f., alt.)

is maintained through the resurrection, a continuity that undermines any dualistic understandings of anthropology.

Deze identiteit van het opstandingslichaam met het lichaam, dat bij den dood werd afgelegd, is in de Christelijke religie van groote beteekenis. Want ten eerste staat zij daarmede lijnrecht over tegen alle dualistische leer, volgens welke het lichaam slechts eene toevallige woonplaats of zelfs een kerker van de ziel is. Het wezen van den mensch bestaat juist in de allernauwste vereeniging van ziel en lichaam tot eene persoonlijkheid. In de identiteit van het lichaam wordt evengoed als in die van de ziel de continuïteit van het individuele, menschelijke wezen gehandhaafd. De verlossing (is) door Christus geen tweede, nieuwe schepping maar eene herschepping.¹⁰⁷

The integral unity of the personality is a creational reality which the work of Christ maintains and redeems. The resurrection of the body is an affirmation of God's work of creation, and thus there is a highly significant component of continuity between the creation and the new creation, a continuity which is revealed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. This continuity of one's identity (together with continuities of fellowship with God and his people) has a number of implications for continuity.

Zijne kinderen blijven zijne knechten, die Hem dienen dag en nacht. Zij zijn profeten, priesters en koningen, die op de aarde heerschen in alle eeuwigheid. Naarmate zij op aarde over weinig getrouw zijn geweest, worden zij in het koninkrijk Gods over veel gezet. Ieder behoudt zijn eigen persoonlijkheid, want van allen, die ingaan in het nieuwe

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 675. "In the Christian faith this identity of the resurrection body with the body that is laid aside at death is of great significance. First, this stands diametrically opposed to all dualistic theories according to which the body is merely an incidental dwelling place or even a prison for the soul. The essence of a human being consists above all in the most intimate union of soul and body in a single personality. The continuity of an individual human being is maintained as much in the identity of the body as in that of the soul. Redemption through Christ is not a second, new creation but a re-creation." (*LT*, p. 134, alt.)

Jeruzalem, zijn de namen geschreven in het boek des levens des Lams, en elk ontvangt een eigen, nieuwen naam. Wat hier gezaaid wordt, wordt in de eeuwigheid gemaaid. De groote verscheidenheid, die in allerlei opzicht onder de menschen bestaat, wordt in de eeuwigheid niet vernietigd, maar van al het zondige gereinigd en aan de gemeenschap met God en met elkander dienstbaar gemaakt.¹⁰⁸

Manifestations of creation's goodness such as the uniqueness of each personality and creaturely diversity are affirmed by the person and work of Christ and brought to their fullest richness in the new creation. Once again, this continuity contains within it a 'shadow to reality' discontinuity evidenced by the retaining of personality on the one hand, and the receiving of a new name, on the other.

At the same time there is an important element of discontinuity between the mortal body and the resurrected body. "Het lichaam staat op, doch niet als vleesch en bloed, zwak, verderfelijk, sterfelijk, doch als een lichaam, dat met onverderfelijkeid en heerlijkheid is bekleed. Het uit vleesch en bloed bestaande lichaam is wel het zaad, waaruit het opstandingslichaam voortkomt, maar desniettemin is er tusschen

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 710. "His children remain his servants who serve him day and night. They are prophets, priests and kings who reign on earth forever. Inasmuch as they have been faithful over little on earth, they will receive authority over much in the kingdom of God. Each one retains his own personality, for all those who enter the new Jerusalem have their names written in the Lamb's book of life, and each one receives his own, new name. What is sown here will be reaped in eternity. The great diversity that exists among people in all sorts of ways will not be destroyed in eternity, but purified from sin and made serviceable to the fellowship with God and each other." (*LT*, p. 167, alt.)

beide een groot onderscheid."¹⁰⁹ Bavinck struggles to describe this great difference, combing the Scriptures to suggest the following articulation:

Het lichaam, dat de geloovigen bij de opstanding terug ontvangen, komt niet in uitwendige gedaante, in toevallige eigenschappen, in stoffelijke hoeveelheid, doch alleen in wezen met hun aardsche lichaam overeen. Het is geen natuurlijk, maar een geestlijk lichaam; een lichaam, dat, boven het geslachtsleven, boven de behoefte aan spijs en drank, verheven; onsterfelijk, onverderfelijk, vergeestelijk en verheerlijkt is, en aan dat van Christus na zijne opstanding gelijkvormig is gemaakt.¹¹⁰

These discontinuities clearly mark a distinction between created realities and the new creation. While Bavinck is able to list a number of specific ways in which the resurrected body is different from the mortal body, his only descriptor of its continuity is the vague and abstract term 'essence.'

Bavinck's descriptions of the resurrection of the body help to place in perspective several other lists he provides of discontinuities between the creation and the new creation. The two

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 678. "The body rises, not as a body of flesh and blood -- weak, perishible, mortal -- but as a body that is clothed in imperishibility and glory. While the body composed of flesh and blood is the seed from which the resurrected body springs, there is nevertheless a great difference between the two." (*LT*, p. 137, alt.)

¹¹⁰ *MD*, p. 566. "The body which the believers receive at the resurrection corresponds to the earthly body, not in external form, in accidental characteristics, in material quantity, but only in essence. It is not a natural but a spiritual body. It is raised above sexual life, above the need for food and drink. It is immortal, incorruptible, spiritualized and glorified, and it is conformed to the body of Christ as it was after his resurrection." (*RF*, p. 563, alt.)

most important lists will be quoted in full, followed by additional observations which Bavinck makes in less detail.

Daar is een groot verschil tusschen den staat der onschuld, waarin de eerste mensch geschapen werd, en den staat der heerlijkheid, waarvoor hij bestemd was. Terwijl Adam afhankelijk was van de wisseling van dag en nacht, van waken en slapen, wordt ons van het hemelsche Jeruzalem bericht, dat aldaar geen nacht zal zijn, en dat de verlostten door het bloed des Lams voor den troon Gods staan en Hem dag en nacht dienen in zijnen tempel. De eerste mensch was gebonden aan de indeeling der week in zes werkdagen en een rustdag, maar voor het volk Gods blijft er hierna eene eeuwige, onverstoorbare ruste over. In den staat der onschuld had de mensch dagelijks behoefte aan spijs en drank, maar in de toekomst zal God buik en spijs beide te niet doen. Het eerste menscheft bestond uit man en vrouw en kreeg den zegen mede, om vruchtbaar te zijn en zich te vermenigvuldigen; maar in de opstanding nemen zij niet ten huwelijk, en worden zij niet ten huwelijk uitgegeven, maar zij zijn als engelen Gods in den hemel. De eerste mensch Adam was aardsch uit de aarde, had een natuurlijk lichaam en werd alzoo tot eene levende ziel, maar de geloovigen ontvangen in de opstanding een geestelijk lichaam en zullen dan het beeld van den hemelschen mensch, van Christus, den Heer uit den hemel, dragen. Adam werd zoo geschapen, dat hij nog dwalen, zondigen, vallen en sterven kon; maar de geloovigen zijn in beginsel reeds hier op aarde boven dat alles verheven: zij kunnen niet meer zondigen, want een iegelijk, die uit God geboren is, die doet de zonde niet, want zijn zaad blijft in hem, en hij kan niet zondigen, want hij is uit God geboren; zij kunnen niet meer afvallen ten einde toe, want zij worden in de kracht Gods bewaard door het geloof, tot de zaligheid, die bereid is om geopenbaard te worden in den laatsten tijd; zij kunnen ook niet meer sterven, want die in Christus gelooven, hebben reeds hier op aarde het eeuwige, onverderfelijke leven, zij sterven in der eeuwigheid niet en leven zelfs, al waren zij gestorven. Aan al die rijkdom, dien Adam geestelijk en lichamelijk bezat, ontbrak een ding: de volstreckte zekerheid. De geloovigen zijn verzekerd voor dit en voor het toekomstend leven, want Christus staat borg voor hen en zal niet dulden, dat een hunner uit zijne hand gerukt worde en verloren ga.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ MD, pp. 201-203. "There is a big difference between the state of innocence in which the first man was created, and the state of glory for which he was destined. Adam was dependent upon the change of night and day, waking and sleeping, but we read of the heavenly Jerusalem that there shall be no night there and that the redeemed by the blood of the Lamb shall stand before the throne of God and serve him night and day in his temple. The

De openbaring, de Schrift, de kerk, heel de Christelijke religie draagt inderdaad een tijdelijk, praeparatoir en paedagogisch karakter. Als Christus zijne gemeente vergaderd en als eene reine bruid aan den Vader voorgesteld heeft, geeft Hij Gode het koninkrijk over. Bovendien kan de tweeheid van genade en natuur, van openbaring en rede, van gezag en vrijheid, van theologie en filosofie niet eeuwig van duur zijn. Het hoogste in de religie bestaat toch daarin, dat wij God dienen zonder dwang en zonder vreeze, uit liefde alleen, naar de inspraak onzer eigen natuur. Het is God zelf in zijne openbaring er om te doen, om menschen te vormen, in wie zijn beeld weer ten volle is hersteld. De wedergeborste, het kindschap, de heiligmaking, de verheerlijking zijn de bewijzen, dat GOD zijne kinderen tot vrijheid opvoedt, tot een liefdedienst, die nimmer verdriet. In zoover kunnen de bovengenoemde voorstellingen eene anticipatie van het toekomstig ideaal worden genoemd. Maar zij zijn desniettemin van eene zeer gevaarlijke strekking. Zij gaan alle uit van eene verwarring tusschen de bedeeeling van het heden en die van het hiernamaals. Ofschoon het nieuwe Jeruzalem geen zon en geen maan meer behoeven zal, blijven beide hier op aarde toch noodzakelijk. Ofschoon wij eens zullen wandelen in aanschouwen, blijft toch het geloof in deze bedeeeling

first man was bound to the apportionment of the week into six work days and one day of rest, but for the people of God there remains hereafter an eternal, undisturbed rest. In the state of innocence man daily required food and drink, but in the future God shall destroy both the belly and meats. The first human couple consisted of man and woman and was accompanied by the blessing: be fruitful and multiply. But in the resurrection men do not marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. The first man, Adam, was of the earth, earthy, had a natural body and so became a living soul, but the believers in the resurrection receive a spiritual body and will then bear the image of heavenly man, the image of Christ the Lord from heaven. Adam was created in such a way that he could stray, could sin, could fall and die; but the believers on earth are in principle raised above this possibility. They can no longer sin, for whosoever is born of God does not commit sin, for his seed remains in him: and he cannot sin for he is born of God. They cannot fall even to the very end for they are kept through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. And they cannot die, for those who believe in Christ have, already here on earth, the eternal incorruptible life; they shall not die in all eternity, and though they were dead they should yet live. One thing was lacking in all the riches, both spiritual and physical, which Adam possessed: absolute certainty. The believers are given certainty for this life and the next, for Christ is their Guarantor and will not allow any of them to be plucked out of his hand and be lost." (RF, pp. 219f., alt.)

onmisbaar. Ofschoon de strijdende en triumfeerende kerk een zijn, blijft er toch onderscheid in beider toestand en leven. De grenslijn mag en kan niet worden uitgewischt. Tot het hemelsche leven brengen wij het hier op aarde nooit. Wij wandelen door geloof en niet door aanschouwen. Wij zien nu door een spiegel in eene duistere rede; eerst hiernamaals zullen wij zien vvan aangezicht tot aangezicht en kennen, gelijk wij gekend zijn. De *visio Dei* is voor den hemel weggelegd. Zelfstandig, onafhankelijk worden wij op deze aarde nooit. Wij blijven gebonden aan den kosmos, doe ons omringt.¹¹²

Bavinck further illustrates the temporal character of the "tweeheid van genade en natuur" in a discussion of the role of miracles in the history of redemption. He observes that "al die wonderen in het Oude Testament hebben niet bewerkt eene verheffing, eene vernieuwing der natuur," but in the day of the Lord "heel de

¹¹² *GD* I, pp. 443f. "Revelation, Scripture, the church, the entire Christian religion, indeed has a temporal, preparatory and pedagogical character. When Christ gathers his church and presents it to the Father as a pure bride, he gives the kingdom to God. In addition, the duality of grace and nature, revelation and reason, authority and freedom, theology and philosophy cannot endure eternally. The highest in religion consists in this: that we serve God without compulsion and without fear, from love alone, according to the dictates of our own hearts. In his revelation God wants to form people in whom his image is again completely restored. Rebirth, sonship, sanctification, glorification are the proofs that God raises his children to freedom, to a service of love that never disappoints. To a certain extent the above named examples can be named an anticipation of the future ideal. Nevertheless, there lies therein a very dangerous tendency. This comes from a confusion concerning the significance of the present and of what comes hereafter. Although the new Jerusalem will not need a sun nor a moon, both are necessary here on earth. Although we will walk by sight then, faith is indispensable in this dispensation. Although the church militant and the church triumphant are one, there remains now a distinction in both circumstances and life. The boundary line may and cannot be discarded. We will never reach heavenly life here on earth. We walk by faith and not by sight. We see through a mirror in darkened reason. Only hereafter shall we see face to face, and know just as we are known. The *visio Dei* is stored away for heaven. We never become autonomous and independent upon this earth. We are bound to the cosmos which surrounds us."

natuur, hemel en aarde, zullen bewogen worden. Er komt een nieuwe hemel en een nieuwe aarde, en de vorige dingen zullen niet meer gedacht worden."¹¹³ In this present dispensation nature is subject to the conditions of space and time. The new heaven and earth will be different. "Boven de beperkingen van tijd en ruimte is het Godsrijk verheven, dat beide volkomen vervult."¹¹⁴ These discontinuities crystallize in the distinction between time and eternity. "Het onderscheid van dag en nacht, van sabbat en werkdagen heeft opgehouden; de tijd is doordrongen van de eeuwigheid Gods; de ruimte is vol van zijne tegenwoordigheid. Zelfs de tegenstelling van hemel en aarde is verdwenen. Want alwat in den hemel en op aarde is, is tot een vergaderd onder Christus als Hoofd."¹¹⁵

One can perceive the relation between continuity and discontinuity in Bavinck's creation/new creation relation in two ways. First, to a certain extent the continuity theme describes

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 309f. "All the miracles in the Old Testament did not result in an elevation, a renewing of nature," but in the day of the Lord "all of nature, heaven and earth, shall be affected. A new heaven and a new earth will come, and the former things shall not be thought of anymore."

¹¹⁴ "Het Rijk God, Het Hoogste Goed" in *KL*, p. 56. "The Kingdom of God is elevated above the limitations of time and space, and fills both perfectly."

¹¹⁵ *GD IV*, pp. 712f. "The distinction between day and night, between sabbath and work days, has been suspended. Time is permeated with the eternity of God. Space is full of his presence. Even the contrast between heaven and earth itself will disappear. For all the things that are in heaven and on earth have been gathered up in Christ as Head." (*LT*, p. 169, alt.)

Christ's work of overcoming sin and restoring the creation to its original goodness, and the discontinuity theme describes Christ's work of overcoming the limitations of the original creation and transforming it into the new creation. There is a dual character to the effects of the work of Christ. Restoring the original creation overcomes the power of sin, but it neither achieves eternal life nor overcomes the duality between nature and grace. "Christus heeft alles volbracht, niet alleen de straf geleden, maar ook door het volbrengen der wet het eeuwige leven verworven."¹¹⁶ Restoration breaks the power of sin, restoring the creation to its original splendour. Elevation overcomes the limitations of time and space and bestows upon the creature the gifts of eternity and full communion with God. Restoration and elevation are woven together in Bavinck's eschatological understanding of redemption.

But it is misleading simply to describe the work of Christ as having a dual character. Bavinck perceives redemption as one work; "de werken Gods vormen een cirkel, die in spiraalvorm naar boven streeft."¹¹⁷ One can make all manner of distinctions between continuities and discontinuities, creational and Christological issues, the elevation of the church above the creation, and so on, but ultimately redemption describes the one work of God in

¹¹⁶ *GD* IV, p. 712. "Christ has fulfilled all the requirements; he not only suffered the penalty but also, by fulfilling the law, won eternal life." (*LT*, p. 169)

¹¹⁷ *MD*, p. 129. "The deeds of God form a circle which mounts upward in the form of a spiral." (*RF*, p. 144)

transforming his creation into a new creation. Thus, there are no 'pure' continuities or discontinuities; there are no purely creational or Christological issues; the elevation of the church is not a demeaning of the creation. The creation is a work of God's hands. Through it he enacted his work of redemption, culminating in the life, death and resurrection of his son. Jesus Christ gathers his church as the first fruit of the new creation in which all sin and brokenness will be banished and all creatures will enjoy communion with God forever. The closing sentence of Bavinck's four volume Dogmatics provides a succinct summary: "Alle schepselen zijn en leven en bewegen zich in God, die alles in allen is, die in den spiegel zijner werken al zijne deugden weerkaatst en daarin zichzelf verheerlijkt."¹¹⁸ In light of that established future all else finds its place.

¹¹⁸ *GD IV*, p. 713. "All creatures will then live and move and have their being in God who is all in all, who reflects his attributes in the mirror of his works and glorifies himself in them." (*LT*, p. 169)

Common Grace in Bavinck's theology

This description of Bavinck's doctrine of creation and its relation to his eschatological understanding of redemption is incomplete without a summary of his understanding of common grace, because this doctrine incorporates elements from both the doctrines of creation and redemption. The doctrine of common grace has assumed an important albeit controversial place in the thought of Dutch neo-Calvinism. Bavinck interpreters disagree concerning the role of common grace in his theology, and these disagreements serve both to focus the thoughts of this chapter and to further the process of evaluating the role of creation in Bavinck's eschatological understanding of redemption.

Bavinck's descriptions of common grace express his response to a dualism which he perceives to be inherent in the thought of Roman Catholicism.¹¹⁹ On the latter account, according to him, nature

¹¹⁹ For the most part Bavinck refers to Catholicism in general, frequently identified simply as "Rome." He defends this approach by suggesting that "although Roman Catholicism has been built up out of varied, even heterogeneous elements, it nevertheless forms a compact structure, a coherent view of the world and of life, shaped in all its parts by a religious principle." ("CCG," pp. 104f.) Bavinck engages specific Catholic theologians (especially Aquinas) on the issue in *GD III*, pp. 581-584, though here too each theologian is treated as a representative of "Rome." In his introduction to his translation of *Algemeene Genade*, Raymond C. VanLeeuwen notes that Bavinck "develops his theme in conscious opposition to the revival of Aquinas signaled by the 1879 encyclical of Pope Leo XIII, *Aeterni Patris*." ("CG," p. 36) Though Bavinck himself does not refer to this encyclical in the essay, in an earlier essay he notes that "de middeleeuwen blijven het ideaal, waarnaar alle roomsen met bewondering opzien. De herstelling van de thomistische filosofie bij de encyclica van 4 aug. 1879 heeft daarop het zegel gedrukt." ("KCK," p. 16. "The Middle Ages (characterized by the nature-grace dualism) remains the ideal to

is a good but incomplete realm which requires grace to be added to it in order to be perfected. "Het natuurlijke is niet het zondige maar het uit zijn aard het bovennatuurlijke niet bereikende. Het bovennatuurlijke is een *donum superadditum*. Genade hervormt en herschept het bestaande niet, maar vult alleen de schepping aan."¹²⁰ In this view a hierarchy exists between nature and grace. "Nu is het natuurlijke wel op zichzelf goed, maar van een lagere orde."¹²¹ According to Bavinck, Calvin was the Reformer who most directly developed an alternative to this dualism.¹²² Calvin perceives both nature and grace as coming from the hand of God, and therefore one cannot be considered supernatural and the other merely natural. God's creation is good, and sin cannot be described as that which simply renders this goodness to a lower order which must be supplemented by grace in order to be perfected. The Reformers, following Calvin's lead, "hebben tegelijk den ernst

which all Roman Catholics aspire. The restoration of Thomistic philosophy by the encyclical of August 4, 1879, seals this aspiration." ["CCC," p. 231]) Obviously such an approach leads to caricaturizing on Bavinck's part. In his defense it can be noted that his intent is to articulate an alternative to this dualism rather than to provide a careful critique of Catholic thought.

¹²⁰ *KCK*, p. 13. "The natural is not that which is sinful but that which by its very nature is incapable of reaching the supernatural level. The supernatural is a *donum superadditum*. Grace does not reform and recreate that which exists, it only completes and perfects creation." ("CCC," p. 229)

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 15. "While the natural order is in itself good, it is of a lower order." ("CCC," p. 230)

¹²² "KCK," pp. 22-28. Though Calvin rarely uses the term "common grace," Bavinck finds the doctrine present in his writings in an incipient manner. His essay "Calvin on Common Grace" quotes extensively from the *Institutes* (and, to a lesser extent, the commentaries) to verify this claim.

der zonde en het recht van het natuurlijke erkend."¹²³ Thus the doctrine of common grace seeks to take into account the goodness of the creation, the all-encompassing character of sin and the corresponding all-encompassing character of (common and special) grace which is not quantitatively added to the creation but rather qualitatively renews the creation. Qualitative renewal recognizes that, just as sin permeates the whole, so grace transforms the entire cosmos.

Bavinck agrees that Catholicism has been correct in distinguishing nature and grace. "Natuur en genade zijn beide van noode; ze kunnen geen van beide worden miskend of veracht. Maar toch maakt het een groot verschil, of it dualisme absoluut of relatief wordt genomen. Bij Rome is het absoluut."¹²⁴ Because there is a relative dualism (or, as I prefer, a duality) the Christian faith finds it very difficult to achieve the proper balance between the 'spiritual' realm and the 'natural' or 'human' realm. "Zelfs zal het in deze bedeling zeker nooit tot die harmonie en eenheid komen welke wij in de toekomst verwachten.

¹²³ AG, pp. 29f. The Reformers "acknowledged both the seriousness of sin and the legitimacy of the natural." ("CG," p. 52)

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 37. "Nature and grace are both necessary; neither of them can be denied or despised. And yet it makes a great difference whether one conceives of this dualism as absolute or relative. With Rome it appears as absolute." ("CG," p. 56)

Eenzijdigheden blijven kerken en personen aankleven."¹²⁵ However, nature and grace both come from the hands of the one God, they are both part of the one history of redemption,¹²⁶ and one day the dualism which characterizes this dispensation will be overcome. "Het is een nieuw lied, dat er gezongen wordt in den hemel. Maar in zoover keert toch de oorspronkelijke ordening der schepping terug, als alle onderscheid van natuur en genade ten eenenmale vervallen zal. Het dualisme houdt op. De genade blijft niet buiten en boven en naast de natuur staan; maar zij gaat in haar in en vernieuwt haar geheel. En de natuur, door de genade herboren, wordt tot haar hoogste openbaring gebracht."¹²⁷

¹²⁵ KCK, pp. 36f. "In this dispensation we will never achieve the full harmony and unity that we expect in the future. Onesidedness will remain in us as persons and churches." ("CCC," p. 248, alt.)

¹²⁶ "Natuur en genade zijn onderscheiden en mogen niet verward of vermengd worden, maar God legt verband tusschen beide. Schepping, verlossing en heiligmaking worden oeconomisch toegeschreven aan Vader, Zoon en Geest, maar deze drie zijn de eene en waarachtige God en saam brengen zij het gansche werk der verlossing tot stand. Niemand kan tot Christus komen, tenzij de Vader hem trekke; en niemand ontvangt den Heiligen Geest, dan wien de Zoon Hem zendt." (GD IV, p. 9. "Nature and grace are distinguished and may not become mixed or confused, but God lays a connection between them. Creation, redemption and sanctification are economically ascribed to the Father, Son and Spirit, but these three are the one and true God and together they bring the entire work of redemption about. No one can come to Christ unless the Father draws him, and no one receives the Holy Spirit except those to whom Christ sends him.")

¹²⁷ AG, p. 43. "A new song will be sung in heaven, but the original order of creation will return, at least to the extent that all distinctions of nature and grace will once and for all be done away with. Dualism will cease. Grace does not remain outside or above or beside nature but rather permeates and wholly renews it. And thus nature, reborn by grace, will be brought to its highest revelation." ("CG," pp. 59f., alt.)

The doctrine of common grace seeks to account for the goodness which one recognizes in humanity apart from Christ while simultaneously acknowledging total depravity. "Het gaat niet aan, al het ware en goede en schoone te loochenen, dat ook in de menschheid buiten Christus op te merken valt. Dat ware niet alleen met de ervaring in strijd, maar zou ook wezen miskenning van gaven Gods en dus ondankbaarheid jegens Hem. En zoo maakt nu Calvijn in aansluiting aan en met beroep op de Schrift onderscheid tusschen de werking des Geestes in alle schepselen en den Geest der heiligmaking die het deel is alleen van de geloovigen."¹²⁸ Bavinck sees a Christological connection between these two distinct workings of the Holy Spirit. On the one hand, sanctification is a process whereby Christ sends the Spirit to work and dwell within the church.¹²⁹ On the other hand, the work of the Spirit in all creatures is also rooted in Christ. "The good philosophical thoughts and ethical precepts found scattered through the pagan world receive in Christ their unity and center. They are the idea of which Christ furnishes the reality. The pagan world, especially in its philosophy, is a pedagogy unto Christ."¹³⁰ Common grace and

¹²⁸ AG, p. 27. "It would not do to deny the true, the good, and the beautiful that one can see in mankind outside of Christ. That would not only be in conflict with experience but would also entail a denial of God's gifts and hence constitute ingratitude toward him. Thus it is that Calvin, in dependence upon and with an appeal to Scripture, comes to distinguish between the working of the Spirit in all creatures and the Spirit of sanctification who belongs only to those who believe." ("CG," p. 51, alt.)

¹²⁹ MD, p. 456.

¹³⁰ "CCG," p. 103.

special grace need to be distinguished (just as nature and grace do), but both are rooted in the work of the one Trinitarian God.

It is helpful to perceive the role which the doctrine of common grace plays in the overall scheme of Bavinck's thought. In his account common grace has a dual purpose, a preparatory one and a prescriptive one. Common grace prepares the world for the work of special grace, and it constitutes part of the foundation for theological ethics. Typically, while these two roles are distinct, they are also closely related, and this relation is best seen through Bavinck's beloved metaphors of the pearl (or treasure) and the leaven.

At the center of the Christian life lies its pearl: communion with God through Jesus Christ. "Whatever material or ideal possessions the world may offer, all these taken together cannot outweigh or even be compared with this greatest of all treasures, communion with God."¹³¹ Enjoying this treasure requires letting go of all else. "This undivided consecration to God assumes on earth largely the character of self-denial and cross-bearing. Calvin strips man of everything in order to restore unto him all things in God."¹³² This treasure is God's gift of special grace, but this gift is given to us in a world which is so perverted by sin that

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 121, referring to Calvin's *Institutes*, Book II, 2, 10.

preparations must be made before this world is ready to receive this special grace. "Van nature staat alles in en buiten den mensch in vijandschap tegen elkander over, maar God is met zijne genade tusschen beide getreden, eerst met zijne algemeene genade, om de macht van zonde en dood te beteugelen, dan met zijne bijzondere genade, om ze te breken en te overwinnen."¹³³ Common grace is a servant of special grace, but the latter cannot do its work without the former's preparatory work. "De eene is voor de andere onmisbaar. De algemeene genade is het, welke de bijzondere mogelijk maakt, voorbereidt en bij den voortduur draagt; de bijzondere genade op haar beurt leidt de algemeene tot zich op en neemt haar voortdurend in dienst."¹³⁴ The most important task of common grace is thus an eschatological task: it plays a part in the history of redemption, signifying that God has not abandoned his fallen creation but is present with it, restraining the power of evil as he works out this history which leads to Jesus Christ as its mid point and culminates in the new creation. Common grace prepares the way for the treasure of full communion with God through Jesus Christ.

¹³³ *GD* IV, p. 591. "By nature all that is in and outside humanity is torn up into mutually hostile segments, but God in his mercy has intervened. He intervened first with his common grace to curb the power of sin and death, then with his special grace to break down and conquer that power." (*LT*, p. 46)

¹³⁴ *MD*, p. 28. "The one is indispensable for the other. It is common grace which makes special grace possible, prepares the way for it, and later supports it; and special grace, in its turn, leads common grace up to itself and puts it into its service." (*RF*, p. 38, alt.)

But common grace plays a second role as well, supporting the work of the Holy Spirit as a leavening agent. "Het Koninkrijk der hemelen moge een schat zijn en een parel; het is ook een mosterdzaad en een zuurdeeg."¹³⁵ The believer who has made communion with God her pearl does not therefore despise all things earthly. The gospel "does not stand isolated but is encompassed, supported and reinforced by the operation of the same will (of God) in the world at large. Special grace is encircled by common grace; the vocation which comes to us in faith is connected and connects us with the vocation presented to us in our earthly calling."¹³⁶ To deny that this heavenly treasure is also a leaven which imparts earthly blessings is to deny, in certain measure, the reality of the Incarnation and results in a docetic Christology.

De wereld wordt door de algemeene genade gedragen en gespaard, geleid en bewaard voor de bijzondere genade in Christus. Scheiding en onderdrukking is daarom ongeoorloofd en onmogelijk. Mensch en Christen zijn geen twee wezens. De schepping wordt in de herschepping opgenomen en hersteld. De mensch, die wedergeboren is, is substantieel geen andere dan die hij was voor de wedergeboorte. In de kerk ingelijfd, blijft hij toch in de wereld, en heeft zich alleen te bewaren van den booze. Gelijk Christus, de Zone Gods, uit Maria de volle menschelijke natuur heeft aangenomen en daarmede niets menschelijks en niets natuurlijks zich vreemd heeft geacht, zoo is de Christen neit anders dan de herboren, vernieuwde en daarom de waarachtige mensch. Dezelfde menschen, die Christenen zijn, zijn en blijven in dezelfde roeping, waarin zij geroepen zijn; zij blijven leden des gezins, burgers der maatschappij, onderdanen der overheid, beoefenaars van wetenschap en kunst, mannen of vrouwen, ouders of kinderen, heeren of knechten, enz. Christus is profheet, priester, koning ook nu nog, en Hij werkt door zijn Woord en Geest op

¹³⁵ KCK, p. 22. "The kingdom of heaven may be a treasure and a pearl of great price, but it is also a mustard seed and a leaven." ("CCC," p. 236)

¹³⁶ "CCG," p. 126.

heel de wereld in. Door Hem gaat er van ieder, die in Hem gelooft, een vernieuwende, heiligende invloed uit in gezin, maatschappij, staat, beroep, bedrijf, kunst, wetenschap, enz.¹³⁷

The Incarnation is an affirmation of God's good creation. Therefore, the believer who seeks communion with Christ does not deny this creation, but lives as a leaven in the dough. Whereas the pearl signifies the eschatological significance of common grace, the leaven signifies its ethical or prescriptive import. Denying the latter is the error of both Roman Catholic dualism and its Protestant counterpart, otherworldly pietism.¹³⁸ The former culminates in a natural ethic construed apart from God's revelation

¹³⁷ GD IV, p. 418. "Through common grace the world is borne and spared, led and preserved for the special grace in Christ. Therefore, separation and oppression is not permitted and impossible. A human being and a Christian are not of two separate beings. In re-creation the creation is taken up and restored. The born-again person is substantially no different from what he was before being born-again. Incorporated into the church, he yet remains in the world, and must only be protected from evil. Just as Christ, the Son of God, took on from Mary the complete human nature, and thereby deemed nothing human or natural as strange, so is the Christian nothing else but the reborn, renewed and therefore the true person. The same people that are Christians are and remain in the same calling in which they received the call. They remain members of families, citizens of society, subjects of government, practitioners of science and art, men and women, parents or children, masters or servants, etc. Christ is still prophet, priest and king, and through his Word and Spirit he permeates the entire world. Through him a renewing, sanctifying influence goes from everyone who believes in him in the family, society, state, occupation, business, art, science, etc."

¹³⁸ In Catholicism "de katholiciteit wordt geloofend in deze zin, dat het Christendom zelf alles als een zuurdeeg doorzuren moet. Het blijft een eeuwig dualisme." (KCK, p. 15. Catholicism "denies catholicity in the sense that the Christian faith itself must be a leavening agent in everything. In this way an eternal dualism remains." ["CCC," p. 231]) Pietism "is een miskenning der waarheid, dat God de wereld liefgehad heeft." (KCK, p. 35. Pietism "is a denial of the truth that God has so loved the world." ["CCC," p. 246, alt.]

in Jesus Christ and Scripture; the latter in an other-worldly ethic which denies the need to live as salt and light in this world. On Bavinck's account, nature and grace must be held together. The pearl has priority over the leaven, but both are indispensable in the Christian life.

While the relation between the pearl and the leaven may not be construed dualistically, their relation does require a duality which cannot be reconciled in this dispensation.

Het is altijd hetzelfde probleem, dat op den bodem van alle ernstige vraagstukken ligt. De verhouding van gelooven en weten, van theologie en filosofie, van gezag en rede, van hoofd en hart, van Christendom en humaniteit, van religie en cultuur, van het hemelsche en het aardsche beroep, van godsdienst en zedelijkheid, van het contemplatieve en het actieve leven, van sabbat en werkdagen, van kerk en staat; ze wordt bij al deze en nog vele andere problemen bepaald door die, welke er bestaat tusschen het goddelijke en het menselijke, tusschen schepping en herschepping, tusschen het werk des Vaders en het werk des Zoons. Zelfs de eenvoudigste wordt betrokken in dezen strijd, als hij telkens in zijn leven de disharmonie gevoelt tusschen zijn aardsch en zijn hemelsch beroep. Geen wonder, dat bij zoo teedere en ingewikkelde vraag de volkomen oplossing toeft en de volle harmonie hier in deze bedeeing bij niemand wordt gevonden.¹³⁹

¹³⁹ AG, pp. 36f. "At the bottom of every serious question always lies the self-same problem. The relation of faith and knowledge, of theology and philosophy, of authority and reason, of head and heart, of Christianity and humanity, of religion and culture, of heavenly and earthly vocation, of religion and morality, of the contemplative and active life, of sabbath and workday, of church and state -- all these and many other questions are determined by the relation between the divine and the human, between creation and re-creation, between the work of the Father and the work of the Son. Even the most simple person is being drawn into this struggle when he senses again and again in his life the disharmony between his earthly and heavenly calling. No wonder, then, that such a delicate and complicated problem remains unresolved and that no one in this dispensation achieves a completely harmonious answer." ("CG," pp. 55f., alt.)

The best one can do in this situation is seek to be as balanced as possible in one's situation, confident that because of the person and work of Christ this duality is merely temporary. Theology "profeteert van eene heerlijke toekomst, waarin alle tegenstellingen, ook die tusschen natuur en genade verzoend zullen zijn en alles wederom tot een vergaderd zal wezen in Christus, beide dat in den hemel en dat op de aarde is."¹⁴⁰

In summary, Bavinck's doctrine of common grace supports his eschatological understanding of redemption in both its theological import and its ethical implications. Concerning the former, common grace asserts that our world belongs to God, and his presence in this world prepares the way for his work of special grace which culminated in the person and work of Jesus Christ. But the history of redemption did not end with the Incarnation; it is complete when all things are gathered under Jesus Christ as Head. Theologically, common grace functions as a servant of that eschatological goal, and in so doing rejects a dualism of nature and grace. Ethically, common grace also functions eschatologically. Believers are mandated to live as leaven in this world, letting the light of the gospel shine in each and every situation. Yet, this leaven is like yeast, hidden within the dough. In this dispensation the leaven is only partially visible;

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 53. Theology "prophesies a glorious future in which all oppositions, including those between nature and grace, shall be reconciled, and all things, whether on earth or in heaven, shall again in Christ be one." ("CG," p. 65)

only with the eyes of faith can one see the church militant as the church triumphant. When Christ returns the Kingdom of God will be fully visible.¹⁴¹

The role of creation in Bavinck's eschatological understanding of redemption: a critique

The perspective developed in this work, that Bavinck's theology coheres around an eschatological understanding of redemption, is not unanimously supported by Bavinck analysts. Three works in particular call into question various aspects of this view: Eugene Heideman's *The Relation of Revelation and Reason in E. Brunner and H. Bavinck*,¹⁴² Jan Veenhof's massive (710 pp.) volume entitled *Revelatie en Inspiratie, De Openbarings- en Schriftbeschouwing van Herman Bavinck in vergelijking met die der ethische theologie*,¹⁴³ and *The Imitation of Christ Theme in the Cultural-ethical Ideal of Herman Bavinck*¹⁴⁴ by John Bolt. The primary issue in the debate concerns the role of the doctrines of creation and common grace in Bavinck's theology (especially in relation to his eschatology). I will develop my interpretation of Bavinck by engaging these three works in discussion, focusing on four areas of contention: Bavinck's terminological inconsistency,

¹⁴¹ The eschatological character of the 'leaven' will be developed more fully in the next section.

¹⁴² Hereafter referred to as *RRR*.

¹⁴³ (Amsterdam: Buitjen en Schipperheijn, 1968). Hereafter referred to as *RI*.

¹⁴⁴ Hereafter referred to as *ICT*.

the relation between redemption as restoration (of the creation) and elevation, the relation between the gospel as 'pearl' and as 'leaven,' and the distinction between duality and dualism in Bavinck's articulation of the relation between nature and grace.

Though the heart of the issue being addressed here concerns the relation between creation and the eschaton, the debate concerning Bavinck's views is most often rooted in his descriptions of common grace. This is not surprising. In the first place, the teaching of common grace incorporates important strands from both the doctrines of creation and of redemption. Furthermore, Bavinck's writings on this topic reveal various inconsistencies that invite confusion and argument. Eugene Heideman perceives many problems with Bavinck's understanding of common grace, but he considers these to be relatively minor because, in his view, common grace is not an important doctrine in the overall scheme of Bavinck's thought. Bavinck "discusses common grace comparatively seldom and then always exercises great reserve in his conclusions."¹⁴⁵ This limited role for common grace in his theology suggests that one should not overemphasize the role of creation in Bavinck's understanding of redemption.

Jan Veenhof disagrees with Heideman's view. While he supports Heideman's observation that Bavinck does not specifically address the topic of common grace with frequency, nevertheless, he claims,

¹⁴⁵ Heideman, *RRR*, p. 178.

common grace is central to his theology because general revelation and common grace function as virtual synonyms in Bavinck's thought, and the former does play a significant role.¹⁴⁶ To circumvent this terminological ambiguity, Veenhof most frequently refers to Bavinck's doctrine of "algemeene openbaring resp. genade."¹⁴⁷ Veenhof's observation is correct. On the one hand, Bavinck distinguishes between revelation before and after the fall. "Ook voor den val was er openbaring," but after the fall, "de openbaring blijft dus wel, maar zij verandert van karakter. Zij krijgt een anderen inhoud. Tegenover den schuldigen mensch, die den dood heeft verdiend, wordt zij eene openbaring van genade."¹⁴⁸ Bavinck continues by observing that this grace "blijft niet eene en ongedeeld" but "zij splitst zich in eene algemeene en bijzondere."¹⁴⁹ The distinction between revelation before and after the fall corresponds with Bavinck's distinction between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. Before the fall

¹⁴⁶ Veenhof, *RI*, p. 288.

¹⁴⁷ "General revelation, otherwise, grace."

¹⁴⁸ *AG*, pp. 7f. "Revelation existed even prior to the fall," but after the fall, "revelation continues, but it changes in character and receives a different content. Now revelation comes to guilty man, who merits death, as a revelation of grace." ("*CG*," pp. 39f.)

¹⁴⁹ *AG*, p. 9. This grace "does not remain single and undivided," but "it differentiates itself into common and special grace." ("*CG*," p. 40) An earlier quote (cf. p. 240, n. 133) is apropos here by way of reminder: "Van nature staat alles in en buiten den mensch in vijandschap tegen elkander over, maar God is met zijne genade tusschen beide getreden, eerst met zijne algemeene genade, om de macht van zonde en dood te beteugelen, dan met zijne bijzondere genade, om ze te breken en te overwinnen." (*GD IV*, p. 591)

humanity enjoys fellowship with God through obedience, but after the fall through grace. Both covenants require revelation.

On the other hand, Bavinck often ignores this distinction between (pre-fall) revelation and (post-fall) grace. In his discussion of the relation between general and special revelation in *Magnalia Dei*, he asserts that "beide openbaringen hebben genade tot inhoud, gene eene algemeene, deze eene bijzondere; maar zoo, dat de eene voor de andere onmisbaar is."¹⁵⁰ He then continues his discussion referring to common and special grace rather than general and special revelation, as if the two sets of terms were interchangeable. Veenhof's observation of synonymity can be taken even farther. In addition to using general/special revelation and common/special grace interchangeably, Bavinck also upon occasion uses nature/grace and creation/re-creation as virtual synonyms of the former sets of terms.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ *MD*, p. 28. "Grace is the content of both revelations, common in the first, special in the second, but in such a way that the one is indispensable for the other." (*RF*, p. 38)

¹⁵¹ For example, in another discussion of the relation between common and special grace Bavinck writes, "natuur en genade, schepping en herschepping zijn in die onderlinge relatie te stellen, waarin de Schrift ze plaatst." (*GD III*, p. 196. "Nature and grace, creation and re-creation are to be placed in the mutual relation in which the Scriptures place them.") Interestingly, while Veenhof does not mention these additional synonymities, in his discussion of the relation between general and special revelation in Bavinck he cites several quotations from Bavinck which treat the relations between nature and grace and creation and re-creation as synonymous with general and special revelation. (Veenhof, *Revelatie en Inspiratie*, p. 308, nn. 38 - 43)

Thus, there is good reason to support Veenhof in rejecting Heideman's claim that Bavinck's infrequent references to common grace indicate that this doctrine is not important in his theology. However, that fact that common grace is virtually synonymous with general revelation in Bavinck's theology constitutes insufficient grounds to claim that the doctrine of common grace is central in his work. With unwavering consistency Bavinck emphasizes the insufficiency and preparatory character of general revelation. In the ensuing discussion I will argue that Veenhof is too eager to overemphasize the significance of common grace (and the doctrine of creation) in Bavinck's understanding of redemption.

Even so, the question must be asked, 'why is Bavinck so inconsistent with his terms?' While he never addresses the question, one can understand that this inconsistency is not a problem for him. In this dispensation, after the fall and before the return of Christ, there are no *functional* distinctions between creation, nature, common grace and general revelation. God's good creation has been thoroughly polluted by sin, but God has not abandoned it. He continues to be present with it, and this presence is grace; because God is present with his creation, he reveals himself through it. Bavinck's inconsistencies are congruent with his hesitation to become more systematic than the Scriptures.¹⁵² The manner in which God is present to his good but

¹⁵² Both Heideman (RRR, p. 183) and Bolt (ICT, p. 191) acknowledge Bavinck's refusal to subordinate Scripture to the demands of one's system.

fallen creation can be described in various ways, and differing terms are appropriate in various contexts. The ambiguities necessarily inherent in describing this 'between the times' reality will lead to a certain amount of terminological inconsistency. While it would have been helpful if Bavinck had explicitly discussed these ambiguities and inconsistencies, in themselves they do not weaken his doctrine or create systematic inconsistencies. They simply require the reader to exercise caution in drawing conclusions.

The issue of terminological inconsistency in Bavinck serves as a preliminary to the heart of the debate: is redemption to be understood as a restoration of the creation, or does it, in some way, elevate the creation? If the former is the case, one may speak of a creational or protological understanding of redemption. In the latter scenario, by contrast, the end result of redemption is in some significant measure greater than the original creation, and one may speak of an eschatological understanding of redemption. Within each of these two poles one can posit varying shades of emphasis. Because achieving systematic clarity is not Bavinck's primary goal in articulating his theology, it is not surprising that considerable disagreement can be found concerning which shade of emphasis best describes his position.

All Bavinck observers (including myself) are agreed on two points: the relation between grace and nature is crucial to his

theology,¹⁵³ and one of his primary concerns in describing the character of this relation is to reject the dualistic construal of the relation adopted by Catholicism,¹⁵⁴ which is perceived as 'grace elevates nature' so that grace adds something to nature which it lacks and in so doing raises nature to a higher level. In the words of a common Bavinck formulation, the relation is construed quantitatively and not qualitatively.¹⁵⁵ According to Bavinck, such an account denies the intrinsic relation between grace and nature, does not allow grace to renew or transform nature, and therefore must be rejected as unscriptural. Heideman, Veenhof and Bolt suggest that a formula which describes Bavinck's alternative to this dualism would be 'grace restores nature.'¹⁵⁶ As John Bolt points out, the restoration motif takes the middle route between two extremes which Bavinck rejects: "the divine work of redemption does not elevate or annihilate creation but has as its proper goal the restoring of creation to its original

¹⁵³ Heideman, *RRR*, p. 196; Veenhof, *RI*, pp. 345ff., Bolt, *ICT*, p. 163. Veenhof makes the strongest claim of the three: "Bavincks visie op de relatie van natuur en genade is een centraal onderdeel, ja wellicht mogen we zelfs zeggen: het centrale motief, van zijn theologie." ("Bavinck's view of the relation of nature and grace is a central part--indeed, perhaps we may even say: the central theme of his theology." [*Nature and Grace in Bavinck*, tr. Albert M. Wolters (Toronto: Institute for Christian Studies, n.d.), p. 4] Note: the latter is a translation of one chapter from *RI*.)

¹⁵⁴ Heideman, *RRR*, p. 200; Veenhof, *RI*, pp. 347ff.; Bolt, *ICT*, p. 104.

¹⁵⁵ Cf., for example, *KCK*, p. 13.

¹⁵⁶ Heideman, *RRR*, p. 191; Veenhof, *RI*, pp. 346ff.; Bolt, *ICT*, p. 162.

goodness."¹⁵⁷ While positing the centrality of the restoration motif in Bavinck's understanding of redemption does accurately reflect his rejection of the two extremes of annihilation and a dualistic elevation, it does not take into account Bavinck's unique use of the concept of elevation, and therefore the restoration motif highlights the original creation in a way in which Bavinck is reluctant to do. The 'grace restores nature' motif requires careful scrutiny because it calls into question the central thesis of this work.

Heideman lists four (unquoted) references to support his assertion that 'grace restores nature' is one of the two fundamental themes in Bavinck's theology.¹⁵⁸ An examination of these four references serves well to introduce this analysis of that motif. They are: "De genade doet de natuur niet te niet, maar bevestigt haar en herstelt ze."¹⁵⁹ "*Gratia reparat et perficit naturam.*"¹⁶⁰ "Het natuurlijke was niet van lager orde, maar was in zijn soort even goed en rein als het bovennatuurlijke, want het was geschapen door dienzelfden God, die in de herschepping zich openbaarde als Vader van den Heere Jezus Christus. Alleen was het door de zonde bedorven en moest daarom door de genade van Christus

¹⁵⁷ Bolt, *ICT*, p. 128.

¹⁵⁸ Heideman, *RRR*, p. 191. The other theme he names is "reason sees by the spectacles of Scripture."

¹⁵⁹ *AG*, p. 48. "Grace does not cancel nature but establishes and restores it." ("*CG*," p. 62)

¹⁶⁰ *GD III*, p. 207.

verzoend en vernieuwd worden."¹⁶¹ "De genade doet de natuur niet te niet, maar bevrijdt en herstelt haar."¹⁶² One could literally list hundreds of similar quotes from Bavinck's writings, but these four illustrate what is true of the vast majority of his formulations: grace restores nature, but grace does more than that as well. Bavinck's pattern in these formulations is to employ two verbs, and these two verbs are drawn from a wide array of possibilities. Other verbs commonly used include "heiligen" (sanctify),¹⁶³ "verheffen" (elevate),¹⁶⁴ and "verheerlijken" (glorify).¹⁶⁵ The fact that Bavinck almost always employs two verbs and then chooses two from a list of several that are used with great frequency suggest that he is very reluctant to describe the grace/nature relation by means of one simple formula. Heideman, Veenhof and Bolt do recognize that Bavinck's view incorporates more than the restoration motif, and each seeks to account for this 'more than' character. It is my contention that the 'restoration-surplus' in Bavinck's account of the grace/nature

¹⁶¹ *GD IV*, p. 417. "The natural was not of a lower order, but was, according to its kind, equally good and pure as the supernatural, because it was created through the same God who in the work of re-creation revealed himself as the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was corrupted by sin, and therefore it needed to be reconciled and renewed through the grace of Christ."

¹⁶² *Christelijke Wetenschap* (Kampen: Kok, 1904), p. 121. "Grace does not cancel out nature, but sets it free and restores it."

¹⁶³ *GD IV*, p. 574.

¹⁶⁴ *MD*, p. 129.

¹⁶⁵ *WO*, p. 266.

relation is properly accounted for in the context of his eschatological understanding of redemption, in which grace does respect and restore God's good creation, but this creation is transformed into something more than the original: the new creation.

Heideman accounts for the restoration-surplus by perceiving a contradiction in Bavinck. The (dominant) restoration theme properly accounts for the goodness and importance of the creation, but this theme is partially negated by a glorification theme.

The goal of the creation is the glory of God. The glory of God is the goal of all things. God can seek nothing else than his own honor. Thus God does not seek the creature, but he seeks himself through the creature. Here the Christian doctrine of creation has difficulty in attaining full stature. The relation between God and his creation is no longer that of the I-Thou, but instead that of the I, God, who enjoys the creation not because he finds there a Thou, but rather because he discovers there the reflection of his own I. Bavinck has failed to see the true mystery of creation, whereby the creation has been given an existence outside of God, and thus has by God been made to be his Thou. Although, in the opinion of the writer, this more Idealistic, not to say neo-Platonic theme remains a subordinate one in Bavinck's thought, it nevertheless is one which the reader encounters again and again.¹⁶⁶

Heideman goes on to say that the dominance of the 'grace renews nature'¹⁶⁷ motif serves to contain the damage of this contradictory glorification motif which demeans the creation.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Heideman, *RRR*, pp. 176f.

¹⁶⁷ Heideman uses 'grace restores nature' and 'grace renews nature' interchangeably without explanation.

¹⁶⁸ Veenhof agrees with Heideman's critique in passing (cf. *RI*, pp. 409f., n. 29).

John Bolt suggests that because Heideman cites isolated statements he is unable to consider the broad context of Bavinck's thought in which there is room for both themes.¹⁶⁹ In my judgment, Bolt is correct. From the vantage point of Bavinck's eschatological understanding of redemption there is ample room for both the glorification and restoration motifs. God's good creation is good precisely because it glorifies its Creator. Its goodness is not autonomous but contingent and relational. Furthermore, this goodness is teleological. This goodness comes to perfect fulfillment when the creation reaches its goal. The restoration of the creation is therefore completely intertwined with its glorification. The creation has been restored so that it will arrive at the goal ordained by its Creator from the beginning.¹⁷⁰

In addition to perceiving elements of a contradictory glorification theme in Bavinck which demeans the creation, Jan

¹⁶⁹ Bolt, *ICT*, pp. 180ff.

¹⁷⁰ In a different context Heideman observes that, because of Bavinck's view of the process of redemption, providence is greater than creation: "A creature stands higher in the measure that God more fully dwells in him and penetrates into his essence. In this respect, providence is even greater than creation, for the first gives only the beginning of being, but the second the continuing and always increasing communication of God to his creatures." (*RRR*, p. 158) Heideman does not perceive this as a demeaning of the creation, even though this (correct) observation also counters, in some measure, the assertion that grace restores nature. In my view, Heideman's observation of the providence/creation relation also supports an eschatological understanding of redemption, in which creation is the starting point and redemption a process of increasing communion with God, culminating in the eschaton.

Veenhof also seeks to deal with the restoration surplus by describing Bavinck's distinction between restoration (herstel) and re-creation (restauratie). The original creation was intended for development. Redemption does not restore it to its original undeveloped state (re-creation), but to the state of higher glory that it would have attained had sin not intervened.

De genade beoogt metterdaad de toestand van mens en wereld op te voeren tot deze hogere heerlijkheid. Intussen mag men niet veronachtzamen, dat deze hogere heerlijkheid de bestemming vormt, waarop de aarde van meet af was aangelegd. Zij wordt derhalve beslist niet als een vreemd bestanddeel aan de schepping toegevoegd. Daarom is Bavinck's these, dat de reformatie door de genade meer is dan louter restauratie, geen omverwerping van zijn uitgangspunt, dat de genade de natuur herstelt.¹⁷¹

On Veenhof's account, this distinction allows Bavinck to construe redemption as a restoration of an original good state of affairs while also allowing for a 'restoration-surplus,' recognizing that the result of redemption is more than what was originally given. On the basis of this distinction Veenhof suggests that "men zou geheel Bavinck's eschatologie kunnen beschouwen als een uitwerking van wat hij in AG 46 van de christelijke religie zegt: 'Zij maakt geen nieuwen kosmos, maar maakt den kosmos nieuw.'¹⁷² Grace,

¹⁷¹ Veenhof, *RI*, p. 361. "Grace intends to bring the situation of man and the world to this higher glory. The fact must not be neglected, however, that this higher glory constitutes the goal to which the earth has been directed from the beginning. Therefore it is certainly not added to the creation as a foreign component. For that reason Bavinck's thesis that reformation through grace is more than mere re-creation is no denial of his foundational principle that grace restores nature." (*Nature and Grace in Bavinck*, p. 19)

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 361, n. 73. "Bavinck's entire eschatology could be considered an elaboration of what he says in AG 46 about the Christian religion: 'It does not make a new cosmos, but makes the cosmos new.'¹⁷² (*Nature and Grace in Bavinck*, p. 35, n. 73)

therefore, does not add anything to God's good creation, but removes the curse of sin so that the creation can be itself again. "De functie van de genade is alleen het wegnemen van de zonde; is dit geschied, dan is de mens vanzelf weer beeld Gods, want het beeld Gods is geen *donum superadditum*, maar behoort tot het wezen van de mens."¹⁷³

Veenhof's distinction between restoration and re-creation in Bavinck's understanding of redemption, and his account of Bavinck's rejection of a Roman Catholic view of elevation are both valid, but they are also incomplete. Veenhof's construal of the restoration motif in Bavinck and his restriction of redemption to the overcoming of sin are unable to account for certain discontinuities between the present and the new creation, and therefore give the creation a greater role than Bavinck intends. Veenhof observes that "het is Bavincks diepste overtuiging, dat nooit enig creatuur of enig deel der wereld naast of tegenover God mag worden geplaatst,"¹⁷⁴ but his one-sided stress on the restoration motif pits God's work in creation over against his work

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 351. "The function of grace is exclusively the removal of sin; when this happens, then man is automatically image of God again, for the image of God is not a *donum superadditum*, but belongs to the essence of man." (*Nature and Grace in Bavinck*, p. 9, alt.)

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 319. "It is Bavinck's deepest conviction that any creature or part of the world may never be placed next to or over against God."

in redemption.¹⁷⁵ Veenhof approvingly cites Bavinck's claim that "de openbaring is het komen Gods tot de menschheid, om eeuwiglijk bij haar te wonen,"¹⁷⁶ but he does not observe (as Bavinck does) that this eternal dwelling of God with humanity constitutes something greater than that which Adam and Eve experienced in the Garden of Eden.¹⁷⁷ Veenhof's fear of the Catholic dualistic construal of redemption blinds him to elements of the elevation motif that Bavinck consistently incorporates into his eschatological understanding of redemption even as he also emphasizes the (relative) significance of the creation. As a result, Veenhof concludes that Bavinck "in zijn pogingen de verhouding van schepping en herschepping dogmatisch te fixeren geen

¹⁷⁵ In a careful explication of Bavinck's thoughts on the covenant with Noah (from *MD*, pp. 39f.), Veenhof writes, "Dank zij dit verbond komt het bestaan en het leven van mens en wereld 'op een anderen, hechteren grondslag' te rusten. Het ligt niet meer vast in de scheppingsdaad en in de scheppingsordinantie Gods, maar ontvangt nu zijn grondslag in een nieuwe, bijzondere daad van Gods barmhartigheid en lankmoedigheid." (Veenhof, *RI*, p. 294. "Thanks to this covenant the existence and life of humanity and the world comes to rest on a different, more solid foundation. It is no longer fixed in God's act of creation and the creation ordinances, but now receives its foundation in a new, special work of God's mercy and long-suffering.") A few pages later he makes the unsupported claim that "een bewijs van de aansluiting van het genadeverbond aan het werkverbond is ook, dat het de natuurlijke ordeningen respecteert, welke krachtens Gods beschikking golden in de bedeling van het werkverbond." (*Ibid.*, p. 304. "Evidence of the connection of the covenant of grace to the covenant of works is also that the former respects the natural ordering which was operative by God's decree in the dispensation of the covenant of works.") We see here a tension between grace and creation in Veenhof's understanding of Bavinck.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 342, from *GD I*, p. 347. "Revelation is the coming of God to humanity, to dwell with her eternally."

¹⁷⁷ Cf. *MD*, pp. 201-203.

algehele klaarheid heeft bereikt en niet tot een volledig afgeronde 'einheitliche' visie heeft kunnen komen. Veeleer is in zijn theologie een gestadige golfbeweging te constateren, die het onmogelijk maakt deze exclusief als een 'scheppings'- or als een 'genade'-theologie te interpreteren."¹⁷⁸ In my view, Bavinck's theology is consistently a theology of grace, and his doctrine of creation serves to emphasize both the cosmic wideness of his theology of grace and the profound coherence of the works of God.

While John Bolt approves of Veenhof's interpretation of Bavinck for the most part, he goes considerably farther down the road of recognizing the limitations of the restoration motif. Bolt, however, seeks to do the impossible: he wishes to maintain the central role of the doctrine of creation in Bavinck's theology while also placing greater emphasis upon the glorification motif which serves to account for the 'restoration-surplus' in Bavinck's understanding of redemption. Therefore, on the one hand Bolt does greater justice to Bavinck's account than Veenhof does, but, on the other hand, Bolt's interpretation is unable to escape its own inner contradictions.

¹⁷⁸ RI, p. 410. Veenhof concludes that Bavinck "in his attempts to articulate dogmatically the relationship between creation and re-creation did not reach complete clarity and was unable to come to a fully well-rounded *einheitliche* vision. Instead, a steady fluctuation can be seen in his theology, which makes it impossible to interpret it exclusively as a theology of creation or a theology of grace." Veenhof continues to highlight this disparity by suggesting that one can find motifs in Bavinck which were developed by Van Ruler on one hand, and Barth on the other.

These contradictions focus on the relation between creation and eschatology. Bolt stresses the importance of the doctrine of creation in Bavinck's theology. "It is precisely to preserve the high valuation of creation, to protect the trinitarian emphasis that grace restores nature from all attempts to make of the Christian religion an alternative cosmic reality, whether by way of a Medieval, ecclesiastically dominated hierarchical system or by way of an Anabaptist revolution, that Bavinck articulates his doctrine of common grace."¹⁷⁹ Bolt perceives a trinitarian division of labour in Bavinck's theology in which the work of God the Father is primarily associated with the creation.¹⁸⁰ The Father has priority in Bavinck's understanding of the Trinity; thus, "the immediate consequence of this order is that creation and law have a priority in Bavinck's cultural-ethical ideal. The redeeming work of the Son and the sanctifying work of the Spirit are both restorative of the creating work of the Father."¹⁸¹ Because of the restoration theme, "the relation between the *status integritatus* and the *status gloriae* is not a vertical one of nature and supernature, but a horizontal, historical one in which the natural simply reaches, in time, its highest but fully natural potential."¹⁸² Like Veenhof, Bolt emphasizes the grace restores nature theme and flatly rejects any dualistic construals of the

¹⁷⁹ Bolt, *ICT*, pp. 177f.

¹⁸⁰ Bolt's trinitarian division of labour will be examined later in this chapter.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 189f.

nature/grace relation while also recognizing the importance of the distinction between restoration and re-creation.

But, on the other hand, Bolt recognizes that the work of redemption also has the character of glorification and therefore is more than restoration. "The theme, 'grace restores nature', if it excludes the important qualification that glorification is 'more' than restoration, is an inadequate interpretation of Bavinck's thought."¹⁸³ Bolt perceives a similarity between Bavinck's position and that outlined by Herbert Richardson in his *Towards an American Theology*, in which Richardson "argues that to consider Christ's work in redemption to be a restoration or actualization of the original image of God is functionally Arian since it implies that Christ's work in redemption is less than God's chief end in creation."¹⁸⁴ Bolt continues by suggesting that Richardson's understanding serves to point out the incongruity in Heideman's claim that in seeking the glory of God in creation Bavinck depreciates the creation.

As a contingent reality, subject to the sovereign good pleasure and purpose of God, the creation cannot and does not have its final goal and purpose intrinsic to itself, but must have that goal outside of itself. The question *cur creatio* cannot be answered within the framework of the creation itself. Therefore, the doctrine of the glory of God as the goal of creation is the final line of defense against all idealistic and neo-Platonic thought, and not, as Heideman suggests, an expression of it.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 197. Surprisingly, Bolt credits Veenhof with demonstrating this point, citing Veenhof's distinction between re-creation and restoration.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

On the one hand, therefore, Bolt posits the priority of the creation rooted in its link with God the Father, and concludes that redemption restores the creation so that it can develop, in time, to its highest potential. He rejects any notion of elevation by construing redemption as a horizontal development rather than a vertical one. On the other hand, he agrees with Richardson that restoration demeans the significance of Christ, and perceives the goal of creation as the glory of God, a goal which cannot be intrinsic to the creation.

Bolt is correct in perceiving a strong emphasis upon creation in Bavinck's theology, an emphasis which serves to counter dualism. He also recognizes the importance of the glorification theme in Bavinck's understanding of redemption. However, he is unwilling to subordinate Bavinck's doctrine of creation to his eschatology.¹⁸⁶ While he properly recognizes a certain priority of the creation in Bavinck, he fails to see that this is limited to a *chronological* priority and not one of ultimate significance.¹⁸⁷ Creation is

¹⁸⁶ In a discussion of the Kingdom of God in Bavinck's theology, Bolt makes the striking but unsupported and unexplicated claim that "precisely because the Kingdom of God is an eschatological reality, it cannot be the all-inclusive concept in Christian theology." (Bolt, *ICT*, p. 111)

¹⁸⁷ Bolt supports his claim that the creation has priority in significance in Bavinck's theology with a citation from *KCK*, p. 21: "De Hervorming heeft ons niet alleen de geloofsartikelen over de Zoon en de Heilige Geest, over de kerk en de vergeving der zonden beter doen verstaan; zij heeft ook het eerste artikel van ons algemeen Christelijk geloof weer in ere hersteld en met volle nadruk beleden: ik geloof in God, de Vader, de Almachtige, Schepper des hemels en der aarde." ("The Reformation not only gave us a better understanding of the articles of faith concerning the Son and the Holy Spirit, concerning the church and the forgiveness of sins. The Reformation also restored to honour the first article

significant because it is the *first* revelation of God, and as such it establishes the parameters for all subsequent revelation, parameters that ensure that the work of redemption encompasses the entire cosmos. However, creation also functions as the servant which prepares the way for subsequent revelation which leads to the goal of all revelation: God dwelling with his people for eternity. Thus, the creation has priority in time, but the new creation has priority in significance. The goal of creation cannot be the natural fulfillment of its original potential (as Bolt himself suggests in quoting Richardson). Bolt's rejection of vertical elevation in favour of horizontal development does not adequately reflect Bavinck's understanding of the work of redemption. Rather, Bavinck's own metaphor expresses his view more accurately: "Het eindpunt keert tot het uitgangspunt terug en is tegelijk een toppunt, dat boven het punt van aanvang hoog verheven is. De werken Gods vormen een cirkel, die in spiraalvorm naar boven streeft; ze zijn eene verbinding van de horizontale en de verticale lijn: ze bewegen zich tegelijk voorwaarts en opwaarts."¹⁸⁸ Bavinck consistently emphasizes that the goal of the creation is

of our universal Christian faith and confessed it with emphasis: 'I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.'" ("CCC," p. 236) In my view this citation emphasizes the importance of the doctrine of creation, but does not give it priority over other doctrines.

¹⁸⁸ *MD*, p. 129. "The point of arrival returns to the point of departure, and is simultaneously a high point elevated high above the point of departure. The works of God form a circle which strives upward like a spiral; they are a combination of the horizontal and the vertical line; they move forward and upward at the same time." (*RF*, p. 144, alt.)

not inherent in the creation, but is the fruit of a work of God.¹⁸⁹

The relation between restoration and glorification in Bavinck's understanding of redemption is a sensitive one, because Bavinck wishes to underscore the significance of the creation while relativizing this significance to its goal: the new creation. The creation is restored for glorification. Bolt correctly concludes that "creation itself is not a static entity but has a teleology. The redemption in Christ is not mere restoration of the image of God in man but includes glorification."¹⁹⁰ The fruit of the work of Christ produces both continuity and discontinuity between the present creation and the new creation, realities which require both the notions of restoration and glorification in their description. In distinction from the interpretations of Heideman, Veenhof and Bolt, the view developed here is in harmony with that of Bavinck's contemporary successors at the Vrije Universiteit who write, "Herman Bavinck took over the thought of an ancient church that the eschaton is not only a restoration of the creation which has been affected by sin, but far excels it."¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ Interestingly, while Heideman perceives problems with Bavinck's stress that the creation exists for the glory of God, he also asserts that this stress safeguards Bavinck's doctrine of creation from underemphasizing the Creator/creature distinction: "Bavinck's position is further protected by his emphasis on the fact that creation does not exist for the purpose of developing its own inner potentialities, but rather that the glory of God is the goal of creation." (Heideman, *RRR*, p. 136)

¹⁹⁰ Bolt, *ICT*, p. 247.

¹⁹¹ A. van Egmond and C. van der Kooi, "The Appeal to Creation Ordinances: A Changing Tide" in *God's Order for Creation*. (Potchefstroom: Institute for Reformational Studies, 1994) p. 30.

One's interpretation of the relationship between grace and nature in Bavinck's theology also affects one's perception of the pearl/leaven relation in his thought. John Bolt rightly points out that a significant theme in Bavinck's theology is holding together in tension the metaphors of the kingdom of God as a pearl and as a leaven.¹⁹² The pearl is communion with God through Jesus Christ. This pearl is something which all believers enjoy now, but they enjoy it in the assurance that someday this communion will be perfect. This pearl must be complemented by leaven. Those who believe in Jesus Christ do not simply pine in solitude as they await full communion; they are actively engaged in the normal affairs of life, functioning as leaven in society, living as the salt of the earth and the light of the world. The metaphor of leaven has a distinctly ethical character. Those who enjoy only the pearl suffer from 'other-worldliness'; those who emphasize only the leaven suffer from 'this-worldliness.' The Christian must find the balance between the two.¹⁹³

¹⁹² Bolt, *ICT*, p. 115.

¹⁹³ Perhaps Bavinck's most frequently used phrase is one that refers to the 'religious-ethical' character of the Christian faith, and his ultimate defense of the Reformation was that it "was a religious and ethical movement through and through." ("CCG," p. 108) This phrase captures the essence of this tension between the gospel as pearl and leaven, as this quote from *KCK* illustrates: "Het Christendom is geen kwantitatieve grootheid, die transcendent over het natuurlijke zich uitbreidt, maar een godsdienstig-zedelijke kracht, die immanent in het natuurlijke ingaat en alleen het onreine verbant. Het Koninkrijk der hemelen moge een schat zijn en een parel; het is ook een mosterdzaad en een zuurdeeg." (p. 22. "The Christian faith is not a quantitative reality that spreads itself in a transcendent fashion over the natural but a religious and ethical power that enters the natural in an immanent fashion and eliminates only that which is unholy. The Kingdom of

'Tension,' however, is not the most accurate term to describe the relation between the gospel as pearl and as leaven. Bolt's comments on the imitation of Christ theme in Bavinck also hold true for the pearl/leaven relation: "mystical union with Christ is the primary sense of the imitation of Christ, and the ethical implications must flow forth from it."¹⁹⁴ Similarly, the pearl has primacy over the leaven; only one whose eyes are fixed on the pearl can function as leaven. Scripture "proceeds on the principle that for man God is the supreme good. Whatever material or ideal possessions the world may offer, all these taken together cannot outweigh or even be compared with this greatest of all treasures, communion with God."¹⁹⁵ But this treasure inherently includes ethical implications. "He who has learned to regard communion with God as the supreme good for his own person, must feel bound to work his way back, behind the world and its phenomena, until he arrives at the will of God."¹⁹⁶ Therefore, even though "Calvin speaks of despising the present life," he also teaches that perfection "consists in the faithful discharge of those ordinary daily duties which have been laid by God upon every man in the conduct of life...life itself in its whole length and breadth and depth must

Heaven may be a treasure and a pearl of great price, but it is also a mustard seed and a leaven." ["CCC," p. 236])

¹⁹⁴ Bolt, *ICT*, p. 123.

¹⁹⁵ "CCG," p. 100.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

be a service of God."¹⁹⁷ The one who properly enjoys the pearl will inevitably also be a leaven. This relation is congruent with the thesis advanced here, that ultimately Bavinck works with an eschatological understanding of redemption, but this eschatology inherently includes ethical implications.

Construed as such, the relation between pearl and leaven in Bavinck's theology serves to address a problem raised by Eugene Heideman. While Heideman does not refer to the metaphors of the pearl and the leaven, he describes the same issues.

There is on the one hand a desire to emphasize that man has been placed in creation by God in order to care for it and subdue it. There is then a tremendous emphasis laid upon man's scientific, philosophical, political and cultural activity as the true service of God and the exaltation of His Glory. On the other hand, there is the line of thought which emphasizes that man's goal lies in his enjoyment of God.¹⁹⁸

He continues by describing this as a tension between common and special grace.

By common grace, man is able to continue to exercise his lordship over all the earth. This is a great and glorious work and God is to be praised that by this common grace man is able to fulfil this purpose. On the other hand, common grace cannot bring man to his ultimate goal, to eternal life, to the enjoyment of fellowship with God. By faith, which is the result of special grace, one is united to God in Christ.¹⁹⁹

Heideman goes on to conclude that this tension is held in check by Bavinck because "the distinction between special and common grace plays a subordinate role in Bavinck's thought. He discusses common

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

¹⁹⁸ Heideman, *RRR*, p. 176.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

grace comparatively seldom and then always exercises great reserve in his conclusions."²⁰⁰ Heideman construes the relation between special and common grace in Bavinck (and, by implication, that between the pearl and leaven) dualistically, suggesting that Bavinck avoids significant problems simply by downplaying the distinction. What Heideman fails to see is that the pearl has priority over the leaven, common grace serves both as a preparatory servant of special grace (the pearl) and a description of God's gracious presence in the world which functions as a precondition for the believer's activity as a leaven. This is not a dualism, though it is, as Bavinck affirms, very difficult to find the balance and believers are almost always guilty of one-sidedness.²⁰¹

One final issue flows from the grace/nature relation in Bavinck's theology: the distinction between duality and dualism. At the heart of Bavinck's theology lies the conviction that dualism signifies a fundamental misconstrual of reality. Much of his theological endeavor is concerned with articulating alternatives to Kant's distinction between the noumenal and the phenomenal and to the Medieval distinction between nature and grace. Nevertheless, Bavinck recognizes that the impulse to dualism is indeed grounded in reality, but that one must perceive this as a duality and not a dualism. Dualism for Bavinck refers to an understanding of reality

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ *KCK*, pp. 36f.

which perceives two distinct realms which ultimately do not affect each other, so that each is autonomous in relation to the other. Heideman correctly points out that Bavinck refuses to designate certain realms of knowledge appropriate for reason and others for revelation, because "all knowledge comes only through revelation. Both God and the world are known one hundred percent by revelation and one hundred percent by reason."²⁰² Similarly, "dualistisch was de levens- en wereldbeschouwing van Rome; kwantitatief de tegenstelling, die het aannam tussen het natuurlijke en het bovennatuurlijke. De hervormers, teruggaande naar het Nieuwe Testament, hebben deze door een in ware zin theistische wereldbeschouwing, en een kwalitatieve tegenstelling vervangen."²⁰³

Bavinck's account of a qualitative, anti-dualistic nature/grace relation can be called a duality. John Bolt provides a helpful summary of this construal of the "two distinct streams of

²⁰² Heideman, *RRR*, p. 156.

²⁰³ *KCK*, p. 21. "Rome's world-and-life view was dualistic; her disjunction between the natural and supernatural was a quantitative one. By returning to the New Testament, the Reformers replaced this with a truly theistic worldview that made the distinction a qualitative one." ("*CCC*," p. 235) While such statements ring with a self-congratulatory tone, it is helpful to keep other statements in mind as well: "Maar de Hervorming, hoe universeel ook van opvatting, is nog veel minder in de kerstening van het leven geslaagd. Hoewel theoretisch overwonnen, bleef het dualisme in de praktijk op menig gebied bestaan." (*KCK*, p. 30. "The Reformation, no matter how universal in its conception, was even less successful in Christianizing life. Although dualism was theoretically overcome it remained a practical reality in many areas of life." [*CCC*, p. 243]).

thought" which make up this duality.

On the one hand there is the line which, among other things, stresses the unity of God and his works, creation and law, the Kingdom of God as a leaven and mustard seed, grace as the restoration of nature, life on earth as a calling from God, the catholicity of the Christian faith, the interim character of Christ's redemptive mediatorial work and the church, and which rejects all forms of dualism between faith and life, church and theology, theology and the other sciences. On the other hand there is the line which emphasizes, among other things, the Kingdom of God as a future divine gift, as a pearl or treasure, considers theology as a unique science, highly values pietism which views salvation as primarily mystical union with Christ, exalts the world-denying, cross-bearing spirituality of the early church and Medieval sectarian groups such as the Waldensians, and insists upon a dual citizenship, a double calling for men in which the heavenly fellowship with God is a distinct and higher goal than the earthly task of subjugating creation. In a phrase Bavinck's position is an attempt to hold to a "duality without dualism."²⁰⁴

These two lines can be held together as a duality because the latter, eschatological line takes priority over the former, more creation-oriented one. The pearl is the context for the leaven, the restoration of nature is the precondition for its glorification, common grace prepares the way for special grace.

One can discern in Bavinck's writings three factors which distinguish duality from dualism. First, the two realms which makes up a duality are both upheld by the hands of the one God. "The divine will which created the world, which in the state of sin preserves it through common grace and makes itself known through special grace as the will of a merciful and gracious father, aims at the salvation of the world...The unity and diversity in the whole world alike point back to the one sovereign, omnipotent

²⁰⁴ Bolt, *ICT*, pp. 122f.

gracious and merciful will of God."²⁰⁵ There may be dualities in the cosmos, but God is one, and ultimately all that is comes from his fatherly hand; no part of created reality is 'more connected' to God than any other part. Therefore, these dualities are not absolute (i.e., dualisms) but relative.²⁰⁶

Second, duality is a given in this dispensation, but it will be overcome in the eschaton. Theology "profefeert van eene heerlijke toekomst, waarin alle tegenstellingen, ook die tusschen natuur en genade verzoend zullen zijn en alles wederom tot een vergaderd zal wezen in Christus, beide dat in den hemel en dat op de aarde is."²⁰⁷ Because this state of affairs is reserved for the future, one-sidedness is inevitable in this life.²⁰⁸ But when the history of redemption reaches its fulfillment, the invisible will become visible, the creation will share in eternity, and grace will fully restore and perfect nature. Third, there is an organic connection between the two distinct realms in this current dispensation which serves as an eschatological signpost, pointing to their full reconciliation in the next dispensation. Now the leaven is hidden within the dough. By faith one believes that it

²⁰⁵ "CCG," pp. 127, 129.

²⁰⁶ Cf. AG, p. 37.

²⁰⁷ AG, p. 53. Theology "prophesies a glorious future in which all oppositions, including those between nature and grace, shall be reconciled, and all things, whether on earth or in heaven, shall again in Christ be one." ("CG," p. 65)

²⁰⁸ KCK, pp. 36f.

is there; by faith one believes that someday it will be fully visible.²⁰⁹

The four aspects of Bavinck's theology of the creation/redemption relation that have been discussed here -- its terminological inconsistency, its understanding of elevation, the pearl/leaven relation and its claim that duality serves as an alternative to dualism -- demonstrate that he works with an eschatological understanding of redemption. This perspective helps one to perceive the coherence of this theology. An overemphasis on his doctrine of creation leads interpreters to conclude that Bavinck is inconsistent or contradictory in his formulations. Perceiving this doctrine in its eschatological context clarifies the inner harmony of his thought.

One must also note, however, that contradictions are also discernible from this eschatological perspective, particularly in

²⁰⁹ Bavinck describes this in connection with the one, universal church and the pluriform expressions of the Christian faith. He suggests that when one sees the relation organically, one recognizes that "er is geen algemeen Christendom boven, maar toch wel in de geloofsverdeeldheid aanwezig. De ene heilige algemene Christelijke kerk, nu voorwerp van het geloof, komt eerst als het lichaam van Christus zijn volle wasdom zal hebben bereikt. En ook dan eerst zal de gemeente komen tot de enigheid des geloofs en der kennis van de Zoon Gods, en zal zij kennen gelijk zij gekend is." (KCK, p. 40. "There is no universal Christianity present above the confessional disunity, but only in it. The one, holy, universal church that is presently an object of faith, will not come into being until the body of Christ reaches full maturity. Only then will the church achieve the unity of faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, and only then will she know as she is known." ["CCC," pp. 250f., alt.]

his short essay *De Algemeene Genade*. Of the three major essays which Bavinck wrote which address the creation/redemption relation,²¹⁰ this one is the weakest. Perhaps its moments of awkwardness are related to the fact that he wrote it at Kuyper's request, and, when Kuyper asked him to expand upon it, he refused.²¹¹ Its contradictions can be summarized under three main issues: first, he projects the nature/grace duality onto the Trinity, resulting in a further 'duality' between the Father and the Son which undermines his assertion that duality is held together in the unity of the works of God. Second, he describes a duality between the creation and the church which fails to place both within the framework of his eschatological understanding of redemption, and therefore uses language which is more appropriate to dualism than duality. Finally, he employs both restoration and glorification language in the same breath, resulting in formulations that are both confusing and contradictory.

Bavinck provides a lengthy list of tensions that are rooted in the duality between nature and grace, and then concludes that balancing these properly requires understanding the relation "tusschen schepping en herschepping, tusschen het werk des Vaders en het werk des Zoons."²¹² While the biblical teachings

²¹⁰ In chronological order, *KCK*, *AG* and "CCG."

²¹¹ Bremmer, *Bavinck en zijn Tijdgenoten*, p. 197.

²¹² *AG*, p. 36. Balancing these properly requires understanding the relation "between creation and re-creation, between the work of the Father and the work of the Son." ("*CG*," p. 56)

concerning the Trinity certainly help one to understand the relation between creation and redemption, Bavinck's application of this Trinitarian teaching is problematic. After noting that Calvinism has developed an understanding of the Christian faith applied to home, society, and the relation between church and state, he continues,

Al deze organische levenskringen der menschen komen op uit de schepping; zij bestaan door de *gratia communis*; zij ontleenen hun gezag en hun macht niet aan de genade van Christus, maar aan de gratie Gods. Christus is wel gezalfd tot Koning over Sion, en Hij is het Hoofd der gemeente, zelfs is alle macht Hem gegeven in hemel en aarde en zijn alle dingen zijnen voeten onderworpen. Maar de soevereiniteit in huisgezin, staat en maatschappij daalt van God rechtstreeks op het schepsel neer. Naar Gereformeerde beginselen heeft de staat, evenals huisgezin en maatschappij, een eigen macht en een eigen gezag, door God hem verleend; en de kerk staat daarnaast met eene eigen regeering, door Christus haar geschonken. Huisgezin en maatschappij en staat worden wel door den Geest van Christus herboren, maar zij bestaan en leven krachtens de ordening Gods in de natuur en behouden naast de kerk hare volle zelfstandigheid. Christus kwam niet om de wereld en de verschillende levenskringen in haar te verderven, maar om ze te herstellen en te behouden.²¹³

This passage suggests that the realms of nature and grace derive their authority from the first and second members of the Trinity

²¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 50f. "All these organic spheres of human life arise out of creation; they exist by the *gratia communis*; they derive their authority and power not from the grace of Christ but from the grace of God. Christ is the anointed King of Sion, and he is the head of the church; indeed, all power has been given him in heaven and on earth, and all has been subjected under his feet. But sovereignty in home, state and society descend directly from God upon the creature. According to Reformed principles, the state, as well as home and society, have their own power and their own authority, granted to them by God; beside them stands the church by the government granted to it by Christ. Home, society and state may well be reborn by the Spirit of Christ, but they exist and live by virtue of God's ordering of nature; they possess alongside the church their own independence. Christ came not to do away with the world and the various spheres of life but to restore and preserve them." ("CG," pp. 63f., alt.)

respectively. After affirming the biblical assertion that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Christ, Bavinck continues by declaring that this authority must be distinguished from the authority which God (the Father) confers in the spheres of home, state and society. The authority of Christ is operative in the church. However, there is a link between the work of Christ and the work of the Father, a link established by the third member of the Trinity, for, as noted above, "huisgezin en maatschappij en staat worden door den Geest van Christus herboren."

One can see in Bavinck's formulations here contradictions concerning divine authority. The realms of nature and grace are not unified in God, but rather their distinction leads to a further division of divine authority between the Father and the Son. It is unclear how the relation between the Father and the Son impacts upon this division of authority. There is a link between the two: the societal spheres are rooted in the creation of the Father but are reborn through the Spirit of Christ. However, this assertion is not explicated in any way and its meaning is highly unclear. If societal spheres receive their authority from God, the church from Christ, and the former are reborn through the Spirit of Christ, does the church then have authority over other societal spheres? No, it would not, for that would lead to the Medieval Christendom model which Bavinck rejects.²¹⁴ Yet in spite of this Trinitarian division of labour and authority, Bavinck asserts that "Christus

²¹⁴ AG, p. 50.

heeft ook iets te zeggen voor het huisgezin en de maatschappij, voor de kunst en de wetenschap."²¹⁵ There is a tension here between Christocentricity on the one hand and a duality which is projected onto rather than resolved within the relation between the Father and the Son and which undermines Jesus' claim that all authority in heaven and earth has been given to him. This tension is, however, an anomaly in Bavinck's theology. The main thrust of his thought is decidedly Christocentric.²¹⁶

While John Bolt helpfully points out that one must recognize the duality without dualism in Bavinck's thought, Bolt's Trinitarian analysis of Bavinck also leads to projecting this duality onto the Trinity in ways which do not entirely do justice to Bavinck's own articulations. Earlier I noted that Bolt gives

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 47. "Christ has also a message for home and society, for art and science." ("CG," p. 62)

²¹⁶ One would be hard-pressed to find such a confusing and problematic formulation in Bavinck's *Dogmatics*. On this particular theme his thought is expressed much more clearly in a statement like this one: "De Vader bereidt met zijne schepping het werk der herschepping voor en leidt naar haar heen; de Zoon gaat met zijn arbeid diep, zoover als de zonde reikt, tot in het werk der schepping terug. Maar toch zijn beide werken onderscheiden en niet te vermengen." (*GD III*, p. 467. "With his creation the Father prepares the work of re-creation and leads towards it; the work of the Son goes deep, as far as sin reaches, back towards the work of creation. But nevertheless both works are distinct and are not to be confused.")

Statements such as this are much more congruent with the thrust of his thought. Therefore, I agree with both Veenhof (*RI*, pp. 314f.) and Heideman (*RRR*, pp. 153f.) that Bavinck avoids the errors of both natural theology and gnosticism by remaining consistently Christocentric: one comes to know the Father only through the Son.

greater priority to the creation than Bavinck does (which leads to the inconsistencies in his discussion of the glorification motif), while at the same time qualifying this priority with the imitation of Christ theme in Bavinck. This leads to a certain lack of consistency in Bolt's discussion of duality in Bavinck. On the one hand, he declares that "it is the doctrine of creation that provides the theological foundation for Bavinck's anti-dualistic emphasis upon catholicity."²¹⁷ On the other, he also asserts that "Bavinck does not believe that what he calls 'relative dualism' can be overcome in this dispensation. This suggests that an ultimate formal conceptual unity in Bavinck's thought is not to be found in the cosmos, in time, but in the eternal unity of God himself."²¹⁸ The latter quote is congruent with this analysis; Bavinck's duality is resolved eschatologically in the unity of God. Within that context, the doctrine of creation supports his anti-dualistic motif. Because there is a unity in the works of God, both creation and redemption are to be perceived in their entirety as works of God, and tensions which occur between them in this dispensation will be overcome in the eschaton. If the doctrine of creation on its own is perceived as the antidote to dualism, the creation is given a greater role than Bavinck intends and his account of the relation between creation and redemption is misconstrued.

Bolt's analysis comes close to projecting Bavinck's duality

²¹⁷ Bolt, *ICT*, pp. 118f.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

onto the relation between the Father and the Son. He perceives a dual ethic in the Christian life, one in which the dominant ethic requires obedience to creation law established by the Father, which is supplemented by an *imitatio Christi* ethic rooted in the Son.²¹⁹ Bolt suggests that recognizing the importance of the Trinity in Bavinck's theology allows one "to appropriate the various tasks of God to specific persons of the Trinity."²²⁰ Bolt correctly perceives that Bavinck's ethics cannot be reduced to creation law and include the *imitatio Christi*, but by placing more emphasis upon creation law than Bavinck himself does, Bolt also projects the tension between these two motifs onto the Father/Son relation and fails to recognize that fundamentally they are different shadings of the same ethic.²²¹ Living the Christian life is not first of all social transformation. "Beoefening is noodig van die Christelijke deugden, die het cement van het volksleven zijn. Huiselijke zin, matigheid, spaarzaamheid, vlijt, trouw,

²¹⁹ This specific theme is analyzed in an interchange between John Bolt and George Vandervelde in the *Calvin Theological Journal* 21 (1986), pp. 95-109; 22 (1987), pp. 91-114.

²²⁰ Bolt, "The Trinity as a Unifying Theme in Reformed Theology, A Response to Dr. George Vandervelde," *Calvin Theological Journal* 22 (1987), p. 99.

²²¹ Bolt draws two questionable conclusions here. First, he concludes that the priority of the Father within the Trinity implies the priority of the creation. Secondly, he concludes that the priority of the creation implies the priority of creation law. The references which he cites to support these implications do not do so adequately. (cf., *ICT*, p. 118, n. 279; p. 121, n. 287; p. 236, nn. 311-314;) An analysis of Bavinck's use of 'law' is beyond the scope of this study, but law refers to a number of different concepts in Bavinck's theology, and only infrequently does it refer to creation law.

eerlijkheid, orde, welwillendheid, enz., dat zijn de deugden, die hoe langer hoe meer verdwijnen en door geen buitengewone maatregelen van staat, kerk of vereenigingen kunnen worden vergoed."²²² This is consistent with Bavinck's theme that both sanctification and redemption (understood eschatologically) move from the inner to the outer, the internal to the external, the invisible to the visible. There is not a duality or a tension between these, but a progression from the former to the latter.

Second, Bavinck's inappropriate construal of the Father/Son relation is also projected onto the relation between the creation and the church in an awkward manner. Christ is head of the church; authority in the other spheres of life (home, state, society) is rooted in God the creator.²²³ In this formulation, the creation and the church co-exist side-by-side, each with its own spheres of authority and yet somehow linked with each other. Yet, earlier in this essay, Bavinck describes the relation between the two within the framework of progressive revelation.

²²² AG, pp. 49f. "What is needed is the practice of Christian virtues, which are the cement of society. Household sense, moderation, frugality, diligence, troth-keeping, honesty, orderliness, benevolence, and the like -- these are the virtues that seem to decline day by day and that can in no way be replaced by extraordinary measures of state, church or social organizations." ("CG," p. 63) These words are especially striking because they come directly before Bavinck's assertion about the authority of home, society and state which are rooted in the creation. Bavinck does not perceive a tension between practising virtues and transforming society. Rather, he perceives a problem when the latter is attempted apart from the former. (Cf. ZG, p. 76)

²²³ AG, pp. 50f.

In de ontwikkeling treedt dit wezen van Israels religie nog duidelijker aan het licht. Ze vindt beide haar einde en haar doel in den Christus. Zoo volkomen is de genade de inhoud der Nieuw-Testamentische religie, dat de eigenschappen Gods, uit de schepping en uit de natuur kenbaar, terugwijken. Ze worden niet ontkend, veeleer overal ondersteld. Maar op den voorgrond treden in het N. Test. de eigenschappen van Gods liefde en genade en vrede. Gods relatie tot de natuur treedt terug voor die tot zijne gemeente. Het Evangelie is louter genade.²²⁴

This description of the creation/church relation suggests that one should not construe their relation dualistically (as the former citation suggests), but rather in terms of redemptive historical progression. That is to say, the relation between creation and the church is best seen in the context of Bavinck's eschatological understanding of redemption. The creation prepares the way, Jesus Christ is the high and mid point of that history, and he has established the church which is the forerunner of the Kingdom of God. God's grace in Jesus Christ covers the entirety of God's good creation, and the church is called to be a vessel of God's good grace in every aspect of its existence. Focusing on the creation as one's starting point and seeking to supplement that starting point by finding a place for the church leads to formulations such as Bavinck's assertion of a division of authority for the Father and the Son. Duality becomes dualism. When one sees the history

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 14f. "In the course of history, the essence of Israel's faith becomes more manifest as it finds its goal and fulfillment in Christ. So perfectly is grace the content of New Testament religion that the attributes of God seen in nature and the creation become less prominent. They are not, however, denied but are rather everywhere presupposed, while in the foreground we find emphasized God's attributes of love, grace and peace. God's relation to nature retreats to give pride of place to the relationship between God and his church. The gospel is pure grace." ("CG," pp. 43f.)

of redemption culminating in the Kingdom of God in which all things are gathered under the Son as Head, one sees how the creation and the church each have a distinct place in the history of redemption, a history which is the one, coherent work of the Trinitarian God.

Bavinck's essay, "De Katholiciteit van Christendom en Kerk," expresses the creation/church relation in terms which respect their duality yet perceive their unity eschatologically. In this creation the church is a leavening agent, a prolepsis of a new heaven and a new earth.

Het koninkrijk der hemelen is enerzijds een schat in de akker en een parel van grote waarde, die een mens vond en kocht voor al wat hij had; het is anderzijds ook gelijk aan een mosterdzaad, dat opgroeit tot een boom in welks takken de vogelen des hemels zich nestelen en aan een zuurdesem, dat een vrouw nam en verborg in drie maten meel, totdat het geheel gezuurd was. In Christus heeft (God) haar met zichzelf verzoend en de zonde haar niet toegerekend. In Christus zijn alle dingen in de hemel en op de aarde met God verzoend, en onder Hem worden ze vergaderd tot een. De wereld, die door de Zoon is geschapen, is ook voor de Zoon als haar erfgenaam bestemd. En eens worden den koninkrijken der wereld van onze Heer en Zijn Christus. Er komt een nieuwe hemel en een nieuwe aarde, waarin gerechtigheid woont. Het Evangelie is een blijde boodschap, niet slechts voor de enkele mens, maar ook voor de mensheid, voor het gezin en de maatschappij en de staat, voor kunst en voor wetenschap, voor de ganse kosmos, voor heel het zuchtend creatuur.²²⁵

²²⁵ KCK, pp. 6f. "On the one hand, the Kingdom of Heaven is a treasure hidden in a field and a pearl of great price for which a man sells everything he has in order to buy it; at the same time it is also a mustard seed that grows into a tree in which the birds of the air build nests and a yeast that a woman takes and hides in three measures of flour until it is all leavened. In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting its sins. In Christ all things in heaven and on earth are reconciled to God and under him brought together in unity. The world, created by the Son, is also destined for him as its heir. The kingdoms of this world shall eventually become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. A new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells

Bavinck continues by describing the post-Ascension history of redemption. Christ's "heengaan is (the disciples') nut geweest. Lichamelijk hen verlatende, is Hij in waarheid veel nader tot hen gekomen door zijn Godheid, majesteit, genade en Geest, met welke Hij woning bij hen komt maken en nimmermeer van hen wijkt. Hoe klein en onaanzienlijk dan ook, deze gemeente was werkelijk katholiek, erfgename van de toekomst, verkondigster van een blijdschap die al het schepsel wezen zal."²²⁶ In these descriptions Bavinck relies heavily on biblical language to place both the church and the creation in the context of the history of redemption centered on the person and work of Christ. This formulation is consistent with the fundamental thrust of Bavinck's theology.²²⁷ The creation/church dualism expressed in *Algemeene Genade* is not.

A final problem in Bavinck's short essay on Common Grace has to do with his confusion of restoration and glorification language.

is coming. The gospel is a joyful tidings, not only for the individual person, but also for humanity, for the family, for society, for the state, for art and science, for the entire cosmos, for the whole groaning creation." ("CCC," pp. 223f., alt.)

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7. Christ's "departure was for (the disciples') good. Leaving them in body, he in truth came much nearer to them in his divinity, majesty, grace and Spirit. Through his Spirit he makes his dwelling among them and never leaves them. No matter how small and insignificant it thus appeared, this church was truly catholic heir of the future, proclaimer of a joy destined for all creatures." ("CCC," p. 225, alt.)

²²⁷ The conclusion of *De Zekerheid des Geloofs* also provides a wonderfully passionate summation of the creation/church relation expressive of Bavinck's eschatological understanding of redemption. (cf. *ZG*, p. 78)

As we have seen, Bavinck's eschatological understanding of redemption may be described as a restoration for glorification. That theme is also clearly expressed in *Algemeene Genade*:

Christus geeft eens het Koninkrijk, als het voltooid is, Gode den Vader over. De oorspronkelijke ordening wordt dan hersteld. Niet natuurlijk, alsof er niets ware gebeurd; alsof de zonde niet hadde bestaan en de openbaring van Gods genade in Christus nimmer hadde plaats gehad. Christus geeft meer, dan de zonde ontnam; de genade is veel meer overvloedig geweest. Hij herstelt ons maar niet in den *status integritatis* van Adam, maar maakt ons terstond door het geloof het *non posse peccare*, en het *non posse mori*, deelachtig. Adam krijgt nimmer de plaats terug, die hij door zijne ongehoorzaamheid verloor. De eerste mensch was uit de aarde aardsch; de tweede mensch is de Heer uit den hemel. Gelijkerwijs wij eenmaal het beeld des aardschen gedragen hebben, zoo zullen wij ook na de opstanding het beeld des hemelschen dragen. Het is een nieuw lied, dat er gezongen wordt in den hemel. Maar in zoover keert toch de oorspronkelijke ordening der schepping terug, als alle onderscheid van natuur en genade ten eenenmale vervallen zal. Het dualisme houdt op.²²⁸

This eschatological understanding of redemption is followed two pages later by the 'restoration only' statement which Veenhof proposes as a summary of Bavinck's entire eschatology: "De Christelijke religie brengt geen enkel substantieel vreemd element

²²⁸ AG, p. 43. "When the Kingdom has fully come, Christ will hand it over to God the Father. The original order will be restored. But not naturally, as if nothing had ever happened, as if sin had never existed and the revelation of God's grace in Christ had never occurred. Christ gives more than sin stole; grace was much more to abound. He does not simply restore us to the *status integritatis* of Adam; he makes us at once, by faith, participants of the *non posse peccare* and of the *non posse mori*. Adam will never again receive the place which he lost by sin. The first man was of the earth, earthly; the second man is the Lord from heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the earthly, so too after the resurrection shall we bear the image of the heavenly man. A new song will be sung in heaven but the original ordering of creation will return, at least to the extent that all distinctions of nature and grace will once and for all be done away with. Dualism will cease." ("CG," p. 59, alt.)

in de schepping in. Zij maakt geen nieuwen kosmos, maar maakt den kosmos nieuw. Ze herstelt, wat door de zonde bedorven wierd."²²⁹ In my view, this latter statement must be seen first of all as Bavinck's response to Medieval dualism, and therefore it is a polemical statement designed to overemphasize one aspect of his own eschatology.²³⁰ The context supports this reading. This citation is introduced as follows: "De Christelijke religie heeft daarom niet tot taak, om eene nieuwe, bovennatuurlijke orde van zaken te scheppen. Zij bedoelt niet een gansch nieuw, hemelsch rijk te stichten, gelijk Rome dat bedoelt in de kerk, en de Wederdoopers dat ondernamen te Munster."²³¹ A more appropriate choice for a statement that summarizes Bavinck's eschatology is the one also cited above, "Het is een nieuw lied, dat er gezongen wordt in den hemel. Maar in zoover keert toch de oorspronkelijke ordening der schepping terug, als alle onderscheid van natuur en genade ten eenenmale vervallen zal. Het dualisme houdt op."²³² This

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 46. "The Christian religion does not introduce a single substantial foreign element into the creation. It creates no new cosmos but rather makes the cosmos new. It restores what was corrupted by sin." ("CG," p. 61)

²³⁰ Heideman (*RRR*, p. 191) Veenhof (*RI*, pp. 351-361) quote extensively from a short section in Bavinck's dogmatics (*GD III*, pp. 578-584) to support the importance of the restoration motif in his view of redemption. This entire section also is a stark polemic against Catholic dualism.

²³¹ *AG*, p. 46. "The Christian religion does not have the task of creating a new supernatural order of things. It does not intend to institute a totally new, heavenly kingdom such as Rome intends in the church and the Anabaptists undertook at Munster." ["CG," p. 61])

²³² *Ibid.*, p. 43.

statement begins by emphasizing newness, discontinuity and glorification. Yet, it affirms the restoration motif in redemption, but leaves it decidedly ambiguous. Finally, it recognizes that redemption is more than the overcoming of sin *per se*; it also involves overcoming the duality between nature and grace which, in itself, is distinct from the battle between sin and grace. Thus, in Bavinck's eschatological understanding of redemption there is room for perceiving grace as that which overcomes sin and restores the good creation and that which overcomes the duality between nature and grace and perfects the creation. Redemption is an ascending spiral which returns to the point of origin and is also elevated high above it.²³³

Summary

Summarizing Bavinck's theology as one which emphasizes 'grace restores nature' is reductionist; it limits God's work of grace to restoration and it highlights the creation in ways which do not do justice to Bavinck's themes of glorification and the priority of the pearl over the leaven. G. C. Berkouwer's assessment of Bavinck harmonizes more closely with the analysis offered here. He perceives catholicity as a major theme in Bavinck's theology, and suggests that "het verband tussen de katholiciteit en de algemene genade wijst in de richting van Bavincks diepste motief, nl. dat

²³³ *MD*, p. 129.

God de wereld heeft liefgehad (KCK 5)."²³⁴ Berkouwer continues by observing that catholicity, together with the other marks of the church (one, holy, apostolic), "gaf zo uitzicht -- in belofte en roeping -- op de toekomst."²³⁵

The motif 'God so loved the world' describes Bavinck's theology much more accurately than 'grace restores nature.' The former is a Scriptural assertion in which grace is assumed in the verb which describes God's manner of relating to his fallen cosmos; the latter is an abstract theological formulation which depersonalizes the works of God and places unwarranted limits around the scope of that work. The former has room for a wideness of conception: the Trinitarian God loves in a way that both restores and perfects the entire cosmos which he has made; the latter is restrictive. The former affirms one of Bavinck's primary goals: "Hij had gezegd dat hij het essentiële in de moderne theologie miste: niet de grootheid van God, maar wel Zijn Vaderliefde;"²³⁶ the latter does not. The former, as Berkouwer points out, has an eye towards the future; the latter looks to the past. The motif 'God so loved the world' serves to express the

²³⁴ G. C. Berkouwer, *Zoeken en Vinden*, p. 49. "The relation between catholicity and common grace points in the direction of Bavinck's deepest motif, namely, that God so loved the world."

²³⁵ *Ibid.* Catholicity "gives an outlook -- in promise and in calling -- upon the future."

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 61. "He said that he missed in modern theology that which was essential: not the greatness of God, but rather his Father-love."

heart of Bavinck's eschatological understanding of redemption which accords a prominent place to God's good creation but perceives the new creation -- in which God and his people will dwell in perfect communion for eternity -- as that which holds ultimate significance.

Chapter Five - Herman Bavinck and contemporary neo-Calvinism, Part I: The character of the relationship between God and the creation.

The purpose of this chapter and the next is to compare Bavinck's eschatological understanding of redemption with the views expressed in two recent works which bring together the insights of contemporary Dutch neo-Calvinism. An examination of these two works -- Albert M. Wolters' *Creation Regained, Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*¹ and Gordon Spykman's *Reformational Theology, A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics*² -- reveals that they contain both significant similarities and significant differences with the thought of Herman Bavinck.³ The thesis that will be developed here is that these contemporary works do not develop an *eschatological* understanding of redemption akin to Bavinck's, but rather a *creational* understanding of redemption. They construe the relationship between creation, Jesus Christ and the eschaton in a manner that is significantly different from Bavinck's construal, and this shift in understanding has major implications for the

¹ Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained, Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985). It will be referred to as *CR* in subsequent citations.

² Gordon J. Spykman, *Reformational Theology, A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992). It will be referred to as *RT* in subsequent citations.

³ There are also differences between these two works. However, in terms of the subject matter being compared in this chapter, they are sufficiently similar to serve together as examples of contemporary Dutch neo-Calvinism.

overall shape of Dutch neo-Calvinist theology and philosophy.⁴ While the works of Bavinck and the later neo-Calvinists are sufficiently similar to be appropriately described in terms of the one theological tradition of Dutch neo-Calvinism, the differences between them also warrant careful description and critique.

This chapter functions as a prolegomenon to the heart of the issue. Before analyzing these respective understandings of redemption one must note the character of the relation between God and the creation. Both Bavinck and the later neo-Calvinists emphasize the correlation between creation and redemption so that for both to a great extent the character of redemption is inseparable from the character of the relation between God and the creation. Consequently, this chapter will provide a comparative description of the character of this relation, and the next will focus specifically on the character of redemption, which can also be described as the goal of the relation between God and the creation.

Before comparing Bavinck's theology with these contemporary publications, a brief survey of the historical context is required. Herman Bavinck clearly situated his theology within the Calvinist Reformed tradition. Time and again his treatment of topics in the *Dogmatics* begins with a historical survey that climaxes with the

⁴ Neo-Calvinism subsequent to Bavinck has a strong philosophical tradition which also claims him as part of its ancestry.

Reformed view, which inevitably is deemed to provide the strongest description of the matter at hand. Bavinck's self-positioning is historically appropriate, but subsequent theologians and philosophers have perceived Bavinck and his older contemporary, Abraham Kuyper, not only as Calvinist thinkers, but as the founders of a sub-tradition within Calvinism which is now commonly referred to as Dutch neo-Calvinism.⁵

This shift within neo-Calvinism from Bavinck's eschatological understanding of redemption to the later creational understanding did not, of course, happen all at once. This study will not describe the development of this shift in historical detail, but will point out factors that contributed to it. Differences were already apparent between the thought of Bavinck and Abraham Kuyper,⁶ although those who have reflected on the neo-Calvinist

⁵ Gordon Spykman describes the tradition within which he situates his dogmatics by writing, "Starting with John Calvin, we take a long leap forward into the nineteenth century... (to) the leader of the neo-Calvinist revival, Abraham Kuyper. This Calvinian tradition in dogmatics proper has come to more lasting expression in the time-tested work of Kuyper's colleague, Herman Bavinck." (RT, p. 6.) Albert M. Wolters also identifies Kuyper and Bavinck as the principal founding fathers of Dutch neo-Calvinism. (See, for example, "The Intellectual Milieu of Herman Dooyeweerd" in *The Legacy of Herman Dooyeweerd*, ed. C. T. McIntire [Lanham: University Press of America, 1985], pp. 4f.)

⁶ John Bolt develops this thesis in two works: *Christian and Reformed Today* (Jordan Station: Paideia Press, 1984), pp. 141-147 and *The Imitation of Christ Theme in the Cultural-Ethical Ideal of Herman Bavinck* (see especially ch. 5, "Bavinck, Kuyper and the Imitation of Christ.") Though he does not analyze the topic, Eugene Heideman observes that "it has often been assumed that Bavinck was a more mild, deliberate, and peaceful reflection of Abraham Kuyper. On the one hand, this serves as a partial explanation for the lack of interest in the work of Bavinck, and on

tradition are not in agreement concerning the importance of these differences.⁷ While these men did have significant disagreements during their lifetimes, these were for the most part limited to the genre of private correspondence; in public the younger Bavinck's usually conciliatory disposition often yielded to the older Kuiper's more aggressive one, thereby masking the differences between them.⁸ A further difficulty in analyzing their differences lies in the fact that they can be described in terms of their differing temperaments, methodologies, theologies, ecclesiologies, and strategies for dealing with the growing pains of a young movement. Isolating specifically theological differences from this tangled web is no mean feat. These differences have become more clearly apparent through the further development of their respective theological emphases by their successors, which requires one to work backwards from the later divergences to the earlier seeds of these divergences. G. C. Berkouwer, who describes the differences between their subsequent influence on others as "considerable," observes that "Kuiper's influence worked through the development of the Philosophy of the Law-Idea. But Bavinck raised theological questions that continued to play a crucial role

the other hand, explains why he has so often been misunderstood. It is unfortunate that this identification of the thought of the two men should be allowed to go on unhampered and unchallenged." (*The Relation of Revelation and Reason in E. Brunner and H. Bavinck*, p.6.)

⁷ For a succinct summary of the debate, see John Bolt, *Imitation of Christ Theme*, pp. 1-6.

⁸ Cf. Bremmer, *Bavinck en zijn Tijdgenoten*, p. 107, and *Bavinck als Dogmaticus*, p. 64.

in mainstream theology after he had gone."⁹

At this point no consensus exists concerning how Bavinck's theology differs from that of Kuyper, partly because of the complexities described above, and partly because careful, in-depth analysis remains to be done. To date the clearest discussion of the matter can be found in John Bolt's *The Imitation of Christ Theme in the Cultural-Ethical Ideal of Herman Bavinck*, and a great deal of helpful groundwork is provided in R. H. Bremmer's works, *Bavinck en zijn Tijdgenoten* and *Bavinck als Dogmaticus*. These two men, however, do not agree in defining the difference (which, in itself, illustrates the state of the issue). Bremmer locates the primary distinction in their understandings of the doctrine of common grace, Bolt in the imitation of Christ theme.¹⁰ Though analyzing the difference between Bavinck and Kuyper lies beyond the scope of this study, I will suggest that the views of Bremmer and Bolt are not mutually exclusive. Both men's theses suggest that the area of difference focuses on construals of the relation between the doctrine of creation and Christology. The concluding reflections in Bolt's analysis support this view. In highlighting the imitation of Christ theme in Bavinck, he notes that this emphasis "provides a corrective to socio-cultural triumphalism, as well as to the socio-political conservatism and ideologization tendencies of a political theology which is grounded exclusively in the doctrine of creation and regeneration and the subsequent

⁹ *A Half Century of Theology*, p. 13.

¹⁰ Bolt, *ICT*, pp. 4-9.

emphasis upon creation ordinances and the cultural antithesis."¹¹ Broadly speaking, one can say that Bavinck executed greater care in qualifying his understanding of creation in the light of his Christology.

This incipient difference between Bavinck and Kuyper became more clearly apparent during the generation which followed these two men as Dutch neo-Calvinism developed its thought primarily in the area of philosophy. Its leading philosophers, Herman Dooyeweerd and Th. Vollenhoven, built more consciously on the work of Kuyper than that of Bavinck.¹² Bavinck's influence was more clearly limited to the area of theology, impacting the work of G. C. Berkouwer in the Netherlands and Louis Berkhof in North America. During the past generation Dutch neo-Calvinism has become firmly rooted on North American soil, and the two books mentioned above are among the leading fruit of this transplanting.¹³ An historical analysis of the shift from Bavinck to Wolters and Spykman lies beyond the scope of this study. Here, proceeding from the

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 343. In Bolt's judgment Bavinck's corrective is directed at the views and actions of Kuyper and other neo-Calvinists.

¹² As will be seen later in this chapter, at the heart of this shift is an attempt to correct a problem which was perceived in the work of Bavinck and Kuyper.

¹³ They are certainly not the only ones. Other works written for a lay readership include John Bolt's *Christian and Reformed Today* and *The Transforming Vision, Shaping a Christian Worldview* by Brian J. Walsh and J. Richard Middleton (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1984), in addition to numerous works written in a more scholarly vein.

observation that a theological shift has taken place in the understanding of redemption, I will describe its fundamental character and evaluate the congruity of this shift with the Scriptures in general and the Reformed tradition in particular.

This chapter will compare these respective understandings of the relation between God and the creation by first comparing the understanding of revelation developed by Wolters and Spykman with that of Bavinck. Then it will examine their concepts of creation law, which also requires one to examine the later neo-Calvinist concern that Bavinck's theology suffered from neo-Platonic influences in its descriptions of the relation between God and the creation. Finally, this chapter will evaluate the later neo-Calvinist corrective of the problem it perceived in Bavinck.

Revelation

In chapter two I described Bavinck's understanding of revelation, developing the thesis that this understanding leads into the heart of his theology as he responded to the most pressing issues of his time. For comparison purposes it is appropriate to begin with the later neo-Calvinist understanding of revelation as well. This later understanding bears strong similarities to Bavinck's, but it describes revelation more systematically in terms of the three forms of the Word of God. Both Spykman and Wolters (like Bavinck) seek to develop a theology and philosophy which is completely faithful to the Scriptures while also recognizing that

God's revelation cannot be limited to the Scriptures. Spykman begins *Reformational Theology* by asserting his desire to begin with Calvin's hermeneutical principle: "Try to say no more than Scripture, for this is speculation; try also to say no less than Scripture, for this is to impoverish God's Word."¹⁴ This affirmation of the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura* cannot be construed to limit God's revelation to Scripture alone. Rather, "taking Scripture seriously as the Word of God leads us to recognize that there is more to the Word of God than Scripture alone."¹⁵ Spykman situates himself within the tradition of "Calvin, Luther and others (who) held that God reveals himself in creation and in Christ as well as in Scripture."¹⁶

Having affirmed that the Scriptures attest that God is revealed through these three forms of the Word of God, Spykman continues by explicating how these three forms work together to reveal the one, true God.

God's single Word impinges itself on our lives in three ways...Christian scholarship is called to discern the norms of God's creational Word for our life in his world, illumined and directed by his Word in Scripture, under the regal authority of his Word incarnate, so that thus we may learn to "lead every thought captive in obedience to Christ."¹⁷

Spykman continues by expanding on this succinct description of the

¹⁴ RT, p. 6.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 83f.

complementary character of these three forms of revelation, beginning with the relation between creation and Scripture.

With respect to its nature and extent, what is true of biblical revelation in its own unique way also holds for creational revelation in its own unique way. By his original and abiding Word for creation God imparted his good order and direction to life in the world. Despite sin, by that Word he still maintains the structures and functions of the cosmos. Then, to overcome the misdirecting effects of sin, God republished his word in lingual form to redirect our lives to their original intent and purpose. In extent, therefore, both modes of revelation are global in authority.¹⁸

The very different forms of creational and Scriptural revelation share an all-encompassing global orientation, but a closer examination reveals another significant commonality between them.

Biblical revelation includes a great deal that has no parallel whatever with creational revelation. In a fundamental sense the Scriptures are the story of our sin in Adam and God's forgiving grace in Christ. Creation, by contrast, does not tell a story at all, nor does it tell anything of that sin or grace. As a message of salvation its revelation is useless. In that regard the two revelations are not comparable. They are comparable, however, as manifestations of God's law, as two ways of making known his will, specifically for human life...Scriptures are the verbal commentary on the dimly perceived sign language of creation.¹⁹

Central to this understanding is that the Word of God revealed in

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

¹⁹ Albert M. Wolters, *CR*, pp. 31, 33. Wolters understands Calvin's comments concerning using the Scriptures as spectacles to come to know God the Creator (cf. *Institutes*, I.6.1) as meaning that the Scriptures enable one to read "the book of nature" and thus "discern creational normativity." (*CR*, p. 32) He echoes the thoughts of Abraham Kuyper: "Our best Calvinistic confessions speak of two means whereby we know God, viz., the Scriptures and Nature. And Calvin, instead of simply treating Nature as an accessorial item as so many theologians were inclined to do, was accustomed to compare the Scriptures to a pair of spectacles, enabling us to decipher again the divine Thoughts, written by God's hand in the book of Nature, which had become obliterated in consequence of the curse." (*Lectures on Calvinism* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931], p. 120)

creation is primary, not just chronologically but also ontically. The Scriptures are fundamentally a handbook for exegeting the sin-obscured creation Word. "Scripture is the noetic key to a right understanding of the ontic order of created reality."²⁰ Scripture's "message is qualified by the prefix 're,' the 're-' factor. It is a redemptive re-publication of God's enduring Word. It is a second, revised edition of God's creational Word, now in lingual form."²¹ Originally, creational revelation was sufficient. But since the fall, "given the reality of sin with its profound and sweeping effect on our minds, it is now 'by Scripture alone' as Word of God that we can begin to arrive at a renewed understanding of God's Word for creation and his Word incarnate in Christ."²² Creation is the fundamental revelation of God's word, and Scripture provides the epistemological key that unlocks its meaning.

But God's revelation in creation and the Scriptures is also complemented by his revelation in his son, Jesus Christ. In the descriptions of Spykman and Wolters, the relation between Jesus Christ and the other two forms of revelation is not articulated as clearly as that between creation and Scripture. Spykman integrates the three by declaring that "the authority of any given passage in Scripture is bound up intimately with its creationally based,

²⁰ Spykman, *RT*, p. 76.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 77.

covenantly focused, kingdom-oriented, Christ-centered thrust."²³ Both Spykman and Wolters perceive Jesus Christ as an additional epistemological key for discerning God's Word in creation. After noting that the Scriptures help us to interpret the creation order, Wolters continues by suggesting that those who question the knowability of the creation order "downplay the renewing power of Jesus Christ in restoring our faculty of discernment."²⁴ In a similar vein Spykman suggests that "Christ Jesus as Word of God is the key to the meaning of creation. His person and work is the hermeneutic key to the meaning of life in the world. Only a Christ-mediated, Christ-centered theology will do."²⁵ These articulations point to a strong relationship between Jesus Christ and creation order in later neo-Calvinism, but the character of this relationship is not described very clearly. This lack of clarity serves as an early manifestation of the fundamental problem in later neo-Calvinist thought (to be discussed in the latter half of this chapter): its construal of the relation between creation and Jesus Christ.

A primary concern for both Wolters and Spykman is that the failure to recognize the significance of God's revelation in creation leads to a dualistic theology which enervates the power of the gospel. This concern, which can be discerned throughout their

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

²⁴ *CR*, p. 29.

²⁵ *RT*, p. 84.

works, came into clear focus at a pastors' conference²⁶ where both men addressed the topic of fundamentalism.

I propose to define fundamentalism as that form of American protestantism which is most consistently anti-creational, i.e., is dominated by a number of non-integral or dualistic worldviews...Fundamentalism is an extreme form of nature-grace protestantism which on the worldview level stands almost everywhere opposed to authentic Calvinism.²⁷

Fundamentalists seem to be in a hurry to get past creation on their way to the cross and the resurrection. If we fail to do justice to creation, however, in the end we also fail to do justice to redemption. Fundamentalism tends to see God as the Savior who snatches perishing souls out of a perishing world. And many CRC people²⁸ live on a daily diet of such gospel preaching, which tends to undermine the Biblical storyline of creation, fall and redemption.²⁹

In the view of Wolters and Spykman, theology which denies the existence of God's revelation in creation is dualistic because it separates redemption as it is revealed in Scripture and in Jesus Christ from the creation, considers the creation to be irredeemable, and therefore defines redemption as being liberated from the sinful creation for heavenly glory.

Herman Bavinck's understanding of revelation bears both significant similarities and significant differences with those of Wolters and Spykman. Bavinck also recognizes the creation, the

²⁶ The event was a conference for pastors of the Christian Reformed Church held at Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa in April, 1986.

²⁷ Albert M. Wolters, "The Nature of Fundamentalism," *Pro Rege* 15 (1986), p. 6, 9.

²⁸ Members of the Christian Reformed Church.

²⁹ Gordon Spykman, "Fundamentalism in the CRC: A Critique." *Pro Rege* 15 (1986), p. 16.

Scriptures, and Jesus Christ as primary forms of revelation, and is concerned with understanding the interrelations between these three. Bavinck also affirms that the creation is significant because it is first chronologically, and therefore has established important parameters within which the other forms are given and received. Though Bavinck was not challenged to contend with the forces of fundamentalism as Wolters and Spykman were, he too perceived dualistic theology in different guises as gospel-energating and asserted the importance of God's revelation in creation as an antidote to such dualistic reductionism.³⁰

But beyond these commonalities, there are significant differences between Bavinck, on the one hand, and Wolters and Spykman on the other. In the view of the latter, all God's revelation is an elaboration upon and clarification of his revelation in creation. Therefore, "Christian theology looks at the Bible in the light of the basic categories of creation" and "Christ is intimately present in the law of creation."³¹ Creation is not just first chronologically, but also primary in an ontological sense, i.e., nothing substantially new is added to God's relationship with his creation. In the creation God establishes his fundamental truth, it defines what is most real in

³⁰ Each point in this paragraph summarizes material from Chapter 2, and thus is not developed in detail here.

³¹ Wolters, *CR*, pp. 9, 21.

the universe, and subsequent forms of revelation seek to clarify this reality and re-establish it as the fundamental truth.

Bavinck affirms that creation is first chronologically, but he does not take the next step of asserting its ontological primacy. Bavinck does perceive a close correlation between creation and redemption so that redemption history occurs within the parameters established in the creation, but he is unwilling to declare that the creation is the repository of the fundamental truth concerning the nature of reality. In contrast, he makes two other moves. First, he asserts the primacy of Jesus Christ in relation to all of God's revelation. In the introduction to his description of general revelation he declares,

Deze gansche openbaring, welke uit en door en tot God is, heeft in den persoon van Christus haar middelpunt, en bereikt tegelijk in Hem haar hoogtepunt. Niet het schitterende firmament noch de machtige natuur, geen vorst of groote der aarde, geen wijsgeer of kunstenaar, maar de Zoon des menschen is de hoogste openbaring Gods. Christus is het vleeschgeworden Woord, dat in den beginne bij God en zelf God was, de Eeniggeborene van den Vader, het Beeld Gods, het afschijnsel zijner heerlijkheid, en het uitgedrukte beeld zijner zelfstandigheid; wie Hem gezien heeft, heeft den Vader gezien, Joh. 14: 9. In dat geloof staat de Christen.³²

³² MD, p. 27. "This whole revelation, which is of God and through him and unto him, has its mid-point and at the same time its high-point in the person of Christ. It is not the sparkling firmament, nor mighty nature, nor any prince or genius of the earth, nor any philosopher or artist, but the Son of man that is the highest revelation of God. Christ is the Word become flesh, which in the beginning was with God and which was God, the Only-begotten of the Father, the Image of God, the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person; who has seen him has seen the Father (John 14: 9). In that faith the Christian stands." (RF, p. 36, alt.)

Bavinck would not say that Jesus Christ first of all serves to clarify and restore God's revelation in creation. Rather, in Jesus Christ God reveals himself most fully and concretely, and this revelation is received within the parameters of his revelation in creation.

Secondly, Bavinck differs with Wolters and Spykman concerning the goal of revelation. In the view of the latter, all revelation has as its goal the restoration of the goodness of creation. The eschaton is the restoration of the proton. On Bavinck's account, revelation is progressive. In the dynamic of this progression, revelation reaches its high-point in Jesus Christ because in him it is most clear; the glory of God is most fully revealed. But this high-point is not the end-point, but rather a mid-point. The end-point or goal of revelation is the new creation, in which God and his creatures dwell in intimate fellowship. Revelation "heeft haar einddoel immers niet in zichzelf, niet in Christus, die middelaar is, maar in de nieuwe menscheid, in het wonen Gods bij zijn volk."³³

This difference in the understanding of the interrelations of the three primary forms of revelation between Bavinck and Wolters and Spykman contains in seed form the fundamental difference

³³ *GD IV*, p. 355. Revelation "has its end goal not in itself, nor in Christ, who is the mediator, but in the new humanity, in God's living with his people."

between the former's eschatological understanding of redemption and the latter's understanding of a creation restored. The implications of this difference become more clear in comparing their doctrines of creation and the character of the relation between God and the creation described by this doctrine.

The doctrine of creation for Spykman and Wolters

The primacy of creational revelation in the thought of Spykman and Wolters leads to a corresponding primacy of the doctrine of creation in the overall scheme of their theology and philosophy.³⁴ This primacy is not simply chronological, but, much more significantly, ontological in character. I will argue that for both men the shape of their theology is rooted in its doctrine of creation. This doctrine is centered on two claims: first, that the character of creation is appropriately described in terms of law-order; second, that the Scriptural account of the history of redemption is best described as creation-fall-redemption, a narrative that is rooted in and bound by the creation so that the goal of this history can be described as 'creation restored.' The first of these two claims focuses on the *character* of the relationship between God and the creation; the second on the *goal* of this relationship. The remainder of this chapter will explore the first claim; the next chapter, the second.

Concerning the general parameters of the doctrine of creation, both men affirm the traditions of Reformed orthodoxy as they are widely confessed in Reformed churches today. These include positing the radical character of the Creator/creature distinction

³⁴ Both Spykman and Wolters endorse the neo-Calvinist conviction that theology requires philosophical prolegomena, and thus their works contain many claims that apply to both theology and philosophy.

(and thus the contingent character of creation),³⁵ *creatio ex nihilo*,³⁶ the goodness of the creation,³⁷ the unique place of humanity as the *imago Dei*,³⁸ and the significance of the cultural mandate as a command to develop the potential of God's good creation.³⁹ These broad parameters find Spykman and Wolters in fundamental agreement with Herman Bavinck, John Calvin, and indeed, much of Christian theology. From this foundation of commonality we can proceed to examine the most important characteristic of Wolters' and Spykman's doctrines of creation: law-order.

Having ascertained that creation functions as the primary form of God's revelation for Wolters and Spykman, we can begin to describe the character of this creation. Wolters explains that, not only in his view, but in that of neo-Calvinism in general, creation is construed fundamentally as a reality that is characterized by order or law.

For the neo-Calvinists, creation was defined by law. The order of creation was a law-order. This is hardly surprising, since a positive notion of law has always been a hallmark of Calvinism in general. If the sovereignty of God is a central, if not the central, theme of Calvinism, then God's law must needs be prominent also, since law and sovereignty go together. To say that God is sovereign is to say that what he says goes, that this word is law. This applies not only to soteriology, but also to cosmology. God lays down the law to

³⁵ Spykman, *RT*, p. 65; Wolters, *CR*, pp. 12-24.

³⁶ Spykman, *RT*, pp. 158-163; Wolters, *CR*, p. 19.

³⁷ Spykman, *RT*, pp. 143f; Wolters, *CR*, pp. 41-43.

³⁸ Spykman, *RT*, pp. 223-228; Wolters, *CR*, pp. 36f.

³⁹ Spykman, *RT*, pp. 256f.; Wolters, *CR*, p. 35-41.

all his creatures. Consequently, we find prominent in the vocabulary of the neo-Calvinists such terms as *levenswet*, the creational ordinance applicable to the life or functioning of a particular kind of creature, *wetsidee*, "law-idea" or "cosmomic idea", and *ordinantien*, the old-fashioned Dutch plural of the word designating a creation ordinance.⁴⁰

Because creation is, as Wolters notes, "defined by law," this creation law is all-encompassing. "There is nothing in human life that does not belong to the created order."⁴¹ This all-encompassing law must be distinguished into two types: laws of nature and norms. Wolters illustrates the distinction: "The stone obeys necessarily, the eagle responds instinctively, but a person must exercise personal responsibility: we are called to positivize the norm, to apply it to the specific situations in our lives. All of human life, in all its vast array of cultural, societal, and personal relationships, is normed in this sense."⁴² Because creation is ontologically fundamental, and creation is understood in terms of its character as law-order, it is not surprising that Spykman asserts that "the decisive question in theology is that of normativity,"⁴³ and "the law is the vital pulsebeat of covenant living."⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Wolters, "Creation Order: A Historical Look at our Heritage" in *God's Order for Creation* (Potchefstroom: Institute for Reformational Studies, 1994), p. 48.

⁴¹ Wolters, *CR*, p. 22.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁴³ Spykman, *RT*, p. 70.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 367.

In addition to its all-encompassing character, Wolters and Spykman describe two other facets of creation law-order: its universal, enduring character, and its availability to human cognition. Concerning the former, Spykman declares, "As long as the earth and the heavens endure, the law of God impinges itself with full normativity on all his creatures."⁴⁵ In the creation order God "put in place the permanently normative environment for our life together in this world."⁴⁶ This constancy must be understood in terms of three qualifying characteristics. First, this permanent normativity cannot be construed in such a manner that the creation is conceived as an ahistorical, static entity. Rather, the creation order establishes the parameters for normative historical development.

Creation is not something that, once made, remains a static quantity. There is, as it were, a growing up (though not in a biological sense), an unfolding of creation. This takes place through the task that people have been given of bringing to fruition the possibilities of development implicit in the work of God's hands. The creational law is crying out to be positivized in new and amazing ways. We are called to participate in the ongoing creational work of God, to be God's helper in executing to the end the blueprint for his masterpiece.⁴⁷

On this account, the cultural mandate is perceived as a call to positivize (i.e., to make positive or concrete manifestations of an

⁴⁵ Spykman, *RT*, p. 343.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

⁴⁷ Wolters, *CR*, pp. 37f.

abstraction) creational law.⁴⁸ Such positivization affirms both the enduring character of creation order and the historical character of human development within the creation.

Second, this dynamic of the relation between history and the creation order is also present in the history of redemption. God's redemptive work respects the creation order. For example, even though the work of the Holy Spirit may be described as "mysterious and sovereignly free, the Spirit does not act contrary to 'nature' but in accord with it, unfolding its good potentials, even in a fallen world. For when God 'fills, moves and quickens all things by the power of the Spirit,' he 'does so according to the character that he bestowed upon each kind by the law of creation.'"⁴⁹ Furthermore, God's work of redemption undergoes significant shifts throughout history, but these shifts in no way affect the abiding importance and constancy of the creation order. For example, Wolters notes that with the coming of Christ,

the law is fulfilled in that the shadow is replaced by the substance, and Jewish law is no longer binding for the people of God. On the other hand, the law is fulfilled in that Christ reaffirms its deepest meaning (see Matt. 5: 17). In other words, insofar as the Mosaic law is addressed to a particular phase of the history of God's people it has lost its validity, but insofar as it points to the enduring

⁴⁸ "The connection between creation and cultural mandate is so close that some Neo-Calvinists have preferred to speak of the 'creation mandate' instead. Culture, and indeed all of history, is the bring forth, through human responsible action, of the riches latent in God's good creation." Albert Wolters, "Creation Order, A Historical Look at our Heritage," p. 56.

⁴⁹ Spykman, *RT*, p. 425. Spykman is quoting from Calvin's *Institutes*, II, 2, 16.

normativity of God's creation order it retains its validity.⁵⁰

In a similar vein Spykman notes that "our norm is obedience to the 'already' of the creation order, redemptively updated in the cross and resurrection."⁵¹ God's involvement with his creation is such that from the beginning to the end of time this involvement occurs in harmony with and within the parameters established by the creation law-order.

Third, in addition to the constancy of the creation order throughout the shifts in the history of redemption, Wolters also posits a distinction between general and particular laws. "Laws of nature are usually understood to be universally valid, and yet individual natural occurrences involve unique features that are not reducible to the aspect of universal regularity. God's will for human beings is not only general but also particular, touching us in what has traditionally been designated 'calling' or 'guidance.'"⁵² The particular has a more personal dimension than the general. What Wolters terms 'particular laws' help us to see that God's law-ordered way with his world cannot be construed "as entailing the absolute sense of a metaphysical determinism divorced from God's personal characteristic of faithfulness or trustworthiness. There is no tension between the universal and

⁵⁰ CR, p. 35.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 524.

⁵² CR, p. 17.

particular in God's law."⁵³ God did not establish his law within a creation order and then disappear in a deistic fashion. The reality of particular law evidences the ongoing involvement of a personal God with his creation.

Wolters' and Spykman's insistence upon the universal, enduring character of the creation law-order is coupled with an equally firm declaration that this law-order is cognitively available. Spykman describes this availability in general terms:

The givenness of God's relationship to the world means that "knowing him not," they nevertheless "know him" (Romans 1: 18-25). The norms which hold for the life of the world are immediately present to the consciousness of all men. Thus the creation order establishes a certain ontic commonality and solidarity among all peoples, even in the midst of the radical noetic polarities among differing faith communities. Based on creation, Christian affirmations are not wholly foreign to others.⁵⁴

Wolters is more specific in his descriptions of this availability. First, he describes it in terms of an intuition. "People have an intuitive sense of normative standards for conduct. One word for that intuitive attunement to creational normativity is conscience."⁵⁵ Second, he speaks of the faculty of discernment, and suggests that those who deny this availability "downplay the renewing power of Jesus Christ in restoring our faculty of discernment."⁵⁶ Admittedly, discernment may not render the

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁵⁴ *RT*, p. 180.

⁵⁵ *CR*, p. 25.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

creation order as clear as one might prefer, but, continues Wolters,

the lack of assurance or unanimity does not invalidate the basic Christian confession that there is a will of God for my life, that it can be known, and that I must seek it and act on it. That involves the perceptive experience and investigation of immediate reality, teamwork and sharing with brothers and sisters in the same field, earnest prayer for guidance and insight, constant reference to Scripture, and familiarity with its overarching themes.⁵⁷

Finally, Wolters perceives a link between the creation order and human rationality. "The creation order speaks with a persuasive voice through both the structure of our rationality, so that we are forced to give due weight to cogent argumentation, and through the evidence of other created things, which we may have overlooked, repressed or misconstrued."⁵⁸ These three, intuition, discernment and rationality, are not so much separate routes to perceiving the creation order as three interwoven strands of the one way in which humankind comes to know this order.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 30f.

⁵⁸ "Dutch Neo-Calvinism: Worldview, Philosophy and Rationality" in *Rationality in the Calvinian Tradition*, eds. H. Hart, J. VanderHoeven and N. Wolterstorff (Lanham: University Press of America, 1983), p. 130.

⁵⁹ Wolters discusses the issue of availability more thoroughly than Spykman (albeit in a more *ad hoc* than systematic fashion), and he hints at the limitations of this availability, but he does not discuss these limitations systematically. In the quotation cited above he makes passing reference to the "lack of assurance or unanimity" concerning knowledge of the creation order. At the conclusion of a lecture on creation order in neo-Calvinism he notes, "I do see two problems with the overall approach to creation which I have sketched, one epistemological and one ethical. I will do no more than name them. The epistemological one is the question of the knowability of creation ordinances, especially the normative ones. What methodological safeguards can we devise against epistemological subjectivism in establishing what is normative? Do

This brief sketch of the notion of creation order in the works of Spykman and Wolters describes its fundamental parameters: its roots in the doctrine of creation, its defining of the creation in terms of a law-order which is both universal and constant, and its cognitive availability to humankind. These parameters describe the character of the relation between God and his creation. In terms of our purposes here, one more significant descriptor can be asserted in terms of this notion of law-order: Wolters and Spykman perceive this understanding to be both in continuity with and distinct from the construal of creation order developed by Herman Bavinck. We will now turn to describing their perception of this relationship.

A comparison of Wolters and Spykman with Bavinck

Both Albert Wolters and Gordon Spykman perceive their thought to be part of the stream of contemporary neo-Calvinism which traces its roots back to Herman Bavinck and Abraham Kuyper on its way further back to John Calvin. It is not surprising, then, that they also perceive a fundamental continuity between their understanding of the doctrine of creation and Bavinck's. While this continuity is rooted in the broad contours of this doctrine (as described in the previous section), it extends into their notion of creation

we have no recourse but to appeal to intuition or self-evidence?" ("Creation Order: A Historical Look at our Heritage," p. 60) Wolters simply raises the question, but does not attempt to suggest a solution. The issue is important for contemporary neo-Calvinism. A good example of the debate is recorded in the proceedings of the RUNA conference, *A Reformed University in a Secularized and Pluralized World*, March 11 and 12, 1993 in Grand Rapids, Mich.

order as well.

Wolters and Spykman both make passing references to Bavinck's theology numerous times in their writings. Here we will briefly survey significant citations of Bavinck's work which they employ to support their understanding of creation order. First, they hear Bavinck describing creation order as that which holds together the fundamentally organic unity of God's good creation, within which there is a rich diversity. Creation order is described as a reality established and upheld by God's activity in creation and by providence. "In his providence God does not negate, but respects and unfolds everything which he called into being through creation. Thus He maintains and rules all creatures in harmony with their natures."⁶⁰ Spykman affirms a theme which was noted in the previous chapter: Bavinck perceives an orderliness in the creation which describes its fundamental coherence as one work of God, a unity within which we can see a kaleidoscopic variety as each creature celebrates its God-given uniqueness.

Second, both men quote Bavinck to reinforce their point that creation order functions as the foundation for God's call to humanity to obey his will in every area and sphere of creaturely

⁶⁰ Spykman, "Sphere-sovereignty in Calvin and the Calvinist tradition" in *Exploring the Heritage of John Calvin*, ed. David E. Holwerda (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), pp. 180f., quoting Bavinck, *GD II*, pp. 569-571. In this essay he also quotes *GD II*, pp. 399f. to make the same point (and cites this identical quote in *RT*, p. 188).

existence as the creation order is unfolded throughout human history. The gospel "informs all earthly relationships in a reforming and renewing way. The various spheres of human life, family, society, state, commerce, occupation, business, farming, industry, science, art, etc., have a certain measure of peculiar independence, which must be ascribed to the will of God as revealed in their very nature. These spheres develop and change in the course of time, each one according to its own nature, under the direction of God's providence."⁶¹ The ordered character of creatureliness is not simply descriptive, but also prescriptive.

Wolters and Spykman, therefore, perceive their notion of creation order to be in continuity with Bavinck's descriptions of creation order as a reality established and upheld by God, i.e., a constant reality, as that which is unfolded during the course of human history, as that which is universal in scope, and as that which holds together both the diversity and the organic unity of the creation. Their claim for continuity here is certainly well founded. Each of these emphases is consistent with the description of Bavinck's doctrine of creation presented in the preceding chapter, although the manner of working out the implications of these claims is not identical (as will be seen in the next

⁶¹ Spykman, "Sphere-sovereignty," p. 181, quoting Bavinck, "Christelijke Beginselen en Maatschappelijke Verhoudingen," pp. 43-44. He also quotes *GD IV*, pp. 416, 418 to make this same point. In his description of this issue, Wolters cites Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation*, pp. 265, 253 ("Creation Order," p. 50), *Our Reasonable Faith*, p. 164 (*Ibid.*, p. 52), and "Common Grace," p. 60 (*Ibid.*).

chapter).

In addition to these similarities, however, there are two significant areas of discontinuity which require careful scrutiny: one philosophical and the other Christological. The former is noted by both Wolters and Spykman, allowing us to analyze their description of a philosophical shift from early to late neo-Calvinist construals of creation order. This dissimilarity, concerning the character of the relation between God and the creation, will be analyzed carefully in the following section. The second, Christological dissimilarity comes into clearer focus in their respective understandings of the goal of redemption, and therefore will be discussed in the next chapter.

Wolters and Spykman both note a discontinuity between their thought and Bavinck's concerning the philosophical foundations for understanding creation order. Spykman does not describe this difference in detail, preferring to emphasize his continuity with Bavinck. His one reference to this discontinuity is relatively oblique:

Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd set out to open up (the early neo-Calvinist) life-vision more fully in terms of a penetrating and coherent philosophical analysis of the structures and functions of created reality. In doing so they also sought to overcome the remnants of scholastic (dualist and synthesist) thinking still present in the theology of Kuyper and his contemporaries. The day is now past that Reformed dogmatics can afford to be unaware of the importance of a Christian philosophy for its theology.⁶²

⁶² *RT*, p. 100.

Bavinck is present as the most significant (although unnamed) of Kuyper's "contemporaries," and Spykman simply indicates that the shift which took place is fundamentally philosophical in character.

Wolters gives more detail, providing a brief summary of this philosophical development within Dutch neo-Calvinism. He perceives an historical shift from a neo-Platonic perception of order to a cosmomic one. "The initial attempts to articulate a Calvinistic philosophy were still very much indebted to the tradition of Christian neo-Platonism," and its "great chain of being."⁶³ Wolters traces the development of an ontology centered on rationality from Plato through Plotinus to Augustine. "Augustine read his Bible with the aid of this neo-Platonic framework: the One was collapsed into the Intellect and equated with God, so that the Logos of the prologue of John refers simultaneously to the second person of the Trinity and to the complex of Platonic forms as the rational archetype and source of created things."⁶⁴ Wolters' brief historical survey continues with Aquinas, the Reformers, and concludes with Bavinck.

(In) the thought of the early neo-Calvinists the basic features of the paradigm are present: God as *summum ens*, the Son or Logos understood as archetypical ideas in the mind of God, creation as the imposition of ectypical *formae* on matter, evil understood as *privatio boni*, the connection of rationality with the image of God, and so on. Herman Bavinck is perhaps most explicit about the connection of rationality with this underlying ontology (see his booklet on *Christian*

⁶³ "Dutch Neo-Calvinism: Worldview, Philosophy and Rationality," p. 124.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

Scholarship [1904] and his discussion in *The Doctrine of God* [1951]). For him, scholarship was a matter of "thinking God's thoughts after him." Perhaps most telling in this regard is a philosophical dissertation, supervised by Bavinck, which was defended at the Free University in 1917 by H. W. Smit. Entitled *The Philosophy of Nature and Theism*, it simply equated Calvinistic philosophy with a Christianized synthesis of Plato and Aristotle, meaning by this essentially a version of Augustinian neo-Platonism. There continued to be a privileged link between rationality and both reality (true being) and divinity.⁶⁵

In Wolters' understanding, Bavinck's concept of creation order owes more to neo-Platonic philosophy than to Biblical teaching, and therefore Bavinck construes rationality as a reality which transcends the Creator/creature distinction and serves to account for the rational order within the creation.

Wolters continues by describing how subsequent neo-Calvinists such as Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd recognized this problem and "sought to make the categorial distinctions of the biblical worldview intrinsic to their philosophical systematics, and not to accommodate them to inherited patterns."⁶⁶ They made two significant moves. First, they recognized that rationality is creaturely rather than divine. "The point was not to depreciate rationality (everything created by God is good), but to put it in its creaturely place."⁶⁷ Second, "the law, as God's reliable creative command for all creatures, 'took over' from rationality (and its correlate, being) the burden of accounting for the

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

constancy, order and unity of created reality." Therefore, "the creational law as a transcendental *a priori* constitutes the possibility of rationality."⁶⁸ According to Wolters, this shift from rationality to creational law frees theology and philosophy from a metaphysical determinism and thus honors the Biblical descriptions of God more appropriately. In Bavinck's neo-Platonism "the changelessness of creational ordinances was that of metaphysical principles which participate in the eternity of the ideas in the mind of God," whereas "in the thought of Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd, the immutability of creational law is dissociated from the long tradition of Christian logos-speculation, and is grounded directly in the faithfulness of God. For them it is more appropriate to speak of the constancy of the created order, since 'constancy' is an ethical rather than a metaphysical concept."⁶⁹

I concur with Wolters and Spykman in the perception that there exists an important discontinuity between their construal of creation order and that of Bavinck's. However, I do not concur with their description of that discontinuity. What they perceive as a shift from the neo-Platonic to the cosmonomic is not, in my view, a significant shift. I will argue that their understanding of a shift away from pre-Christian (i.e., 'pagan') influences to a

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ "Creation Order: A Historical Look at our Heritage," pp. 54f. Wolters notes that Bavinck's position is clearly expressed in *Christelijke Wereldbeschouwing*, pp. 55-57.

more biblical foundation in fact jettisons crucial biblical underpinnings in favour of other, equally problematic notions, and that the solution they espouse is in fact a greater cause for concern than the problem that Dooyeweerd 'solved.' The argument will proceed in two parts: first, it will examine more carefully the critique of Bavinck as neo-Platonic, and second, it will examine the proposed solution.

Neo-Platonism as described by Albert Wolters is characterised as follows: the relation between the divine and the creaturely is construed as a chain of being. The larger metaphysical principle which holds the chain together is rationality. As a result, the *imago Dei* is conceived primarily in terms of rationality, and creaturely realities are dualistic, i.e., they are rational forms or ideas imposed upon raw material. In this scheme God does not function ultimately as a personal God, but rather as one who illustrates the metaphysical principle of rationality. The identity of Jesus Christ is conceived as the pre-existent Logos through whom all things were made, and thus is the one through whom this rationality is linked to the creation. The question which lies behind this neo-Platonic construal is this: how is one to describe the link between God and his creation? What serves to mediate the relationship between the two? The issue which this question must deal with concerns the fact that any mediator or link which one may posit will inevitably function to delineate in some way the identities of both the Creator and the creature. This

fundamental challenge is captured very aptly in Michael Buckley's concise observation: "god functions as an explanatory factor in a larger, more complex system."⁷⁰ The mediating link functions as an umbrella under whose shape one comes to understand both the character of God and of his creation. In the case of a neo-Platonic construal, the God of the Scriptures is replaced by a god of a metaphysical principle of rationality.

Obviously such a construal does great violence to the integrity of Scripture and the truth of the Christian faith. Therefore, Wolters' charge requires careful scrutiny. He raises his concerns in the context of providing an overview history of neo-Calvinism, presenting a summary account of the shift from the neo-Platonic to the cosmonomic within this tradition. He refers to two of Bavinck's works *im passim* without giving page references,⁷¹ in a footnote he refers to another work,⁷² and the most explicit reference he makes to substantiate his charge is to a doctoral dissertation written by a student under Bavinck's guidance!⁷³ Though the latter piece of evidence is highly questionable, on the whole Wolters is not to be faulted for the paucity of analysis

⁷⁰ *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), p. 349.

⁷¹ Cf. n. 65 above.

⁷² "Creation Order: A Historical Look at our Heritage," p. 55, n. 35, which reads: "For a clear statement of this general position, see Bavinck's *Christelijke Wereldbeschouwing*, esp. 55-57."

⁷³ Cf. n. 65 above.

because such analytic argumentation is beyond the scope of his purposes in these writings. And, in spite of this paucity, he does provide enough ground for us to engage his charge in dialogue here. I will not introduce the aforementioned dissertation into the discussion, but will summarize the works of Bavinck to which Wolters makes reference, analyze them and place them within the wider context of his theology in an effort to determine the extent that they have been infiltrated by neo-Platonic thought.

Bavinck's *The Doctrine of God* is a translation of the majority of GD II.⁷⁴ The work contains two brief sections which specifically enter into dialogue with neo-Platonic thought. In a section entitled "God's Communicable Attributes: Omniscience, Wisdom, Veracity," Bavinck summarizes Augustine's appropriation of Plato's ideas.⁷⁵ After providing a non-evaluative summary of Augustine's teaching, he very briefly surveys the changing meanings of the word 'idea' in modern philosophy, and concludes by relating the notion of 'idea' to the Biblical discussion of 'wisdom.' Bavinck neither endorses nor rejects Augustine's neo-Platonism; his evaluative comments are limited to pointing out that Augustine is not always clear or consistent.⁷⁶ Thus, we need to recall Bavinck's methodology in his dogmatics: his style is eclectic; he seeks to distill elements of truth from any work that he engages.

⁷⁴ Tr. William Hendriksen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 197-199.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

He presents an historical overview of a particular issue, and concludes with his own presentation of the subject.⁷⁷ It is safe to assume that his viewpoint in this section is represented not by his summary of Augustine, but in his concluding section on the relation between 'idea' and 'wisdom.'

Bavinck begins by noting that God "has created all things with wisdom," that "in all his works he is guided by wisdom, by ideas."⁷⁸ These ideas form a link between God and creation.

The ideas in God themselves constitute the "essence of God" insofar as this is the pattern of created things and can be expressed and reflected in finite creatures. Every creature is a revelation of the Deity, and partakes of God's being. The character of this participation is not such that a creature is a modification of God's being or that it has in reality received into itself the divine essence, but every creature has its own distinct essence because in its existence it is an ectype of the divine essence.⁷⁹

Bavinck attempts to use the concept of the ideas to illustrate both the distinction between the Creator and the creature and the relationship between them. Bavinck mentions three additional implications of this concept. First, "God's wisdom is manifest in the creation, ordering, guidance, and government of all things." Second, "there is no 'idea' of sin as such; for sin is not a distinct being but an impairment of being, a deformation." Finally, "God's wisdom is one, and his idea of the universe is one, gradually unfolding itself in the course of the ages, and guiding

⁷⁷ Cf. Chapter 2, pp. 88f.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

reality onward toward the established goal."⁸⁰ In this passage Bavinck treats 'wisdom' and 'ideas' synonymously, and freely employs the non-Biblical philosophical term 'essence' to describe the relation between God and creation. Such language certainly reinforces Wolters' concerns about Bavinck's theology.

A second significant discussion of neo-Platonism occurs in a section entitled "The Trinity in the Old Testament, the Apocrypha, and Philo." After briefly noting that the influence of Greek philosophy is apparent in the Apocrypha, he continues with a summary and thorough rejection of the thought of Philo.⁸¹

Between God and matter (on Philo's account) there can be no direct contact. Before God created the sensible world, he made a plan and conceived the "totality of ideas" or "patterns and energies" of all things. In Philo these ideas are the forces through whose mediation an active relation of God to the world is brought about. These ideas are many in number but they are all comprehended in one highest Logos or Reason, Idea or Force -- the unity of the individual ideas -- the "world (or totality) of ideas." Reason is, as it were, an hypostasis standing between God and the world and partaking of the nature of both.⁸²

Bavinck lists four reasons for rejecting this construal: (1) it "is derived from the Platonic dualism between God and the material universe," a dualism which is foreign to the OT. As a result, "the boundary-line which in the OT always separates the creature from the Creator has been erased."⁸³ (2) The OT meanings of 'word' and

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 259-263.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 260.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

'wisdom' are distorted. "In the OT, the primary significance of 'word' is not God's reason or intellection, even less an idea image of plan of the universe, a 'totality of ideas,' but the spoken word by means of which God creates and preserves all things. Similarly, 'wisdom' in Job and Proverbs is not pictured as a divine attribute, but as a person possessed and ordained by God from eternity, searched and consulted in connection with the creation of the world."⁸⁴ (3) "The mediating entities in Philo and Jewish theology have no soteriological significance. To Philo an incarnation of 'Reason' would have seemed absurd; in the NT the incarnation of 'Word' is God's highest revelation."⁸⁵ (4) In Philo's thought there is no room for a Biblical understanding of the Holy Spirit as it is described in the OT. Therefore, "it is dualism with a vengeance. The antithesis between God and the universe remains unchanged; the world remains something entirely separate from God."⁸⁶ Here Bavinck is much more overtly critical of neo-Platonic thought than in the previous citation. These lengthy summaries from *The Doctrine of God* illustrate that Bavinck does develop a line of affinity with neo-Platonic thought, while also clearly rejecting important elements of this tradition.

Before analyzing these affinities and rejections more carefully, I will also look at one more work to which Wolters makes

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

reference, *Christelijke Wereldbeschouwing*, pp. 55-57. In the context of a section which describes the creational diversity which is held together in a coherent unity by God, Bavinck concludes, "Hierdoor geleid, kon de Christelijke filosofie dan ook in gewijzigden zin de Platonisch-Aristotelische leer van de ideeën, de *formae* overnemen."⁸⁷ These ideas are not merely subjective. Rather, they "zijn te beschouwen als de objectieve ideeën, die aan eene veelheid van deelen orde en samenhang schenken en ze tot eene organische eenheid verbinden. Zoals een kunstenaar zijne idee in het marmer legt, zoo realiseert God Zijn woord in de wereld."⁸⁸ Though there is a distinction between the idea and the creaturely reality, there is also intimate connection. "God is niet alleen transcendent boven, Hij is met Zijn Woord en Geest ook immanent in al het geschapene."⁸⁹

Bavinck continues by pointing out that this area of agreement between Scripture and Platonism must not overlook a significant divergence between the two: "naar de Schrift hebben de ideeën geen objectief, metafysisch bestaan buiten God, maar alleen in zijn

⁸⁷ *CW*, p. 55. "In this area Christian philosophy can, with changes, adopt the Platonic-Aristotelian doctrine of the ideas and forms."

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* These ideas "must be regarded as objective ideas which give order and coherence to the multitude of parts and bind them together in organic unity. Just as an artist lays his ideas in marble, so God realizes his Word in the world."

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 56. "God is not only transcendent above; through his Word and Spirit he is also immanent in all that is created."

Goddelijk wezen."⁹⁰ The God revealed in Scripture is a personal God whose actions are rooted in his will. Bavinck refers to Col. 1: 15 and Hebrews 1: 3 to declare that "de gedachten Gods, uitgesproken in Zijn Woord, Zijn Zoon, zijn de *causae exemplares* der dingen, de band tusschen God en wereld, tusschen het eene en het vele."⁹¹ God cannot be construed as a metaphysical principle, but rather has created all things through his Son, and he has revealed himself most fully through that Son.

Bavinck's neo-Platonic tendencies are not limited to these three citations, but these three serve as clear examples of these tendencies in their most concentrated form. I will argue that, though Bavinck certainly does leave himself vulnerable to charges of an inappropriate neo-Platonic influence, his theology contains safeguards which minimize the problems caused by this influence. He does describe Biblical teachings partially with the aid of neo-Platonic terms and concepts, and this strategy is neither successful nor helpful. But these elements of neo-Platonism are employed as *ad hoc* descriptions; they do not form the substantive, conceptual framework for his descriptions of creation and the character of the relation between God and the creation. Furthermore, his use of the notion of the organic occupies a more

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* "According to Scripture the ideas do not have an objective, metaphysical existence outside of God, but exist only in his divine essence."

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 57. "The thoughts of God, expressed in his Word, his Son, are the *causae exemplares* of things, the link between God and the world, between the one and the many."

foundational role in his discussion of the God-creation relation than neo-Platonic concepts. This more Biblically consistent notion of the organic serves to contain his neo-Platonism by affirming the boundary between Creator and creature as it describes an intimate but necessarily mysterious link that cannot be described with utter comprehensiveness.⁹² In spite of these constraints upon Bavinck's neo-Platonic tendencies, it is clear that these tendencies cannot appropriately be pressed into such service.

That Bavinck employs neo-Platonic themes in an *ad hoc* manner rather than constructing a systematic neo-Platonic framework is consistent with the overall strategy and framework of Bavinck's theological work. Concerning strategy, it is appropriate to recall several points from the first chapter. Bavinck believes that theology is unable to find utterly precise concepts and terms for describing the ways of God, and therefore is always characterized by a 'that's the best one can do at this time' character.⁹³ Furthermore, he was concerned to situate his theology both directly within the Reformed stream and within the broader corpus of Christian theology. It is to this end that he provides such extensive historical descriptions in his dogmatics, seeking wherever possible to build bridges between his own thought and that

⁹² The notion of the organic is carried over into later neo-Calvinism in a severely restricted form, referring only to the character of the inspiration of the Scriptures (Cf. Spykman, *RT*, p. 122). The curtailing of this notion is consistent with the shift to creation law-order.

⁹³ Cf. p. 25.

of his predecessors. While he often posits clear distance between his thought and that of others, he also will often adopt a 'hermeneutic of charity' which gives others the benefit of the doubt. His theological justification for such a strategy lies not only in the humility he believes is required of the dogmatician, but also in the high value he ascribes to general revelation.⁹⁴ Bavinck's method results in strains of eclecticism which at times become more confusing than helpful.

Furthermore, Bavinck's methodology prioritizes faithfulness to the Scriptures over developing a highly systematic theology. John Bolt is essentially correct when he concludes that "the language Bavinck uses does not reflect his affinity with idealistic or neo-Platonic thought, it simply reflects his concern to use the language of Scripture whenever one's system of thought appears inadequate to embrace all the biblical givens."⁹⁵ While it is true that the problem of neo-Platonic influence arises precisely because Bavinck does not always use the "language of Scripture," Bolt's fundamental point is helpful: Scripture has priority over system

⁹⁴ E. P. Heideman, in a comparison of Bavinck and Emil Brunner, summarizes this point well: "Both (men) will be seen to stand remarkably open to the realities of creation and of human culture. It is just this element of openness to all reality that gives these two writers their power, but has at certain points caused a certain lack of clarity or logic in their thought." (*Relation of Revelation and Reason*, p. 7)

⁹⁵ Bolt, p. 191. Heideman makes a similar point. In reflecting on the possibility of neo-Platonic influences in Bavinck's writings on common grace, he concludes, "Bavinck was too biblical in his thought to develop these distinctions to their logical conclusion." (*Relation of Revelation and Reason*, p. 183)

in Bavinck's thought. When Bavinck employs neo-Platonic language, he is not importing a neo-Platonic system into his own. Rather, he is exploring the possibility that neo-Platonic language can help to clarify Scriptural notions that he is seeking to describe. While the merits of this strategy are certainly debateable, such a strategy is far less compromising than the one of seeking to mold Scripture into the patterns of a system of thought which is fundamentally alien to Scripture. Heideman's warning to readers of Bavinck is appropriate:

There lurks the suspicion that at the basis of Bavinck's thought one will find philosophical axioms which are Greek rather than Christian. But caution must be exercised against any hasty judgment of Bavinck, not only because he lived in an era which used different terminology and breathed another air than our own, but also because there is often only a hair's breadth distinction between good theology and terrible heresy.⁹⁶

The significance of this "hair breadth's distinction" becomes clearer in light of Heideman's profoundly perceptive concluding observation on Bavinck's work: "His theology is not one that solves problems; it is simply one that confesses what God is doing in the world. His confession, instead of solving problems, causes the tension of the problems to become the greatest."⁹⁷ Because Scripture does not provide the reader with a systematic theology, but rather with a primarily narrative account of God's action in the world, so Bavinck seeks to provide a theologically astute description of Scripture rather than a systematic solution to

⁹⁶ *Relation of Revelation and Reason*, p. 138.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 239f.

theological problems. His use of neo-Platonic terms and concepts occurs within such a context. It is intended to serve the purpose of clarifying Scriptural descriptions rather than providing a systematic framework.

With this distinction in mind, we turn to more substantive theological issues. Bavinck's use of neo-Platonic terms and concepts is best understood when we remember the larger context within which these are employed. To that end, what follows is a brief summary of significant themes (discussed in chapter four) developed by Bavinck which are relevant to the issue of the relation between God and the creation. These include: (1) a radical distinction exists between the Creator and his creatures; (2) the Creator is a Trinitarian God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; (3) this God establishes and seeks intimate relation with his creatures in an organic manner; (4) the entire creation was made as a reality which was very good. It admits no room for a dualism which undermines this goodness. (5) the creation is upheld by this God as a reality which is both highly diversified and a coherent and unified organic whole; (6) this God is a rational God, and this quality is reflected both in the orderly character of the creation and through the means which humankind comes to know this God and his creation; (7) while God, creation and humankind are rational, rationality is an aspect of their character and not the ultimate determinant of their identities; (8) creation is characterized by both stability and a dynamic teleology, enduring

order and a goal; (9) creation and redemption are intimately linked in an organic manner. God's work of redemption respects the parameters of the enduring order of the creation. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all intimately involved with the entire works of creation and redemption.

These nine themes constitute, in Bavinck's view, non-negotiable descriptions of his understanding of Scripture on issues upon which neo-Platonic terms and concepts have an impact. The one question which runs as a submerged thread through each nine of these themes (and which becomes the most problematic in terms of neo-Platonic influence) is this: how is one to construe the link between God and the creation so that, on the one hand, there is a meaningful link which, on the other hand, does not compromise the radical distinction between the Creator and the creature? This question was particularly important for Bavinck for two reasons: first, he was determined to avoid the mirror heresies of a deism which perceived only an unbridgeable gap between God and the creation, and a pantheism which did not honour the radical distinction between the two. Second, much of his theology is a response to Immanuel Kant's dualistic division of knowledge into the noumenal and phenomenal realms. On this account, God was known through the noumenal but not the phenomenal, through redemption but not creation, and the phenomenal realm gradually became cut off from notions of enduring objectivity. In response to such claims Bavinck sought to affirm that God is linked to reality in its

entirety, that reality has an objective orderliness that lies beyond the order imposed by human perception, and that this orderliness is directly linked to God the Creator. Most frequently Bavinck employs the notion of the organic as a comprehensive notion that expresses each of these three truth claims.⁹⁸ In addition, Bavinck found in the neo-Platonic doctrine of the ideas a supplementary vehicle for giving expression to these three claims.

As a result, Bavinck's theology is left with this contradictory situation: the nine themes listed above are affirmed with clarity and strong Scriptural backing. These nine themes are mutually reinforcing; together they build a coherent account of the relations between God and his creatures. At the same time, neo-Platonic terms and concepts are employed for the sub-thread which runs underneath and through many of these themes. On the one hand, this neo-Platonic sub-thread contradicts aspects of these nine themes; on the other hand, these nine themes with their primary reliance on the notion of the organic serve as solid boundaries to contain the damage of the alien sub-thread, not allowing it to take on the character of a system which determines the fundamental direction of his thought in this area.

Within the context of this larger framework, we will return to the three examples of neo-Platonism in Bavinck's writings

⁹⁸ The versatility and fluidity of this notion is such that it expresses much more than these three claims. The organic plays a role in each of the nine themes outlined on pp. 331f.

summarized above. First, it is clear that his rejection of Philo⁹⁹ is solidly rooted in the nine themes listed above. Philo's neo-Platonism is rejected because it is dualistic, it treats the OT terms 'word' and 'wisdom' as metaphysical concepts instead of descriptors of the personal God of Scripture, it posits a chasm between creation and redemption, and it ignores the role of the Holy Spirit in the relation between God and his creatures. In this case the issue is the most black and white of the three. There is no room for compromise between Bavinck and Philo.

Second, we find a cautious endorsement of neo-Platonic thinking in *Christelijke Wereldbeschouwing*.¹⁰⁰ The doctrine of the ideas is used to reinforce certain of the nine themes. They help to account for the fact that creation is both diverse and coherent, and that "God is not only transcendent above, (but) through his Word and Spirit is also immanent in all that is created."¹⁰¹ Bavinck takes care to rule out any metaphysical interpretation of these ideas, concluding with a Christological interpretation: "the thoughts of God, expressed in his Word, his Son, are the *causae exemplares* of things, the link between God and the world, between the one and the many."¹⁰² The latter statement on its own can be interpreted to indicate that the Son is a

⁹⁹ *The Doctrine of God*, pp. 259-263.

¹⁰⁰ pp. 55-57.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 55f.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 57.

metaphysical principle which links God to the creation. However, Bavinck's extensive descriptions of the person and work of Jesus Christ in both his dogmatics and his theological corpus as a whole rule out such an interpretation of metaphysical reductionism concerning the Son. Within the broad context of his Christology which seeks to honour Scripture's multitudinous descriptions of the Son, Bavinck interprets Col. 1: 15 and Heb. 1: 3 as descriptions of the relation between the Son and the creation. However, we do see in this section the use of the extra-Biblical language of 'ideas' and 'thoughts' to describe the character of this link. Bavinck's purpose in using such language is to affirm that God is not linked to a chaotic and random creation, but rather the link affirms the rational, orderly character of creation. While it can be argued that Scripture does affirm the rational and orderly character of creation, it does not appear necessary to use non-Biblical terminology to describe this affirmation. Bavinck's use of such terminology in this section is not particularly helpful.

A further observation is apposite concerning *Christelijke Wereldbeschouwing* and its sister publication, *Christelijke Wetenschap*. These works, both published in 1904, represent the first two-thirds of a more philosophically oriented trilogy which culminated with the publication of *Wijsbegeerte der Openbaring* (the Stone Lectures) in 1908. It is the latter which contains the more mature philosophical theology of Bavinck, while the former two serve as a philosophical theology 'on the way.' As Bremmer

observes,

Terwijl hij zich in zijn *Christelijke Wetenschap* vooral afzette tegen het positivisme in de wetenschap en in de *Christelijke Wereldbeschouwing* zijn ideeenleer ontwikkelde, gaf hij in de Stone-lectures een geheel eigen wijsgerige visie op de mens, de tijdelijke werkelijkheid en het gehele veld der toenmalige wetenschapsbeoefening. Veelmeer dan de ideeenleer speelt in dit boek de openbaring zelf een rol. Zonder openbaring zijn de grondproblemen van het menselijk denken niet op te lossen. Hij bond daarom vanuit het openbaringsgeloof van de christelijke kerk de strijd aan met de moderne negentiende eeuwse wetenschap. Het grondprobleem van het boek is de harmonie te vinden tussen de openbaring, het menselijk zelfbewustzijn en de tijdelijke werkelijkheid.¹⁰³

The Stone lectures do contain traces of neo-Platonic language, but not to the extent of the earlier two works. I concur with Bremmer that the latter work is a more accurate reflection of Bavinck's mature thought than the earlier two, and this maturity is partially reflected in a diminished dependence upon neo-Platonic concepts.

While granting that Bavinck's theology suffers from neo-Platonic influences, I do take issue with Albert Wolters who suggests that one example of Bavinck's neo-Platonism is that "for him, scholarship was a matter of 'thinking God's thoughts after

¹⁰³ Bremmer, *Bavinck en Zijn Tijdgenoten*, pp. 250f. "While in *Christelijke Wetenschap* he primarily took distance from positivism in scholarship and in *Christelijke Wereldbeschouwing* developed his doctrine of the ideas, in the Stone-lectures he gave his own philosophical vision of humanity, temporal reality and the entire field of contemporary scholarship. Revelation itself played a much greater role in this book than the doctrine of ideas. Without revelation the fundamental problems of human thought cannot be solved. Therefore he connected the Christian teaching of revelation to the battles of modern nineteenth century scholarship. The foundational problem of the book is to find the harmony between revelation, human self-consciousness and temporal reality."

him.' "¹⁰⁴ For Bavinck, this articulation is not construed within a framework of an ultimate metaphysical principle of rationality which embraces the relation between God and humanity. Rather, it expresses the contingent, responsive character of all human knowing which occurs within the radical distinction of the Creator/creature relationship. Heideman's analysis is closer to the mark: "man never becomes autonomous in his scientific activity. He does not give reason to the world, but rather attempts to conform his thinking to the thoughts of God in creation."¹⁰⁵ This phrase is more appropriately interpreted in terms of Psalm 139: "How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand."¹⁰⁶ For Bavinck, as for the psalmist, the priority is to comprehend the ways of God in a manner that is humbly appropriate to the creature.

The third section which was described above, *The Doctrine of God*, pp. 197-199, presents the greatest problem. Bavinck's non-evaluative summary of Augustine leaves his relation to Augustine's

¹⁰⁴ "Dutch Neo-Calvinism," p. 126. This is the only time Wolters quotes Bavinck in his critique of his neo-Platonism, but he does not provide a reference. This phrase occurs frequently in the Bavinck corpus, cf. *CW*, p. 24 and *KL*, pp. 7, 60.

¹⁰⁵ Heideman, *Relation of Revelation and Reason*, p. 220.

¹⁰⁶ vs. 17-18a, *NIV*.

use of the ideas somewhat ambiguous. The concluding section (which most likely reflects Bavinck's own thought) treats 'ideas' and 'wisdom' synonymously. On the one hand this has the advantage of redefining 'ideas' in terms of thoroughly biblical terminology. As such, it serves to describe God's personal presence with his creation ("God's wisdom is manifest in the creation, ordering, guidance and government of all things."¹⁰⁷), the nothing-ness of sin, and the correlation between creation's multitudinous diversity, its enduring coherence and its ultimate teleology ("Because of the multitude and abundance of the divine ideas realized in creation, God's wisdom is properly called 'manifold,' Eph. 3: 10. Nevertheless, God's wisdom is one, and his idea of the universe is one, gradually unfolding itself in the course of the ages, and guiding reality onward toward the established goal."¹⁰⁸). Furthermore, these terms serve to affirm that creation is not random but rational. God "creates all things in accordance with the ideas which he himself has formed. He is not an unconscious Creator; on the contrary, in all his works he is guided by wisdom, by his ideas."¹⁰⁹ In spite of neo-Platonic terminology, Bavinck's articulations remain close to Scripture.

Even so, it is not at all clear what contribution the term 'ideas' makes to this discussion. The Biblical notion of wisdom is

¹⁰⁷ *The Doctrine of God*, p. 199.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

sufficient to address all the points summarized above. Bavinck, however, expanding on the notion of the ideas with the non-biblical terms 'essence' and 'being,' muddies the waters considerably.

The ideas in God themselves constitute the "essence of God" insofar as this is the pattern of created things and can be expressed and reflected in finite creatures. Every creature is a revelation of the Deity, and partakes of God's being. The character of this participation is not such that a creature is a modification of God's being or that it has in reality received into itself the divine essence, but every creature has its own distinct essence because in its existence it is an ectype of the divine essence.¹¹⁰

Bavinck here comes perilously close to the *analogia entis* language associated with 'Christianized' neo-Platonism. While I concur with R. H. Bremmer that the broad thrust of Bavinck's theology clearly rules out a Thomistic construal of *analogia entis*,¹¹¹ this particular articulation does not take sufficient distance from such conceptualizations. Wolters' warning that neo-Platonic thought leads to inappropriate construals of rationality and being in the God-creature relation is appropriate.¹¹² This articulation reveals the difficulty Bavinck wrestled with in his attempts to respect both the Creator/creature distinction and their intimate relation. Eugene Heideman provides an articulation of the issue that serves to clarify Bavinck's understanding of these two realities. He writes that for Bavinck creation "is not partially distinct from God and partially dependent upon him, but it is one hundred per cent distinct, one hundred per cent dependent, one

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck als Dogmaticus*, p. 343.

¹¹² cf. "Dutch neo-Calvinism," pp. 126f.

hundred per cent free, and one hundred per cent under the irresistible leading of the Spirit."¹¹³ By employing neo-Platonic language, Bavinck's theology did not always respect the "one hundred per cent distinct" character of the God-creation relation.¹¹⁴

In summary, it was important for Bavinck to find ways to describe the link between God and the creation. He sought to work theologically with the Biblical material recorded in Genesis 1, 2 and 9, the account of wisdom in Proverbs, and declarations concerning the relation between Jesus Christ and the creation in John 1, Colossians 1 and Hebrews 1, and various other passages. Bavinck supplemented these sparse Scriptural accounts with neo-Platonic terms and concepts. For the most part he did so with reserve, so that their usage does not undermine his nine fundamental affirmations concerning this relation. At times this reserve is not apparent, resulting in Biblically inappropriate construals of this relation. However, because these terms were used in an *ad hoc* fashion and not as part of a systematic theological framework, and because his notion of the organic plays the primary role in his descriptions of the God-creation relation, these neo-Platonic influences have inflicted a limited amount of

¹¹³ Heideman, *Relation of Revelation and Reason*, p. 159.

¹¹⁴ While Heideman does provide a helpful description of the issue at this point, I do agree with John Bolt that his larger analysis of the problem which he describes as Bavinck's "idealism" is confusing and not particularly helpful (cf. Bolt, *Imitation of Christ Theme*, pp. 178f., 195f.).

theological damage upon his work. In the concluding chapter I will bring contemporary voices into dialogue with Bavinck's theology on this point in an effort to point towards a construal of the God/creation relation that both affirms the nine themes developed by Bavinck and is less hampered by non-Christian philosophical influences. First, we will look at the later neo-Calvinist proposal to correct this neo-Platonic problem as it is articulated by Wolters and Spykman.

The solution of later neo-Calvinism

The analysis now shifts from reflecting upon the problem in Bavinck's theology which needed correction -- his use of neo-Platonic notions -- to the solution which later neo-Calvinism proposed. Earlier we noted Wolters' succinct summary of this solution: "the law, as God's reliable creative command for all creatures, 'took over' from rationality (and its correlate, being) the burden of accounting for the constancy, order and unity of created reality; the creational law (functions) as a transcendental *a priori*."¹¹⁵ This solution sought to overcome the early neo-Calvinist construal which posited a philosophical link between God and creation in which both God and the creation became limited by the philosophical principle of the ideas. Instead, later neo-Calvinism posited the notion of creation law-order as a reality 'outside' of God, as it were, through which God holds the creation together and reveals his will to humankind.

Once again, we begin by affirming the continuity between Bavinck and the later neo-Calvinists. Both recognize that the Christian faith requires a strong affirmation of the creation to counter creation-denying dualisms which distort and reduce the power of the gospel. Both also seek to counter voices influenced by subjectivism, relativism and historicism which perceive nothing enduring in created reality and thus make it incumbent upon

¹¹⁵ "Dutch Neo-Calvinism, Worldview, Philosophy and Rationality." p. 127.

humankind to posit arbitrarily notions of order. Though Bavinck and the later neo-Calvinists worked in very different cultural settings, and therefore dealt with differing influences which they sought to counter, the problems listed above are common to both settings.

Neo-Calvinism is not alone in seeking to develop a doctrine of creation to counter the influences of dualism and historicism. This emphasis is echoed in a variety of ways by many others. In response to dualistic understandings, Claus Westermann declares, "What sort of God is he who does everything for the salvation of man but clearly has nothing to do with his life situation? The matter stands or falls with the question, is God concerned with the real world which surrounds us? Is he creator or not?"¹¹⁶ Langdon Gilkey agrees, pointing out that the concept of *creatio ex nihilo* is required for a doctrine of creation to thwart dualisms which ultimately betray tendencies towards Manicheism.¹¹⁷ Colin Gunton begins his study of the doctrine of creation by claiming that the fruits of historicism, modern subjectivism and relativism, are rooted "in an inadequate exegesis of the opening chapters of

¹¹⁶ "Biblical Reflection on Creator-Creation" in *Creation in the Old Testament*, Ed. Bernhard W. Anderson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), p. 92.

¹¹⁷ *Maker of Heaven and Earth*, (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1959), pp. 49ff.

Genesis and the other biblical focusings of creation."¹¹⁸ Oliver O'Donovan concurs, observing that "the theological weakness which has led to such a result (relativism) is a failure to reckon with creation, and so with the reality of a divinely-given order or things in which human nature itself is located."¹¹⁹ The doctrine of creation assumes a clear distinction between creation and fall; historicism rejects such a distinction, with the result that "the beginnings are left without positive characterization. Historicism betrays resemblances both to the old gnostic dualism which called creation evil and to the idealism which denied the reality of evil altogether."¹²⁰ From this starting point of common ground between Bavinck, later neo-Calvinists, and many others which affirms the necessity of a strong doctrine of creation, we can look more closely at the later neo-Calvinist portrayal of creation order.

Later neo-Calvinism made two distinct moves in responding to the problem of neo-Platonic tendencies in the theology of Bavinck (and other early neo-Calvinists). First, it sought to articulate a more tightly systematic articulation of the Christian faith, a goal which it pursued by seeking to anchor theology in a philosophical system. Second, it argued that the mediating party

¹¹⁸ *The One, the Three and the Many, God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity, The 1992 Bampton Lectures.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 2.

¹¹⁹ *Resurrection and Moral Order, An Outline for Evangelical Ethics,* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), p. 16.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

between God and the creation cannot be a divine reality (e.g., the thoughts of God or the ideas in the mind of God) but must be a creaturely reality. While the first move is primarily methodological and the latter more substantive, both have significant substantive implications. While supporting the critique that Bavinck's use of neo-Platonic notion is problematic, I will argue that both moves proposed by later neo-Calvinism compounded rather than solved the problem. Here I will briefly examine these two moves as prolegomena to the fundamental issue to be dealt with in the next chapter: the resultant reductionist Christology of later neo-Calvinism.

The first move concerns two related but distinct issues: the character of system in one's thought and the relation between theology and philosophy. Later neo-Calvinism perceived in Bavinck's theology a lack of systematic clarity which is related to his use of philosophy as an *ad hoc* complement to his theology. His work clearly recognizes that there is significant overlap between theological issues and philosophical ones, and he dialogues at length with many philosophers and their ideas in his writings, but the relation remains *ad hoc*. He does not describe this *ad hoc* character, but it is consistent with his theological method. His concern to be faithful to the Scriptures, to give an account of the specific deeds of the one, true God and to respect the significant role of mystery in theological understanding precludes a methodology which subordinates theology to the requirements of a

theological or philosophical system.¹²¹

Later neo-Calvinism perceives Bavinck's subordination of system and *ad hoc* use of philosophical concepts as inherently problematic, and therefore develops clear, systematic articulations in which theology is rooted in a prior philosophical foundation which describes creation order. "Apart from philosophy, theology becomes a narrow, shallow and largely vacuous undertaking."¹²²

Philosophy paints a totality picture within which theology explores in depth a community's faith-life and confessional expressions. Philosophy surveys the house of theoretical reflection as a whole. Theology, including dogmatics, occupies one room of the house. It makes sense, then to view the house as a whole, and the street on which it stands, before moving into one of its rooms. Philosophy ought therefore to be included as a very strong foundational component in a good theological education.¹²³

Philosophy establishes the foundation; theology builds on that foundation. The doctrine of creation is central in this articulation of theology, and this doctrine requires a philosophical underpinning which serves to describe what the Scripture teaches concerning the creation. Though Wolters and Spykman express deep respect and appreciation for Bavinck's

¹²¹ "De Schrift geeft geen afgetrokken Godsbegrip, gelijk de wijsbegeerte dat doet, maar zij stelt den waarachtigen, levenden God voor onze oogen en doet Hem ons zien in al de werken zijner handen." (*MD*, p. 118. "What the Scriptures give us is not an abstract concept of God, such as the philosopher gives us, but puts the very, living God before us and lets us see the works of his hands." [*RF*, p. 133])

¹²² Spykman, *RT*, p. 7.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 97. Wolters makes a similar point, cf. *CR*, pp. 96-98.

theological work, his theological house was 'built on philosophical sand,' as it were, and therefore his theology stands more securely when transplanted onto the more self-consciously Biblical 'rock' of Dooyeweerdian philosophy. Though the character of system and the relation between theology and philosophy are distinct issues, in later neo-Calvinism they are closely correlated as philosophical means are employed to systematize theological endeavor.

Obviously there is significant interaction between philosophy and theology. Both disciplines search out questions of ultimate meaning and purpose. Scholars in one discipline often engage writings from the other in their deliberations. Even Karl Barth, who vigorously fought for a highly *ad hoc* relation between theology and philosophical influences, engages in dialogue with a widely varied array of philosophers throughout his *Dogmatics*. Later neo-Calvinism is certainly correct in asserting that, because of these interrelations, it is imperative that both these disciplines (indeed, all disciplines!) be thoroughly rooted in Scripture. But is it appropriate to make the additional move of declaring that theology must be systematized by being established upon a philosophical foundation?

A brief summary of Langdon Gilkey's thoughts on this issue serves as a counterpoint to the later neo-Calvinist solution. Gilkey explores this issue in his study of the doctrine of creation, *Maker of Heaven and Earth*. He agrees with later neo-

Calvinism that both of these disciplines "need to see all things in the light of its special knowledge of God."¹²⁴ But he does not conclude that theology must be rooted in philosophy. Rather, he sees separate, mutually complementary roles for each. While philosophy aids theology in coherently systematizing its reflections, theology sets limits to this systematization, leaving appropriate room for mystery and paradox.¹²⁵ He warns that to translate the language of Scripture, particularly its talk of creation, "into the impersonal, nonparadoxical language of philosophy would be to enclose God within the world or to remove him from it; and surely it would be to lose his personal character as encountered in faith."¹²⁶ Though Gilkey's reference to "impersonal, nonparadoxical language" assumes a limited definition of philosophy, his formulations are helpful because, as we shall see later, the problem of philosophy's impersonal language describes an aspect of the problem of later neo-Calvinism.

A major difference between the engagement between philosophy and theology as practised by Bavinck and Gilkey on the one hand, and later neo-Calvinists on the other, is that the former perceive the relation as one of mutual complementarity, while the latter perceive a unidirectional flow from philosophy to theology. This first, methodological corrective of Bavinck is correlated with a

¹²⁴ *Maker of Heaven and Earth*, p. 39.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 289.

second move: identifying creation law-order as the philosophical notion which serves to systematize theological endeavor. Wolters and Spykman develop the view that theology must be rooted in philosophical categories. The one-way direction of this endeavor becomes apparent in Wolters' articulation of these basic categories of Scripture and of creation. He suggests that "Christian philosophy looks at creation in the light of the basic categories of the Bible. Christian theology looks at the Bible in the light of the basic categories of creation."¹²⁷ This formulation suggests a mutual complementarity between the two disciplines. In reality, however, he does not distinguish between Scriptural categories which philosophy must adhere to and creational categories which theology must adhere to. Rather, he sees one fundamental category which guides one's understanding of both, a category which he perceives to be both Scriptural and creational.

Biblical revelation includes a great deal that has no parallel whatever in creational revelation. In a fundamental sense the Scriptures are the story of our sin in Adam and God's forgiving grace in Christ. Creation, by contrast, does not tell a story at all, nor does it tell anything of that sin or grace. As a message of salvation its revelation is useless. In that regard the two revelations are not comparable. They are comparable, however, as manifestations of God's law, as two ways of making known his will.¹²⁸

God's law is the fundamental category through which one is to understand God's revelation in both creation and in Scripture. Because these two revelations are "not comparable...as a message of salvation," the Scriptural category of "the story of our sin in

¹²⁷ CR, p. 9.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

Adam and God's forgiving grace in Christ" does not illumine the philosophical endeavor to understand the creation. As a result, what Wolters originally posits as a two-way mutually complementary interaction becomes a unidirectional account understood in terms of God's law. Accepting this account requires one to accept three propositions: (1) revelation is fundamentally the revelation of God's law; (2) The Biblical accounts of God's law are fundamentally described in terms of creation law-order; (3) creation law-order is the Scriptural philosophical category which serves as an appropriate foundation for theological endeavor.

The first of these propositions raises significant questions in the area of Christology. Though later neo-Calvinism asserts revelation is given in the three forms of Scripture, creation and Jesus Christ, Wolters' search for a common denominator is restricted to the first two. If law is the common denominator, the basic category through which one understands creation and Scripture, then one must either understand God's revelation in Jesus Christ through the medium of this same category, or one must posit another category (e.g., grace) for understanding Jesus Christ, and then also construct a relation between law and this other category.

Later neo-Calvinism has chosen the former route, describing the person and work of Jesus Christ as primarily comprehensible through the lens of God's law. Both Wolters and Spykman refer to

Col. 1: 16-17 to assert that Christ is the mediator of creation, the one through whom all things were made, the one in whom the creation order holds together.¹²⁹ This passage both links Christ directly to the creation, and affirms that this link is total in its scope. Therefore this passage (together with John 1: 1-3 and Hebrews 1: 1-3) provides the key for relating Christology to the doctrine of creation, in opposition to dualistic theologies. Such New Testament passages are further linked with Old Testament passages which refer to God's Word or Wisdom fashioning and upholding the creation.¹³⁰

Such Scripture passages clearly posit that a link exists between Christ and creation, and they assert the *primacy* of Christ over the creation, but they do not describe in further detail *how* they are related. Wolters and Spykman find it insufficient simply to declare that Christ and creation are intimately related, and continue beyond this assertion to describe the 'how' of this link in terms of creation law-order.

There is a sense in which Christ is the mediator of creation. Christ is intimately present in the whole range of what we are calling the law of creation.¹³¹

Christian scholarship, theology included, is called to discern the norms of God's creational word for our life in his world, illumined and directed by his word in Scripture, under the regal authority of the Word Incarnate, so that thus we may

¹²⁹ CR, p. 21; RT, p. 376.

¹³⁰ CR, pp. 18-28.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

learn to lead every thought captive in obedience to Christ.¹³²

In the next chapter we will look much more closely at the relation between creation and Jesus Christ in later neo-Calvinism, but here it is clear that there is an intimate relation between Jesus Christ and creation law. While the Scripture passages that are referred to describe the relation between Christ and creation in terms of the supremacy of Christ over creation and his agency in the process of creation, the statements of Wolters and Spykman make two moves beyond these Biblical statements: they construe creation in terms of creation law, and they describe the significance of the person and work of Jesus Christ within this framework of creation law.

Later neo-Calvinism's philosophical notion of creation law-order leads one to question the second of the three propositions stated above: is this philosophical notion of creation law-order in harmony with Scriptural descriptions of law, and thus free from non-Christian philosophical influences? As with the preceding proposition, it will be addressed here in a preliminary way simply to form the parameters for the next chapter's discussion. We can begin by noting that the Scriptures do clearly describe God's work as the Creator as an orderly work. His Word and his Wisdom do not fashion a randomly chaotic universe, but one that can be characterized as orderly. Bavinck and, indeed, much of Christian theology, agree with Wolters and Spykman that the relationship

¹³² Spykman, *RT*, p. 84.

between God and his creation is characterized by orderliness of some kind. Wolters' exegetical survey of the Word of God in creation¹³³ and God's wisdom in creation¹³⁴ develops themes that have held a firm place in Christian thought since the second century.

Wolters (again, in harmony with a clear strand in the Christian tradition) perceives this notion of creation law-order as one which pre-dates second century Christian thought. Speaking of the structure of creation order, he writes

Structure is anchored in the law of creation, the creational decree of God that constitutes the nature of different kinds of creatures. It designates a reality that the philosophical tradition of the West has often referred to by such words as substance, essence and nature.¹³⁵

Here Wolters goes beyond exegeting the terms 'Word' and 'Wisdom' to positing a type of synonymy between Biblical notions and 'extra-biblical' philosophical notions. This synonymy helps to clarify characteristics of creation law-order which cannot be directly found in Scripture: creation law-order is a universal, ahistorical abstraction which lies 'within' and 'behind' the creation as it were, waiting to be concretized. "The creation law is crying out to be positivized in new and amazing ways. We are called to participate in the ongoing creational work of God, to be God's helper in executing to the end the blueprint for his

¹³³ CR, pp. 18-21.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-29.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

masterpiece."¹³⁶ 'Positivizing the blueprint' refers to creating concrete manifestations of the abstraction. Wolters perceives the descriptions of wisdom in Proverbs to say that God positivized the blueprint when he created the world and invites humanity to continue this work of positivization in partnership with him. After quoting Prov. 8: 22-23, 27-30, he concludes,

In a bold metaphor the poet has Wisdom describe herself as a kind of living blueprint, preceding creation but present at its execution. It seems to be the law of creation before creation. I would suggest that it means something like a scale model, a fixed point of reference that serves the craftsman as a standard in building.¹³⁷

Creation law is here characterized as a blueprint which exists between God and the creation. Elsewhere Wolters writes, "the law, as God's reliable, creative command for all creatures, 'took over' from rationality (and its correlate, being) the burden of accounting for the constancy, order and unity of created reality. The creational law as a transcendental *a priori* constitutes the possibility of rationality, and this is part of the creaturely makeup of all humans."¹³⁸ In this context Wolters does not define what the term 'transcendental *a priori*' involves. It would appear to be synonymous with nature, essence and substance as quoted above. As such, it serves as a link between God and creation, and functions as a reality which is not entirely dissimilar to the function of the neo-Platonic ideas in Bavinck's theology.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹³⁸ "Dutch Neo-Calvinism," p. 127.

Because later neo-Calvinism perceives one of the difficulties with Bavinck's neo-Platonic tendencies to be positing the link between God and creation within the Godhead, it is careful to argue that creation order is located on the creaturely end of the Creator/creature distinction. The link between God and the creation describes the character of the creation, but it must not be used to place limits around the character of God. Therefore Wolters, for example, summarizes the "five categorial distinctions that define the unity and distinctiveness of neo-Calvinism as a whole" by beginning with the distinction "between God and creation," which is followed by "that between God's creational ordinances and what is subject to these ordinances."¹³⁹ He declares that "a keen sense of the sovereignty and transcendence of God makes the neo-Calvinist shy away from any view that points to a common denominator for both God and creation, making the difference between them gradual rather than qualitative."¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, "a postulated creational 'law' that must be responsibly implemented makes all these areas philosophically accessible as creation."¹⁴¹ Creation law is a creaturely reality which describes the creation; its description of God is limited to

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 120f.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 121. In the distinction between a "gradual" and a "qualitative" difference we see the later neo-Calvinist correction of the neo-Platonic problem.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, emphasis his.

affirming that he is faithful and consistent.¹⁴²

This later neo-Calvinist second corrective move raises two questions: 'is creation law-order an appropriate description of the biblical accounts of law?' and 'does this link between God and the creation avoid inappropriately describing the character of God by being situated within the creation?' In response to the first question, Wolters describes three uses of law in Scripture: creation law,¹⁴³ the Mosaic law which "was the divinely accredited implementation of creational law for ancient Israel,"¹⁴⁴ and the fulfillment of the law in Jesus Christ, through whom God "in large measure gives us the freedom to do our own implementing," even as "he holds us to the blueprint of the law of creation."¹⁴⁵ Thus, creation law constitutes the ahistorical foundation for the various manifestations of law in the history of redemption.

Nik Ansell, responding to the notion of creation law-order in later neo-Calvinism, suggests its construal is reductionistic in two ways. First, he perceives that law so construed "is prone to

¹⁴² "The universal validity of God's law reflects his constancy in dealing with his creatures." (CR, p. 18)

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-34.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

reducing the richness of the presence of God with us to order."¹⁴⁶ When creation law functions as the link between God and the creation, this link necessarily limits the presence of God to the confines of this order. Second, Ansell perceives the biblical account of law as richly diverse, and as such irreducible to creation law. He perceives four different types of law formulations in Scripture which are more or less correlated with the four moments of creation/fall/redemption/consummation in the narrative of God's relationship with his creation. The first of these four is consistent with the later neo-Calvinist understanding of creation law, which he terms "texts of orientation."¹⁴⁷ The other three are "reorientation texts (which) address us with a special awareness of our fallenness."¹⁴⁸ First, because of the fall, certain laws are strictly prohibitive. Second, in the light of redemption there are "limited/limiting reorientation texts (which) make contact with our brokenness and give direction to what is achievable."¹⁴⁹ Finally, in anticipation of the consummation we are given "eschatological/prophetic reorientation texts (which) do have the capacity to go beyond what was normally imagineable as possible. They point to the future - often the eschaton - when

¹⁴⁶ N. Ansell, "The Trouble with Normative...Creation Order, Hermeneutics and Homosexuality." Unpublished monograph presented at the Institute for Christian Studies, p. 5.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

orientation and reorientation will come back together again."¹⁵⁰

As with Gilkey's thoughts on the philosophy/theology relation, Ansell's critique is (all too) briefly summarized here to suggest that the later neo-Calvinist solution is by no means an obvious one. Scripture often resists simple systematization; to perceive all Scriptural accounts of law as manifestations of creation law raises many questions concerning historical context, redemption history, Christology, pneumatology and eschatology. To some extent these issues will surface again in the next chapter as it investigates the relation between creation order, Christology and eschatology. This brief excursus simply raises the question: might it not be suspect to incorporate all of the Biblical teachings concerning law into the philosophical notion of creation order? Is the notion of creation order capable of carrying the weight of serving as the overarching umbrella which reveals God's will to humankind (albeit with assistance from Scripture and Jesus Christ)?

The suspicion that creation order is required to carry more weight than it can rightfully bear is further supported when one observes in Wolters' and Spykman's discussions of creation law a type of 'inappropriate synonymity' between creation law and God. Though later neo-Calvinism perceives the heart of its correction of Bavinck's neo-Platonism to be relocating the link between God and

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

the creation from the thoughts of God to creaturely realities, several descriptions of creation order impute divine characteristics to this order. This is hardly surprising. The mediator between God and the creation necessarily characterizes (to some degree, at least) the identity of both parties. If creation law-order as a reality that carries ontological weight is the appropriate mediator, then creation law-order will contain properties that are also associated with divinity in such a way that the boundary between the Creator and the creature is blurred.

Many phrases used by Wolters and Spykman suggest that such blurring does indeed occur. Wolters quotes John Calvin's thoughts on using the spectacles of Scripture in order to read the book of nature to see the true God, but then concludes that this is "another way of saying that we can discern creational normativity best in the light of Scripture."¹⁵¹ Where Calvin spoke of God the creator, Wolters speaks of creational normativity. Such inappropriate synonymity also occurs in assertions such as "hope is grounded in the constant availability and the insistent presence of the good creation, even in those situations in which it is being terribly violated,"¹⁵² "God presses his claim upon us in the structure of his creation, regardless of our direction,"¹⁵³ and "the religious conflict rages for the sake of the created

¹⁵¹ CR, p. 32.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 51.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

structure."¹⁵⁴

Spykman also articulates several formulations which point to such inappropriate synonymity: "only by donning the spectacles of Scripture, in submission to the Christ of the Scriptures, and illumined by His spirit, can we answer faithfully to creation's call,"¹⁵⁵ "the law is the vital pulsebeat of covenantal living,"¹⁵⁶ "structure refers to the orderliness of creation as it originally was and as God's Word still impinges on it, calling it back to what it is still meant to be and to what it will one day become,"¹⁵⁷ and "the eschatological 'not yet' is not the norm for Christian living. Our norm is obedience to the 'already' of the creation order, redemptively updated in the cross and resurrection."¹⁵⁸ The creation order as a reality apart from the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ fulfills functions which include providing hope, calling the church to faithful obedience, establishing the 'already' of the kingdom, and existing as the 'scandal' which provokes the raging religious conflict between the truth and the lie. When these citations are considered *in toto*, they suggest that the boundary between Creator and creature is significantly blurred by the notion of creation order, calling into

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

¹⁵⁵ *RT*, p. 170.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 367.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 524.

question Wolters' assertion that this notion escapes the problems associated with neo-Platonism because the constancy it affirms "is an ethical rather than a metaphysical concept."¹⁵⁹

This blurring is further evident in Spykman's account of what he terms "a three factor alternative."¹⁶⁰ On this account the Word of God functions as the boundary and the bridge between God and the creation. The Word of God, "given as creation ordinance," cannot be equated with God but neither can it be "pulled down into history."¹⁶¹ Instead, it functions as a third factor. Spykman clearly asserts that the Word of God cannot be equated with creaturely realities,¹⁶² but he is less clear in describing the distinction between the Word of God and God.

The Word is subservient to God himself. At the same time it transcends creation. The Word is the Word of God. It is therefore distinguishable from God himself. At the same time it stands transcendentally above and holds for all creation.¹⁶³

This 'in between' character applies to all three forms of the Word of God, and therefore to Jesus Christ also.

Christ Jesus as the Word of God is the key to the meaning of

¹⁵⁹ "Creation Order: A Historical Look at our Heritage," p. 55.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 60ff. Wolters does not endorse this concept, which illustrates the primary difference between the thought of these two men. (He does not discuss this difference in his publications, but has so indicated in personal conversation.)

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 68, 67.

¹⁶² E.g., "We may never humanize the divine Word, nor deify the human word." (*Ibid.*, p. 75)

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

creation. He is God's ultimate Word. We have not Word beside or beyond this Word. All God's dealings with the world - creation, preservation, judgment, redemption, consummation - are through Christ. Only a Christ mediated, Christ centered theology will do. Christian scholarship, theology included, is therefore called to discern the norms of God's creational Word for our life in his world, illumined and directed by His Word in Scripture, under the regal authority of his Word incarnate, so that thus we may learn to lead every thought in captive obedience to Christ.¹⁶⁴

The two citations quoted above evoke a number of questions: is Jesus Christ synonymous with creation law? Is Jesus as mediator also somehow between God and creation? How can this construal of a 'three factor alternative' avoid a three-level hierarchy?¹⁶⁵

These examples of synonymity between creation order and God in Wolters and Spykman and the latter's 'three factor alternative' show that the function of creation law in the later neo-Calvinist construals of philosophy and theology does not maintain the distinction between Creator and creature consistently and clearly. Creation law construed as substance, essence, nature, abstract blueprint and transcendental *a priori* blurs the line between Creator and creature. In fact, there is little functional difference between Bavinck's use of the ideas and Wolters' use of creation law; the distinction is primarily terminological. Bavinck's ideas are virtually synonymous with the thoughts of God,

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

¹⁶⁵ Spykman affirms in a footnote that "the idea of God's mediating Word within this three-factor worldview should not be confused with the 'logos' doctrine espoused by a number of early church fathers," (*Ibid.*, p. 74) but he does not develop a description of the difference.

and therefore fall on the 'Creator' side of the Creator/creature distinction; creation law in later neo-Calvinism is declared to be located on the creaturely side of the distinction, but in both cases the integrity of the distinction is violated and, as Ansell points out, law "is prone to reducing the richness of the presence of God with us to order."¹⁶⁶ The truly significant difference between Bavinck and later neo-Calvinism does not lie in their locating the God/creation link in terms of the Creator/creature distinction, but rather in the differing construals of systematic theology and the philosophy/theology correlation: Bavinck's use of linking concepts is *ad hoc* whereas in later neo-Calvinism it lies at the heart and foundation of its thought. The later neo-Calvinist solution to Bavinck's neo-Platonic tendencies replaces an *ad hoc* inappropriate use of unscriptural philosophy with what appears to be, functionally, nothing more than a revision of that unscriptural philosophy. If that is indeed the case, the later neo-Calvinist 'solution' has compounded the problem by systematically establishing an unscriptural notion as the philosophical foundation for its theological thought.

Conclusion

The questions raised (albeit cursorily) in this chapter serve to introduce the primary issue which follows: what is the relation between creation order and Jesus Christ? The Christian tradition has a long history of affirming the mediatorial role of Jesus

¹⁶⁶ "The Trouble with Normative," p. 5.

Christ as mediator between God and the creation. Can the creation order also share in this function? Is it Scripturally appropriate to develop a Christology which describes the person and work of Jesus Christ as, at its root, restoring the creation order? How does a description of the relationship between God and creation that construes that relationship in terms of creation order impact upon one's understanding of the goal of that relationship? Does the later neo-Calvinist solution allow the Biblical descriptions of Jesus Christ to come to expression with the full richness of the Scriptural accounts of his significance? These issues, which constitute the agenda of the next chapter, penetrate to the heart of the matter.

Chapter Six: Herman Bavinck and contemporary neo-Calvinism, Part II: The goal of creation

In this chapter the differences between Herman Bavinck's understanding of redemption and that of the later neo-Calvinists comes into clearest focus. Whereas the previous chapter analyzed the character of the *relationship* between God and creation in neo-Calvinism, this chapter is preoccupied with the *goal* of creation. These two aspects of the doctrine of creation are thoroughly intertwined, but in a study of the goal of creation Christological and eschatological issues necessarily move into the foreground more clearly. The primary thesis here is that Bavinck's theology is characterized by an eschatological understanding of redemption, while the later neo-Calvinist view supports a creational understanding.

This analysis of the goal of creation in neo-Calvinism involves several important and interrelated theological loci: redemption history, Christology, eschatology, and the character of the Christian life. This chapter will begin by describing the later neo-Calvinist understanding (represented, once again, by Spykman and Wolters) of each of these loci, continue by analyzing their appropriation of Bavinck's thinking concerning these matters, and conclude by contrasting the later neo-Calvinist construals with Bavinck's.

The goal of creation in later neo-Calvinism

Later neo-Calvinism constructs a very close link between creation and redemption, summarizing the latter as creation restored. This construction was aided by Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977), a Dutch neo-Calvinist philosopher situated at the midpoint between Bavinck and Wolters and Spykman, who developed the view that redemption history is most appropriately summarized as an account of what he termed the 'creation-fall-redemption motif:' "What makes the diversity of the books of the Old and New Testaments into a radical spiritual unity? Their principle of unity can only be the central theme of creation, fall into sin and redemption by Jesus Christ in the communion of the Holy Spirit, since it is the key to true knowledge of God and self-knowledge."¹ This pattern is accepted as a given by both Wolters and Spykman, used as a structuring principle in both of their major works that are discussed here, and assumed in all of their writings. Spykman introduces his *Dogmatics* with the assertion that "in creation God covenanted his kingdom into existence. After the fall, God renewed the covenant with a view toward the coming of his kingdom. The ultimate goal is the restoration of all creation in the renewed earth."² Structurally this foundation requires "rearranging the themes of the traditional loci method of organizing systematic theology, ordering them instead along the lines of the biblical

¹ *In the Twilight of Western Thought, Studies in the Pretended Autonomy of Western Thought* (Nutley, NJ: The Craig Press, 1968), p. 141.

² *RT*, p. 11.

story line of creation-fall-redemption on the way to the final consummation of all things."³

This general organizing principle is given very specific content in later neo-Calvinism. It is not intended simply to serve as a chronological summary of redemption history, but describes an ontology of redemption history. Just as creational revelation serves as the foundation for God's later revelation in Scripture and in Jesus Christ, so the creation serves as the ontological foundation for the events of the fall and redemption. As another later neo-Calvinist work puts it,

Creation is the biblical starting point. Jesus Christ and the redemption he brings are undoubtedly the focus of Scriptures. The biblical message is a call from sin to reconciliation with God. But what is sin? And what do words like salvation, redemption and reconciliation mean? It is impossible to offer an answer to these questions if we do not have an implicit idea of creation. For it is creation that is affected by both sin and salvation.⁴

Creation forms the good context of all redemption history. "All our present-day God-given callings were potentially present there at the dawn of human history. History adds nothing ontically new

³ *Ibid.*, p. 12. Later Spykman notes that his revision of the traditional loci method "aims at overcoming the abstract and rationalist way of dealing with Christian doctrines which is inherent in the older 'loci' method, betraying as it does the influences of Protestant scholastic thought." (*Ibid.*, p. 135) Wolters' *Creation Regained* also employs a creation-fall-redemption structure, devoting its three principal chapters to each of these themes respectively.

⁴ Brian Walsh and Richard Middleton, *The Transforming Vision, Shaping a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), pp. 43f.

to creation."⁵

Both the fall and redemption are understood in terms of the creation. The fall into sin affects every part of the creation, so that in a post-fallen context it is very difficult to delineate clearly between creation and fall. Even so, "creation and sin remain distinct, however closely they may be intertwined in our experience."⁶ Sin is parasitical, possible only because it distorts or perverts something that is originally good. Sin is not a reality in its own right but can only be understood within the context of creation. "What something in creation 'still is' points to the enduring goodness of creation - that is to say, to the faithfulness of God in upholding the created order despite the ravages of sin. Creation will not be suppressed in any final sense."⁷ If one does not posit a distinction between creation and fall, one "fails to do justice to sin's fundamentally outrageous and blasphemous character, and in some subtle or sophisticated sense lays the blame for sin on the Creator rather than on ourselves in Adam."⁸ This theological error is necessarily dualistic, and "grants sin a built-in ontological status."⁹ To deny sin this status is not to minimize its effect. Later neo-

⁵ Spykman, *RT*, p. 278.

⁶ Wolters, *CR*, p. 47.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 48f.

⁹ Spykman, *RT*, p. 67.

Calvinism affirms the Calvinist teaching of total depravity. "Scripture confronts us squarely with the reality of sin as an all-pervasive blight which is inescapably ours. Sin touches our entire personhood. It bends all our life relationships out of shape."¹⁰ And yet, in spite of its all-pervasive character, the fall cannot represent more than the perversion of God's good creation and is comprehensible only within that prior context.

Similarly, understanding the redemption of the fallen creation requires the context of the original, good creation. "The plan of salvation represents God's way of restoring the fallen creation to all it was and is meant to be."¹¹ Such restoration does not bring anything new into the creation; neither does it exclude any part of the creation. "Wherever there is disruption of the good creation - and that disruption is unrestricted in its scope - there Christ provides the possibility of restoration."¹² Restoration is not to be equated with repristination, i.e., a return to the garden of Eden. Rather, restoration recognizes that God intended his good creation to be developed throughout history, and thus redemption is in harmony with the realization of the full potential of the creation.¹³

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 315.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 351.

¹² Wolters, *CR*, p. 59.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 63f.

This later neo-Calvinist understanding of redemption as creation restored is intended to counter two errors: that of perceiving redemption as leading to a reality greater than the original creation, and, conversely, as achieving something less than creation. The former is represented by a Thomistic dualism which construes grace as something added to an incomplete 'nature.' "Redemption is not a matter of an addition of a spiritual or supernatural dimension to creaturely life that was lacking before; grace does not bring a *donum superadditum* to nature."¹⁴ The claim that redemption culminates in a reality greater than the original creation denies, on this account, the goodness of the original creation.

Claims that move in the opposing direction are also dualistic and thus equally problematic. Therefore Wolters writes, "if salvation does not bring more than creation, it does not bring less either. It is all of creation that is included in the scope of Christ's redemption. There is something totalitarian about the claims of both Satan and Christ; nothing in all of creation is neutral in the sense that it is untouched by the dispute between these two great adversaries."¹⁵ The notion that grace pertains to 'religious' realities, and has nothing to do with the vast realm of 'neutral' realities is rooted in a dualism that Spykman traces back

¹⁴ Wolters, *CR*, pp. 58f.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 59f.

to Immanuel Kant, "the great mastermind of the Enlightenment."¹⁶

Kant's distinction between pure and practical reason

recasts the nature/grace dualism into the science/morality, fact/value, or nature/freedom dichotomy. Science deals rationally with the firm facts of reality. Theology belongs to the religious domain where men contemplate sacred things, act morally, and make value judgments. (Kant) exploded the idea of natural theology, of philosophy providing a rational foundation for theology, of faith supported by reason. Traditional theology came to be divorced from all other branches of scholarship, including philosophy. It was left to stand alone as a house without foundations.¹⁷

Kant's fact/value distinction was transposed into a distinction between the public (neutral) and private (religious) spheres of life. When this distinction is taken to its logical conclusion, redemption becomes limited to the salvation of one's soul.

Neo-Calvinist thought has consistently and forcefully rejected any such reduction of redemption. Wolters and Spykman are in complete harmony with Bavinck in repudiating all forms of this Kantian dualism. Their differences lie in their critique of the Thomistic nature/grace dualism. Bavinck also rejects this dualism, but he does accept the notion that the new creation is, in certain respects, greater than the original. Understanding this difference between Bavinck and the later neo-Calvinists requires also analyzing the later view of Christology, eschatology and ethics.

The discussion in chapter five compared Bavinck's theology

¹⁶ *RT*, p. 29.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

with that of the later neo-Calvinists as each construed the relation between God and the creation, surveying concerns that have to do with the Scriptural account of law, the relation between philosophy and theology, and neo-Platonism. In a sense this analysis proceeds in the manner of peeling away the layers of an onion until one arrives at the more central issues. At the center one finds Christology, an area in which the difference between these two views becomes the most stark and is the most clearly discernible. Because the two primary works analyzed here as representative of later neo-Calvinism are both structured according to a creation-fall-redemption pattern, they do not contain specific sections that deal solely with Christology. Wolters' *Creation Regained* in particular presents challenges when one wishes to describe its Christology because it is a relatively small work summarizing the later neo-Calvinist vision, though Christological claims are interspersed throughout the entire book.

Spykman's *Reformational Theology* is a much more thorough, self-consciously theological work, and accordingly offers (or appears to offer) a fairly extensive treatment of Christology.¹⁸ Upon closer examination one discovers that this treatment is not so extensive. Its 135-page Christology chapter includes thirty pages dealing with Christology proper, with the remainder focusing on pneumatology, ecclesiology and the Christian life. More than

¹⁸ Cf. Part Four, "The Way of Salvation, Ch. III, God's Way in Christ," pp. 376-512.

twenty of the thirty pages in the Christology section offer a critique of other Christologies in the history of the Christian faith. Thus, in Spykman's extensive (584 pp.) theological volume, fewer than ten pages are devoted specifically to articulating the Christology of later neo-Calvinism (though, like Wolters, he does intersperse Christological claims throughout his work).

An examination of the Christological claims in these two works yields four fundamental characteristics of later neo-Calvinist Christology. First, this Christology is broadly situated within the orthodox Christian tradition that traces its roots back to the Chalcedon council of 451 C.E. and more narrowly situated within the Calvinist stream. In his introductory chapter Wolters indicates that his purpose is to articulate a very particular understanding of the Christian faith, but these particulars fall within the parameters of "all orthodox Christian churches (which) confess that Jesus Christ has come to atone for sin and redeem mankind from (the) curse, (and) that Christ is both divine and human."¹⁹ Spykman surveys the ecumenical councils of the fourth and fifth centuries, concluding that "Chalcedon said what needed saying without going beyond what Scripture warrants."²⁰ Even so, he shares Calvin's concern over the "often dubious philosophical terminology employed by the early church fathers," and endorses Calvin's mediatorial Christology, which affirms that Jesus Christ,

¹⁹ CR, p. 10.

²⁰ RT, p. 404.

the fully human and fully divine Son of God is the only true mediator between God and his creation.²¹ These fundamental claims are not later neo-Calvinist distinctives; they simply affirm this tradition's affinity with orthodox Christianity and Calvinism.

Second, later neo-Calvinism perceives the mediatorial work of Christ as impacting both areas of creation and redemption, with the latter serving to restore the former. Wolters identifies Christ as the mediator of creation by correlating John 1 and Genesis 1, identifying Christ as the Word of God with the creative word in the beginning.²² Certainly Wolters is in harmony with the long-standing tradition of logos Christology in asserting this correlation, but he then takes one additional step in noting that one might "use 'Word of God' for what we have been calling God's creation 'law.'" While he considers it theologically appropriate to equate Jesus Christ with creation law, he declines to do so because "to give it (the Word of God) yet another standard theological meaning would only cause confusion."²³ Instead, he concludes that "Christ is intimately present in the whole range of

²¹ "Calvin's Christology is most at home in the context of redemption history. In light of both Old and New Testaments he presents Christ as Mediator of the covenant. In his threefold office Christ is our Teacher, Intercessor and King." (RT, p. 405)

²² CR, p. 21.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

what we are calling the law of creation."²⁴ These assertions suggest that the heart of Christology is Christ's work in establishing, upholding and being present through creation law. Christ's mediatorial work is synonymous with the mediatorial work of the creation law which functions between God and his creation, upholding the creation in the proper relationship with its Creator.

The second task of Christ, mediator of redemption, involves restoring the good creation that was made through him. "Redemption as the restoration of the fallen creation to what it was and still is intended to be and become -- this is the basic biblical story line which shapes Reformed thinking. As mediator of redemption Christ builds anew on the foundations he laid as God's mediating Word for creation."²⁵ The Incarnation, the crucifixion, and the resurrection are fundamentally creation restorative events. Through Jesus' death and resurrection believers are enabled and equipped to obey the creation law-order. "Our norm is obedience to the 'already' of the creation order, redemptively updated in the

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 21. Spykman does not posit as close a link between Christ and creation law as does Wolters. In his discussion of cosmology, Spykman notes its Trinitarian source, quoting Calvin to attribute to the Son "the ordered disposition of all things," and citing Kuyper's Trinitarian summary: "In every work effected by Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in common, the power to bring forth proceeds from the Father, the power to arrange from the Son, the power to perfect from the Holy Spirit." (*RT*, pp. 141, 143) These comments also describe the task of mediator of creation in terms of orderedness.

²⁵ Spykman, *RT*, p. 406.

cross and resurrection."²⁶ "The final ground of baptism is the cross and the resurrection. But its original ground lies in the order of creation."²⁷ Those who claim that believers are unable to 'read' the creation order "downplay the renewing power of Jesus Christ in restoring our faculty of discernment."²⁸ "Redemption is the recovery of creational goodness through the annulment of sin and the effort toward the progressive renewal of its effects everywhere. We return to creation through the cross."²⁹ The later neo-Calvinist correlation of Christ as the mediator of creation and of redemption is clearly an expression of its fundamental theme of 'creation restored.' One might say that Christ's work both as mediator of creation and of redemption involves mediating between the creation and the creation order. In the former capacity he establishes and upholds this order. The fruit or benefit of Christ's work of redemption is that the creation is restored to proper relationship with the creation order.

Third, later neo-Calvinist Christology understands Christ to represent the culmination of redemption history. This culmination includes two elements: coherence and climax. Understanding Christ requires situating him within the broad sweep of a coherent redemption history, and this history leads up to and climaxes in

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 524.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 457.

²⁸ Wolters, *CR*, p. 29.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

his Incarnation. Wolters and Spykman affirm the Calvinist emphasis on the unity of redemption history. History displays one coherent work of redemption, a work which is held together in the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. "God's way with the creation, his way with the nations of the world, his way with Israel, and now his way with the church all find their deepest meaning in his way in Christ."³⁰ The Old and New Testaments together depict one fundamental work of salvation.

But Christ does more than 'fit into' a historical work of redemption; he is the climax and culmination of that history. All that is prior to his Incarnation flows to that event, and all that is subsequent flows from his Ascension. This climax makes clear what has been limited to the shadows prior to that time, but this shadow-to-clarity dynamic is not identical to Bavinck's notion of progressive revelation. Whereas Bavinck sees in Christ the full revelation of the love of the Father, later neo-Calvinism asserts that it is in Christ that the creation order becomes more clear once again. Wolters explains this point in careful detail.

The Mosaic law was the divinely accredited implementation of creational law for ancient Israel. This means that the law of Moses is fixed between two reference points: creational law and ancient Israel, the universal and enduring principles of creation and the historical situation of a particular people (Israel) in a particular place (Palestine) at a particular time (the centuries between Moses and Christ). Because of this double reference, the coming of Christ also involves a "fulfillment" of the law in a double sense. On the one hand, the law is fulfilled in that the shadow is replaced by the substance, and Jewish law is no longer binding for the people

³⁰ Spykman, *RT*, p. 376.

of God. On the other hand, the law is fulfilled in that Christ reaffirms its deepest meaning (see Matt. 5: 17). In other words, insofar as the Mosaic law is addressed to a particular phase of the history of God's people it has lost its validity, but insofar as it points to the enduring normativity of God's creation order it retains its validity.³¹

Revelation is progressive to the extent that in Christ the shadows of the Old Testament are replaced by the substance of his person. But it is also not progressive in the sense that creation order is inherently incapable of progression. "God did the implementing for his people in the Old Testament, while in the New he in large measure gives us the freedom in Christ to do our own implementing. But in both cases he holds us to the blueprint of the law of creation."³² There is a progression in the maturity given and the responsibility assigned to the believer; there is a type of epistemological progression, but the ontology remains constant. Creation order stands firm.

This notion of a limited progressive revelation is further clarified by the Wolters' distinction between story and law.

Biblical revelation includes a great deal that has no parallel whatever in creational revelation. In a fundamental sense the Scriptures are the story of our sin in Adam and God's forgiving grace in Christ. Creation, by contrast, does not tell a story at all, nor does it tell anything of that sin or grace. In that regard the two revelations are not comparable. They are comparable, however, as manifestations of God's law, as two ways of making known his will.³³

³¹ CR, pp. 34f.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 35.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

This formulation is striking because it locates redemption history (the story of our sin and God's grace) entirely within the parameters of law. There is a type of progression within the story, but this progression is limited because the entire story is circumscribed by law, which does not change and is therefore not progressive.

A further striking feature of this formulation is that it categorizes the three fundamental forms of the Word of God (creation, Scripture and Jesus Christ) according to two overarching categories (story and law), which are then compressed into one fundamental category: law. Jesus Christ is perceived within the context of Scripture, and Scripture is construed within the context of law.³⁴ This formulation raises a question (to which Bavinck will provide an answer): if Jesus Christ is indeed the climax and center of God's revelation, might there not be an appropriate way to construe both creation and Scripture in terms of Jesus Christ?

Before drawing Bavinck into the conversation, we can note one

³⁴ Spykman provides a similar description of the three forms of the Word of God and progressive revelation. In a section entitled "Closer and closer," he writes, "The original impact of God's creational Word has lost none of its force. To counteract the effects of the fall, God in his condescending grace drives his Word home to us, closer and closer, in successively unfolding stages of revelation. Eventually, in the fullness of the times, God goes all the way. He identifies his Word with us. God walks with us a second mile in the Scriptures, and then a third mile in his Son incarnate." (RT, pp. 84f.)

final characteristic of later neo-Calvinist Christology, which flows directly from the previous point. Both Wolters and Spykman list fundamental categories and distinctions which are foundational for their theology and philosophy. For both men these categories and distinctions are 'pre-Incarnational,' that is, they are categories and distinctions which are rooted in assumptions distinct from God's truth revealed in the Incarnate, crucified and risen Jesus Christ, and the Incarnate Jesus Christ is then understood within the framework formed by these categories and distinctions.

Spykman provides such a list under the heading "Hallmarks of a Christian Philosophy."³⁵ After noting that Christian philosophy is the necessary prolegomena for Reformed dogmatics, he lists six fundamental tenets for such a philosophy: (a) "a firm and clear distinction between the Creator and his creation;" (b) "God discloses his sovereign will and elicits our responses to it by his mediating Word," which is known "theologically as 'creation order,' 'Law-Word,' and 'cultural mandate;'" (c) "*creatio ex nihilo*;" (d) a distinction "between 'the heavens' and 'the earth;'" (e) "history is God's way with his world;" (f) "the distinction between structure and direction," which affirms that "the divinely ordained structures for creation stand forever," and, though the creation is fallen, "in Christ we can begin anew to experience the restoration of our lives, and, within these structures and orders

³⁵ RT, pp. 107-110.

of creation, to redirect them to obedient service." Jesus Christ, as the mediator of both the creation and of redemption, is involved with each of these six 'hallmarks,' yet each of these six is defined apart from the Incarnate, crucified and risen Jesus Christ.³⁶

The Christology of later neo-Calvinism is utterly consistent with the fundamental thrust of its understanding of the Christian faith. Creation law remains at the heart of its understanding, and Jesus Christ is thus portrayed as the mediator of creation through whom the creation was ordered, the one who upholds this order, and the mediator of redemption who restores the capacity of believers to discern and obey creation law. On the one hand, later neo-Calvinism is deeply Christocentric. Its emphasis on the centrality of creation law is thoroughly interwoven with a Christological understanding of that law. On the other hand, this construal raises questions concerning its understanding of Christ: is it appropriate to describe the significance of Jesus Christ within the parameters of the fundamental category of law? Can his significance be rooted in philosophical understandings of creation?

Before dealing with such questions, I will briefly survey two other areas of theological discourse that are derived from

³⁶ Wolters provides a very similar list in "Dutch Neo-Calvinism: Worldview, Philosophy and Rationality," (pp. 120-122) describing "five categorial distinctions that define the unity and distinctiveness of neo-Calvinism as a whole" which parallel Spykman's six with the exception of *creatio ex nihilo*.

Christology: eschatology and ethics. The 'creation restored' motif in later neo-Calvinism obviously has significant implications for its eschatology as well, for the eschaton can be described as the full restoration of the goodness of the original creation, not re-primed but developed in harmony with the cultural mandate. Because the work of redemption neither adds to nor overlooks anything in the creation, "the prospect of the full realization of all things in the consummation is present from the beginning as a potential in the creation."³⁷ Any other construal of the eschaton lapses into a dualism which enervates the power of the Christian faith. Eschatology must be rooted in creation.

If protology runs amuck, then ultimately eschatology will suffer too. Accordingly, "the first word" (protology), "the things which must be said first" (prolegomena), must be anchored in God's "first Word" for the world given with creation. Detaching prolegomena from its creational base means that redemption, as the restoration of the fallen creation, is left hanging in thin air. Then the promised consummation of all things in a renewed world gets reduced to an idealized, vacuous goal, which beckons us onward toward a future as nebulous as the sentimentalized versions of a "sweet bye-and-bye" located "somewhere beyond the blue horizon" on some "beautiful isle of somewhere." If the biblical foundations of the creation order are allowed to crumble, then sooner or later the whole house of Reformed dogmatics will collapse like a deck of cards.³⁸

Spykman's use of strong, uncompromising language here is consistent with the emphases and tone of later neo-Calvinism.

Later neo-Calvinist eschatology, not surprisingly, places a heavy stress on the continuity between the creation, this present

³⁷ Spykman, *RT*, p. 541.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

reality, and the eschaton. "The familiar contours of the created order, with its divinely given structures and functions, give shape and form to the life of a resurrected humanity in God's renewed world where everything will be thoroughly redeemed, completely redirected to its appointed end."³⁹ While there may be "surprising discontinuities within the continuity of God's way with the world,"⁴⁰ the emphasis is clearly on the continuity, for "the eschatological drama introduces no totally new unheard-of themes and characters."⁴¹

Later neo-Calvinism also describes the Kingdom of God in terms of creation restored. During his earthly ministry Jesus declared that the kingdom had come and was coming, and in so doing identified the present and coming kingdom with the renewed and being renewed creation, for "the restoration in Christ of creation and the coming of the Kingdom of God are one and the same."⁴² Spykman perceives a correlation between creation, covenant and kingdom.

In creation God covenanted his kingdom into existence. After the fall, God renewed the covenant with a view toward the coming of his kingdom. The ultimate goal is the restoration

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 559.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 515. Wolters makes a similar point, referring to Bavinck's image of the present creation as a pupa and the new as a butterfly. (*CR*, p. 41)

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Wolters, *CR*, pp. 60f. Spykman agrees: "The most central, all-embracing unifying theme running throughout the Scriptures is that of the coming kingdom." (*RT*, p. 478)

of all creation in the renewed earth. Covenant is kingdom looking back at its original and abiding charter given with the creation. Kingdom is covenant looking forward programatically towards its promised goal of perfect renewal.⁴³

Jesus Christ is the guarantor of the new creation, for through his death and resurrection the kingdom is inaugurated, and at his second coming it will be fully revealed. Later neo-Calvinist writers are fond of quoting Oscar Cullman's eschatological analogy of the significance of D-Day and V-day for World War II: in Christ the decisive victory over sin and death has been won (D-Day), but this victory will not be fully realized until Christ returns (V-Day).⁴⁴ Because of the later neo-Calvinist correlation of creation and kingdom, the 'already and not yet' language of Cullman's analogy can be applied not only to Christ's work, but also to the creation-eschaton relation, allowing Spykman to compare "the eschatological 'not yet'" and the "'already' of the creation order, redemptively updated in the cross and resurrection."⁴⁵

This summary of the later neo-Calvinist understanding of redemption will conclude with brief observations concerning its account of the character of the Christian life. Two characteristics describe the shape of Christian living: first, the

⁴³ *RT*, pp. 11f.

⁴⁴ Cf. Spykman, *RT*, pp. 526f. and Wolters, *CR*, p. 70. Another later neo-Calvinist work, Brian Walsh and Richard Middleton's *The Transforming Vision*, also refers to Cullman's analogy (p. 82). Cullman developed the analogy in *Christ and Time* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1950), p. 87.

⁴⁵ *RT*, p. 524.

believer seeks to live in obedience to the creation order, which, upheld by God's word, is "the permanently normative environment for our life together in this world."⁴⁶ This environment calls the believer to exercise personal responsibility: "we are called to positivize the norm, to apply it to specific situations in our lives. All of human life, in all its vast array of cultural, societal, and personal relationships, is normed in this sense. The almighty Creator lays claim to it all; the universal Sovereign lays down his laws for it all; the absolute King requires his will to be discerned in it all."⁴⁷ Because Jesus Christ is present in the creation order as the mediator of creation, obeying the creation order is obeying Jesus. As mediator of redemption, Jesus Christ enables and equips believers to discern and obey (however falteringly) this order.

Second, redeemed living can be described as redeeming the creation. Defining sanctification as "the restoration of creation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ," Wolters continues by describing it as "the process whereby the Holy Spirit, in and through the people of God, purifies creation from sin on the basis of Christ's atonement and victory. The 'Spirit of holiness' seeks to permeate our creaturely lives, making a qualitative difference in the internal workings of family, business, art,

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

⁴⁷ Wolters, *CR*, p. 15.

government, and so on."⁴⁸ Spykman reinforces Wolters' point, noting that because sanctification "embraces all of life...we can speak meaningfully of political sanctification, academic sanctification, economic sanctification, and all the rest."⁴⁹ The believer who has surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus Christ will seek to proclaim his kingship in every part of her life.

Later neo-Calvinist thought concerning the goal of redemption is unerringly consistent. Wolters' title, *Creation Regained*, sums up its understanding of redemption, its Christology, its eschatology and its ethics. At the heart of these construals one sees Jesus Christ as the mediator of creation, establishing and upholding the creation order as the means through which the creation is held in right relationship with the Triune God. In response to the fall, Jesus Christ also becomes the mediator of redemption, thereby freeing the creation from the grasp of sin, establishing the kingdom, the renewed creation, which is and which is coming.

Wolters and Spykman on Bavinck

In the previous chapter we noted that the later neo-Calvinists perceive themselves to be in harmony with the main thrust of Bavinck's understanding concerning the relationship between God and creation, though they do take issue with his neo-Platonic

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁴⁹ *RT*, p. 497.

tendencies. In their discussions of the goal of creation, Wolters and Spykman mention no divergences whatsoever between their thought and Bavinck's. Both men consistently cite him to support their own theses, emphasizing the continuity between early and later neo-Calvinism. However, it is my contention that Wolters and Spykman have a tendency to appropriate his thought too quickly, overlooking divergences between Bavinck's articulations and their own. Furthermore, they neglect to deal with important themes in Bavinck's understanding of redemption that call their own understandings into question. Here we will note several inappropriate citations, and concern ourselves with neglected themes in the subsequent sections.

First, both Wolters and Spykman adopt the school of interpretation which summarizes the heart of Bavinck's theology as "grace restores nature." Wolters introduces his historical survey of creation order in neo-Calvinism by asserting that "Herman Bavinck (was) probably the greatest theologian of Dutch Neo-Calvinism, (one) whose thought was dominated by the theme 'grace restores nature,' by which he meant that salvation was essentially a restoration of creation in all its fulness."⁵⁰ In chapter four

⁵⁰ "Creation Order: A Historical Look at our Heritage," p. 42. Wolters does not quote Bavinck to support this claim, but cites Veenhof's dissertation, which suggests that Wolters is situating himself within a particular stream of Bavinck interpretation. For other citations of 'grace restores nature' as a summary of Bavinck's theology, cf. Wolters, *CR*, pp. 10f., "The Intellectual Milieu of Herman Dooyeweerd," p. 4 (also supported by a Veenhof footnote), and Spykman, *RT*, pp. 69f., 480, 558. (Spykman refers to Veenhof's dissertation in each of these citations.)

I engaged in conversation with this Veenhof/Heideman interpretation of Bavinck's theology, and suggested "grace restores and perfects nature" as a more accurate summary of Bavinck's understanding of redemption.⁵¹ That discussion need not be revisited here; it is sufficient to note that both Wolters and Spykman uncritically accept the Veenhof interpretation, frequently relying more on Veenhof than on Bavinck. The difficulty of reading Bavinck through Veenhof's eyes becomes particularly acute in Spykman's discussion of the 'creation restored' theme. At one point he cites the following Bavinck quotation from Veenhof's work (from a chapter of Veenhof's dissertation translated into English by Wolters):

The covenant of grace (redemption) differs from the covenant of works (creation) in the road, not in its final destination...The point of arrival returns to the point of departure, and is simultaneously a high point elevated high above the point of departure.⁵²

Spykman cites this quotation to reinforce his point that redemption "is aimed at the restoration of God's original intent for the creation,"⁵³ and does not make reference to the concept of elevation in the citation. Spykman does not acknowledge Veenhof's purpose in citing this reference, which is that the redeemed creation does not return to the original, neither is it elevated through a *donum superadditum*, but rather is developed as God

⁵¹ Cf. chapter four, pp. 245-288.

⁵² *RT*, p. 87, cited from Veenhof, "Nature and Grace in Bavinck," pp. 19-20. (Veenhof is quoting from *GD III*, p. 582).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

intended to be.⁵⁴ My view (developed in chapter four) is that Bavinck's eschatology must include a concept of elevation, which is not to be construed as a *donum superadditum*, nor as the development of creation, but rather as the transformation of the creation.⁵⁵ To summarize Bavinck's theology with the phrase 'grace restores nature' is reductionistic: while partially true, it does not describe the full reality. Bavinck does perceive an important link between the creation and the eschaton, but this link also involves a crucial 'surplus' which cannot be acknowledged in the phrase, 'grace restores nature.'

Second, Spykman cites Bavinck to support the notion that ethics are rooted in creation law. He provides a lengthy citation from *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* II, pp. 399f. to describe the "kaleidoscopic picture" of creation which contains a wonderfully diverse array of creatures, each held in its distinct place by its Creator and yet all part of an organic whole. Among this array one finds "doctrine and life, art and science, religion and morality, state and church, family and society, etc."⁵⁶ Spykman quotes Bavinck to affirm that redemption is enacted in every part of one's

⁵⁴ Veenhof concludes, "the thesis concerning the restoration of nature by grace, in combination with the insight that reformation is more than reipristination, is constitutive for Bavinck's eschatology." (p. 20)

⁵⁵ This brief 'aside' concerning transformation is necessary simply to engage the Veenhof interpretation as adopted by Wolters and Spykman. However, more detailed discussion has taken place in chapter four, and will continue in chapter seven.

⁵⁶ RT, p. 188, quoting Bavinck, *GD* II, pp. 399f.

life, and these various parts are both distinct and thoroughly interrelated. Up to this point in the argument, the views of Bavinck and Spykman are very similar.

Spykman continues with a second Bavinck citation that develops the further point that Christian ethics are rooted in the "normed and lawful nature of the created order:"⁵⁷ "Man is not autonomous, but is always and everywhere bound by laws not invented by man, but set forth by God as the rule for life. They form a unity among themselves and find their origin and continuation in the Creator and Lawgiver of the universe."⁵⁸ These sentences support an ethic rooted in creation order, but a reading of this citation in the context of the chapter from which it originates reveals that Bavinck's understanding of creation order ethics is not identical to Spykman's. Spykman perceives all history as bound by the creation order, and redemption in Christ enables and equips the believer to live in obedience to the creation order, which will be fully restored when Christ returns. This contrasts with Bavinck's view, which sees the creation order as a firm reality established by God which undermines attempts by humanity to posit human autonomy and a corresponding subjectivism, and which sets the parameters for the work of redemption culminating in the fulness of

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 188f., quoting Bavinck, *Christelijke Wereldbeschouwing*, p. 90. Spykman cites the identical quotation earlier, concluding that it expresses "the central importance of God's Law-Word as the norm for all created reality, to which God freely binds himself, and to which he holds us." (*Ibid.*, p. 94)

the kingdom.

Indien de Christelijke religie, die haar voorbereiding reeds heeft in de openbaring van het paradijs af en haar doel eerst bereikt in de wederkomst van Christus ten jongsten dage, indien deze religie niet is de werkelijke verlossing der menschheid en de herschepping der wereld, valt alle grond weg voor het geloof, dat de geschiedenis ontwikkeling en vooruitgang is, dat zij streeft naar een doel en op het voltooide Godsrijk uitloopt.⁵⁹

In this context of redemption history, humanity today remains in submission to God's law as it is revealed through the creation and points to Jesus Christ. "Daarnaar ons te conformeeren, in verstand en hart, in denken en handelen, dat is in den diepsten grond den beelde van Gods Zoon gelijkvormig te worden; en dit is het ideaal en de bestemming van den mensch."⁶⁰ Such conformity is not to be construed as conforming to an abstract creation order 'out there.' Rather, the Incarnation describes for us the way of obedience, which is to become a new creation in Christ.

Gelijk de wijsheid Gods in Christus vleesch geworden is, zoo behoort de waarheid ook in ons in te gaan, zij moet in den weg der vrijheid ons eigen persoonlijk en geestelijke eigendom worden; door een levend en waarachtig geloof moet zij in een bestanddeel van ons eigen denken en handelen worden omgezet, en dan buiten van ons worden verbreid, totdat de aarde vol is

⁵⁹ Bavinck, *CW*, pp. 94f. "If the Christian religion, which already has its preparation in the revelation in paradise and first reaches its goal with the return of Jesus in the day of the Lord, if this religion is not the true reconciliation of humanity and the re-creation of the world, then all grounds for belief collapse, that history is development and progress, that it strives towards a goal and culminates in the completed reign of God."

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 103. "To become conformed to these (laws), in mind and heart, in thought and action, is the deepest meaning of becoming conformed to the image of God's son. And this is the ideal and goal of humanity."

van de kennis des Heeren.⁶¹

These citations point to an integrated understanding of creation, Christ and eschaton in which the creation indeed plays an important role but it is not determinative of the character of Christ and the eschaton. Rather, through the creation God establishes the enduring, stable context which leads to Christ and climaxes in the eschaton. The enduring, stable context provided by the creation precludes any understandings of *homo autonomos* who writes his own laws.⁶²

John Bolt also takes issue with neo-Calvinist readings of Bavinck, stating that many Bavinck interpreters have too hastily concluded that Bavinck's ethics are entirely rooted in creation. While Bolt acknowledges the important role that the doctrine of creation does play in Bavinck's ethics, he clearly demonstrates that, in addition, one can also discern "Bavinck's explicit use of the imitation of Christ theme as a valid and necessary but partial

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 106. "Just as the wisdom of God has become flesh in Christ, so the truth is intended to become part of us. In a way which respects freedom it must become our own personal and spiritual property. Through a true and living faith it must be translated into a constituent part of our own thoughts and actions, and then be spread outwards from us, until the earth is full of the knowledge of the Lord."

⁶² At another point Spykman also reads his own understanding of creation order into Bavinck's theology. In a section which seeks to demonstrate that "the covenant is rooted in God's work of creation," (*RT*, pp. 260-263), he cites a lengthy passage from Bavinck (*GD II*, pp. 530-532) which emphasizes the centrality of the covenant in the Christian faith, but does not directly support his point, that this covenant is rooted in the creation.

aspect of his total cultural-ethical ideal,"⁶³ a theme which is absent from other neo-Calvinists.⁶⁴ Bolt is not concerned with comparing creational and eschatological understandings of redemption as we are here, but his observation supports the view that, in Bavinck's understanding, Christ's work as mediator of redemption cannot be reduced to restoring his work as mediator of creation. The ethic of following Christ cannot be equated with the ethic of creation order. Though Bolt's view and the position developed here are not entirely in harmony with each other, both positions agree that Bavinck's theology includes a prominent role for the doctrine of creation, but this doctrine cannot be construed as being the ontological determinant for his overall thought.

One final brief observation concerning the later neo-Calvinist citations of Bavinck may be made. Both Wolters and Spykman stress the continuity between the original creation and the eschaton. Both cite Bavinck on this point; Wolters, recognizing that the continuities with the eschaton will also include transfiguration and transformation, employs Bavinck's metaphor of "the colorful butterfly that develops out of the pupa: dramatically different but the same creature."⁶⁵ Spykman provides a paragraph from *Magnalia Dei* that lists several Scriptural quotations that

⁶³ Bolt, *ICT*, p. 6.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁶⁵ *CR*, p. 41.

emphasize the same point.⁶⁶ Both emphasize the continuity, but use Bavinck to qualify this emphasis, to indicate that there are discontinuities within the fundamental continuity. Neither provide a systematic description of these continuities and discontinuities as was done in chapter four. As noted in that chapter, Bavinck's account asserts that both continuities and discontinuities play a prominent role in the creation/eschaton relation, and it is simplistic to emphasize the former and subsume the latter within the context of continuity. For a just rendering of Bavinck's thought another model is needed, one which respects the two-sided relation between creation and eschaton: grace restores *and perfects* nature.

Because the doctrine of creation plays a prominent role in both early and later neo-Calvinism, it is not surprising that both Wolters and Spykman cite Bavinck extensively in their works. However, the later writers do not note the shift which has taken place in the understanding of redemption, and the implications of this shift for Christology and ethics. As a result, too often their citations do not do justice to Bavinck's full intent, and do not recognize the theological framework within which these citations function. This disharmony between original intent and later citation provides the foundation for Bavinck's theology to serve as a foil for later neo-Calvinism. How might his theology respond to the construals of later neo-Calvinism? Before engaging

⁶⁶ *RT*, p. 560, quoting *MD*, p. 644.

in this dialogue, a contemporary critic of neo-Calvinism needs to be heard.

Begbie's critique

Jeremy Begbie's essay "Creation, Christ and Culture in Dutch Neo-Calvinism" provides a profoundly perceptive and helpful analysis of the issues under discussion here.⁶⁷ He limits himself to summarizing the thought of Kuyper, Bavinck and Dooyeweerd. Begbie's purpose is twofold: first, he commends the theology of culture articulated by Dutch neo-Calvinism:

For their consistency, thoroughness and concern for fidelity to Scripture, the Dutch neo-Calvinists deserve considerable respect and much wider appreciation in the English-speaking world than they have received to date. Few have offered a theology so comprehensive in scope, and when it comes to applying this theology to specific fields of culture, few have been so courageous in venturing into areas frequently disregarded by other theologians.⁶⁸

Though he concludes the essay with another affirmation of respect,⁶⁹ the bulk of Begbie's energy is directed towards pinpointing the problems he perceives in Dutch neo-Calvinism. These include the following: first, God is construed primarily as a law-giver and a judge. "We are not allowed to speak of love at the heart of God."⁷⁰ Second, "this doctrine of God is wedded to

⁶⁷ Jeremy Begbie, "Creation, Christ and Culture in Dutch Neo-Calvinism" in *Christ in our Place, The Humanity of God in Christ for the Reconciliation of the World*, eds. Trevor A. Hart and Daniel P. Thimell. (Allison Park: Pickwick, 1989), pp. 113-132.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

a thoroughly legalistic theology of creation. Kuyper invites us to view the created world in terms of unchanging structures which express God's will. Bavinck follows a very similar route."⁷¹ Third, such a view "will all too easily sanction a sub-Christian theology of creation. Creation has been defined in advance outside of Christ according to some theory of universal law."⁷² Fourth, "what is missing is a thorough integration of creation and redemption by means of the headship of Christ as man."⁷³ This is due to a "curious type of Nestorianism (which) tends to limit the significance of the human nature of Christ to the salvation of the elect, and the import of the incarnation and the manhood of Christ for apprehending God's purposes in creation as a whole is virtually ignored."⁷⁴ Fifth, neo-Calvinist "anthropology displays a legalistic twist from the start."⁷⁵ As a result, it "runs the risk of forgetting that the orders of creation are there for us to enjoy."⁷⁶ Sixth, it also overlooks that through Christ God is carrying the creation forwards to its goal, and "it is our calling to participate in this divine activity in union with the Son of God."⁷⁷ Finally, the neo-Calvinist understanding of obedience is

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 125.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

reductionist. "We are at our most obedient, not when we conform to some law imposed from without, but when we are conformed through the Spirit to the likeness of Christ our brother."⁷⁸ These seven complaints directly address the issues of this chapter. In summary, they perceive an understanding of redemption rooted in a pre-Christological, law-oriented doctrine of creation, Nestorian Christology, a weak eschatology, and a legalistic view of sanctification.

Begbie's critique deserves serious attention. He provides extensive footnotes, his words of appreciation for the tradition are well-founded, and his critique is thorough and coherent. Each point builds upon and flows from the previous point, penetrating to issues that lie at the heart of neo-Calvinism. His essay also raises an important question for the discussion taking place here. Several of his points of critique resonate with critical comments made here concerning later neo-Calvinism. Yet, Begbie does not concern himself with later neo-Calvinism at all, limiting himself to two figures from the early period and one from mid neo-Calvinism. As such, his critique calls into question a fundamental thesis of chapters five and six of this work: that later neo-Calvinism has shifted from Bavinck's eschatological understanding of redemption to a creational understanding, and this shift creates more problems than it solves. On Begbie's account Bavinck participates completely in a creational understanding of

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

redemption, and thus is a full participant in the problems he associates with such a view.

I will respond to Begbie's critique in two ways. First, I will analyze the propriety of his critique of Herman Bavinck. Second, I will evaluate the extent to which his comments can also be applied to later neo-Calvinism. Concerning the former, three general observations set the stage for a response. Begbie treats Kuyper, Bavinck and Dooyeweerd as theological bed-fellows without qualification (although he does make one brief reference to Dooyeweerd providing a corrective to Kuyper's view of common grace.⁷⁹) In the introduction to chapter five I noted that later neo-Calvinism particularly traces its heritage from Kuyper through Dooyeweerd, and that there is reason to perceive Bavinck's theology as bearing close affinity to while not being completely in harmony with this particular stream. Begbie does not acknowledge such a possibility. Furthermore, though Begbie provides ample citations of Bavinck's works to illustrate his points, he makes only two brief, unquoted references to the *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, and on four occasions quotes Bavinck as he has been cited and translated by Gordon Spykman.⁸⁰ This suggests that he has accepted (consciously or unconsciously) the later neo-Calvinist school of Bavinck interpretation which is being called into question here. Finally, Begbie's methodology involves introducing Kuyper's view on

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 116, nn. 11, 12, 13; p. 125, n. 65.

a particular topic, and continuing with a synopsis of Bavinck as an echo of Kuyper. For example, after summarizing Kuyper's understanding of common grace, he continues, "Among Kuyper's followers, this doctrine of common grace found its strongest supporter in Bavinck."⁸¹ Bremmer's summary of the correspondence between Kuyper and Bavinck on this topic demonstrates that this claim is highly questionable.⁸² These three observations give one reason to scrutinize Begbie's analysis of Bavinck very carefully. I will not investigate each description Begbie offers concerning Bavinck's theology. There is a great deal of affinity between Kuyper, Bavinck, Dooyeweerd and later neo-Calvinism, and many of Begbie's observations ring true. I will focus on challenging those assertions in which he inappropriately construes Bavinck's theology.

Begbie's first (and fundamental) concern is that neo-Calvinism subscribes to a "thoroughly legalistic theology of creation" in which "creation has been defined in advance outside Christ according to some theory of universal law."⁸³ More specifically, he notes that "Kuyper invites us to view the created world in terms of unchanging structures that express God's will. Bavinck follows a very similar route."⁸⁴

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁸² *Bavinck en zijn tijdgenoten*, p. 197.

⁸³ Begbie, "Creation, Christ and Culture," pp. 124f.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

Bavinck echoes Kuyper when he claims: "Grace is something other and higher than nature, but it nevertheless joins up with nature, does not destroy it but restores it rather. Grace... (flows) on in the river-bed which has been dug out in the natural relationships of the human race."⁸⁵

Begbie provides a Bavinck quote which expresses a foundational concern of his theology -- that of the intimate relationship between God's work of redemption and his work of creation -- but this citation does not illustrate what Begbie purports it to. Bavinck does not define creation "outside of Christ according to some theory of universal law." He does not perceive it "in terms of unchanging structures that express God's will." Rather, creation provides the parameters through which God's grace is received. That grace is "other and higher than nature" as it flows in its "riverbed" is consistent with Bavinck's understanding that one cannot define creation outside of Christ but neither can one define Christ within the limits of creation. Bavinck does recognize the reality of creation law, but this law functions to provide an objective stability to the creation which lies outside of human positing and to which humanity is also subject.

Second, Begbie perceives a type of Nestorian Christology in Bavinck's theology. After describing this tendency in Kuyper, he continues, "For Bavinck also, Christ exercises his reign over the world as the divine King but not as the crucified and risen Man in whom the created order is reconciled to its Maker."⁸⁶ Begbie

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 125, quoting Bavinck, *RF*, p. 277.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 127. He cites Bavinck, *RF*, p. 384 in a footnote.

perceives a dichotomistic Christology in which the mediator of creation is the second person of the Trinity, the mediator of redemption is the divine and human Jesus Christ, and "the import of the incarnation and the manhood of Christ for apprehending God's purposes in creation as a whole is virtually ignored."⁸⁷

In the reference that Begbie provides to substantiate this critique,⁸⁸ Bavinck does indeed make a distinction within the work of Christ, but not in the manner which Begbie describes. Bavinck focuses on the title of Christ as head, and he perceives this headship as indicating two distinct meanings. First, Christ is head of the church, so that "in the church there is nothing, no gift, no power, no office, no ministry, no faith, no hope, no love, no salvation except as it comes from Christ."⁸⁹ Second, "Christ is the head of every man...the head of all principality and power, that is, of all angels, because he is the firstborn of every creature."⁹⁰ Bavinck continues by noting the distinction between these two types of headship:

The name of head has a different significance in these contexts than it has when Christ is called the head of his church. In the second instance Paul is thinking especially of the organic relationship, the unifying principle of life, of Christ and his church. But when Christ is called the head of the man, or of angels, or of the world, the figure of sovereign or king is being stressed. All creatures without exception are subordinate to Christ, even as he himself as

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Bavinck, *RF*, p. 384.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

Mediator is subordinated to the Father. While he exercises a sovereignty of grace over the church and is therefore frequently called the head of the church, he is vested with a sovereignty of power over all creatures.⁹¹

At this point Bavinck continues by pointedly rejecting the view which has led to Begbie's concern. "The kingship of power may not be identified with the absolute sovereignty which Christ, according to his Divine nature, has in common with the Father and the Spirit. The omnipotence which is the Son's from eternity is to be distinguished from the power of which Christ speaks in Matt. 28: 18 and which is given him specifically as Mediator in both of his natures."⁹² Bavinck clearly stresses that the two types of headship he is describing here are both attributed to the fully divine and fully human crucified and risen Christ, and he distinguishes these two types from the eternal sovereignty in which Christ participates in his divine nature. Though Begbie charges that for Bavinck Christ's headship over the world (as distinguished from his headship over the church) is "not as the crucified and risen Man," Bavinck declares that Christ "must also triumph over all his enemies. He does not meet them in the field and defeat them in battle by means of his Divine omnipotence, but he shows them the power which he has earned by his suffering and death. He will triumph over them through the cross."⁹³ Bavinck specifically and clearly rejects "the curious type of Nestorianism" which Begbie discerns in his thought.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 384f.

Third, Begbie faults neo-Calvinism (including Bavinck) for its eschatology.

The theme of Christ as the agent of creation reminds us that not only does God sustain the created world and hold it in being through the Son, but through him, God is actively carrying it forward towards its goal. God is at work 'developing the earth', bringing to fruition its implicit possibilities, forging order out of disorder and chaos, summoning all things to a destiny not given 'in the beginning'. It is our calling to participate in this divine activity in union with the Son of God, in whom all things find their meaning and coherence, and in whom, by virtue of his incarnation, passion and resurrection, every evil in creation has been defeated. It is here we need to appreciate the pivotal importance of the headship of the man Jesus Christ, crucified and exalted, which, as we have already remarked, eludes the neo-Calvinists and leads to so many unfortunate dichotomies in their theology. Our 'developing the earth' can only mean accepting, affirming and above all sharing in Christ's continuing ministry as Lord of creation.⁹⁴

On the basis of Bavinck's theology, one can respond to this concern in two ways. First, Bavinck fully supports the eschatological dynamic which Begbie espouses. The most basic point of the present work is to illustrate that many of Begbie's claims summarized above lie at the heart of Bavinck's theology; Bavinck subscribes to an eschatological understanding of redemption in which the crucified and risen Lord reigns as head of the church and will gather all things together under his feet. Second, Bavinck would take issue with Begbie's claim that God's work of developing the earth forges "order out of disorder and chaos."⁹⁵ In Bavinck's view that sentence should read, "God is at work developing the earth,

⁹⁴ Begbie, "Creation, Christ and Culture," pp. 130f.

⁹⁵ It is difficult to discern the internal coherence between this reference to "disorder and chaos" and his opening description of God "sustaining the created world and holding it in being through the Son."

bringing to fruition its implicit possibilities, forging order out of the disorderedness of the good but fallen creation, summoning all things to a destiny not fully given in the beginning." Begbie does not describe his own theology of creation, but the objectionable phrase referred to here suggests that he not only rejects the neo-Calvinist construal of creation as "defined outside Christ according to some theory of universal law," but also rejects any notion of the ordered character of creation. Bavinck's theology demonstrates that one need not choose between these two extremes. Affirming the ordered character of creation does not undermine the Lordship of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ.

Finally, Begbie rejects a legalistic construal of sanctification with its "inclination to conceive God first and foremost as the lawgiver" so that "we are not allowed to speak of love at the heart of God."⁹⁶ In this case Begbie runs into direct conflict with G. C. Berkouwer who perceives the fundamental motif in Bavinck's theology to be "for God so loved the world," observing that Bavinck especially missed the emphasis on the Father's love in the theology of his day.⁹⁷ On this point the weight of Bavinck's theology leans decidedly more to Berkouwer than to Begbie. In response to Begbie's corrective statement, "we are at our most obedient, not when we conform to some law imposed from without, but when we are conformed through the Spirit to the likeness of Christ,

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁹⁷ Berkouwer, *Zoeken en Vinden*, pp. 49, 61.

our brother,"⁹⁸ Bavinck can reply,

Gelijk de wijsheid Gods in Christus vleesch geworden is, zoo behoort de waarheid ook in ons in te gaan, zij moet in den weg der vrijheid ons eigen persoonlijk en geestelijk eigendom worden; door een levend en waarachtig geloof moet zij in een bestanddeel van ons eigen denken en handelen worden omgezet, en dan buiten ons worden verbreid, totdat de aarde vol is van de kennis des Heeren.⁹⁹

Herein we see Bavinck's summary of sanctification: growing in Christ as we anticipate the glorification of the entire creation. Certainly law plays a role in this process for Bavinck, but it is not the fundamental determinant of the character of the process. That role belongs to Christ alone.

This response to Begbie's critique of Dutch neo-Calvinism has been extensive, primarily because Begbie warrants a decisive and thorough response. Begbie's essay is perceptive and helpful. It errs in its assumption that Bavinck's thought is simply an echo of Kuyper's as both anticipate the thought of Dooyeweerd. It also appears to assume a doctrine of creation with which not only Kuyper and Dooyeweerd, but also Bavinck, would be at odds. In spite of these two qualifiers, the essay has much to contribute to an analysis of neo-Calvinism, and we will return to it later in this chapter.

⁹⁸ Begbie, "Creation, Christ and Culture," p. 131.

⁹⁹ *CW*, p. 106. "Just as the wisdom of God became flesh in Christ, so is the truth to become part of us. In a way which respects freedom, it must become our own personal and spiritual property. Through a true and living faith it must be translated into a constituent part of our thoughts and actions, so that it spreads outwards from us, until the earth is full of the knowledge of the Lord."

Bavinck and later neo-Calvinism

There are many significant similarities between the theology of Herman Bavinck and that of later neo-Calvinism, but as one penetrates to the heart of their respective thought, the differences between them become increasingly striking. Later neo-Calvinism is creation-centered; every topic and theme which it develops eventually comes home to the doctrine of creation. Bavinck is Christ-centered. He asserts the unquestionable significance of the creation, but the majority of the themes and topics which he develops in his theology eventually find their rootage in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The later neo-Calvinists perceive the fruit of Christ's work as the restoration of the creation. Bavinck's Christocentric understanding of redemption construes the new creation as both a restoration and a perfection of the creation, so that the new creation is in some way greater than the original. For later neo-Calvinism the Christian life focuses on the believer's responsibility for redeeming the creation in anticipation of the coming kingdom within the context of the creation order. Bavinck's ethic is more nuanced, distinguishing between the believer's inner renewal and the outer manifestations of this renewal and between the rebirth of the believer and the rebirth of the entire creation. These distinctions support an understanding of the church as the prolepsis of the new creation within the context of an organic relationship between God, humanity and the creation. These divergences between Bavinck and the later neo-Calvinists come into

clearer focus as we recall concepts which are central to Bavinck's theology and which are either not employed or significantly altered in later neo-Calvinism: progressive revelation, duality and the organic.

I will develop the argument here that Bavinck's theology develops the stronger framework for dealing with these issues. The later neo-Calvinist corrective of Bavinck's theology is reductionist in character, requiring certain truths of the Christian faith to function with more weight in its overall theological understanding than they can rightly bear. I will argue that Bavinck would agree that creation is indeed (in part) a lawfully ordered entity, but this truth must be construed in proper relation to the larger picture of Christian truth. The later neo-Calvinists ascribe to creation law more weight than it can appropriately bear, and this inappropriate emphasis corresponds with a reductionist Christology, a reductionist eschatology, and a reductionist understanding of the history of redemption. In essence this reductionism treats creation order as an end in itself; the full restoration of the creation indicates the completion of God's purposes. For Bavinck the ultimate end is intimate relationship between God and his people in the new creation, and an ordered creation serves as the context for the way of redemption now.

The heart of the divergence lies in differing construals of

the relation between creation and Jesus Christ. I will describe these construals from two perspectives: first, the broader picture which surveys the relations between Christology and creation, redemption and revelation, and second, a more narrowly defined perspective which focuses on their methods of Christological description. In the wider picture, later neo-Calvinism posits the priority of creation, and perceives Jesus Christ first of all as the mediator of creation, the one through whom all things were made. God's revelation in creation has ontological priority; the work of Christ as the mediator of redemption is fundamentally restorative in character, repairing the damage caused by the fall. Because creation has ontological primacy, revelation can be construed within the basic category of law, for law most accurately describes the character of creation. Both Wolters and Spykman provide summary statements that encapsulate these interrelations and describe the significance of Jesus Christ primarily in terms of creation law.

We have seen that these central realities -- creation, fall, redemption -- are the fundamental points of the biblical compass. When we look through the corrective lens of Scripture, everywhere the things of our experience begin to reveal themselves as creaturely, as under the curse of sin, and as longing for redemption. These are the ABC's of authentically Christian experience, the biblical assumptions that clarify our experience when we bring every thought into obedience in Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁰

Christian scholarship, theology included, is called to discern the norms of God's creational Word for our life in this world, illumined and directed by his Word in Scripture, under the regal authority of his Word incarnate, so that thus we may

¹⁰⁰ Wolters, CR, p. 72.

learn to "lead every thought captive in obedience to Christ."¹⁰¹

Only by donning the spectacles of Scripture, in submission to the Christ of the Scriptures, and illumined by his Spirit, can we answer faithfully to creation's call.¹⁰²

In each of these formulations Jesus Christ is recognized as the bearer of ultimate authority, and the purpose of this authority is to uphold and restore the creation order. It is as if creation order serves as the mediator between God and the creation, and Jesus Christ serves as the mediator between the creation order and the creation. The significance of the person and work of Jesus Christ is construed within the context of creation law. This construal is rooted in a double reduction: the significance of Jesus Christ is defined within the framework of creation, and creation is defined by creation law.

On Bavinck's account, God's revelation is progressively richer and deeper, culminating in the person of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the most fundamental, all-embracing 'category' which describes this revelation is not law, but the person of Jesus Christ. "In Christus heeft God zich ten volle geopenbaard en ten volle geschonken."¹⁰³ "Een mensch is de voltooide openbaring Gods."¹⁰⁴ Both the creation and Scripture point to God's revelation in Jesus

¹⁰¹ Spykman, *RT*, p. 84.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 170.

¹⁰³ *GD I*, p. 355. "In Christ God has revealed himself fully and given himself fully."

¹⁰⁴ *MD*, p. 81. "A person is the completed revelation of God."

Christ. Because the fullness of God is revealed in Christ, "daarom is de Schrift ook voltooid, zij is het volkomene woord Gods."¹⁰⁵ Similarly, because revelation is coherently progressive, Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of creational revelation. "De openbaring, welke in Christus tot ons komt, zich aansluitende bij de openbaring, welke de natuur zelve ons kennen doet, verheft zij deze tot haar volle recht en handhaaft ze in hare wezenlijke waarde."¹⁰⁶ Though all revelation culminates in Christ, Christ does not point to himself but rather to the new creation. "Het doel der openbaring is niet Christus; Christus is centrum en middel. Het doel is, dat God wederom in zijn schepselen wone en in den kosmos zijne heerlijkheid openbare."¹⁰⁷

There is truth in noting that later neo-Calvinism perceives 'law' as the fundamental revelatory category while Bavinck understands 'person' to hold this role, but such a comparison is also misleading. Bavinck does not describe revelation in terms of categories. God reveals himself in creation, in Scripture, in Jesus Christ (and, to a lesser extent, in history and personal experience), and Bavinck simply describes the character of each of

¹⁰⁵ *GD* I, p. 355. "Therefore the Scriptures are also completed, they are the full Word of God."

¹⁰⁶ *WO*, p. 90. "The revelation which comes to us in Christ joins itself to the revelation which nature itself makes known to us, elevates this to its fullest right, and maintains it in its real value."

¹⁰⁷ *GD* I, p. 352. "The goal of revelation is not Christ; Christ is the center and means. The goal is that God will live again in his creatures and reveal his glory in the cosmos."

these types of revelation without defining them in terms of philosophical categories. He does declare that all of God's revelation holds together and reaches its completion in Jesus Christ, and he notes that a person is the completed revelation of God, but he does not take the additional step of defining categorical distinctions. This divergence illustrates the more systematically philosophical character of later neo-Calvinism in contrast with the Bavinck's desire to maintain faithfulness to the Scriptures rather than achieve systematic precision.

The role of law in Bavinck's theology differs from that in later neo-Calvinism. Both Bavinck and the later neo-Calvinists affirm that God fashioned the cosmos in a lawfully ordered manner as a contingent reality dependent upon its Creator, but beyond that commonality two important distinctions can be noted. Bavinck takes the additional step of perceiving the establishment of the creation order as we know it today in God's covenant with Noah.

Natuur en menschenwereld zijn door het verbond aan banden gelegd. Overal zijn wetten en ordeningen. Allerwege zijn dammen en dijken gelegd, om den stroom der ongerechtigheden te beteugelen. Orde, maat en getal zijn het kenmerk der schepping geworden. God breidelt het wilde dier in den mensch, stelt hem in de gelegenheid om zijne gaven en krachten in kunst en wetenschap, in maatschappij en staat, in beroep en bedrijf tot ontwikkeling te brengen, en vervult daarmede de voorwaarden, welke geschiedenis mogelijk maken.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ MD, p. 40. "By this covenant bans and restrictions were laid upon nature and man. Laws and ordinances appeared everywhere. There were dams and dikes now to hold back the stream of iniquities. Order, measure, and number came to be the characterizing earmark of creation. God curbs the wild animal in man and so gives him the opportunity to develop his gifts and energies in art and science, in state and society, in work and

This claim counters the later neo-Calvinist understanding of creation order in two ways. First, it does not perceive creation order as an abstract blueprint which existed prior to the creation of the cosmos, but rather situates creation order (at least partially) within the flow of redemption history. One of the steps of God's progressive work of redemption was to curb the chaos of sin after the flood. In contrast to the later neo-Calvinist view which perceives there to be a limited type of progressive revelation within the bounds of an ahistorical creation order, Bavinck's account of an increased orderliness established after the flood constitutes one step in that progression. The order of creation is affected by God's work in redemption history. Second, rather than redemption history serving to restore the creation order, on Bavinck's account the establishment of a post-deluge heightened orderliness expedites the course of redemption history as through it "God fulfills the conditions which make history possible." Bavinck's view is consonant with an eschatological understanding of redemption. Bavinck recognizes lawful orderliness as one of the characteristics of creation, but he does not reduce creation to creation law. Rather, this lawful orderliness provides the stable parameters for redemption history as God leads his creation to its eschatological goal.

Earlier in this chapter we noted that later neo-Calvinism

calling. Thus God fulfills the conditions which make history possible." (RF, p. 50)

understands the role of law to progress through redemption history from the Mosaic law to its fulfillment in Jesus Christ, a progression which occurs within the framework of constancy provided by creation law. Bavinck also sees this historical progression, but rather than situating it within the framework of creation law he situates it within that of the eschatological gospel promise.

Niet wet, maar Evangelie is in Oud en Nieuw Testament beide een kern der Goddelijke openbaring, het wezen der religie, de hoofdsom der H. Scriptuur. Elke andere opvatting doet aan de bijzondere openbaring tekort, wischt haar onderscheid van de algemeene uit, degradeert het Oude Testament, scheurt de beide bedelingen van het eene genadeverbond uiteen, verandert langzamerhand ook het Evangelie des Nieuwen Verbonds in eene wet en maakt Christus tot een tweeden Mozes. De wet is tijdelijk, voorbijgaand, een middel in dienst der belofte, maar de belofte is eeuwig; zij nam haar aanvang bij het paradijs, wordt door de openbaring bewaard en ontwikkeld in de dagen des Ouden Verbonds, bereikt in Christus hare vervulling en breidt dan tot de gansche menschheid en tot alle volken zich uit.¹⁰⁹

The eternal gospel promise, within whose context one is to understand the role of law, progresses from its fulfillment in Christ to the new creation.

De centrale feiten van incarnatie, satisfactie en resurrectie zijn de vervulling van des Ouden Testaments, de inhoud van het Evangelie des Nieuwen Verbonds, het kerygma der apostelen, de grondslag der Christelijke kerk, de kern van hare belijdenis

¹⁰⁹ *WO*, p. 163. "Not law, but gospel, is in the Old and New Testament alike the core of the divine revelation, the essence of religion, the sum total of the Holy Scriptures. Every other view fails to do justice to special revelation, effaces its difference from general revelation, degrades the Old Testament, rends apart the two economies of the same covenant of grace, and even gradually changes the gospel of the New Covenant into a law, and makes of Christ a second Moses. The law is temporal, transitory, a means in the service of the promise, but the promise is eternal; it had its beginning in paradise, was preserved and developed by revelation in the days of the Old Covenant, received its fulfillment in Christ, and is now extended to the whole human race and all the peoples." (*PR*, pp. 192f.)

en de stof van hare dogmengeschiedenis. Zoo komt er eenheid en verscheidenheid, gedachte en plan, ontwikkeling en vooruitgang in de geschiedenis der openbaring. Van de paradijsbelofte af tot aan de voleindiging der eeuwen toe loopt er eene draad door de geschiedenis der menschheid, n.l. de werking van den vrijmachtigen, barmhartigen en almachtigen wil Gods, om de wereld, niettegenstaande haar afval, zalig te maken. Krachtens het welbehagen van dien wil wordt in de bedeeling van de volheid der tijden alles wederom vergaderd tot een, onder Christus als Hoofd, beide dat in den hemel en dat op de aarde is. En in de openbaring zelve ontvouwt die wil Gods zich altijd klaarder als liefde des Vaders, genade des Zoons en gemeenschap des Heiligen Geestes.¹¹⁰

These two summary paragraphs illustrate a decidedly different approach to the creation-Christ-eschaton relation than that of the later neo-Calvinists. When creation law serves as the essence of God's revelation, the Christian faith is construed as a restoration of life in conformity to creation law. When the person and work of Jesus Christ occupies the center, what is most important is the full restoration of personal relation between God and his people in the new creation, a relation characterized by (to use Bavinck's words), love, grace and communion. Revelation "heeft haar einddoel

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 170. "The central facts of the Incarnation, satisfaction, and resurrection are the fulfillment of the Old Covenant, the content of the New Testament, the kerygma of the Apostles, the foundation of the Christian church, the essence of its confession and the content of its history of dogma. Through them there is brought unity and variety, thought and plan, development and progress into the history of revelation. From the promise in paradise to the consummation of all things one thread runs throughout the history of humanity, namely, the operation of the sovereign, merciful and almighty will of God, to save the world, notwithstanding its subjection to corruption. This will of God forms the heart of pure religion and at the same time the soul of all true theology. In virtue of the good pleasure of this will both that which is in heaven and on earth will be gathered in one in the dispensation of the fulness of time under Christ as head. And in the whole course of revelation this will of God unfolds itself ever more clearly as the love of God, the grace of the Son, and the communion of the Holy Spirit." (PR, pp. 201f., alt.)

immers niet in zichzelf, niet in Christus, die middelaar is, maar in de nieuwe mensheid, in het wonen Gods bij zijn volk."¹¹¹ There is a correlation in Bavinck's theology between the two truths that revelation is fulfilled in a person, and revelation and redemption culminate in deeply intimate personal relation.

Jeremy Begbie criticizes the Dutch neo-Calvinist doctrine of God, with its "pronounced emphasis on the inviolable will of God, and an inclination to conceive God first and foremost as the law-giver. We are not allowed to speak of love at the heart of God."¹¹² Begbie posits a polarity between God's will and his love, preferring the latter while perceiving the former in Dutch neo-Calvinism.¹¹³ For Begbie, emphasizing God's will and perceiving God primarily as the law-giver are synonymous. The later neo-Calvinist doctrine of God also comes close to making this equation, and in that context Begbie's concern is justifiable.¹¹⁴ But this equation is by no means a necessary one, and declaring it

¹¹¹ *GD IV*, p. 355. Revelation "finds its ultimate goal not in itself, not in Christ, who is the mediator, but in the new humanity, in God living with his people."

¹¹² Begbie, "Creation, Christ and Culture," p. 123.

¹¹³ Begbie may be following the lead of Colin Gunton (whom he cites approvingly elsewhere in the essay [p. 131, n. 87]), who has written extensively concerning this polarity in similar terms. (Cf., *The One, The Three and the Many, God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity, The 1992 Bampton Lectures* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993], pp. 54ff., 120, 205)

¹¹⁴ Albert Wolters, for example, uses creation law and God's will interchangeably during an extended discussion of creation law (*CR*, pp. 12-18).

to be so is in itself reductionist. The question is, how does one construe God's will? On Bavinck's account (as cited above) God's will is best seen in the love of the Father, the grace of the Son, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, all working together to bring about the new creation. The ordered creation is not in opposition to, but rather serves as a full participant in this work of the Triune God. Surely the heart of the doctrine of God does not involve developing a Manicheean-type account of the conflict between God's will and his love, but rather celebrates (as Bavinck does) the fact that God's will is fully in harmony with and expressive of his incomprehensible love!

The foregoing compares the Christologies of Bavinck and the later neo-Calvinists in the broader contexts of their respective theologies. It is also helpful and instructive to narrow the perspective by observing their specifically Christological descriptions. Both Bavinck and the later neo-Calvinists understand Jesus Christ to be both the mediator of creation and the mediator of redemption. Beyond this commonality lie important differences between them concerning the relation of this two types of mediatorship and the role which these types of mediatorship play in their Christologies. Later neo-Calvinism treats these mediatorial roles as appropriate Christological summaries and perceives Christ primarily as the mediator of creation, understanding his work as the mediator of redemption within the framework of that prior role. Because Scripture gives very little concrete content that goes

beyond its clear declarations that all things were made through Jesus Christ, the later neo-Calvinists supplement the Scripture with their philosophical understandings of creation law. This move lends credence to Begbie's concern that there may be a "curious type of Nestorianism"¹¹⁵ in neo-Calvinist Christology. The Incarnate Jesus Christ who was crucified and raised from the dead functions as a later addendum to the mediator of creation. The concrete history of Jesus of Nazareth, the one who is fully human and fully divine, does not participate in defining the mediator of creation. As a result, the latter role is 'freed,' as it were, to be filled with abstract, philosophical content. Because Christ's work as the mediator of redemption is understood within the prior framework of his role as mediator of creation, significant constraints are placed upon the significance of Christ's redemptive work and important Scriptural themes concerning the Incarnation, the ministry of Jesus, the crucifixion and the resurrection are underplayed. Begbie's observation that in Dutch neo-Calvinism "creation has been defined in advance outside Christ according to some theory of universal law"¹¹⁶ can be correlated with the observation that Christ's role as the mediator of creation has been defined apart from his Incarnation according to a theory of creation law. The ultimate irony of this reductionist construal is this: the overemphasis on and inappropriate construal of Christ's role as the mediator of creation results in undermining the

¹¹⁵ Begbie, "Creation, Christ and Culture," p. 127.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

significance of the creatureliness of Jesus Christ.

Like the later neo-Calvinists, Bavinck describes Christ as both the mediator of creation and the mediator of redemption, but both the relation between these two roles and the function of these roles within the overall shape of his Christology differ from the later neo-Calvinists. The most fundamental descriptive categories which Bavinck employs concern Christ's humiliation and his exaltation. These categories follow the narrative structure of the history of Jesus Christ, culminating in particularly the crucifixion but also the resurrection as the turning point events in the transition from Christ's humiliation to his exaltation. In contrast with the chronologically linear creation-fall-redemption motif of later neo-Calvinism, which requires the priority of Christ as the mediator of creation, Bavinck's Christology is rooted in the cross and the empty tomb and moves out from that point in both directions in concentric circles, as it were.¹¹⁷ Rather than

¹¹⁷ The Christian "heeft God leeren kennen in het aangezicht van Jezus Christus, dien Hij gezonden heeft. Van dit hooge standpunt ziet de Christen rondom zich, terug en vooruit en naar alle zijden. En wanneer hij dan in het licht der kennis van God, welke hij aan Christus dankt, zijn blik laat weiden over de natuur en over de geschiedenis, over den hemel en over de aarde, dan ontdekt hij overal in de gansche wereld sporen van dienzelfden God, dien hij in Christus als zijn Vader heeft leeren kennen en aanroepen." (*MD*, p. 27. The Christian "has learned to know God in the person of Jesus Christ, whom God has sent. From this high vantage point the Christian looks around him, forwards, backwards, and to all sides. And if, in doing so, in the light of the knowledge of God which he owes to Christ, he lets his eyes linger on nature and on history, on heaven and on earth, then he discovers traces everywhere of that same God whom he has learned to know and to worship in Christ as his father." [*RF*, pp. 36f.] "In Christus is midden in de historie door God een organisch centrum geschapen;

beginning with roles that must be construed chronologically, Bavinck begins with events that must be understood in their concretion.

Consistent with this methodological contrast is Bavinck's repeated stress upon the dangers of formulating Christological statements that seek to be too precise and go beyond the doctrinal reserve found in Scripture. He emphasizes instead that our task is to worship and to follow, not to comprehend every fine Christological detail.¹¹⁸ In keeping with this emphasis, he highlights the concrete personhood of Christ as opposed to his abstract meaning. "De Christus-figuur is geen idee en geen ideaal van het menschelijk brein, zooals velen in vroegere eeuwen en ook sommigen thans nog ervan willen maken, maar zij is eene reele gestalte, welke in een bepaalden tijd en in een bepaald persoon, in den mensch Jezus, ons tegemoet is getreden...Het kruis staat in het middelpunt der apostolische prediking."¹¹⁹ The later neo-Calvinist Christology which perceives Christ as the source and upholder of

vandaar uit worden thans in steeds wijder kring de cirkels getrokken, binnen welke het licht der openbaring schijnt." (GD I, p. 355. "God has created an organic center in the middle of history in Christ. From there the circles are drawn in progressively wider rings in which the light of revelation shines."

¹¹⁸ MD, pp. 303f., 337, GD III, pp. 232, 369, 371.

¹¹⁹ MD, pp. 291f. "The Christ-figure is not an idea nor an ideal of the human mind, as many in past ages maintain, and as some in our time also assert, but is a real figure who manifested himself in a particular period and in a particular person in the man Jesus...The cross stands at the central point in the apostolic preaching." (RF, pp. 309f.)

creation law succumbs to this danger of identifying Christ with an idea or an ideal. In this case we see a concrete manifestation of the difference between one theology which construes God's relationship with his creation through the category of law, and another which sees a person at the heart of this relation.

This difference between 'abstract law' and 'concrete person' Christologies is also apparent in the outworking of the first article of the Apostles Creed in these respective theologies. Later neo-Calvinism stresses that God is the Creator of all, relating to his creatures through the medium of creation law. This assertion downplays the claim that God also reveals himself to us as a Father within the context of the Trinity, resulting in a reductionism in the doctrine of God. Spykman does declare that his dogmatics are thoroughly Trinitarian. After stating that his work will follow "the biblical story line of creation-fall-and-redemption," he continues, "these central biblical motifs will be cross-referenced with a doctrine of the Trinity which views the Father as initiator, the Son as mediator, and the Holy Spirit as enabler. These are the organizing principles I have chosen in shaping the basic contours of this systematic theology."¹²⁰ While Spykman does avoid the reduction of limiting the work of creation to God the Father, he speaks of the Trinitarian God almost exclusively in terms of God's relationship with the creation. This emphasis results in a reduction: even though 'Father' and 'Son'

¹²⁰ RT, p. 12.

are terms whose meaning is centered in an intertrinitarian relationship, the character and significance of this relationship is not explored. Because later neo-Calvinism construes revelation through the category of creation law within which there is a limited account of progressive revelation, it is unable to give adequate expression to the significance of the relationship between God the Father and Jesus his Son. The Old Testament rarely refers to God as Father, but this form of address is central in the New Testament, along with a corresponding emphasis upon the relationship between God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ. Because later neo-Calvinism does not perceive the progressive character of revelation in its fullest sense, it is unable to find ways to incorporate appropriately this significant New Testament 'newness' into its theology. Its philosophical framework does not contain the room to incorporate the biblical accounts of the Father-Son relation and the implications of this relation for the Christian faith. Because the Father-Son relation provides a profound revelation of personal intimacy, this gap in later neo-Calvinism reinforces its reduction of the personal character of God.

Thomas Smail provides an incisive summary of the problems that arise with such an approach.

The function of the Father is to send the Son and the Spirit, so that he cannot be rightly understood or approached as creator except through his Son and in his Spirit. God the Father out of context of the coming of Christ quickly ceases to be Father at all. He quickly becomes instead the remote and abstract God of the philosophers, the anonymous and

abstract ground of our being, who is in everything in general but never does anything in particular...The extraordinary Christian claim is that the coming, living, dying and rising of Jesus of Nazareth is the indispensable clue to God's purpose in creation, his universal will of redemption, and to final judgment at the end.¹²¹

Later neo-Calvinism has far too much respect for Scripture to portray God as "the anonymous and abstract ground of our being," but its emphasis upon creation law does lead to the reductionism of a Christology characterized by abstraction and an overlooking of the intertrinitarian relations.¹²²

Bavinck's Christology with its emphasis on the person of Jesus Christ and the progressive character of revelation does not suffer from this reduction. He stresses that God the Father sent the Son,¹²³ that the work of Jesus Christ can be described as that of perfect obedience to his Father,¹²⁴ and, though this perfect obedience culminated in his death on the cross, the Father's response to the Son was to raise him from the dead, and exalt him to the highest place.¹²⁵ These descriptions of the Father-Son relation are important because the Son is the representative of the

¹²¹ *The Forgotten Father* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1980), pp. 24, 61.

¹²² It is striking that Spykman quotes extensively from Langdon Gilkey's *Maker of Heaven and Earth*, but ignores completely Gilkey's lengthy and helpful discussion concerning the impact of the Father/Son relation on our understanding of creation (Ch. 8, "Creation and the Gospel, pp. 208-238).

¹²³ *MD*, p. 313.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 331.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 347.

creation; in their relation we see the shape of the manner in which God relates to all his creatures. The absence of this emphasis in later neo-Calvinist Christology corresponds with an underemphasis on Jesus' identification with the creation. In the later account he is the king who can be identified with creation law; to a much lesser extent is he the man who identifies with God's creation.

While Bavinck's Christology is stronger than that of the later neo-Calvinists in terms of the Father-Son relation, one can perceive in Bavinck's construal a problem raised by Jeremy Begbie. Begbie notes that Kuyper and Bavinck subscribe to the notion of the two covenants: the covenant of works is in effect prior to the fall and the covenant of grace after the fall. In the former humanity relates to God by obeying his law, while in the latter God invites humanity through grace.¹²⁶ In Bavinck's construal, Jesus Christ is able to be the redeemer because he is the only one who is capable of fulfilling and who has fulfilled the obligations of the covenant of works.¹²⁷ Therefore, his relationship to his Father is primarily characterized by obedience. Though Bavinck repeatedly emphasizes that in Christ we see the love of the Father,¹²⁸ he does not properly account for the love between the Father and the Son, and in this omission the reductionism resulting from an overemphasis upon law impacts his Christology. The relation

¹²⁶ Begbie, "Creation, Christ and Culture," p. 117.

¹²⁷ *GD* III, pp. 205-210.

¹²⁸ Cf., for example, *GD* III, p. 353.

between the Father and the Son is to a great extent defined by law so that Bavinck does not properly account for the deep love between them portrayed in passages such as John 17. This reduction does not lead (as Begbie fears) to a legalistic construal of the Christian life. Because Jesus Christ has fulfilled the covenant of works, humanity is freed from its demands and is given the gift of participation in the covenant of grace. However, a theology which not only sees the love of the Father in giving the Son to fulfill the covenant of works, but also sees the love between the Father and the Son does provide a richer account of that grace as sharing in the Sonship of Christ Jesus and participating in the love between the Father and the Son. Bavinck does recognize (and even emphasize) these biblical themes, but his account would be strengthened with a corresponding description of the love between the Father and the Son.

In contrast with later neo-Calvinism, Bavinck's Christology begins with the person and work of the historical Jesus and moves from there to encompass his work as the mediator of creation. "Christus heeft niet slechts eene soteriologische, maar ook eene kosmologische beteekenis. Hij is middelaar der herschepping niet alleen, maar ook der schepping."¹²⁹ Bavinck moves from the cross outwards to both the creation and the new creation, thereby linking these three realities. "Daarom gaat de schepping uit van den

¹²⁹ *GD II*, p. 387. "Christ has not only a soteriological, but also a cosmological, significance. He is not only the mediator of re-creation, but also of creation."

Vader door den Zoon in den Geest, opdat zij in den Geest door den Zoon weder tot den Vader terugkeere."¹³⁰ The heart of Bavinck's Christology is concerned with the narrative account of Christ's humiliation and exaltation as the mediator of redemption, and this account is intimately linked with his work as the mediator of creation, but the latter role does not define the character of the former. The narrative account is most fundamental, but it is possible because Christ is intimately linked with the entire cosmos. This linkage brings us to the topic of the new creation, and a comparison of Bavinck's understandings here with that of the later neo-Calvinists.

Both Bavinck and the later neo-Calvinists agree that the new creation is in some way 'more' than the original creation, but they differ in defining the character of this 'more'. The latter assert that in essence the new creation is a restoration of the original, but what is there as potential in the beginning is, at the end, developed, i.e., restoration is to be distinguished from re-creation. Bavinck accepts this, but also goes one step further: the new creation also, in some way, represents an elevation of the original creation which is more than the development of original potential. From the later neo-Calvinist

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 389. "Therefore the creation goes out from the Father through the Son in the Spirit, because in the Spirit through the Son it returns again to the Father."

perspective elevation language is dualistic.¹³¹ From Bavinck's perspective, the later view is reductionist. We will address these two concerns here.

Is Bavinck's eschatology dualist? If the end exhibits something which is not present in the beginning (as an actual or potential reality), then one could argue that the beginning is deficient in some way. Such deficiency would suggest that the original creation cannot be recognized as a very good reality; creation is either wholly or partially evil and redemption, either wholly or in part, includes redeeming creation from itself. Both Bavinck and the later neo-Calvinists forcefully repudiate any such dualist construals. It is not an overstatement to declare that at the heart of their respective theological projects lies the desire to describe the ways of God and his creation in a manner that overcomes the various dualisms that have bedeviled the Christian faith since its beginnings. The concern that Bavinck's eschatology is dualist is to be taken seriously (though Bavinck himself does not appear to have known the need to defend himself against such a concern).

The creation-surplus in Bavinck's eschatology does not indicate a dualist doctrine of creation because this surplus does

¹³¹ Because Wolters and Spykman summarize Bavinck's theology as 'grace restores nature,' they do not comment on the issue of elevation in Bavinck's theology (though Veenhof, Heideman and Bolt do [cf. Ch. 4, pp. 251-265]).

not remedy an evil in the original creation. Rather, the surplus is necessary to account for the maturation in the relationship between God and his creation that takes place during the course of redemption history and culminates in the eschaton. The concept of maturation expresses a progression through normal states of growth; just as one does not find fault with an infant who acts like one, so the relationship between God and his creatures undergoes a maturation process from the beginning of time to the end. The earlier level of maturity at the beginning does not indicate a problem, but rather indicates the proper state of affairs of a process that has not yet begun to mature.

Bavinck's use of this concept requires extensive qualification and careful description. One must remember that, for the most part, his theology does not seek to provide a systematic account of the Christian faith, but rather a just account of the Scriptural record. It does not seek to answer questions that Scripture itself does not deal with, even when articulating a just account of the record raises difficult questions. With that in mind, we can rehearse several characteristics of his descriptions of maturation.¹³²

First, redemption is primarily concerned with overcoming the effects of the fall, and restoring God's creatures to right

¹³² Because much of this material was developed more extensively in earlier chapters, I will provide a brief summary with few citations here.

relation with him once again. But somehow this restorative work also contains a maturational element. One cannot clearly isolate the restorative component from the maturational, neither can one quantify the relative weight of each in the work of redemption, but one can observe that both are constituent parts of God's work of redemption.

Second, this work of maturation cannot be reduced to the later neo-Calvinist notion of developing the creation. That notion is also maturational in character, but it differs from Bavinck's account in three fundamental ways: it is a human work, the potential for this maturation is present within the creation itself, and it is the creation which is developed. In Bavinck's understanding, maturation is a divine work, it is a gift of grace whose potential is not present in the creation, and it is the relation between God and his creation that matures. Bavinck also espouses the later neo-Calvinist notion of development, but his notion of maturation forms part of the broader framework within which that development takes place.

These two lead to the third and most important characteristic of Bavinck's notion of maturation. Whereas in later neo-Calvinism the creation order constitutes the constant foundation upon which the development process takes place, for Bavinck the relation between God and his creation forms the constant which endures even as it matures. In this view the creation order serves the relation

between God and creation. This emphasis can be seen in Bavinck's use of duality language with its polarities of the invisible/visible, internal/external and transcendent/immanent. The creation order is characterized by a duality between the invisible and the visible, and the believer, living in both realms, is called to place his faith in invisible realities as he lives in the visible world. The history of redemption is a history in which the invisible God carries out redemption in visible, tangible ways which become progressively more visible. God's way with Israel in the Old Testament provides a 'shadowy' visibility of his work of redemption, which becomes a clear reality in the face of Jesus Christ.¹³³ Jesus Christ is the center of this history of redemption, and the transformation that took place in his resurrected body in some way represents the transformation that will take place in this entire creation when this maturation is complete.¹³⁴ Through the gift of the Holy Spirit present in the church this duality dynamic continues in two ways. First, the external word of God begins to become internal, on the way to becoming fully internal in the new creation.¹³⁵ Second, the new creation is already present in an invisible way, pointing to the day in which it will be fully visible and fully revealed.¹³⁶ Throughout this entire process one can discern "een altijd nader

¹³³ *GD I*, pp. 298, 347.

¹³⁴ *GD IV*, p. 700. (*LT*, p. 158)

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 700-702. (*LT*, pp. 158-160)

komen van God tot zijn creatuur. De transcendentie blijft die ze is, en wordt toch steeds diepere immanentie."¹³⁷ In this creation this duality endures even as the relationship deepens. The duality between the invisible and the visible represents one way in which God has ordered this creation. The duality itself remains until the new creation, but, due to the progressive character of redemption, the character of the duality does change during the course of redemption history. The reconciliation of that duality in the eschaton represents one way in which that ordering of the creation is in service to (and therefore relativized by) the maturation of the relation between God and his creation.

The maturation of the God-creation relationship within the context of duality also contains an organic character which serves to describe the manner in which the relationship anticipates its future in the present. Earlier I described Bavinck's notion of the organic as that which "describes a particular character of the relationship between two (or more) distinct parties which represents the intimate but hidden connection between these parties."¹³⁸ In Christ Jesus the relationship between God and his creation is characterized by the promised and established new creation, the seeds of which are present within history. As a

¹³⁷ *WO*, p. 23. Throughout this entire process one can discern "God always coming nearer to his creature. The transcendence remains the same, but becomes an ever deeper immanence." (*PR*, p. 28)

¹³⁸ Chapter 2, p. 83.

result, the being-sanctified believer "groeit op en bereikt langzamerhand zijn hoogtepunt" because "God stort de gerechtigheid en heiligheid van Christus niet mechanisch in ons, als water in een vat, maar Hij werkt ze op organisch wijze in ons en door ons uit."¹³⁹ This process anticipates the new creation in which "de gemeenschap met God neemt de eerste, de centrale plaats in. Maar die gemeenschap zal rijker, dieper, zaliger zijn, dan zij heir op aarde ooit was of wezen kon, want zij zal door geen zonde verstoord, door geen afstand verbroken, door geen natuur of Schrift bemiddeld zijn."¹⁴⁰ The present organic character of redemption indicates that it is both real and incomplete, a beginning anticipating its complete fulfillment.

The later neo-Calvinist account of the eschaton is more clear and consistent than Bavinck's, but methodologically it is more concerned with deductive coherence based on its philosophical foundation than with accounting for the many and diverse givens of Scripture. The result is a reduction of the richness of the biblical account. The creation-fall-redemption framework does not

¹³⁹ *MD*, p. 481. The believer "grows up and only gradually reaches his maturity" because "God does not inject the righteousness and holiness of Christ into us mechanically, as one pours water into a vessel, but he works it out in us in an organic way." (*RF*, p. 502, alt.)

¹⁴⁰ *GD IV*, p. 704. This process anticipates the new creation in which "fellowship with God is primary and central. But this fellowship will be richer, deeper and more blessed than it ever was or could be on earth, since it will not be disturbed by any sin, or interrupted by any distance, or mediated by either Scripture or nature." (*LT*, p. 162)

acknowledge the eschaton as a distinct moment in the history of redemption; such acknowledgment is redundant since the culmination of redemption completes the circle with the restoration of creation. Spykman does frequently supplement this framework, speaking of creation-fall-redemption-consummation, and in one brief chapter he provides many clear insights concerning interpreting the genre of apocalypse, the millenium and attempts to calculate the date of the parousia,¹⁴¹ but these thoughts are not integrated into the overarching fabric of his theology. Eschatological transformation does not permeate his theology in general and his Christology in particular.

In contrast with the deductive approach of later neo-Calvinism, Bavinck favors an inductive approach, citing numerous passages selected from the breadth of Scripture. This method does minimize the risks of reductionism, but it increases the risk of systematic inconsistency which in turn provides grounds for the later neo-Calvinist concerns that descriptions of the elevation of creation through redemption are dualist. For example, Bavinck provides a lengthy and rhapsodic account of the difference between the state of innocence and the state of glory which (in typical fashion) surveys the entire canon.¹⁴² He concludes this description by declaring that "aan al die rijkdom, dien Adam

¹⁴¹ *RT*, pp. 516-530.

¹⁴² *MD*, pp. 201-203. This account is excerpted at length in ch. 4, pp. 228f., n. 111.

geestelijk en lichamelijk bezat, ontbrak een ding: de volstreckte zekerheid. De geloovigen zijn verzekerd voor dit en voor het toekomend leven, want Christus staat borg voor hen en zal niet dulden, dat een hunner uit zijne hand gerukt worde en verloren ga."¹⁴³ Bavinck does not develop this claim that Adam lacked "absolute certainty" in Paradise. The claim follows the observation that Paradise contained the possibility of sin whereas the new creation admits no such scenario. In this case he moves one step beyond describing Biblical givens and uses language concerning the original creation that can be construed as dualist. What are the implications of lacking absolute certainty? Was Adam's relationship with God characterized in some measure by fear or doubt? Bavinck does not explore the implications of his claim. In his defense one can say that this one isolated claim does not undermine his basic argument: the state of innocence was very good, but it was the beginning of a lengthy maturation process whose culmination is even richer and deeper than its marvellous beginning.

Within this framework of the relations between the creation, Christ and the eschaton, we will conclude by comparing Bavinck and later neo-Calvinism in terms of their construals of the Christian life. The latter account summarizes the Christian life as

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 203. "One thing was lacking in all the riches, both spiritual and physical, which Adam possessed: absolute certainty. The believers are given certainty for this life and the next, for Christ is their Guarantor and will not allow any of them to be plucked out of his hand and be lost." (RF, p. 220)

obedience to the creation order. In Christ the believer is restored to bear the responsibility of carrying out the cultural mandate to develop the creation, but in this post-fall state this mandate has two aspects: in addition to positivizing the potential of creation, it now also includes redeeming the creation, i.e., transforming areas of life in which the creation order is not being obeyed and reclaiming them in the name of Jesus Christ. In this account sanctification is understood as the sanctifying of the believer within the larger work of reclaiming of the creation. It is "the process whereby the Holy Spirit, in and through the people of God, purifies creation from sin on the basis of Christ's atonement and victory. The 'Spirit of Holiness' seeks to permeate our creaturely lives, making a qualitative difference in the internal workings of family, business, art, government, and so on."¹⁴⁴ This process is fraught with difficulties and challenges and therefore requires "teamwork and sharing with brothers and sisters in the same field, earnest prayer for guidance and insight, constant reference to Scripture and familiarity with its overarching themes."¹⁴⁵ The eschaton represents the complete and final purification of the creation from sin.

Bavinck's understanding of the Christian life shares this view which perceives the believer's responsibility to lead her to become engaged in Christ's name in every aspect of personal and cultural

¹⁴⁴ Wolters, *CR*, p. 74.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 30f.

existence, but the theological framework within which he develops this view is somewhat different. What later neo-Calvinists term 'redeeming the creation' Bavinck metaphorically describes as 'being a leaven,' and this metaphor is to be understood in conjunction with the metaphor of the pearl. For Bavinck, the Christian life begins with focusing on the pearl: full reconciliation and communion with God through Jesus Christ, an achieved reality which is awaiting its consummation. Pearl-oriented living enables (and requires) one to function as a leaven in the world, being contagious (as it were) with Christ's goodness. "Het koninkrijk Gods is wel aan eene parel gelijk, tegen welker waarde de gansche wereld niet opweegt, maar het is ook gelijk aan een zuurdeesem, die het gansche deeg doorzuurt. Met God verzoend, is (de Christen) het ook met alle dingen."¹⁴⁶

The pearl-leaven analogy points to a different framework for the Christian life. In later neo-Calvinism reclaiming the creation functions as the Christian's task between the original, good creation and the fully restored creation. For Bavinck, the leaven functions within the context of the 'already' and the 'not yet' of the pearl. The context within which believers are leaven is defined by the first and second comings of Christ. The 'already' indicates that the Christian life is rooted in fellowship with God,

¹⁴⁶ ZG, p. 78. "The Kingdom of God is, to be sure, like a pearl more precious than the whole world, but it is also like a leaven that leavens the entire dough. Reconciled with God, (the Christian) is also reconciled with all things." (CF, p. 96)

which is a mysterious, hidden, invisible, internal reality, living in the "prayer chamber."¹⁴⁷ The 'not yet' refers to the complete transformation or rebirth of the creation, which will be fully visible and external.

Wijl Jezus' komst in eene eerste en tweede uiteenvalt, wordt eerst het koninkrijk Gods in geestelijken zin in het hart geplant; en de goederen van dat rijk zijn alle inwendig en onzienlijk, vergeving, vrede, gerechtigheid, eeuwig leven. Terwijl Jezus de eerste maal gekomen is, om dat koninkrijk in geestelijken zin te stichten, keert Hij aan het einde der dagen weder, om er ook eene zichtbare gestalte aan te geven. De reformatie gaat van binnen naar buiten; de wedergeborste der menschen voltooit zich in de wedergeboorte der schepping; het Godsrijk is dan eerst ten volle gerealiseerd, als het ook zichtbaar over de aarde uitgebreid is.¹⁴⁸

Between these two events, the invisible, internal rebirth of the believer and the visible, external rebirth of all creation, one lives the Christian life as a leaven. In small, anticipatory ways this leavening activity makes visible and external the pearl that lives inside the body of believers as it awaits the full revelation of the Kingdom of God.

These differing contexts for understanding the Christian life point to a difference in the foundational frameworks of Bavinck and

¹⁴⁷ Cf. *ZG*, p. 77.

¹⁴⁸ *GD IV*, p. 700. "Since Jesus' advent breaks up into a first and a second coming, the Kingdom of God is first planted in human hearts spiritually, and the benefits of that kingdom are all internal and invisible: forgiveness, peace, righteousness, eternal life. Whereas Jesus came the first time to establish that kingdom in a spiritual sense, he returns at the end of history to give visible shape to it. Reformation proceeds from the inside to the outside. The rebirth of humans is completed in the rebirth of creation. The Kingdom of God is fully realized only when it is visibly extended over the earth as well." (*LT*, p. 158)

the later neo-Calvinists. Wolters and Spykman perceive the distinction between God and the creation as fundamental in the Christian faith.¹⁴⁹ Creation law serves as the mediator of the relationship between these two distinct parties; humanity lives as an inherent part of the creation, related to its creator through the medium of creation law. Humanity as the *imago Dei* occupies a unique role within the creation, a role that is primarily creational in character. As Wolters notes, on the seventh day of creation "God has withdrawn from the work of creation (but) he has put an image of himself on earth with a mandate to continue. People must now carry on the work of development. Mankind, as God's representatives on earth, carry on where God left off."¹⁵⁰ The *imago Dei* indicates the human task within creation, a task to be carried out in obedience to the creation law-order.

In contrast with later neo-Calvinism, Bavinck develops his theology in terms of the three parties of God, creation and humanity. On his account humanity is a part of the creation and thus a full participant in and subject to the ordered character of creation, but humanity also stands at the head of a creaturely hierarchy so that a description of its unique identity cannot be limited to creational terms.

De leer van de schepping handhaaft de Goddelijkheid, de goedheid, de heiligheid van al het geschapene. In die wereld

¹⁴⁹ Spykman, *RT*, p. 107; Wolters, "Dutch Neo-Calvinism: Worldview, Philosophy and Rationality," p. 120.

¹⁵⁰ *CR*, p. 36.

ontvangt de mensch dan voorts eene eigene en eene zelfstandige plaats. Hij is aan de gansche wereld verwant, gevormd uit het stof, aardsch uit het aarde; niets natuurlijks is hem vreemd. Maar in een opzicht is him van alle schepselen onderscheiden; hij is zoon, beeld, gelijkenis Gods, zijn geslacht. Daardoor is hij boven dier en engel verheven en tot heerschappij over de gansche wereld bestemd en geschikt.¹⁵¹

The imago Dei not only describes humanity's task, but also its unique relationship to God. These are not two distinct aspects of the imago Dei, for the task is rooted in the relationship. "Omdat de mensch Gods zoon is, is hij tevens koning der aarde."¹⁵² Though Bavinck himself does not make this connection, his understanding of the imago Dei is completely in harmony with his usage of the metaphors of the pearl and the leaven. The imago Dei is rooted in right relationship with God (the pearl), which necessarily expresses itself as a leaven, i.e., through right relationship with all of creation.

Though the relation between God and humanity lies at the center of Bavinck's theology, his framework is nevertheless triadic. However, this triad is not as systematically precise as the later neo-Calvinist two-part framework. Bavinck's framework contains an ambiguity: from one perspective it describes the

¹⁵¹ *WO*, p. 91. "The doctrine of creation maintains the divinity, the goodness, the sacredness of all created things. In this world man now receives his own place. He is of kin to all the world, formed out of matter, earthy of the earth; nothing natural is strange to him. But in one respect he is different from all creatures; he is son, image, similitude of God, his offspring. That is why he is elevated above animal and angel, and destined and fitted for dominion over all the world." (*PR*, pp. 107f., alt)

¹⁵² *MD*, p. 167. "Because man is the son of God, he is king of the earth."

relationship between God and humanity within the context of God's relationship with creation, from another the relationship between God and creation in which humanity is given the highest place. Because creation is characterized by duality, both statements are true: man "is burger van eene zinlijke orde van zaken, maar uit deze heft hij zich ook tot eene bovenzinlijke orde op. Met de voeten op aarde geplant, heft hij het hoofd omhoog en richt den blik hemelwaarts."¹⁵³

The distinction between the later neo-Calvinist two-part framework and Bavinck's triadic one further illustrates the divergence between the creational and eschatological understandings of redemption. In the former the Christian life is primarily characterized by a task; the latter stresses the relational context from which the task flows. For the later neo-Calvinists the task is defined by law, and Jesus Christ restores humanity with the capabilities and the desire to fulfill this task. In Bavinck's theology, the relation is a deeply personal one, and through the mediatorship of the person of Jesus Christ this relation is restored and brought to maturity. In the later neo-Calvinist account the creation order is constant, in need of neither restoration nor maturation, but sin is overcome and humanity's place within that order is restored. For Bavinck, that "God so

¹⁵³ *MD*, p. 10. Man "is indeed a citizen of a physical order of affairs, but he also rises above this order to a supernatural one. With his feet firmly planted on earth, he raises his head aloft and casts his eyes towards heaven." (*RF*, pp. 17f., alt.)

loved the world" remains constant, and though this love embraces the entire cosmos, in a certain way it is anthropocentric so that humanity is transformed and begins to enjoy the benefits of grace prior to the entire creation doing so. Therefore, even though the entire creation will be transformed, "veel nauwer dan de band aan de schepping in het algemeen, is die, welke het Woord aan de menschen verbindt."¹⁵⁴ And even though the eschaton represents the transformation of the entire creation, Bavinck most frequently describes the eschaton in terms of the deep intimacy between God and his people.

Conclusion

The substance of Jeremy Begbie's reflections upon Dutch neo-Calvinism applies to later neo-Calvinism. This movement does have a great deal to offer towards developing a theology of culture, but its corrective of dualist theology comes at a price. Grace is subsumed within a legal framework and ultimately obedience takes priority over love. The primacy of law in this theology is due to the positing of creation order as the mediator between God and creation, thereby functionally limiting the role of Jesus Christ to that of a mediator between the creation order and the creation. What is gained in later neo-Calvinism does not compensate for what is lost through its reductionisms in Christology, ethics, and eschatology as the implications of its creational claims impact

¹⁵⁴ "Kennis en Leven" in *KL*, p. 209. "The bond which connects the Word to humanity is much closer than the bond to the creation in general."

upon other areas of its thought.

A survey comparison of the notion of creation law-order in later neo-Calvinism with the notion of the organic in Bavinck provides a helpful summary of the differences between them concerning the goal of the creation. In both views these respective notions are extra-Biblical concepts used to describe the Biblical accounts of creation, redemption history and the eschaton, and thus both notions also carry significant Christological weight. Both notions are helpful for circumventing unBiblical dualisms. From the basis of this common starting point, significant divergences emerge. Law-order is protological, referring to an abstract blueprint established prior to the creation of the world; the organic is eschatological, describing the interplay of transcendence and immanence in the manner of God's relationship with his creation within the framework of its dualities as it anticipates the resolution of the tensions inherent in this interplay. Law-order correlates with a logos Christology, creating a framework within which one also understands the incarnate Jesus Christ. The organic begins with the incarnate Jesus Christ at the center of reality, intimately linked with all creation, declared to be the first fruit of the new creation through his death and resurrection. Law-order affirms the enduring stability of the creation; the organic also expresses the stability of the creation but incorporates this with its capacity for transformation in its organic bond with its risen Lord. Law-order is cognitively

available; organic realities function with an interplay of clarity and hiddenness, awaiting the day when all will be clear. Law-order functions as a mediator; the organic serves to describe the manner in which Jesus Christ functions as the mediator. Law-order mediates between the Creator and his creation; the fluid character of the organic allows one to describe the mediatorial work of Jesus Christ in the context of the triadic (and philosophically imprecise) interplay between God, humanity and the creation. Law-order requires an ethic of obedience; the organic serves a more nuanced, fluid ethic which includes the *imitatio Christi*, obedience to law, and an emphasis upon the virtues and character because the organic assumes an interplay between 'inner' sanctification and its 'outer' manifestations. Law-order is ahistorical; the organic describes the presence of the Triune God in the history of the creation on its way to the eschaton. Law-order places the center of revelation in the creation; the organic provides room for a progressive account of revelation centered in the incarnate Jesus Christ.

Like later neo-Calvinism, Bavinck's theology overcomes dualist thinking and lays the foundation for a strong theology of culture, and he does so while maintaining the centrality of Jesus Christ as the mediator between God and the creation. His theology contains traces of neo-Platonism, legalism and scholasticism, along with various inconsistencies, but these problems fade in significance in the context of a Christocentric theology that combines the

Reformation ideals of *sola Scriptura* and *tota Scriptura*. This combination has led him to articulate a theology centered upon the person and work of Jesus Christ in such a way that this emphasis is interwoven with his accounts of creation, redemption history, the eschaton and the Christian life; the broad themes and the supporting detail are articulated coherently and convincingly. As a result, a rediscovery of the eschatological import of Bavinck's understanding of redemption has much to offer today, not only to contemporary neo-Calvinism, but to the church of Jesus Christ in its diverse manifestations.

Chapter Seven - Theses towards configuring the goal of redemption

Dutch neo-Calvinism provides a unique and important theological contribution to the understanding of the goal of redemption. While this study has pointed out various weaknesses in the approach of Herman Bavinck and, in particular, later neo-Calvinism, this tradition's emphasis upon the correlation between creation and redemption, the unity of redemption history and its vigorous efforts to repudiate all forms of dualism and replace these with an all-embracing kingdom vision and ethic are highly commendable. The purpose of this final chapter is to build upon these strengths by articulating theses which point towards a clearer configuration of the goal of redemption (and, by implication the relation between God and creation), free from neo-Platonic influences and free from modernist construals of creation law. I will articulate four theses which seek to resonate with the Reformation principles of *sola Scriptura* and *tota Scriptura*, be faithful to the creeds of traditional orthodoxy, and address the issue in ways relevant to the contemporary context. In other words, the presuppositions for this theological endeavor are congruent with those of Herman Bavinck.

Thesis one: *the person and work of Jesus Christ, centered on the cross and the empty tomb, provide the ontological foundation for both the goal of redemption and the relationship between God*

and the creation.¹

This claim asserts that the incarnate Jesus Christ who died and rose again is the foundation of redemption and creation; in his bodily person and through the events of his death and resurrection God accomplishes and reveals his redemption. Such a claim requires explication in five areas: (1) How is one to understand that God works "through" Jesus Christ? That God works through him suggests a mediatorial work. How is mediatorship rightly construed? (2) What is the significance of the personhood of Jesus Christ? (3) What is the significance of the cross? (4) What is the significance of the resurrection? (5) Why must this Christological understanding take priority over other understandings, particularly that of the pre-incarnational Logos-Christology? Obviously such questions properly require extensive Christological description; however, each of these issues has been raised earlier in this study, and here I will simply point them in directions that I believe are helpful.

The first two issues are best taken together: a specific person serves as the mediator between the triune God and his creatures. Describing Jesus Christ in this way requires careful qualification. The terms 'person' and 'mediator' are not prior

¹ The phrase "person and work" functions here as it does for Bavinck: it denotes the comprehensiveness of Jesus Christ, and does not refer to two distinct philosophical or theological categories.

abstractions awaiting the Incarnation to be filled with concrete content. Rather, the history of the creation prior to the Incarnation reveals many anticipations of God's work in Jesus Christ, but these anticipations are shadows which in and of themselves are not sufficiently clear to delineate fully what it is that God reveals himself in a person who serves as a mediator. According to this account of progressive revelation the later neo-Calvinist ontology of creation law within whose frame one understands the person and work of Jesus Christ is to be rejected, but attempts to posit an ontology of the personal or an ontology of the relational derived from the Incarnation are equally problematic for similar reasons.² The starting point is not an abstraction into which a concrete reality named Jesus Christ is poured. Bavinck's assertion that the person and work of Jesus Christ are fundamental is helpful, as is his spelling out of the implications of this assertion: that the believer's primary response is one of adoration, that all roles which one perceives Jesus Christ to fulfill are secondary to and derivative of his person and work, and

² Allan D. Galloway and R. S. Barbour both see in the crucified and risen Christ the "ontological priority of the personal." ("Creation and Covenant," p. 115, and "Creation, Wisdom and Christ," p. 37, respectively, in *Creation, Christ and Culture, Studies in Honour of T. F. Torrance*, ed. Richard W. A. McKinney [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1976]). Similarly, Colin Gunton declares that "person is an ontologically primitive reality," a concept which he develops in the direction of what I would call an ontology of relationality. (*The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991], p. 169. These concepts are developed further in his *The One, the Three and the Many, God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity, the 1992 Bampton Lectures* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993] and *Christ and Creation, the Didsbury Lectures, 1990* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992]).

that any concepts which one uses to describe him are never more than 'the best one can do for now.' To develop an ontology rooted in abstract concepts as 'the personal' and 'relationality' is to violate the priority of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

This first thesis declares that ontological primacy properly belongs to the incarnate Jesus Christ, that through his life, death and resurrection the character of the relation between God and his creation is revealed and the goal of its redemption is accomplished. On the basis of this fundamental claim one can articulate implications of this claim, and these implications include the mediatorial work of Christ which is focused on relation (i.e., as mediator Jesus Christ establishes and reconciles the relation between God and the creation), and the personhood of Christ. Construing aspects of these implications as ontological truth claims not only succumbs to the error of describing Jesus Christ through abstract categories defined outside of him, but also blinds one to the fact that these implications are often contextual; that is, the implications which one emphasizes are to a large extent dependent on the needs of one's particular context. In contexts of social injustice the church appropriately emphasizes that Jesus Christ is a prophet. Amidst the dehumanizing technocracy of the late twentieth century we are witnessing a resurgence in emphasis upon the personal and the relational in Christology. It is the immeasurable wonder of the person and work of Jesus Christ that admits a variety of specific implications in

differing contexts; to grant ontological status to abstractions derived from such descriptions is to grasp for that which is beyond human reach, deny the provisional character of theological articulations and diminish the significance of the concrete person and work of Jesus Christ.

A major implication of this first thesis is that the person and work of Jesus Christ is to be understood within a Trinitarian frame. One cannot understand the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the foundation of the relationship between God and the creation and of the goal of redemption unless one sees within it the love of the Father for his cosmos in giving the Son, the love of the Father for the Son, the love of the Son for the Father in his obedience unto death, and the love of the Father and the risen Son in the sending of the Holy Spirit. The Trinitarian frame for the person and work of Jesus Christ reveals that the three person-ed God as a community of love shares that love with the creation and is personally involved within the history of this creation. As Colin Gunton expresses it so well, "The gospel is that the Father interrelates with his world by means of the frail humanity of his Son, and by his Spirit enables anticipations in the present of the promised perfection of the creation."³ In many ways Bavinck's theology honours the Trinitarian frame required by the priority of person and work of Jesus Christ, but here a tension rooted in the doctrine of the two covenants surfaces in two areas:

³ Colin Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, p. 73.

the character of the relation between the Father and the Son is too quickly limited to obedience,⁴ and the Christian life as following the Spirit (although acknowledged and celebrated) is too quickly circumscribed by law.⁵

The heart of this mediatorial work is seen in the death of Jesus on the cross. Bavinck's notion of the cross at the center of history from which one moves out in concentric circles is helpful. The cross does not only occur within a prior framework of the creation as a response to its fall, but the light of the cross also reveals the shape of that framework of creation (and of the new creation). Bavinck's observation that the creation reveals the mind of God, while the cross displays his heart exemplifies this movement out from the center.⁶ Other theologians have developed such a notion further. David Ford and Daniel Hardy suggest that the cross reveals the importance of respect in the relationship between God and his creation. Respect

is a vital clue to the sort of reality creation is. This respect is not just an attitude, but is worked out in the structure of the cosmos itself. The crucifixion of Jesus is the summary of God's respect for creation. This is God's speech expressed in suffering. He lets people be themselves,

⁴ cf. chapter six, pp. 424f.

⁵ Bavinck concludes a chapter on justification by declaring "De geloovige, die in Christus gerechtvaardigd is, is het vrijste schepsel ter wereld. Althans zoo moest het zijn." (*MD*, p. 449. "The believer who is justified in Christ is the freest creature in the world. At least, so it ought to be." *RF*, p. 468) The next chapter's description of sanctification is very much preoccupied with the role of law in the Christian life.

⁶ *WO*, p. 21.

lets them have their freedom even to be wrong, to ignore him and to show disrespect to the point of killing.⁷

Edward Schillebeeckx' comments serve to elaborate the point that respect is 'worked out in the structure of the cosmos.' He observes that the creation is "entrusted to human beings within their creaturely limits, and YAHWEH trusts them there."⁸ God sacrifices, as it were, his own sovereignty by entrusting his creation to his human creature. Because Jesus is the one who responds properly to God's trust,

Christology is concentrated creation: belief in creation as God wills it to be. Only through Christ do we begin to realize clearly that there is more to God than might otherwise have been expected.⁹

On this account, the cross represents more than a divine response to sin. In the shed blood of Jesus on the cross one sees the depths of God's love for and affirmation of his creation, and the height of God's involvement and identification with the creation. The non-manipulative, respectful love of God which is revealed most clearly on the cross also lies at the heart of the creation of all things as God entrusts his creative masterpiece to his human creatures.

These themes concerning the goal of redemption and the

⁷ *Praising and Knowing God* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), pp. 78f.

⁸ *Church, The Human Story of God*, Tr. John Bowden (New York: Crossroad, 1990), p. 142.

⁹ *Interim Report on the Books Jesus and Christ*, Tr. John Bowden (New York: Crossroad, 1981), p. 128.

character of the relationship between God and the creation which are enacted in Jesus' death on the cross are revealed in surprising ways in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, ways which support Bavinck's theme that grace *restores* and *perfects* nature. On the one hand the resurrection, like the crucifixion, evidences a profound affirmation of the creation. On the other hand, the raising of Jesus reveals a God whose being cannot be described within the confines of the orderliness of creation. This 'greater than' character of the resurrection is difficult to describe. David Ford and Daniel Hardy playfully wrestle with language in discerning "the jazz factor" which "is not order or disorder, but 'non-order.'"¹⁰ "God must be at least as rich as his creation, and a rigid over-ordered and over-ordering God is far too impoverished to be responsible for a universe such as ours."¹¹ The resurrection points to such a God.

The resurrection of Jesus is the supreme surprise, setting the tone for Christian existence - an astonishing, endlessly fresh and 'eloquently new and abandoned' life. In a faith which has the foolishness of the cross, a 'lamb on the throne' and 'justification of the ungodly' there must be an appreciation of upside-downness, and many ways of joining in the laughter of the resurrection. The resurrection of the crucified Jesus is this logic at the heart of Christianity. True realism will take account of this first, and live from it.¹²

Such a construal does not force a choice between the 'nonorder' of the resurrection and the 'order' of the creation. Rather, the order of the creation is circumscribed by a God who reveals himself

¹⁰ *Praising and Knowing God*, p. 20.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 73.

in the nonorder of the resurrection. The resurrection

is the overcoming of evil and death in a way that utterly respects but also judges and shows the limits of the world. The core of astonishment around which it all spirals is that God is free to be involved with his creation from the 'inside' as well as from the 'outside.' The result of this is to change the very nature of the universe, to produce something new yet in harmony with the best possibilities of the old.¹³

The only adequate response to this wonder which God has wrought in Jesus Christ is doxology,¹⁴ which "leads into the most thorough and discerning involvement with creation,"¹⁵ just as God himself submits to such involvement.

The Ford/Hardy account of the resurrection provides a helpful framework for perceiving in the resurrection both the restoring and perfecting of the creation. Creation, Incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection are works of the one true God, and as such an inner harmony holds these works together. In the resurrection God reveals most concretely the eschatological character of the creation and of redemption, a character that lies beyond human understanding but can be appropriately described with phrases such as 'the jazz factor.' The entire creation is in some sense represented in the person of Jesus Christ, and as such the transformation of his body establishes as accomplished fact the coming transformation of the entire creation. The eschatological content of the resurrection contains two phases. The first is

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 80f.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

pneumatological. "The resurrection of Christ is a new affirmation of God's first decision that Adam should live, an affirmation that goes beyond and transforms the initial gift of life: the first Adam became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit."¹⁶ Second, the promise inherently achieved in the resurrection is cosmic. "The resurrection of Christ is the beginning of the new and final world-order, an order described as spiritual and heavenly. It is the dawn of the new creation."¹⁷ The link between the character of the relation between God and his creation and the goal of redemption is revealed through the crucifixion and the resurrection as the profound wonder of God's involvement with and identification with his creation. In the resurrection the creatureliness of Christ is transformed, and this transformation inherently contains the transformation of the entire creation graciously given as a present, pneumatologically experienced reality in the life of the believer. Bavinck clearly perceived this profound truth, and gave it eloquent expression in the closing pages of his Dogmatics.¹⁸

A final implication of this first thesis requires that the pre-incarnational aspects of Christology must respect the

¹⁶ Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order, An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eermdans, 1986), p. 14.

¹⁷ Richard Gaffin, *The Centrality of the Resurrection, A Study in Paul's Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), p. 89.

¹⁸ Cf. especially *GD IV*, p. 700. (*LT*, p. 158)

ontological priority of the person and work of Jesus Christ incarnate, so that the latter circumscribes one's understanding of the former. The result of such circumscription is that one's descriptions of the pre-incarnate Christ are not to be filled with extra-Christological content. The five key New Testament passages which refer most overtly and specifically to the pre-incarnate Christ do so in the context of his Incarnation, death and resurrection.¹⁹ These passages assert that the mediator of redemption is also the mediator of creation; because they give no clear account that explains the character of this latter mediation, the title 'mediator of creation' requires descriptive minimalism. It celebrates the supremacy of Christ over all creation, his eternal co-existence with the Father, the depths of his involvement with that which was made through him, and the inner unity of the works of redemption and creation; beyond this, Scripture is silent. These five passages support Bavinck's hermeneutical principle of beginning at the cross and moving out from that point in concentric circles. The crucified and risen Lord is the mediator of creation.

Much more can be said concerning this first thesis. It holds profound implications for the theological significance of the Kingdom of God, hermeneutical principles, revelation, and more. All of these implications need not be spelled out here. What is essential is that the person and work of Jesus Christ is the

¹⁹ Cf. John 1: 1-18, Eph. 1: 3-23, Phil. 2: 6-11, Col. 1: 15-20, Heb. 1: 1-4.

starting point in understanding the relation between God and his creation and the goal of redemption, the significance of his person and work is highlighted in the crucifixion and resurrection, and all other Christological claims -- including roles, concepts and his pre-existence -- are derived from this starting point.

Thesis two: *The person and work of Jesus Christ are understood within the parameters of a stable creation in anticipation of the new creation.*

The location of the ontological foundation for both the goal of redemption and the relationship between God and the creation in the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ requires a construal of the relation between Jesus Christ, the creation and the new creation. Such construal is inevitably problematic, for the ontological priority of Jesus Christ inherently requires a profound affirmation of the creation and of the new creation even as such affirmations inevitably engender conflict between Christology, the doctrine of creation and eschatology. As Daniel Hardy notes, affirming the creation carries with it the danger of idolatry, but this danger must be risked in order to provide a just account of the universal character of the God/creation relation and redemption and of the orderedness of the cosmos.²⁰ Such an account undermines both dualist constructs which deny the universal scope of

²⁰ "Created and Redeemed Sociality" in *On Being Church, Essays on the Christian Community*, Colin E. Gunton and Daniel W. Hardy, eds. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989), pp. 32-39.

redemption and monist descriptions of order emerging or evolving from chaos. Though affirming the creation and new creation risks provoking competition with the priority of Christ, any demeaning of these two realities necessarily demeans the supremacy of Christ as well.

The affirmation of the creation which is consequent upon the primacy of Jesus Christ is circumscribed by two qualifications which serve as boundaries between appropriate affirmation and inappropriate idolatry. First, the stable parameters of the creation function as servants of Jesus Christ and the goal of his redemptive work: the new creation. Their significance lies not in themselves but in their relation to God's revelation in Jesus Christ and his work in both creation and redemption. To assert their relativity is not to demean their significance. These stable parameters point to boundaries between truth and wickedness which are in some measure embedded in the orderedness of the creation and which make all of life and redemption history possible. Though a great deal of theological, ethical and ecclesial discourse today focuses on specific issues²¹ for whom defining the meaning of these stable parameters is very difficult, these vociferous debates obscure the fact that for the vast majority of human activity such stable parameters are simply assumed and not questioned.

Second, an epistemological boundary prevents the creation from

²¹ Particularly issues related to gender and sexuality.

usurping the priority of Jesus Christ. Neo-Calvinist philosopher Hendrik Hart has persuasively argued that his tradition's account of creation law-order has uncritically accepted foundationalist epistemology and is a thinly disguised subjectivism dressed up as an account of objective law-order.²² Hart's critique is supported by Bavinck's notion of progressive revelation with its assertion of the opaque character of creational revelation. In his *Resurrection and Moral Order*, Oliver O'Donovan gives concrete shape to this epistemological boundary. On his account, knowledge of the creation is always relational, participatory, performative, compromised by sin and ignorant of the end of history.²³ These limitations preclude the possibility of defining an 'objective' creation order. O'Donovan concludes that

such knowledge (of created order), according to the Christian gospel, is given to us as we participate in the life of Jesus Christ. The phrase 'in Christ' must not be etherealized in defiance of the Incarnation. It does not speak solely of a universal Logos, but of the Logos made flesh in the first century AD, crucified under Pontius Pilate and raised again on the third day.²⁴

O'Donovan's assertion of the primacy of the incarnate Christ, through whom one receives a limited access to created order, is in harmony with the theses proposed here. In the late twentieth-century context, many theologians who accept Barth's repudiation of natural theology and reject modernist construals of foundationalist

²² "Creation Order in our Philosophical Tradition: Critique and Refinement." Unpublished essay presented at the Institute for Christian Studies, Toronto, on June 4, 1992.

²³ *Resurrection and Moral Order*, pp. 76-85.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

epistemology are also seeking to articulate incarnationally derived doctrines of creation as an antidote to historicism and relativism.²⁵ This project is certainly not yet complete, but much fruitful work is being done.

Just as the ontological priority of the incarnate Christ requires a deep affirmation of the creation, so it also requires an eschatological orientation. The transformation of Jesus Christ in his resurrection from the dead is in fact the transformation of the entire creation. The link between what has been accomplished in the person of Jesus Christ and what is accomplished in a promissory way in the entire cosmos is so intimate that Bavinck can appropriately declare "de eschatologie wortelt in de Christologie en is zelve Christologie."²⁶ In response to Schillebeeckx's claim (cited above) that "Christology is concentrated creation," one can say with greater emphasis, "Christology is concentrated new creation."

Descriptions of the relation between the person and work of Jesus Christ and the new creation require two components: transformation and epistemological boundary. Transformation

²⁵ In addition to those already cited (Colin Gunton, Daniel Hardy, David Ford, Eduard Schillebeeckx), such a list would include Kathryn Tanner and Claus Westermann. Many of the essays in *Creation in the Old Testament* (ed. Bernhard W. Anderson [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984]) resonate with these goals as well.

²⁶ *GD IV*, p. 667. "Eschatology is rooted in Christology, and is itself Christology." (*LT*, p. 122)

describes the combination of continuity and discontinuity between the present and the new creation, summarized in O'Donovan's appropriately ambiguous observation that "the transformation is in keeping with the creation, but in no way dictated by it."²⁷ He provides a helpful example of this description: in the creation accounts of Genesis marriage is established as instituted by God. However, in the eschatological New Testament view,

humanity in the presence of God will know a community in which the fidelity of love which marriage makes possible will be extended beyond the limits of marriage. To this eschatological hope the New Testament church bore witness by fostering the social conditions which could support a vocation to the single life. It conceived of marriage and singleness as alternative vocations, each a worthy form of life, the two together comprising the whole Christian witness to the nature of affectionate community.²⁸

On this account, the church as the body of Christ represents an eschatological transformation of the creationally-founded biological family, made possible by the presence of the Holy Spirit which binds believers together. One of the myriad implications of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the transformation of the family. Family becomes a Christological/eschatological reality rather than a creational one.

Karl Barth provides a second illustration of the transformation of the creation. Genesis 1 describes the establishment of three boundaries within the creation: those between heaven and earth, light and darkness and land and sea.

²⁷ *Resurrection and Moral Order*, p. 64.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

These boundaries are important, for they create the conditions which make life possible. Even so, these boundaries also point to the teleological character of the creation, for in the consummation they will disappear. They will be no longer necessary for, as St. John describes in Rev. 21-22, God and the Lamb will be directly present with the creation.²⁹ A consistent theme of the Apocalypse is that the victory of the Lamb who was slain culminates in the transformation of the creation. O'Donovan's illustration of marriage represents the relatively small scale transformation of what is often called a creation ordinance, and this transformation has a highly provisional character as a reality on this side on the consummation. Barth's illustration represents a major structural transformation of the cosmos which is reserved entirely for the consummation. Though they are very different, these illustrations portray the new creation as an event in continuity with the creation but which also represents a significant transformation as direct result of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The resurrected body of Jesus Christ constitutes the transformed microcosm guaranteeing that of the macrocosm, the entire cosmos.

The notion of transformation is inherently ambiguous and fluid. How does one articulate principles to describe the relation between a caterpillar and a butterfly when one has never seen a

²⁹ *Church Dogmatics* III/1, Tr. J. W. Edwards, O. Bussey, H. Knight. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1958), pp. 121-149. Barth's account resonates closely with Bavinck's account of the reconciliation of dualities in the new creation.

butterfly but only received vague impressions of one through a glass darkly? The epistemological boundary between the knowing subject and the creation also extends to the new creation. Douglas Schuurman sums up the challenge well: "Because the vision of creation and eschatology is indeed a dim view in a dark glass, one must take care not to say too much about the world as originally intended and finally intended by God. But because of the importance of creation and eschatology in Scripture, liturgy and theology, one must also take care not to say too little."³⁰ He proposes that one use the methods of analogy and extrapolation rooted in doctrines and images of the Christian faith such as law, covenant, kingdom of God, Christ, church, Spirit, soteriology, etc.³¹ Schuurman's proposal is helpful albeit somewhat unfocused. Bavinck's method of beginning with the cross and moving out from that point in concentric circles provides a clearer and more coherent route for applying these methods of analogy and extrapolation, positing a Christological framework for understanding both the creation and the new creation and the situation of the believer living between the cross and the crown.

An important implication of this Christological framework in which Jesus Christ is the microcosm of the transformed new creation is that created orders are both affirmed and relativized within

³⁰ *Creation, Eschaton and Ethics, The Ethical Significance of the Creation-Eschaton Relation in the Thought of Emil Brunner and Jurgen Moltmann* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), p. 153.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 154-156.

this framework. They are affirmed to the extent that they point to Jesus Christ and the new creation and relativized to the extent that the creation has been transformed in him. A. van Egmond and C. vander Kooi describe this difficult concept.

Creation and creation ordinances have no independent value apart from the covenant. Sometimes just because of the covenant it was necessary that ordinances were eliminated. Jesus had no children. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit. People became eunuchs for the Kingdom of God. Everyone who "does the will of my Father who is in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." The eschatological perspective provides a powerful relativizing of the creative orders. The most striking statement of all is the message in Revelation that even the succession of day and night, which is a creation ordinance of the first order, does not have an eternal character.

Creation ordinances exist for the sake of the covenant. That is to say that their wholesome and life-giving value for the relation between God and man and between people mutually is the ultimate criteria (sic). At the same time the ordinances may not be simply pushed aside: in principle they exist to serve human life before the face of the Eternal One. It is therefore impossible to push the notion of ordinances aside with an appeal to eschatological perspective. The search for the will of God in relationship with the ordinances of human life transpires within the knowledge of the covenant that God has brought to its full light in the history of Jesus Christ.³²

This description of the creation/covenant relation raises difficult questions concerning the distinction between relativizing the created orders and relativism. The later neo-Calvinist fear that a rejection of the ontological character of creation law-order in favour of an ontological new creation order can hardly be distinguished from relativism is well grounded,³³ and van Egmond

³² "The Appeal to Creation Ordinances: A Changing Tide," in *God's Order for Creation*, pp. 31f.

³³ Cf. Spykman, *RT*, p. 541.

and vander Kooi also reject such a move. Rather, the created orders are relative to the ontological priority of the incarnate Jesus Christ, but within the context of this priority created order continues to be significant. The believer saved by the blood of the Lamb continues to need nourishing food, sufficient sleep, loving companionship, appropriate shelter, meaningful labour, restorative leisure, and so on, but all of these creaturely concerns are relativized by the 'pearl' of life in Christ and living for his kingdom. Jesus' teaching, "Seek first the kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well," (Matt. 6: 33) points to both an affirmation ("for your heavenly Father knows that you need them") and a relativizing of creation. While the continuing role for creaturely needs in the Christian life is obvious, the significance of this relativizing for ethical issues is much more complex.

Thesis three: Because the concrete particularity of the person and work of Jesus Christ has universal significance vis-à-vis both the relation between God and creation and the goal of redemption, theological articulations require 'linking notions' which serve to provide a framework for describing the link between this concrete particularity and its universal significance.

The previous thesis asserted that one must describe the relation between Jesus Christ and the creation in spite of the dangers inherent in such description. The theological problem of

describing the universal significance of the particular man Jesus Christ is complicated by the fact that Scripture simply asserts this significance without articulating a conceptual framework for such assertion. As a result, the theologian who desires to expand upon this assertion is required to create extra-biblical language to facilitate such description. Such an effort need not undermine the principles of *sola Scriptura* and *tota Scriptura* if the theologian respects two guidelines: she seeks to discover notions which are true to the heart of Scriptural accounts of reality³⁴ and she recognizes that linking notions are provisional attempts to facilitate description of the ontological primacy of the person and work of Jesus Christ, and therefore are not to be confused with ontological truth claims.³⁵ These two guidelines are complementary, for a linking notion dressed up as an ontological truth claim cannot provide an account of reality in harmony with Scripture. Linking notions must relate the particularity of Christ to all of reality in both dimensions of time and space, that is, they must help to describe his universal significance over all of history and over the entire cosmos. The provisional character of linking notions is correlated with their contextual character: the theologian uses them to respond affirmatively or critically to the issues of the day.

³⁴ Bavinck's use of neo-Platonic notions exemplifies the failure to follow this guideline.

³⁵ The later neo-Calvinist account of creation law illustrates the treatment of a linking notion as an ontological truth claim.

One of the strengths of Bavinck's theology is precisely that he employs contextual linking notions (though he does not name them as such) which -- for the most part -- exhibit faithfulness to both guidelines named above. His linking notions include duality, the organic, construing the God/creation relation in terms of the God/humanity/world triad, and progressive revelation. None of these notions is named in Scripture, and yet, as the summary of Bavinck's account of these in chapter two shows, each one is biblically defensible. Not one of these four stands on its own; in complementary fashion these four notions provide a coherent account of reality that points to the ontological primacy of the person and work of Jesus Christ and links him with all of history and the entire cosmos. Together they undermine dualist and monist accounts of creation. Reality is comprised of both invisible and visible realms, but an organic bond holds these realms together, describing God's presence with his world. In the history of redemption this presence becomes progressively clearer, climaxing in the person and work of Jesus Christ. This history, in both its totality and its climax, reveals that God is intimately related with the entire cosmos, but his relation with humanity is sufficiently unique that it cannot be reduced to a component part of the God/creation relation. In the God/humanity relation these factors of duality, the organic, and progressive revelation come into the clearest and most dramatic focus, but they are present in the entire God/creation relation. Each of these four linking notions anticipates the new creation in which God will be all in

all.

G. C. Berkouwer begins his *A Half Century of Theology* by observing that after Bavinck's death "theological issues he raised kept stirring the minds of others...Bavinck raised theological questions that continued to play a crucial role in mainstream theology after he had gone."³⁶ These four linking notions developed by Bavinck illustrate Berkouwer's point, retaining value and usefulness a century after he first developed them. The problems to which Bavinck responded are still in vogue, though the names of their proponents and the clothes they wear have changed. He did not articulate a distinction between ontological primacy and linking notions, but such a distinction is operative in his theology. The contemporary theological context, in which ontological claims and statements properly derived from them are easily confused, requires an overt positing of such a distinction.

That Bavinck uses these four notions without carefully defining them is frustrating for the Bavinck analyst but, more importantly, his approach also enhances their adaptability. His use of these is characterized by a minimalist fluidity which can be described as follows: each is employed with sufficient clarity and consistency to facilitate coherent and systematic theological description while maintaining the provisional and somewhat nebulous character appropriate to extra-biblical description. Particularly

³⁶ pp. 11, 13.

the notions of duality and the organic are employed in widely ranging areas with diverse applications without losing their inner consistency. Each notion carves out the middle ground between polarities: duality avoids dualism and monism; the organic accounts for God's transcendence and his immanence while avoiding deism and pantheism;³⁷ the God/humanity/world triad avoids anthropomorphism and depersonalizing cosmologies while affirming both the significance of creation and the uniqueness of humanity; progressive revelation asserts the centrality of Jesus Christ while recognizing the variety of ways in which revelation is given and received. The interplay of consistency and fluidity within these notions, particularly in their complementarity, both serves to describe the link between Jesus Christ and the universal scope of creation and redemption and admits room for eschatological transformation in the new creation.

Bavinck's theology provides a model *par excellence* of thesis three, and provides fertile ground for adaptation of these notions for contemporary theological discourse. Diverse voices in the Christian church in the late twentieth century are becoming increasingly concerned with affirming the centrality of Jesus Christ in his concrete particularity in the context of global pluralism and relativism. While no one employs the term, such

³⁷ The notion of the organic is particularly relevant for current explorations of the interrelatedness of all creatures. These discussions easily assume pantheistic tendencies; the notion of the organic allows expression of such interrelatedness while maintaining the Creator/creature boundary.

affirmations require attempts to posit something akin to what I have called 'linking notions.' Daniel Hardy and Colin Gunton seek to describe "transcendentals" which, in Hardy's words, "are the forms through which being displays itself, through which being is determinate; they constitute an answer to the search for the fundamental features of the cosmos."³⁸ Hardy continues by describing the "Christomorphic" character of reality,³⁹ while Gunton develops the transcendentals of person, relation, otherness and freedom,⁴⁰ and (in a later work), relationality, perichoresis, and substantiality.⁴¹ Konrad Raiser moves in a similar direction, positing the "oikoumene" as a new paradigm for linking Christological realities with the contemporary context.⁴² Within the neo-Calvinist tradition, Richard Mouw and Sander Griffioen describe an "associative pluralism" which allows for a type of "organicism" which they see as the only alternative to anarchy.⁴³ Reflecting a climate of growing ecumenism, their proposal resonates with that of Jesuit theologian David Hollenbach, who suggests that

³⁸ "Created and Redeemed Sociality" in *On Being Church, Essays for the Christian Community*, p. 25.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁴⁰ *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, p. 10.

⁴¹ *The One, the Three, and the Many*, p. 230.

⁴² *Ecumenism in Transition, A Paradigm Shift in the Ecumenical Movement?* Tr. Tony Coates. (Geneva, WCC Publications, 1991), p. 78.

⁴³ *Pluralism and Horizons* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), pp. 168-170. Their advocacy of 'organicism,' though not clearly defined, marks their proposal as a contemporary application of Bavinck's thought (and early neo-Calvinist thought in general).

a "pluralistic-analogical understanding of the meaning of the common good" provides opportunity to affirm the centrality of Jesus Christ in a pluralistic context.⁴⁴ Many more such examples can be listed, but the point has been made. Each one listed here describes a linking notion of some kind between a Christological reality and an aspect of creational reality. Because these proposals occur in widely differing theological contexts and discussions, in each case the functional definition of 'linking notion' which is assumed is different. Even so, these discussions are occurring on the same playing field. A comparative study of such proposals (including Bavinck's) which provides conclusions concerning the character of appropriate linking notions in our context would be a fascinating undertaking.

Thesis four: *The believer follows Jesus Christ by taking up the cross on the way to the new creation within the parameters of this creation.*

These four theses follow a particular/universal/particular pattern: they begin with the concrete particularity of the person and work of Jesus Christ which is linked to the cosmos in its entirety, both spatially and temporally. Finally, they return to the particular, describing the believer (and the believing community) following her Lord within these cosmic parameters. The

⁴⁴ "The Common Good Revisited," *Theological Studies* 50 (1989), p. 86.

believer travels by faith as a pilgrim between "the two fixed points of our origin and our destination. We do not know wholeness and perfection by experience: we know them by an intent gazing of faith, backwards and forwards. And this faith is a faith which on one hand no longer sees, and on the other hand does not yet see."⁴⁵ The emphasis, however, does not lie on the epistemological boundary, on what is not seen, but rather on what is seen, for "we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone." (Heb. 2: 9) From that starting point of what is seen, one can describe several characteristics of the Christian life.

First, the Christian life is life in the Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit the believer is a new creation, sharing in the new creation achieved in Jesus Christ, for God "put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come." (II Cor. 1: 22) The pneumatological character of the Christian life is both ontological and epistemological: through the Holy Spirit the believer is joined to Jesus Christ (Gal. 2: 20, Col. 1: 27), and this Spirit leads the believer into all truth (John 16: 12-15). The presence of the Spirit is focused upon Christological and eschatological realities, but it also includes an affirmation of the creation. Life in the Spirit does not require a rejection of

⁴⁵ K. J. Popma, "Sin and Sickness," tr. A. Wolters. *Anakainosis* 1/2 (1979), p. 16.

one's creatureliness in order to receive the Spirit, but rather the Spirit comes to the believer in his creaturely situation. Through the Spirit the creaturely passion of Paul the persecutor is transformed into a zeal for the kingdom; through the Spirit Paul the creaturely human being is enabled to survive deadly snake attacks (Acts 28). Life in the Spirit is in harmony with creatureliness but not determined by it. Rather, Spirit-filled living describes the true shape of creatureliness.

Second, the Christian life involves participation in the body of Christ. As the Spirit joins one to Christ, one is also joined to his body. "God graciously creates a community, the church, in which human beings are mandated to work together at discerning God's will, and this is an ongoing process whose end point will be reached only in the eschaton."⁴⁶ This community represents both a Christological transformation of the creational biological and ethnic communities and a proleptic anticipation of the great community of the new creation (Rev. 7: 9-17). The body of Christ provides mutual support as it grows in intimacy with its 'pearl,' Jesus Christ (Eph. 3: 14-19), as it grows in inner strength (Eph. 4: 11-16, I Cor. 12-14), and as its light shines in the world (Phil. 2: 14-16).

Third, the Christian life is universal in its scope. The all-

⁴⁶ Richard J. Mouw and Sander Griffioen, *Pluralisms and Horizons*, p. 103.

encompassing character of the creation narratives is matched by the all-encompassing character of Christ's authority (Matt. 28: 18, Col. 1: 15-20) and the all-encompassing character of the new creation (Rev. 21: 1-5). Within this universal framework the Christian life follows an all-encompassing rhythm of worship and work, powerfully described by Paul in Colossians 3: 16-17: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." The particular/universal/particular dynamic of the Christian faith requires that the particular believer, together with the universal church, adores its 'particular' pearl and honours his lordship by recognizing the universal character of being a leaven in this world.

Fourth, the Christian life is lived under the cross. "We are not now invited to live in the created order as though there had been no cross. The resurrection body of Christ bears nail-prints, and the life of those who follow him means taking up the cross."⁴⁷ The cruciform shape of the Christian life is expressed in a number of ways. These include an ethic of sacrificial servanthood, boldly living out one's convictions and risking the rejection this may evoke, and recognizing the provisional character of one's

⁴⁷ O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, p. 95.

activities and one's knowledge, which renders all ethics and all knowledge penultimate at best and requires a pluralism which honours both the supremacy of Christ and the believers' lack of clarity concerning the details in following him.⁴⁸ Such a life is cloaked in humility, rejecting triumphalism and finding its strength and boldness only in the triumph of the cross.⁴⁹ Life under the cross is appropriately described as pilgrimage, following Jesus within this creation on the way to the New Jerusalem. As the body of Christ we have received "the single and all-embracing call to present our entire creaturely existence as a holy love offering to God, the call to commit ourselves totally to a life of pilgrimage."⁵⁰

These four descriptors of the Christian life form the parameters for the final one: the Christian life is characterized by a seemingly disparate collage of transformations whose coherence can only be discerned from an eschatological perspective. Bavinck's distinction between present pneumatological transformation which is internal, invisible and personal and the

⁴⁸ Helpful descriptions of such pluralism are provided by Mouw/Griffioen, *Pluralisms and Horizons*, pp. 154-177, and David Hollenbach, "The Common Good Revisited," pp. 70-94.

⁴⁹ Bavinck (*ZG*, p. 76), Berkouwer (*Zoeken en Vinden*, p. 58) and Douglas Schuurman (*Creation, Eschaton and Ethics*, p. 9) stress the need to reject triumphalism, especially in the context of the neo-Calvinist overemphasis upon creation which easily engenders a triumphalist spirit.

⁵⁰ George Vandervelde, "Siblings on Alien Planets? Refocussing a Discussion," *Calvin Theological Journal* 22 (1987), p. 114.

transformation of the entire new creation which is external, visible and cosmic is helpful for beginning to describe this disparate collage.⁵¹ The backdrop for life in the pneumatological age is the new creation. In front of this background myriads of transformations take place: human beings are regenerated, human character is changed in subtle and not-so-subtle ways, the fruit of the Spirit is made manifest in varying degrees, relationships are reconciled, manifestations of the body of Christ appear in expected and unexpected situations, small steps are taken towards administering justice in social and institutional settings, seeds of the kingdom are planted in good soil and in rocky soil, of which some will flourish while others do not even germinate (with no necessary correspondence between the quality of the soil and the success of the planting). The notion which best describes this disparate yet coherent collage is 'organic': such transformations point to the presence of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit with his creation as he leads it to its already achieved culmination in the new creation.

How can one discern the coherence of these transformations from an eschatological perspective? Only through the eyes of faith which see the Lion of Judah, appearing as a Lamb looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne in the heavenly throneroom. He is the one in whom all things hold together; he is the one who will construct the new creation out of

⁵¹ Cf. *GD* IV, p. 700. (*LT*, p. 158)

the seemingly disparate and fledgling transformations of the present, using the cross as his instrument. Because of the supremacy of Christ,

die de wereld schiep, die ze voortdurend in bestand en verband hield, die altijd en overall was het licht en leven der menschen, die in de volheid des tijds als Zaligmaker der wereld optrad, en die daarom die wereld door en door kent en volmaakt naar recht beoordeelen kan..., daar gaat in de toekomst geen enkele waarde verloren; alle werken volgen ons na, en de koningen en volken der aarde brengen in de Godsstad hun gansche heerlijkheid en eere saam. Voor den Christen wordt deze donkere wereld nog altijd van omhoog door den glans der Goddelijke openbaring bestraald en gaat zij onder hare leiding het rijk des levens en des lichts tegemoet.⁵²

Conclusion

Each of these four theses owes a great deal to the theology of Herman Bavinck. Dutch neo-Calvinism continues to wrestle with issues that arise from the relation between creation and Jesus Christ, and Bavinck has articulated two fundamental claims which serve to orient this discussion: creation and redemption history are understood in terms of their eschatological goal, and the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ stands at the center of redemption history. These two claims are not in tension with each

⁵² Bavinck, *WO*, pp. 271f. Because of the supremacy of Christ, "who created the world, who continually supports it in its being and unity, who is the life and light of man always and everywhere, who appeared in the fulness of time as the saviour of the world, and who therefore knows the world through and through, and can judge it in perfect justice..., nothing of any value will be lost in the future; all our works do follow us, and the kings and the nations of the earth will bring together into the city of God all their glory and honour. For the Christian this dark world is always irradiated from above by the splendour of divine revelation, and under its guidance it moves onward towards the kingdom of life and light." (PR, pp. 314f., alt.)

other but are complementary, for Christology is inseparable from eschatology. Within Bavinck's framework one can see that the issue does not involve choosing creation or Jesus Christ, but perceiving that in Jesus Christ the creation, redemption history, and its eschatological goal, the new creation, are held together.

In these four theses I have spoken of the ontological foundation provided by the person and work of Jesus Christ and of linking notions which serve to describe the universal significance of Jesus Christ. Bavinck does not speak of such an "ontological foundation;" neither does he refer to "linking notions." His theological approach does not include a careful, self-consciously descriptive defense of his methodology. Therefore this study sought to examine carefully the broad scope of his theological works to discern the shape of his methodology and its relation to his theology. This examination concluded that Bavinck's theology is centered on the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ, this center is inextricably intertwined with creation, redemption history, and the new creation, and this intertwining is described through the notions of progressive revelation, duality, the organic, and a triadic framework comprised of God, world, and humanity, all developed within the context of an eschatological understanding of redemption.

These theses are presented here as a nascent contribution to a theology 'on the way.' The issues to which these theses point

are relevant in the Dutch neo-Calvinist community as well as in other contemporary theological arenas of discourse. To affirm and describe the centrality of Jesus Christ in our Western context whose relativist creed has both denied this centrality and exposed the inadequacy of modernist construals of the universal significance of Jesus Christ are daunting tasks. Observing the role of Bavinck's eschatological understanding of redemption in his theology provides the beginnings of one helpful path towards such affirmation and description. The tasks of developing this observation further and consciously engaging contemporary discussions remain to be done.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources: The Writings of Herman Bavinck

- De Algemeene Genade*. Kampen: Zalsman, 1894. ET: "Common Grace," tr. R. VanLeeuwen. *Calvin Theological Journal* 24 (1988), pp. 35-65.
- "Calvin and Common Grace" in *Calvin and the Reformation*. Ed. Wm. Armstrong. New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1909.
- Christelijke Wereldbeschouwing*. Kampen: Kok, 1904.
- Christelijke Wetenschap*. Kampen: Kok, 1904.
- Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*. 4 vols. 4th. ed. Kampen: Kok, 1928-30. ET: *The Doctrine of God*, tr. William Hendriksen. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951 (includes *GD* II, pp. 1-369). *The Last Things, Hope for This World and the Next*, tr. John Vriend, ed. John Bolt. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996 (includes *GD* IV, pp. 564-713).
- "Herman Bavinck on Scripture and Science," tr. A. Wolters. *Calvin Theological Journal* 27 (1992), pp. 91-95.
- De Katholiciteit van Christendom en Kerk*. Kampen: Zalsman, 1888. ET: "The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church," tr. J. Bolt. *Calvin Theological Journal* 27 (1992), pp. 220-251.
- Kennis en Leven*. Kampen: Kok, 1922.
- Magnalia Dei*. Kampen: Kok, 1909. ET: *Our Reasonable Faith, A Survey of Christian Doctrine*, tr. Henry Zylstra. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977.
- Wijsbegeerte der Openbaring, Stone Lezingen*. Kampen: Kok, 1908. ET: *The Philosophy of Revelation*, tr. Geerhardus Vos, Nicholas Steffens, Henry Dosker. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979.
- De Zekerheid des Geloofs*. Kampen: Kok, 1901. ET: *The Certainty of Faith*, tr. H. derNederlanden. St. Catharines: Paideia Press, 1980.

Secondary Sources: Works Consulted

- Armstrong, Brian. *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy: Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in Seventeenth Century France*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969.
- Anderson, Bernhard W., Ed. *Creation in the Old Testament*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984.
- Ansell, Nik. *The Trouble with Normative...Creation Order, Hermeneutics, and Homosexuality*. Toronto: Institute for Christian Studies, 1991.
- Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics*, III/1. Tr. J. W. Edwards, O. Bussey, H. Knight. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1958.
- Beardslee III, John W. *Reformed Dogmatics*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1965.
- Begbie, Jeremy. "Creation, Christ and Culture in Dutch neo-Calvinism" in *Christ in Our Place, The Humanity of God in Christ for the Reconciliation of the World*. Eds, Trevor A. Hart and Daniel P. Thimell. Allison Park: Pickwick, 1989.
- Berkhof, Hendrikus. *Two Hundred Years of Theology, Report of a Personal Journey*. Tr. J. Vriend. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989.
- Berkouwer, G. C. *A Half Century of Theology, Movements and Motives*, tr. Lewis Smedes. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977.
- _____. *Zoeken en Vinden, Herinneringen en Ervaringen*. Kampen: Kok, 1989.
- Bolt, John. "Christ and Law in the Ethics of Herman Bavinck." *Calvin Theological Journal* 28 (1993), pp. 45-73.
- _____. "Church and World: A Trinitarian Perspective." *Calvin Theological Journal* 18 (1983), pp. 5-31.
- _____. *Christian and Reformed Today*. Jordan Station: Paideia Press, 1984.
- _____. *The Imitation of Christ Theme in the Cultural-ethical Ideal of Herman Bavinck*. Unpublished dissertation, University of St. Michael's College, 1982.
- _____. "Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Dutch Reformed Church and Theology: A Review Article." *Calvin Theological Journal* 28 (1993), pp. 434-442.

_____, Ed. *Orthodoxy and Orthopraxis in the Reformed Community Today*. Jordan Station: Paideia, 1986.

_____. "The Trinity as a Unifying Theme in Reformed Thought: a Response to Dr. George Vandervelde." *Calvin Theological Journal* 22 (1987), pp. 91-104.

Boomsma, Clarence. "What has happened theologically to the Christian Reformed Church since World War II?" *Calvin Theological Journal* 19 (1984), pp. 32-49.

Bouwsma, William J. "Calvin and the Renaissance Crisis of Knowing." *Calvin Theological Journal* 17 (1982), pp. 190-211.

_____. *John Calvin*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Bratt, James D., *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America, A History of a Conservative Subculture*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984.

_____. "Reformed Tradition and the Mission of Reformed Colleges" in *A Reformed University in a Secularized and Pluralized World*. Grand Rapids: RUNA Conference, 1993.

Bremmer, R. H. *Herman Bavinck als Dogmaticus*. Kampen: Kok, 1961.

_____. *Herman Bavinck en zijn Tijdgenoten*. Kampen: Kok, 1966.

Brueggemann, Walter. "A Shape for Old Testament Theology, I: Structure Legitimation." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 47 (1985), pp. 28-46.

_____. "A Shape for Old Testament Theology, II: Embrace of Pain." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 47 (1985), pp. 395-415.

_____. *The Prophetic Imagination*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978.

Buckley, Michael D. *At the Origins of Modern Atheism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987.

Burnham, Frederic B. "Maker of Heaven and Earth: A Perspective of Contemporary Science." *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 12 (1990), pp. 1-15.

Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Tr. Ford Lewis Battles. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960.

Cooke, Vincent M. "The New Calvinist Epistemology." *Theological Studies* 47 (1986), pp. 273-285.

- Cooper, John. "Reformed Apologetics and the Challenge of Post-Modern Relativism." *Calvin Theological Journal* 28 (1993), pp. 108-120.
- _____. "Reformed Scholarship and the Challenge of Post-Modern Pluralism" in *A Reformed University in a Secularized and Pluralized World*. Grand Rapids: RUNA Conference, 1993.
- Davies, W. D. and Daube, D., Eds. *The Background of the New Testament and its Eschatology*. Cambridge: University Press, 1956.
- DeJong, James A. "Abraham Kuyper's edition of The Institutes." *Calvin Theological Journal* 21 (1986), pp. 231-232.
- _____, and Louis Y. VanDyke, Eds. *Building the House, Essays on Christian Education*. Sioux Center: Dordt College Press, 1981.
- DeKlerk, Peter, Ed. *Calvin and the Holy Spirit*. Papers and responses presented at the Sixth Colloquium on Calvin and Calvin Studies. Grand Rapids: Calvin Studies Society, 1989.
- _____, and Richard R. DeRidder, Eds., *Perspectives on the Christian Reformed Church, Studies in Its History, Theology and Ecumenicity*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983.
- Dooyeweerd, Herman. *In the Twilight of Western Thought, Studies in the Pretended Autonomy of Western Thought*. Nutley, NJ: The Craig Press, 1968.
- _____. *Roots of Western Culture, Pagan, Secular and Christian Options*. Tr. John Kraay. Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1979.
- Dosker, H. E. "Herman Bavinck." *The Princeton Theological Review* XX (1922), pp. 448-464.
- Ericson Jr., Edward E. "Abraham Kuyper: Cultural Critic." *Calvin Theological Journal* 22 (1987), pp. 210-227.
- Fernhout, Harry. *Building on "The Beginning of Wisdom," A Philosophical Agenda*. Unpublished essay presented at the Chicago Conference on Christian Education, June 30, 1988.
- _____. *Man, Faith, and Religion in Bavinck, Kuyper and Dooyeweerd*. Toronto: Institute for Christian Studies, 1975.
- _____. "Response to John Cooper" in *A Reformed University in a Secularized and Pluralized World*. Grand Rapids: RUNA Conference, 1993.

Ford, David F. and Daniel W. Hardy. *Praising and Knowing God*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985.

Fowler, Stuart. *Understanding Humanity in the Twentieth Century*. Melbourne: Institute for Christian Education, 1988.

Frei, Hans. *The Identity of Jesus Christ*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975.

_____. "The Literal Reading of Biblical Narrative in the Christian Tradition: Does it Stretch or Will it Break?" in F. McConnell, Ed., *The Bible and the Narrative Tradition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986, pp. 33-77.

Frey, Bradshaw et al. *All of Life Redeemed, Biblical Insights for Daily Obedience*. Jordan Station: Paideia Press, 1983.

Gaffin, Richard. *The Centrality of the Resurrection, A Study in Paul's Soteriology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978.

Geyl, Pieter. *The Netherlands of the Seventeenth Century*. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1961.

Gilkey, Langdon. *Maker of Heaven and Earth, A Study of the Christian Doctrine of Creation*. Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1959.

Green, Garrett, Ed. *Scriptural Authority and Narrative Interpretation*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987.

Gunton, Colin E. *Christ and Creation, the Didsbury Lectures, 1990*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992.

_____, and Daniel W. Hardy, Eds. *On Being Church, Essays on the Christian Community*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989.

_____. *The One, The Three, and the Many, God, Creation and The Culture of Modernity, The 1992 Bampton Lectures*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

_____. *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991.

Hart, Hendrik. "Creation Order in our Philosophical Tradition: Critique and Refinement." Unpublished essay, presented at Institute for Christian Studies during the conference "An Ethos of Compassion and the Integrity of Creation," June 4, 1992.

- _____. *Setting our Sights by the Morning Star, Reflections on the role of the Bible in post-modern times.* Toronto: The Patmos Press, 1989.
- _____. *The Challenge of Our Age.* Hamilton: Guardian, 1968.
- _____. "A Theme from the Philosophy of Herman Dooyeweerd." *Faith and Philosophy* 5 (1988), pp. 268-282.
- _____, Johan VandDerHoeven and Nicholas Wolterstorff, Eds. *Rationality in the Calvinian Tradition.* Lanham: University Press of America, 1983.
- Heideman, Eugene. *The Relation of Revelation and Reason in E. Brunner and H. Bavinck.* Assen: Van Gorcum, 1959.
- Hexham, Irving. "Christian Politics according to Abraham Kuyper." *Crux* 19 (1983), pp. 2-7.
- Higman, Francis. "Linearity in Calvin's Thought." *Calvin Theological Journal* 26 (1991), pp. 100-110.
- Hollenbach, David. "The Common Good Revisited." *Theological Studies* 50 (1989), pp. 70-94.
- Holwerda, David E., Ed. *Exploring the Heritage of John Calvin.* Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976.
- Jaarsma, Cornelius. *The Educational Philosophy of Herman Bavinck.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1935.
- Jenkins, Michael. "Theodora Beza: Continuity and Regression in the Reformed Tradition." *Evangelical Quarterly* 64 (1992), pp. 131-154.
- Klauber, Martin I. "Continuity and Discontinuity in Post-Reformation Reformed Theology: An Evaluation of the Muller thesis." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 33 (1990), pp. 467-475.
- Klooster, Fred H. "The Uniqueness of Reformed Theology: A Preliminary Attempt at Description." *Calvin Theological Journal* 14 (1979), pp. 32-54
- Konig, Adrio. "An Outline of a Contemporary Covenant Theology." *Calvin Theological Journal* 29 (1994), pp. 180-189.
- Kraay, John and Anthony Tol, Eds. *Hearing and Doing, Philosophical Essays Dedicated to H. Evan Runner.* Toronto: Wedge, 1979.
- Kraftchick, Steve. "Paul's use of Creation Themes, A Test of Romans 1-8." *Ex Auditu* 3 (1987), pp. 72-87.

- Kromminga, J. H. "'De Afscheiding' - Review and Evaluation." *Calvin Theological Journal* 20 (1985), pp. 43-57.
- _____. *In The Mirror, An Appraisal of the Christian Reformed Church.* Hamilton: Guardian, 1957.
- _____. "The Shape of a New Confession." *Calvin Theological Journal* 7 (1972), pp. 146-157.
- _____. "The Shaping Influence of a Tradition." *Calvin Theological Journal* 17 (1982), pp. 182-189.
- Kuiper, Dirk Th. "Theory and Practice in Dutch Calvinism on the Racial Issue in the Nineteenth Century." *Calvin Theological Journal* 21 (1986), pp. 51-78.
- Kuiper, H. *Calvin on Common Grace.* Grand Rapids: Smitten Book Company, 1928.
- Kuyper, Abraham. *Lectures on Calvinism.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931.
- _____. *Principles of Sacred Theology.* Tr. J. Hendrik de Vries. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963.
- _____. *To Be Near Unto God.* Tr. J. Hendrik de Vries. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979.
- _____. *Work of the Holy Spirit.* Grand Rapids: Christian Classics, n.d.
- Langley, McKendree R. *The Practice of Political Spirituality: Episodes from the Public Career of Abraham Kuyper, 1879-1918.* Jordan Station: Paideia Press, 1984.
- Lawrence, David. *Heaven, It's not the End of the World, The Biblical Promise of a New Earth.* London: Scripture Union, 1995.
- Lindbeck, George. *The Nature of Doctrine.* Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984.
- Marsden, George, Ed. *Evangelicalism and Modern America.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984.
- _____. *Fundamentalism and American Culture, The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1980.
- McGrath, Alister E. *A Life of John Calvin, a Study in the Shaping of Western Culture.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990.

- _____. *The Genesis of Doctrine*. Cambridge: Oxford, 1990.
- McIntire, C. T., ed. *The Legacy of Herman Dooyeweerd, Reflections on critical philosophy in the Christian tradition*. Lanham: University Press of America, 1985.
- McKee, Elsie Anne and Brian G. Armstrong, Eds. *Probing the Reformed Tradition, Historical Studies in Honor of Edward G. Dowey Jr.* Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989.
- McKinney, Richard W. A. *Creation, Christ and Culture, Studies in Honour of T. F. Torrance*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1976.
- McNeill, John T. *The History and Character of Calvinism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1954.
- Mekkes, J. P. A. "Methodology and Practice." *Philosophia Reformata* 38 (1973), pp. 77-83.
- Milbank, John. "'Postmodern Critical Augustinianism': A Short Summa in Forty Two Responses to Unasked Questions." *Modern Theology* 7 (1991), pp. 225-237.
- _____. *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990.
- Mouw, Richard J. "Dutch Calvinist Philosophical Influences in North America." *Calvin Theological Journal* 24 (1989), pp. 93-120.
- _____. *Politics and the Biblical Drama*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976.
- _____, and Sander Griffioen. *Pluralisms and Horizons*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993.
- _____, Sander Griffioen and Paul Marshall, Eds. *Stained Glass: Worldviews and Social Science*. Lanham: University Press of America, 1989.
- Muller, Richard A. "How Many Points?" *Calvin Theological Journal* 28 (1993), pp. 425-433.
- _____. *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, Volume I, Prolegomena to Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987.
- Murdoch, Iris. "Vision and Choice in Morality" in *Christian Ethics and Contemporary Philosophy*, Ian Ramsay, Ed. London: SCM Press, 1966.

- Murphy, David Graham. "Public Theology? A Current Dutch Discussion." *Calvin Theological Journal* 28 (1993), pp. 372-392.
- Noll, Mark A., Ed. *The Princeton Theology, 1812-1921*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983.
- O'Donovan, Oliver. *Resurrection and Moral Order, An Outline for Evangelical Ethics*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986.
- Olthuis, James. "On Worldviews." *Christian Scholars Review* 14 (1985), pp. 153-164.
- Oosterhaven, M. Eugene. "John Calvin: Order and the Holy Spirit" in his *The Faith of the Church*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982.
- _____. "The Experiential Theology of early Dutch Calvinism." *The Reformed Review* 27 (1974), pp. 180-189.
- Plantinga, Alvin. "Advice to Christian Philosophers." *Faith and Philosophy* 1 (1984), pp. 253-271.
- _____. "The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology." *Christian Scholars Review* 11 (1981), pp. 187-198.
- Plantinga, Cornelius. *A Place to Stand, A Study of Reformed Creeds and Confessions*. Grand Rapids: Board of Publications of the Christian Reformed Church, 1980.
- _____. *A Sure Thing, What we Believe and Why*. Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1986.
- Popma, K. J. "Patristic Evaluation of Culture." *Philosophia Reformata* 38 (1973), pp. 97-113.
- _____. "Sin and Sickness." (excerpts) Tr. A. Wolters. *Anakainosis* 1/2 (1979), pp. 15-16.
- Postema, Gerald J. "Calvin's Alleged Rejection of Natural Theology." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 24 (1971), pp. 423-434.
- Potchefstroomse Universiteit. *God's Order for Creation*. Potchefstroom, Institute for Reformational Studies, 1994.
- Raiser, Konrad. *Ecumenism in Transition, A Paradigm Shift in the Ecumenical Movement?* Tr. Tony Coates. Geneva: WCC Publications, 1991.
- Ratzsch, Del. "Abraham Kuyper's Philosophy of Science." *Calvin Theological Journal* 27 (1992), pp. 277-303.

- Recker, Robert R. "The Redemptive Focus of the Kingdom of God." *Calvin Theological Journal* 14 (1979), pp. 154-186.
- Reid, W. Stanford, Ed. *John Calvin: His Influence in the Western World*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982.
- Remelts, Glenn A. "The Christian Reformed Church and Science, 1900-1930: An Evangelical Alternative to the Fundamentalist and Modernist Responses to Science." *Fides et Historia* 21 (1989), pp. 61-80.
- Rice, Oliver. "John Calvin's Doctrine of General Revelation." *The Presbyterian* 29 (1989), pp. 21-26.
- Ridderbos, Herman. *The Coming of the Kingdom*. Tr. H. deJongste. Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962.
- _____. *Studies in Scripture and its Authority*. St. Catharines: Paideia Press, 1978.
- Runner, H. Evan, *The Bible and the Life of the Christian*. Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1968.
- Schillebeeckx, Edward. *Church, The Human Story of God*. Tr. J. Bowden. New York: Crossroad, 1990.
- _____. *Interim Report on the Books Jesus and Christ*. Tr. J. Bowden. New York: Crossroad, 1981.
- _____. *Jesus, an Experiment in Christology*. Tr. H. Hoskins. New York: Crossroad, 1979.
- Schreiner, Susan E. "Through a Mirror Dimly: Calvin's Sermons on Job." *Calvin Theological Journal* 21 (1986), pp. 175-193.
- Schuurman, Douglas J. *Creation, Eschaton and Ethics, The Ethical Significance of the Creation-Eschaton Relation in the Thought of Emil Brunner and Jurgen Moltmann*. New York: Peter Lang, 1991.
- _____. "Discussion Starters on Al Wolters' *Creation Regained*," unpublished review presented at the Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship, Grand Rapids, Mich., January 1990.
- Seerveld, Calvin. "Footprints in the Snow." *Philosophia Reformata* 56 (1991), pp. 1-34.
- _____. *On Being Human, Imaging God in the Modern World*. Burlington: Welch, 1988.
- _____. "Philosophy as Schooled Memory." *Anakainosis* 5 (1982), pp. 1-6.

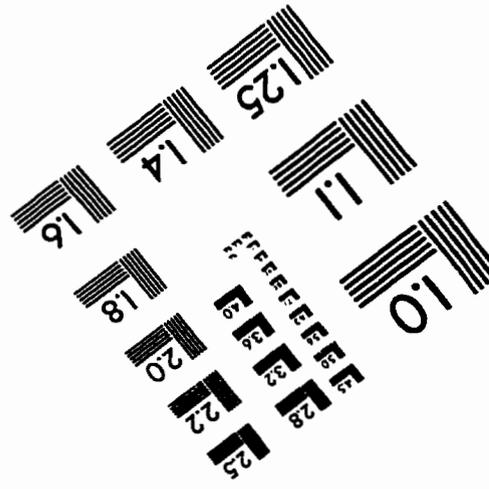
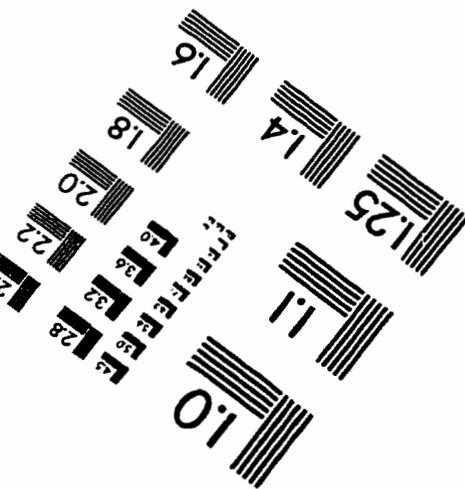
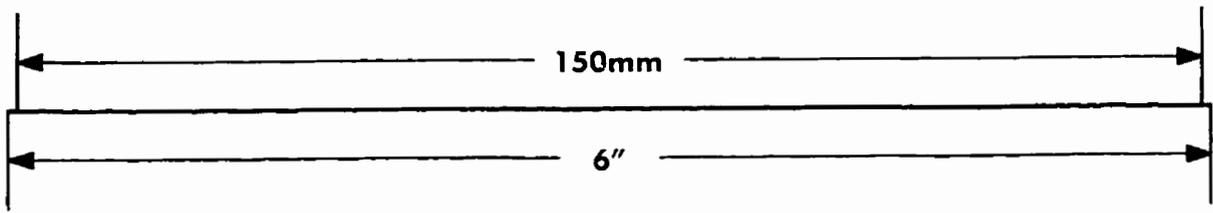
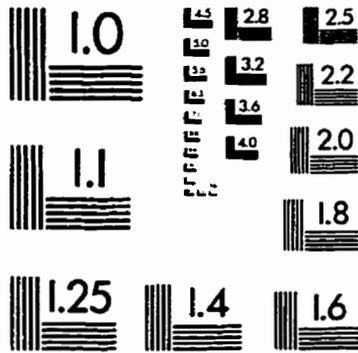
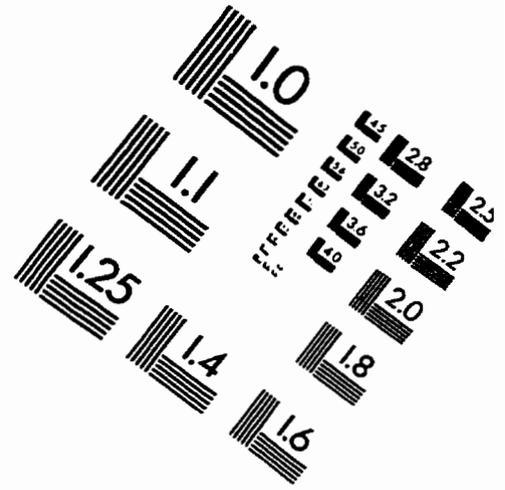
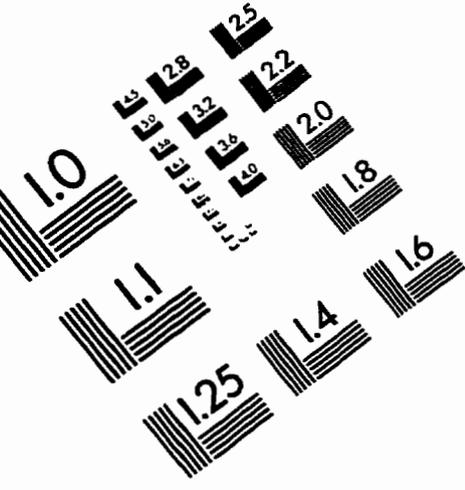
- _____. "Vollenhoven's Legacy for Art Historiography." *Philosophia Reformata* 58 (1993), pp. 49-79.
- _____, et al. *Out of Concern for the Church*. Toronto: Wedge, 1970.
- _____ and Arnold DeGraaff. *Understanding the Scriptures, How to read and not to read the Bible*. Hamilton: Guardian, 1968.
- Shaw, Luci. "Taming the Wilderness? Order, chaos, poetry and God." *The Reformed Journal* 40 (April 1990), pp. 11-17.
- Skillen, James. "God's Ordinances, Calvinism in Revival." *Pro Rege* 8 (1980), pp. 24-33.
- Smail, Thomas A. *The Forgotten Father*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1980.
- Spykman, Gordon J. *Christian Faith in Focus*. Jordan Station: Paideia Press, 1992.
- _____. "Fundamentalism in the CRC: A Critique." *Pro Rege* 15 (1986), pp. 10-21.
- _____. *Reformational Theology, A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992.
- Stek, John H. "'Covenant' Overload in Reformed Theology." *Calvin Theological Journal* 29 (1994), pp. 12-41.
- _____. "Salvation, Justice and Liberation in the Old Testament." *Calvin Theological Journal* 13 (1978), pp. 133-165.
- _____. "The Modern Problem of the Old Testament in the Light of Reformation Perspective." *Calvin Theological Journal* 2 (1967), pp. 202-225.
- Stob, Henry. "Calvin on Christ as Mediator." *Calvin Theological Journal* 8 (1973), pp. 5-16, pp. 131-157.
- _____. "Natural Law Ethics, an appraisal." *Calvin Theological Journal* 20 (1985), pp. 58-68.
- Stoeffler, F. Ernest. *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965.
- Tanner, Kathryn. *God and Creation in Christian Theology, Tyranny or Empowerment*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1988.
- Toon, Peter. "The Significance of the Ascension for Believers." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 141 (1984), pp. 16-27.

- Torrance, James. "Interpreting the Word by the light of Christ or the Light of Nature? Calvin, Calvinism and Barth" in *Calviniana: Ideas and Influence of Jean Calvin*. Ed. Robert Victor Schnucker. Kirksville: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers Inc., 1988.
- Torrance, T. F. "Calvin's Doctrine of the Trinity." *Calvin Theological Journal* 25 (1990), pp. 165-193.
- VandenBerg, Frank. *Abraham Kuyper*. St. Catharines: Paideia Press, 1978.
- VanderGoot, Henry. *Interpreting the Bible in Theology and the Church*. Toronto: Edwin Mellen Press, 1984.
- _____, Ed. *Creation and Method, Critical Essays on Christocentric Theology*. Washington: University Press of America, 1981.
- VanderMerwe, N. T. "Qua Via, Philosophia?" *Philosophia Reformata* 38 (1973), pp. 84-96.
- VanderStelt, John C. "Kuyper's Semi-Mystical Conception." *Philosophia Reformata* 38 (1973), pp. 178-190.
- Vandervelde, George. "Sibling on Alien Planets? Refocussing a Discussion." *Calvin Theological Journal* 22 (1987), pp. 104-114.
- _____. "A Trinitarian Framework and Reformed Distinctiveness: A Critical Assessment of *Christian and Reformed Today*." *Calvin Theological Journal* 21 (1986), pp. 95-109.
- Van Engen, John. "The Problem of Tradition in the Christian Reformed Church." *Calvin Theological Journal* 20 (1985), pp. 69-89.
- VanHook, Jay M. "Knowledge, belief and Reformed Epistemology." *The Reformed Journal* 30 (July, 1981), pp. 12-17.
- Van Ruler, A. A. *Calvinist Trinitarianism and Theocentric Politics*. Tr. J. Bolt. Queenston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989.
- _____. *The Christian Church and the Old Testament*. Tr. G. W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971.
- Veenhof, Jan. "A History of Theology and Spirituality in the Dutch Reformed Churches, 1892-1992." *Calvin Theological Journal* 28 (1993), pp. 266-297.

- _____. *Revelatie en Inspiratie, De Openbarings- en Schrift-
beschouwing van Herman Bavinck in vergelijking met die der
Ethische Theologie.* Amsterdam: Buijten en Schipperheign,
1968. ET: *Nature and Grace in Bavinck*, tr. Albert M.
Wolters. Toronto: Institute for Christian Studies, n.d.
(translation of pp. 346-365)
- Wainright, Geoffrey, Ed. *Keeping the Faith, Essays to Mark the
Centenary of Lux Mundi.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press,
1988.
- Walsh, Brian J., and J. Richard Middleton, *The Transforming
Vision, Shaping a Christian World View.* Downers Grove:
Inter-Varsity Press, 1984.
- Wells, David F., Ed. *Reformed Theology in America, A History of
its Modern Development.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985.
- Wendel, Francois. *Calvin, Origins and Development of his Religious
Thought.* Tr. P. Mairet. New York: Harper and Row, 1950.
- Westermann, Claus. *Creation.* Tr. John J. Scullion, S. J.
Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984.
- _____. *The Genesis Accounts of Creation.* Tr. Norman E.
Wagner. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964.
- Wingren, Gustaf. *Creation and Gospel, The New Situation in
European Theology.* Toronto: Edwin Mellen Press, 1979.
- Wolters, Albert M., *Creation Regained, Biblical Basics for a
Reformational Worldview.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985.
- _____. "The Nature of Fundamentalism." *Pro Rege* 15 (1986),
pp. 2-9.
- _____. "Theses on 'Word of God.'" *Anakainosis* 6 (1984),
pp. 1-3.
- _____. "What's in a name?" *Anakainosis* 1 (1979), pp. 1-2.
- Wolterstorff, Nicholas. *Reason within the Bounds of Religion.*
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976.
- _____. "The AACS in the CRC." *Reformed Journal* 24 (1974),
pp. 12-16.
- _____. *Until Peace and Justice Embrace.* Grand Rapids:
Eerdmans, 1983.

- _____ and Alvin Plantinga, Eds. *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983.
- Woudstra, Marten H. "The Old Testament in Biblical Theology and Dogmatics." *Calvin Theological Journal* 18 (1983), pp. 47-60.
- Wright, David F. "Calvin's Pentateuchal Criticism: Equity, Hardness of Heart and Divine Accommodation." *Calvin Theological Journal* 21 (1986), pp. 33-50
- Wright, G. Ernest. *God Who Acts, Biblical Theology as Recital*. London: SCM Press, 1952.
- Wright, N. T. *For All God's Worth, True Worship and the Calling of the Church*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997.
- Young, William. "Historic Calvinism and Neo-Calvinism." *The Westminster Theological Journal* 36 (1973/4), pp. 48-64, pp. 156-173.
- Zachman, Randall C. "Jesus Christ as the Image of God in Calvin's Theology." *Calvin Theological Journal* 25 (1990), pp. 45-62.
- Zuidema, S. U. "Common Grace and Christian Action in Abraham Kuyper," *Communication and Confrontation*. Toronto: Wedge, 1972.
- Zwaanstra, H. *Catholicity and Secession: A Study of Ecumenicity in the Christian Reformed Church*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991.
- _____. *Reformed Thought and Experience in a New World, A Study of the Christian Reformed Church and its American Environment, 1890-1918*. Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1973.

IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)



APPLIED IMAGE, Inc
1653 East Main Street
Rochester, NY 14609 USA
Phone: 716/482-0300
Fax: 716/288-5989

© 1993, Applied Image, Inc., All Rights Reserved